

Keynote Message

by H.E. Le Luong Minh, Secretary-General of ASEAN

at the

2013 Dialogue between the Secretary-General of ASEAN and Representatives of Civil Society Organisations

2:00PM, 1 November 2013, Grand Hyatt Hotel, Jakarta

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I thank the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) and the Human Rights Working Group (HRWG) for inviting the Secretary-General of ASEAN to join you in this dialogue with representatives from the civil society organisations in the region as part of the continuing efforts to engage various stakeholders in the process of building a people-oriented ASEAN Community. I would also like to thank His Excellency Ambassador Heinz Walker-Nederkoon and the Government of Switzerland for their contributions to the realization of this dialogue.

ASEAN has a long standing process of engagement with civil society. At the 22nd ASEAN Summit in Brunei Darussalam, the ASEAN Leaders reiterated the need to engage civil society organisations, the private sector, and other stakeholders in ASEAN's community building process. ASEAN has been seeking to increase stakeholder engagement across all pillars and encourage their participation and contribution to the Community building process through consultations, workshops, partnerships, joint programmes, among others. In 2012, ASEAN also developed the "Guidelines on the Accreditation of Civil Society Organisations" to encourage civil society organisations to seek accreditation with ASEAN. This is done in order to draw civil society organisations into the mainstream of ASEAN activities; to ensure interaction and fruitful relationships between ASEAN bodies and civil society organisations; and to help promote the development of a people-oriented ASEAN Community.

With two more years before 2015, significant progress has been achieved in ASEAN's Community building process. But much remains to be done. Effective and enhanced coordination across the three pillars of the Community is needed especially on cross-cutting issues. Climate change and food security issues call for an integrated and multi-sectoral approach. The cross-cutting issues such as poverty eradication, social protection, gender equality, and those problems vulnerable groups are facing should be seen from a more comprehensive perspective. Specifically, for human rights, the integration of a human rights-based approach in the work of all three pillars has been a challenge. Awareness and understanding of ASEAN and our Community building process also need to be further enhanced at local, national, regional and international levels to garner broad stakeholder support for ASEAN initiatives. There is a need for continued engagement with all stakeholders of the ASEAN Community – both private and public sectors - to foster a better

understanding of ASEAN and pave the way for more support, confidence and participation in ASEAN.

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Over the years, ASEAN has overcome many challenges in developing a coherent basic policy on human rights. In 2009, the 15th ASEAN Summit established the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR). As an ASEAN organ for regional cooperation on human rights, the AICHR represents ASEAN's commitment to the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms. The adoption by the Leaders of ASEAN at the 21st ASEAN Summit of the ASEAN Human Rights Declaration (AHRD), the first regional human rights instrument in Asia Pacific with added values such as the right to peace and the right to development besides the other fundamental human rights such as political, economic, social and cultural rights contained therein is another reflection of ASEAN's commitment to placing the well-being of the ASEAN peoples at the forefront of the process of ASEAN Community building. Together with the ASEAN Charter, the United Nations Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action and the many basic human rights instruments that ASEAN countries have committed to, the establishment of AICHR and the adoption of such a Declaration, human rights have been firmly rooted in ASEAN's landscape, ensuring unity in diversity and evolving in its own ASEAN context. As such, the AHRD can serve as a standard setting instrument, serving as the basis for the development of other human rights instruments in ASEAN. The recent adoption of the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women and Elimination of Violence Against Children in ASEAN reflects ASEAN's commitment to enhance human rights protection by addressing violence through a holistic, multidisciplinary approach by strengthening legal and policy frameworks as well as assisting victims through protection, services, rehabilitation, recovery and reintegration of victims.

Promoting and protecting human rights as part of the ASEAN Community Building process will always be a work in progress. The ASEAN Human Rights Declaration is the product of a process of hard work by AICHR. Indeed, as stated by Pehin Dato Dr. Awang Hj. Ahmad bin Hj. Jumat, Chair of AICHR 2013, the drafting of this document was not easy, given the diversity within the region and the high expectation placed on ASEAN, its contents and impact on the rights of the peoples of ASEAN. As a result of that process of hard work, the ASEAN Human Rights Declaration states "All human rights are universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated. All human rights and fundamental freedoms in this Declaration must be treated on a fair and equal manner, on the same footing and with the same emphasis". The Declaration also state that "...the realization of human rights must be considered in the regional and national context bearing in mind the different political, economic, legal, social, cultural, historical and religious backgrounds". Recognizing the organic relationship between rights and responsibility, the Declaration states that the human rights and fundamental freedoms of every person shall be exercised with due regard to the human rights and fundamental freedoms of others and subject to limitations as are determined by law to meet the requirements of national security, public order, public health, public safety, public morality, as well as the general welfare of the people in a democratic society. Furthermore, while reaffirming the need to take into account people's

participation, inclusivity and accountability, the Declaration stresses that “in the realization of human rights and freedoms contained in the Declaration, the principles of impartiality, objectivity, non-selectivity, non-discrimination, non-confrontation and avoidance of double standards and politicisation should always be upheld”.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Building an ASEAN Community that is able to uphold the ASEAN Human Rights Declaration and address the region’s human rights issues is a shared and collective effort. There is high expectation from the international community that ASEAN will continue on its track of promotion and protection of human rights.

I hope this Dialogue will be an opportunity for ASEAN bodies and civil society organisations to find common ground towards synergising our efforts to accelerate progress in achieving the ASEAN Community 2015 towards the fulfilment of human rights of the ASEAN peoples. As the dialogue will contribute to the enhancement of trust and confidence among all stakeholders striving together for the further promotion and more effective protection of human rights for the peoples of ASEAN, the dialogue will only succeed on the basis of mutual respect, trust and confidence. Unity in diversity has been the unique strength of our resilient ASEAN. United on common goals while respecting and the diversity in the political, economic, legal, social, cultural, historical and religious backgrounds of the ASEAN Member States is key to the success in ASEAN’s human rights cooperation, among us and with our partners.

I wish you all a productive and successful Dialogue!