

Remarks of Secretary-General of ASEAN

H.E. Dato Lim Jock Hoi

**7th ASEAN-UN Workshop Regional Dialogue V on Political Security
Cooperation: Focused Collaboration in Support of
the ASEAN Institute for Peace and Reconciliation”**

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***H.E Nguyen Quoc Dzong, Vice Foreign Minister of the Socialist
Republic of Vietnam***

***Mr. Khaled Khiari, Assistant Secretary-General for Political and
Peacebuilding Affairs and Peace Operations of the United Nations
Former ASEAN Secretaries-Generals Ong Ken Yong and Le Luong
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***The ASEAN-Institute for Peace and Reconciliation Governing
Council and the IPR’s Advisory Board and Executive Director
Excellencies, Distinguished Experts and Participants, Ladies and
Gentlemen,***

Foremost, allow me to extend my appreciation to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam and the UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, for organizing, together with the ASEAN-IPR, this regional dialogue.

Indeed, a dialogue about focused collaboration to support the ASEAN Institute for Peace and Reconciliation is both timely and useful because it is not only beneficial for the institute but more importantly for the broader agenda of peace and reconciliation in ASEAN. As we are all aware of, peace and reconciliation are not only goals which ASEAN hopes to achieve; advocacies that the organization pursues, but could

actually be considered as ASEAN's *raison d'être*, its reason for existence.

We could all recall that ASEAN in 1967 was founded primarily to promote peace in Southeast Asia. And if we were to reflect on that objective laid out by ASEAN's founding fathers, it becomes clear that promoting peace is not only about the absence of inter-state conflict or preventing such from erupting, it is equally about reconciliation, especially given the diversity among the peoples that comprise each ASEAN Member State, a diversity that at one point or another have generated friction among ASEAN peoples. It is therefore important for reconciliation among peoples to be promoted and pursued. Of course, what should not be overlooked is the equal importance of promoting reconciliation among states.

Having said that, allow me then to briefly reflect on how ASEAN has fared in its vision of promoting peace. And here allow me to dissect it along three levels: one, within each ASEAN Member State; two, among the member states of ASEAN; and three, beyond Southeast Asia.

Excellencies, Distinguished Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen,

To a great extent, and I say this with utmost modesty, ASEAN in its journey for more than the past five decades has done pretty well in working towards the overall vision of having peace not only across the region but more importantly within each member state of ASEAN. Statistics show that not a single member state of ASEAN is homogenous and it is this reality that has prompted governments of ASEAN Member States to continuously work towards bringing their peoples in the margins towards mainstream societies, to undertake programs to address social issues that are considered as root causes of possible conflict, knowing too well that one of the key principles when ASEAN was founded: that regional resilience is anchored on national resilience, equally applies today.

ASEAN Community building efforts anchored on the three pillars of political-security community, economic community and socio-cultural community underpins ASEAN's quest for peace at the regional level. As encapsulated in the *ASEAN Vision 2025: Forging Ahead Together* (and I quote) "peoples and members of ASEAN living in peace with one another and the world at large" (end of quote), the respective Blueprints 2025 of the three Community Pillars contain specific strategic measures and action lines to deepen the sense of community in ASEAN.

Mid-way into their implementation which commenced in 2016, I am happy to share with you the good progress of implementation of these Community Blueprints by the various sectoral bodies in ASEAN including the ASEAN Member States, with key milestones achieved and others underway as 2019 draws to a close. As Community Building is a process, ASEAN continues to sustain momentum by further taking additional actions on those strategic measures and action lines already acted upon while efforts are underway to act on the remaining ones. And to ensure that ASEAN's community building efforts are on track, a Mid-term Review of each of the Community Blueprints will be undertaken next year as Viet Nam Chairs ASEAN.

The sense of community in ASEAN as a whole and among ASEAN Member States in particular is manifested by the readiness of members to assist each other in times of disasters, whether human-induced or natural. ASEAN's efforts to deal with issues, particularly those that transcend the boundaries of neighboring states, whether ASEAN or otherwise, may not necessarily hog the limelight. For some observers, these may even be falling short of what is expected of ASEAN. But we could give everyone the assurance that as always, ASEAN is working, quietly but consistently to deal with these issues, as has always been one of the hallmarks of ASEAN. Indeed, amidst the challenges to peace and security that exist in our region, ASEAN continues to work hard to promote stability so that the peace dividend, which is needed for our community building efforts, is maintained.

Beyond Southeast Asia, ASEAN has contributed to building peace by promoting strategic trust not only between ASEAN and its external partners but also between and among the external partners themselves. By providing platforms where these external partners interact with each other through the various ASEAN-led or ASEAN-centred mechanisms, ASEAN is both able to contribute in building confidence and trust among its partners, with a strong emphasis that in working towards regional peace and stability, none should be excluded; instead all ought to be included.

The adoption by the ASEAN Leaders of the *ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific* this year at the 34th ASEAN Summit in June is the latest testament to ASEAN's belief that inclusiveness is the key to promoting peace and cooperation in the wider Indo-Pacific region. By emphasising the principle of inclusiveness through this AOIP, ASEAN has reshaped the discourse about the Indo-Pacific, which was then beginning to be perceived as a tool by some partners of ASEAN to counter another partner of ASEAN, into something that is inclusive of all stakeholders. The support to the AOIP manifested by the Leaders of ASEAN's external partners during the most recent 35th ASEAN Summit and Related Summits in Thailand last November reaffirms their recognition of ASEAN's central role in the regional architecture.

Excellencies, Distinguished Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Before I close, I must emphasize that we in ASEAN appreciate the contributions of our partners in building our capacity. While ASEAN has been recognized as a successful experiment in regard to promoting peace within and beyond Southeast Asia, dialogues and workshops like this, which I understand, would map existing capacities and identify required capabilities in regard to peacebuilding as well as develop a pool of experts and build a network of support for these experts would go a well way in further enabling ASEAN both to prevent conflict from arising as well as deal and manage it when it arises.

True enough, as we in ASEAN and the rest of the world for that matter know too well, peace is not only about the absence of conflict; it is rather a never ending process of working for and towards it, which I believe, is the essence of peace building where everyone is supposed to play a critical role, to include women. This is something which ASEAN Leaders themselves affirmed in 2017 when they adopted the *Joint Statement on Promoting Women, Peace and Security in ASEAN*. The initiative to establish an “ASEAN Women for Peace Registry” through the ASEAN-IPR is a step in the right direction to further enhance women’s involvement in peacebuilding. Women have always played a crucial role both in maintaining the peace or building it; many at times not accorded due recognition that is appropriate. It is therefore also encouraging that there is now a momentum for women to play a role in related areas such as peacekeeping operations.

To end, if we were to ensure that peace is sustained, we need to continuously work towards removing divisions among our peoples from narrowing the development gap to bridging the digital divide. Indeed, the peace that we enjoy today both at the national and regional levels will not be sustainable if such divide or gap persists. It is for this reason that ASEAN continues to put premium on developing our human capital to include women, children and the youth. Even the ageing members of our societies are part of our human capital development agenda, hence ASEAN’s focus on active ageing.

Indeed, human capital development is an essential factor in building a people-centred ASEAN Community that looks to the future and leaves no one behind as contained in the *ASEAN Leaders’ Vision Statement on Partnership for Sustainability*; something that will continue to be envisioned as we all work towards a *Cohesive and Responsive ASEAN*, the theme for 2020.

Thank you for your kind attention.