

REGIONAL CONFERENCE

CAMBODIA AND ASEAN
MANAGING OPPORTUNITY AND
CHALLENGES BEYOND 2015

28 March 2016, Phnom Penh



Konrad
Adenauer
Stiftung

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

As ASEAN aspires to promote regional peace, stability and prosperity and become an effective community, there has been a relentless effort for the regional grouping to facilitate an even closer economic, political, social, and cultural cooperation. ASEAN also wishes to become a political and security community that is capable of managing regional tensions and preventing conflicts from flaring up. Notwithstanding positive developments, however, ASEAN still faces glaring challenges of both a traditional and non-traditional nature.

These challenges include the unstoppable rise of China, the decline of the US and the deep flux of global institutional arrangements coupled with the ongoing territorial and sovereignty claims in the South China Sea. All of these pose serious uncertainty, as no one can predict the future of this region.

As such, the Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace feels that it is timely to organize a regional conference on “Cambodia and ASEAN: Managing Opportunity and Challenges beyond 2015 to determine how the future will hold for ASEAN.

CICP would like to sincerely express deep appreciation to all the eminent speakers who are experts in their related fields from government officials and from other credible think-tanks in the region who have contributed their perspectives to address common challenges in the region of Southeast Asia, including Cambodia.

CICP would also like to thank Mr. Rene Gradwohl, Country Representative of the Konrad-Adenauer Stiftung, for supporting the hosting of this regional conference and for the realization of this conference report which we hope will promote wider debates and interest on how ASEAN could revitalize its critical duties to deal with new challenges that have emerged.

Ambassador Pou Sothirak

Executive Director

The Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace

CONTENTS

1) Rationale of the Conference	01
2) Program	03
3) Role Players	07
4) Executive Summary and Some Policy Recommendations	15
5) Appendices	
▷ Welcome Remarks <i>HRH Samdech Norodom Sirivoudh</i>	23
▷ Special Remarks: Where will ASEAN be beyond 2015? <i>H.E. Ambassador Ong Keng Yong</i>	25
▷ Keynote Address <i>H.E. Kan Pharidh</i>	31
▷ The ASEAN Community: Lessons from the Past and Prospects for the Future <i>Tan Sri Rastam Mohd Isa</i>	35
▷ ASEAN Centrality Beyond 2015: An ASEAN Perspective <i>Dr. Termsak Chalermphanupap</i>	41
▷ Cambodia and ASEAN: Past, Present and Future Direction <i>H.E. Ambassador Pou Sothirak</i>	55
▷ Cambodia and Post-2015 ASEAN: Roles and Responsibilities <i>Dr. Chheang Vannarith</i>	63

RATIONALE OF THE CONFERENCE

The future of ASEAN is in the spotlight once again this year, following the announcement of the ASEAN Community 2015 and the inauguration of the ASEAN Economic Community at the end of last year. The vision of creating a sound ASEAN Community demands that the Association must prove that it can further enhance unity and forge stronger centrality both within ASEAN and with the global community. Most importantly, ASEAN must demonstrate that it can continue to improve the quality of life of its people through the enhancement of capability to implement the blueprints of its three community pillars – political, economic and social-cultural – if ASEAN as a regional organization wants to remain relevant in the fast changing geo-political environment beyond 2015.

There is still skepticism about ASEAN's ability to achieve a meaningful sense of community beyond 2015 without adopting new approaches to its core activities, especially in the context of the power shifting dynamic in the Asia-Pacific region. ASEAN's aspiration to realize a community must overcome ongoing challenges and shortfalls which hold back its aspirations. It must also remove uncertainty and tensions that could jeopardize the hard-earned peace and prosperity the region of Southeast Asia has been able to enjoy thus far.

Therefore, looking ahead beyond 2015, it is a crucial time for ASEAN to reflect on the way forward so as to maintain its credibility and manage the emerging strategic currents that may pose a challenge to its relevance in the years ahead.

It is in this light that this regional conference has been organized. There will be three distinct sessions.

The focus of the first session is to visualize the Post-ASEAN 2015 direction and agenda and draw fresh perspectives on how ASEAN intends to set its priorities in the context of upholding the promise of making the region of Southeast Asia peaceful and prosperous as they move forward beyond 2015.

The second session is intended as a discussion which deals with key factors needed to enhance ASEAN centrality and explore how ASEAN can best improve its relevance and secure its interests in the long term beyond 2015, while meeting the challenges and dynamics of regional and global development.

The third session is reserved for a debate about how Cambodia has been able to contribute to ASEAN since it became a member in 1999 and also highlight the country's efforts in its preparation for the realization of a broader ASEAN Community 2015. In addition, this session will attempt to identify strategic issues for Cambodia to consider in the next phase of ASEAN Community beyond 2015.

The conference aims to gather a select group of scholars, regional and domestic experts and officials to determine key issues that prescribe the Post-2015 ASEAN agenda amidst emerging shifts in major power relations and security developments. It will focus on examining the effectiveness of ASEAN centrality beyond 2015, as well as identifying some key elements of an appropriate plan of action to ensure that ASEAN continues to play a central role in regional and global issues. In addition it will assess the ability and

preparedness of Cambodia in keeping up with ASEAN's regionalism and identify along with fresh initiatives that Cambodia can utilize within the new ASEAN 2025 Agenda.

The proceedings of this regional conference will be compiled into a conference report by the Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace, which will cover the issues and points discussed during the conference, including some policy recommendations. The post-conference report will be made available to ASEAN leaders for their consideration to encourage them to step up efforts in promoting ASEAN's relevance in order to meet the challenges ahead in the context of a more dynamic regional and global environment beyond 2015.

PROGRAM

07:00 – 08:00		Registration	
08:00 – 08:20		Welcome Remarks	HRH Samdech Norodom Sirivudh Supreme Privy Counselor to His Majesty the King of Cambodia, Member of Constitutional Council and Founder and Chairman of Board of Directors of CICP
		Opening Remarks	Mr. Rene Gradwohl Country Representative Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS), Cambodia
08:20 – 08:40		Special Remarks <i>“Where Will ASEAN Be Beyond 2015?”</i>	H.E. Ambassador Ong Keng Yong Executive Deputy Chairman and Director Institute of Defense and Strategic Studies S Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS) Singapore
08:40 – 09:30		Keynote Address	H.E. Kan Pharidh Under Secretary of State, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Cambodia
09:30 – 10:00		Coffee Break	
10:00 – 12:00		SESSION I: ASEAN Post 2015 Agenda The focus of this session is to visualize the ASEAN Post-2015 Agenda and draw fresh perspectives on how ASEAN intends to set their priorities in the context of upholding the promise of making the region of Southeast Asia peaceful and prosperous as they move forward beyond 2015	Moderator: HRH Samdech Norodom Sirivudh Supreme Privy Counsellor to His Majesty the King of Cambodia, Member of Constitutional Council and Founder and Chairman of Board of Directors of CICP
			Panel of Speakers H.E. Ambassador Yong Chanthalangsy Director-General of Institute of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Deputy Director General of the ASEAN Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Laos PDR
		<i>“The ASEAN Community: Lessons from the Past and Prospects for the Future”</i>	Tan Sri Rastam Mohd Isa Chairman and Chief Executive Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) Malaysia
		Questions & Answers	

Program

12:00- 13:00		Lunch	
13:00 - 15:00		SESSION II: ASEAN Centrality beyond 2015 This Session deals with key factors needed to enhance ASEAN centrality and explore how ASEAN can best improve its relevance and secure its interests in the long term beyond 2015, while meeting the challenges and dynamics of regional and global development.	Moderator: Ambassador Pou Sothirak Executive Directors of the Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace Panel of Speakers <i>“ASEAN Centrality Beyond 2015: An ASEAN Perspective”</i> <i>“ASEAN Centrality and The Great Power(s): The Prospect of ASEAN Community Beyond-2015”</i> Questions& Answers
			Dr. Termsak Chalermphanupap Visiting Research Fellow at the ASEAN Studies Centre of the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies-YusofIshak Institute, (ISEAS), Singapore Mr. Andrew Mantong Researcher the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), Indonesia
15:00 - 15:30		Coffee Break	
15:30 - 17:15		SESSION III: Cambodia and ASEAN Relations in a post 2015 setting This session will discuss how Cambodia has been able to contribute to ASEAN since it became a member in 1999 and highlight the country’s efforts in its preparation for the realization of a broader ASEAN Community 2015. In addition, the speakers will attempt to identify strategic issues for Cambodia to consider in the next phase of ASEAN Community beyond 2015.	Moderator: Mr. Pou Sovachana Deputy Director in Charge of Research and Publication of the Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace Panel of Speakers <i>“Cambodia and ASEAN: Past, Present and Future Direction”</i>
			H.E. Ambassador Pou Sothirak Executive Director of the Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace

Program

	<i>ASEAN Economic Community: Perspective from the Private Sector</i>	Mr. HingVutha Research Fellow at the Cambodia Development Research Institute, Cambodia
	<i>"Cambodia and Post-2015 ASEAN: Roles and Responsibilities"</i>	Dr. Chheang Vannarith Senior Research Fellow at the Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace, Co-founder and Chairman of Cambodian Institute for Strategic Studies and Consultant for Southeast Asia Program, The Nippon Foundation
	Questions & Answers	
17:15 - 17:30	Wrap-up Session and Closing Remarks	H.E. Ambassador Pou Sothirak Executive Director of the Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace
17:30	End of Program	

ROLE PLAYERS



HRH Samdech Norodom Sirivudh

Supreme Privy Counselor to His Majesty the King of Cambodia, Member of Constitutional Council and Founder and Chairman of Board of Directors of CICP

Prince Norodom Sirivudh is a member of the Constitutional Council, Privy Counselor to His Majesty the King and Founder and Chairman of the Board of Directors, Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace (CICP). His political career began in 1971 when he joined the Paris-based royalist movement, GRUNC/FUNK (Gouvernement Royal d'Union Nationale du Cambodge/United National Front of Kampuchea). In 1981, he joined the National United Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful and Cooperative Cambodia (FUNCINPEC) and in 1988, left France for Thailand where he was appointed Chief of FUNCINPEC's Humanitarian Department. On Nov 7, 1991, he returned to Cambodia for the first time in 20 years, and, as Chief of a Survey Mission on behalf of Prince Norodom Ranariddh, was in charge of laying the groundwork for FUNCINPEC's participation in the electoral process, mandated under the Paris Peace Agreement, in advance of the UN's 18-month Mission in Cambodia. In May 1993, as FUNCINPEC's Bureau Chief in Phnom Penh, Prince Norodom Sirivudh helped his party to its election victory, after which he was appointed Co-Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs. And in August 2001, Prince Norodom Sirivudh was elected as a Senator. In the July 2003 General Elections, Prince Norodom Sirivudh was elected as Member of Parliament for Kandal Province for the third legislature and was nominated as Deputy Prime Minister and Co-Minister of Interior of the Royal Government until March 2006. From March 2006, Prince NORODOM Sirivudh is Privy Counselor to His Majesty the King and a Member of Parliament. In May 2010, King Norodom Sihamoni appointed Prince Norodom Sirivudh as a member of the Constitutional Council.



Mr. Rene Gradwohl

Country Representative, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS)
Phnom Penh

Mr. Rene Gradwohl is the Country Representative of KAS in Cambodia since February 2016. Before taking over the KAS leadership in Cambodia, Mr. Gradwohl worked as advisor to the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) on issues such as decentralization, democratic transformation, national and regional governance reforms, peace and security. Moreover, Mr. Gradwohl has held several project management positions in Ethiopia, Liberia and Germany. He also has extensive experience as international advisor and expert on international development issues in Africa, Turkey and South as well as East Asia.

He holds a Bachelor's degree in political science, economics and sociology from the Ruprecht-Karls-University of Heidelberg (Germany) and a Master's degree in political science from the Free University of Berlin (Germany). Additionally, he studied international relations at the University of Cape Town in South Africa.



H.E. Ambassador Ong Keng Yong

Executive Deputy Chairman and Director, Institute of Defense and Strategic Studies
S Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Singapore

Ambassador ONG Keng Yong is Executive Deputy Chairman of the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies at the Nanyang Technological University in Singapore. Concurrently, he is Ambassador-at-Large at the Singapore Ministry of Foreign Affairs, non-resident High Commissioner to Pakistan and non-resident Ambassador to Iran. Mr Ong also serves as Chairman of the Singapore International Foundation (SIF).

Mr. Ong was High Commissioner for Singapore to Malaysia from 2011 to 2014. He served as Secretary-General of ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations), based in Jakarta, Indonesia from January 2003 to January 2008.

Mr. Ong started his diplomatic career in 1979 and was posted to the Singapore Embassies in Saudi Arabia, Malaysia and the United States of America. He was Singapore's High Commissioner to India and concurrently Ambassador to Nepal from 1996 to 1998. From September 1998 to December 2002, he was Press Secretary to the then Prime Minister of Singapore, Mr. Goh Chok Tong. At the same time, Mr. Ong held senior appointments in the Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts, and the People's Association in Singapore. From 2008 to 2011, he served as Director of the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) in the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy at the National University of Singapore.

Mr. Ong graduated from the then University of Singapore with a LLB (Hons) and the Georgetown University (Washington DC, USA) with a MA in Arab Studies.



H.E. Ambassador Yong Chanthalangsy

Director-General of Institute of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Deputy Director General of the ASEAN Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Laos PDR

Mr. Yong Chanthalangsy is Director General of the Institute of Foreign Affairs (IFA), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He received a Diploma of Journalism in 1997 from the Ecole Supérieure de Journalisme de Paris (1973-1975), the Center de Formation des Journalistes de Paris (1975-1977), and the India Institute of Mass-Communication (1980-1981). He was an official interpreter for the Government of the Lao PDR from 1978-2008, and worked at the Lao News Agency for 20 years (1977-1997).

Mr. Yong Chanthalangsy, a senior officer at the FCB of the ASEAN Secretariat in 1998-2002, worked as Director General of the Press Department and a spokesman of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2002 before he was assigned to be Ambassador Permanent Representative of the Lao PDR to UNOG and Ambassador of the Lao PDR to Switzerland, Greece, Turkey, Italy, Malta and Cyprus for five years (2009-2013). Recently, he has assumed a new position as Director General of the Institute of Foreign Affairs since 2014.

Mr. Yong Chanthalangsy has other professional skills, interpretation, and can speak three foreign languages; English, Vietnamese and French.



H.E. Ambassador Pou Sothirak
Executive Director,
The Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace

Title of Presentation: "Cambodia and ASEAN: Past, Present and Future Direction"

- 🌐 The speaker will share his views on the Cambodia - ASEAN relationship and discuss some salient aspects of their engagement pertaining to their past, present and future. More specifically, the speaker intends to highlight the reason why Cambodia joined ASEAN, discuss the benefits and challenges deriving from Cambodia's membership with ASEAN, and conclude with some thoughts on what this relationship might bring in the next phase of the ASEAN Community beyond 2015.

Pou Sothirak is currently holding a position as Executive Director of the Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace since June 2013. He also serves as Advisor to the Royal Government of Cambodia as of February 2014.

He was appointed as Secretary of State of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Cambodia from September 2013 to January 2014. He was Visiting Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS) in Singapore from January 2009 to December 2012. He was appointed as Cambodian Ambassador to Japan from April 2005 to November 2008. He served as an elected Cambodian Member of Parliament twice during the general election in 1993 and 2003. He was appointed as Minister of Industry Mines and Energy of the Royal Government of Cambodia from 1993 to 1998.

He has written extensively on various issues confronting the development of Cambodia and the region.



Professor Pou Sovachana
Deputy Director in Charge of Research and Publication of
The Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace

Pou Sovachana is the Deputy Director of Research and Publication at the Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace (CICP). In that position he oversees the work of several research fellows. He is also a part time lecturer at ZAMAN University Cambodia. He has written extensively concerning the development of Cambodia, including various books, book chapters and articles. Recently, he just published a final report on "Doing Research in Cambodia: Making Models that Build Capacity" with his research team. In 2015, he authored the book "The Voices of Change in Cambodia" and co-authored "Human Security and Land Rights in Cambodia". His research interests include human capital development and human security. He holds an MA degree in Curriculum and Instruction from Portland State University, Oregon, USA.



Tan Sri Rastam Mohd Isa

Chairman and Chief Executive,
Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) Malaysia

Title of Presentation: "The ASEAN Community: Lessons from the Past and Prospects for the Future"

🌐 ASEAN has come a long way since 1967 from an association of nations that aimed to promote economic and social cooperation to a community, as of January 2016, that pledges to place the people at the centre of its activities with its vision, policies, plans and programmes oriented towards the people in all spheres – political, security, economic, social and cultural. In 2017 ASEAN will be celebrating its 50th anniversary. While a lot has been achieved, there are still many critics who feel that ASEAN has not done enough in the last half century. There are obviously lessons from the past both within ASEAN and outside that cannot be ignored as the ASEAN member states work together to nurture the ASEAN Community towards being truly people-centred and people-oriented. This presentation will seek to examine those lessons and look at prospects for the future of the ASEAN Community.

Tan Sri Rastam Mohd Isa is Chairman and Chief Executive of the Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) Malaysia. He holds a Bachelor's of Social Science (Hons) degree from Universiti Sains Malaysia, a Master of Arts degree in International Relations and Strategic Studies from the University of Lancaster and a Certificate of Diplomacy from the University of Oxford.

He is a former senior Malaysian diplomat. He was High Commissioner of Malaysia to Pakistan, Ambassador of Malaysia to Bosnia Herzegovina, Ambassador of Malaysia to the Republic of Indonesia and Permanent Representative of Malaysia to the United Nations in New York. He retired as Secretary General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 2 September 2010.

He is Chairman of the Malaysian National Committee for the Pacific Economic Cooperation Council (PECC), Chairman of the Malaysian National Committee of the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific (CSCAP). He is also CSCAP Co-Chair (2015-2017).



Dr. Term sak Chalermphanupap

Visiting Research Fellow at the ASEAN Studies Centre of the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies-YusofIshak Institute, (ISEAS), Singapore

Title of Presentation: ASEAN Centrality Beyond 2015: An ASEAN Perspective

🌐 In the wake of the intensifying rivalry between China and the US in the Asia-Pacific and in Southeast Asia, the centrality of ASEAN is playing the primary driving force role in Southeast Asia in the post-2015 era has become crucial to peace, security and prosperity. It is now imperative that we in ASEAN have a good understanding of what ASEAN centrality is all about. Undoubtedly it concerns managing constructively and creatively all the processes that ASEAN has initiated in its external relations to engage friends and partners in dialogue and cooperation. That is the external dimension of ASEAN centrality. That is the area where international recognition and support is vital. It is also the area which ASEAN and its member states have little or no control. For the time being, ASEAN leadership has been accepted by default, largely because there is no better convener of dialogue and cooperation processes that is more acceptable or agreeable than ASEAN. For ASEAN is a threat to none and a friend to all. ASEAN is a champion of peace and moderation. However, the more important part of ASEAN centrality is the internal dimension. This is the community-domain which will create more weight in ASEAN. After the formal “establishment” of the ASEAN Community on 31 December 2015, ASEAN and its member states have ventured into building the post-2015 ASEAN Community, towards a more integrated ASEAN Community by 2025. This paper deliberates on what is required for ASEAN and its member states to succeed, and thereby enhance ASEAN centrality with ASEAN’s own merits, as well as ASEAN’s own political, diplomatic, economic, and social weight.

Dr. Termsak Chalermphanupap (เดิมศักดิ์ เถลิ้มพลาณภาพ) is a research fellow at the ASEAN Studies Centre of the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute in Singapore. His research interests concentrate on political and security issues in ASEAN and ASEAN’s external relations.

Before joining the ASEAN Studies Centre in mid-July 2012, Dr. Termsak had served nearly 20 years as the ASEAN Secretariat in Jakarta, where his last post was Director of Political and Security Cooperation. He joined the ASEAN Secretariat in February 1993, and served as Assistant Director for Economic Research, and for External Relations during the 1990s. From July 1999 until April 2009, he was Special Assistant to three Secretary-Generals of ASEAN (Mr. Rodolfo C. Severino, Ambassador Ong Keng Yong, and Dr. Surin Pitsuwan).

Prior to joining the ASEAN Secretariat, Dr. Termsak had worked at The Nation, an English language daily newspaper, off and on, since October 1972 in various positions, including political news reporter, chief reporter, news editor, and lastly editor of the Editorial Pages until December 1992. Born in Bangkok in September 1952, he received a B.A. in international relations from Chulalongkorn University’s Faculty of Political Science in 1977 (the 27th Batch), and M.A. and Ph.D. in political science from University of New Orleans in 1982 and 1986 respectively.



Mr. Andrew Mantong

Researcher the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), Indonesia

Title of Presentation: "ASEAN Centrality and The Great Power(s): The Prospect of ASEAN Community Beyond-2015"

My presentation will seek to understand the role of the great power in fostering the idea of community for ASEAN states. The ASEAN proposal to deepen Southeast Asia regional integration by moving forward to realize the ASEAN Community by 2015 has sparked many reactions both from officials and academic sides. A lot of ideas have been communicated in order to define and to direct the development of ASEAN as a "community." Inherent in such ideas is the notion of ASEAN Centrality from which members expect that there is some degree of unity among ASEAN members toward the vision and capability which follow in order to ensure that ASEAN will continuously serve as the main driver of any regional initiative to ensure peace, stability, and prosperity in the region. However, many have argued that such initiatives can hardly be separated from the role of great powers to let such initiatives be possible for the very first time.

This presentation will observe how various mechanisms and forums are conflated, and how agendas in the community are synchronised through various discussions in order to fully understand the direction ASEAN could lead to by substantiating the idea of "community" post-2015. It will first define the meaning of "community" by overviewing concepts coming both from academics and official discussions. Community will also be explored by highlighting the perspective of the community as the result of communications and also by examining the difference between European and Southeast Asian perspectives on community and the role that great power(s) play in ensuring deeper integration. The talk will subsequently discuss how the idea of community has developed and how agendas are being conflated in ASEAN's course towards integration. After reviewing ASEAN achievements in political-security, economy, and socio-cultural pillars, this talk will conclude by discussing the role of great powers and how this role can shape the relevance and prospect of ASEAN integration post-2015.

Mr. Andrew Wiguna Mantong joined CSIS in January 2016. Prior to joining CSIS he served as the Secretary of Undergraduate Program at the Department of International Relations, Universitas Indonesia. His research experience and activities include topics such as the uses of developmental measures for foreign policy and counter-terrorism objectives, cyberpolitics, non-traditional security, state-society relations, ASEAN and Indonesian foreign policy. He also teaches some international relations related courses on foreign policy, global civil society, theory and methodology at the Faculty of Social and Political Science, Universitas Indonesia. He obtained his bachelor's degree in International Relations from Universitas Indonesia in 2008 and master's degree in International Relations from S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Nanyang Technological University, Singapore, in 2012.

Research interests: state-society relations, authority and globalization, nationalism, education, technology and innovation policies, and foreign policy.



Dr. Chheang Vannarith

Visiting Lecturer in Asia-Pacific studies at the University of Leeds, United Kingdom and Senior Research Fellow at the Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace

Title of Presentation: Cambodia and Post-2015 ASEAN: Roles and Responsibilities

- Geographically located between the two historically antagonistic neighbors, and perpetually constructing its national identity based on historical memories and experiences, Cambodia is vigilant towards its neighbors and major powers. However, after becoming a member of ASEAN in 1999, Cambodia became more confident in strengthening cooperation and integration with its neighbors and regional neighbors. Moreover, through ASEAN Cambodia has been able to forge an equal relationship with each of the major powers.

ASEAN membership fosters reforms of the public institutions and legal frameworks to meet the regulations and policies of ASEAN. ASEAN is regarded as the cornerstone of its foreign policy and international economic integration. ASEAN creates favorable regional condition for national economic development. ASEAN is regarded as a shield to ward off adverse impacts deriving from the power competition and rivalry between and among major powers.

As ASEAN continues to strengthen its regional community in post 2015, Cambodia needs to show stronger commitment and leadership in strengthening the ASEAN institutions and unity, deepening national legal and institutional reforms in line with the ASEAN blueprints and policies, promoting ASEAN identity and image on the international stage, and contributing innovative ideas and initiatives in promoting a people-centered ASEAN. Ideally, Cambodia should aim to become a role model in implementing the ASEAN Charter, which has not been fully implemented by the member states.

Dr. Vannarith Chheang is currently a consultant for Southeast Asia Program of the Nippon Foundation. He is also a Senior Fellow at the Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace, a co-founder and chairman of Cambodian Institute for Strategic Studies and a columnist of the Khmer Times. He was lecturer at the University of Leeds from 2013 to 2016. He previously served as the Executive Director of Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace (2009-2013). He used to serve as a technical adviser to the Cambodian National Assembly, helping to organize the 32nd ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly, and supported the Ministry of National Defence of Cambodia to host the Sixth ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting. He has been awarded numerous fellowships, including T-wai's Global Emerging Voices programme (2013), the Nippon Foundation Fellowship for Asian Public Intellectuals (2013-2014), France's Ministry of Foreign Affairs Personalités d'avenir (2012), the CSIS Pacific Leadership Program (2010) and the East-West Center's Asia Pacific Leadership Program (2008). He has also been a Visiting Research Fellow at the Institute for Developing Economies (IDE-JETRO) in Tokyo (2012) and a South-East Asia Fellow at the East-West Center in Washington (2010).



Mr. HingVutha

Research Fellow at the Cambodia Development Research Institute, Cambodia

Title of Presentation: ASEAN Economic Community: Perspective from the Private Sector

🌐 This presentation discusses in detail the awareness and perception of business people about the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC). The core content to be addressed in the presentation includes:

- General view on AEC progress
- How do regional and global business executives see AEC? How will they react/adapt to it?
- How do Cambodian businesses see AEC?
- Moving forward with AEC

The contents are largely extracted from the following papers written by the presenter: 1). AEC 2015 and Beyond: What does it mean for Cambodia's economy and businesses; 2). Harnessing the AEC for Industrial Development in Cambodia; and 3). AEC Guide for Business in Cambodia.

Hing Vutha is a Cambodian researcher who holds a Master's degree in International Trade Law and Policy (LL.M) from the University of Barcelona, Spain and another Master's degree in International Economics (M.A) from Waseda University, Japan. He is currently a research fellow and head of the economics unit at the Cambodia Development Resource Institute (CDRI). He has eleven years of experience in research on a number of development themes, especially on international trade, labour markets and migration.

In recent years, he has written a number of articles on ASEAN economic integration including: Cambodia and Its Region - Challenges and Choices; Cambodia's Preparedness for the ASEAN Economic Community 2015 and Beyond; Leveraging Trade for Economic Growth in Cambodia; ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) 2015: What Does it Mean for Cambodia's Economy and for Business?; and Harnessing the AEC for Industrial Development. In addition, he is currently working in partnership with the Cambodian Federation of Employers and Business Associations (CAMFEBA) to develop 'AEC guide for business in Cambodia'. The book will be launched in the very near future. In addition, he is also engaged in various migration studies including Causes and Consequences of Irregular Migration in Cambodia; Impacts of Migration on Well-being of Children Left Behind; the Impact of Migration on Poverty, Inequality and Productivity; and Policy Priorities for better managing migration in Cambodia; and interrelations between public policies and migration in Cambodia.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND SOME POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

On Monday 28th March, 2016 the Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace hosted a Regional Conference “Cambodia and ASEAN: Managing Opportunity and Challenges Beyond 2015” at the Cambodiana Hotel in Phnom Penh with the support from the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) Cambodia.

The Conference aimed to address issues related to the ASEAN post-2015 agenda focusing on efforts to draw fresh perspective on ASEAN’s priorities and centrality in meeting the challenges beyond 2015, with a special session focusing on Cambodia – ASEAN relations.

The conference was divided into 4 sessions: the opening session with a special remarks and a keynote address by honorable guest speakers, followed by a panel discussion of each of the 3 sessions with question and answer sessions. There was a wrap-up session and closing session to conclude the conference as well.

The first session addressed the ASEAN Post 2015 direction and drew fresh perspectives on various priorities in making Southeast Asia a region of peace and prosperity as it moves forward beyond 2015. The second session dealt with key factors needed to enhance ASEAN centrality and explore how best ASEAN can improve its relevance and secure its interests in the longer term beyond 2015, while meeting the challenges and dynamics of regional and global development. The third session was reserved for a deeper debate on Cambodia and ASEAN relations since Cambodia became a member in April 1999. It looked at the benefits and challenges that this relation may bring and identified critical areas of cooperation that the two sides must take forward in the next phase of ASEAN Community beyond 2015.

During the opening session, HRH Samdech Norodom Sirivudh, Chairman of CICP mentioned that the ASEAN Community has just been transitioning to a new phase, so there is the stronger expectation for the organization to prove that it can further enhance unity and forge stronger centrality both among the Member States and with the global community at large. This conference was intended to find out what the future might hold for ASEAN and what is required for Cambodia and ASEAN to work together for a better future in Southeast Asia. He also suggested appropriate recommendations to implement the three community blueprints – political and security, economic, and social and cultural pillar of the ASEAN Community beyond 2015. At the end of his remarks, he expressed his sincere appreciation to His Excellency Kan Pharidh, Under Secretary of State who represents H.E. Deputy Prime Minister Hor Namhong, Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Cambodia who took his valuable time to come and deliver a keynote address. He thanked H.E. Ambassador Ong Keng Yong, Executive Deputy Chairman and Director of the Institute of Defense and Strategic Studies, S Rajaratnam School of International Studies, for coming all the way from Singapore to give his Special Remarks on “Where would ASEAN be beyond 2015?”. He also thanked Mr. Rene Gradwohl, Country Representative, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS), Cambodia for the valuable support in making this regional conference possible as well as expressing his deep appreciation to all the speakers and role players who have come to Cambodia to share their perspectives on this important seminar.

During his special remarks, H.E. Ambassador Ong Keng Yong, Executive Deputy Chairman and Director of the Institute of Defense and Strategic Studies, S Rajaratnam School of

International Studies mentioned that this conference was timely to for examining ASEAN's accomplishments in the context of the establishment of the ASEAN Community based on the three pillars of political-security cooperation, economic integration and socio-cultural development. The ASEAN Community is a continuous learning process; as such it is important to understand the depth and scope of building a community which has evolved gradually with many challenges remaining to be tackled given the diversity of the ASEAN Member States (AMS) and rapidly changing geopolitical dynamics. He also discussed the ASEAN Economic Community, the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community, and ASEAN Political Security Community, as well as ASEAN Community and Cambodia. At the end of his remarks he mentioned that the ASEAN Community was a work in progress, but that ASEAN needed to hasten its commitments under the ASEAN Community 2015 to fully implement and carry out what has been agreed in order to obtain credibility among investors and trust within the ASEAN family.

During the keynote address, His Excellency Kan Pharidh, Under Secretary of State, Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Cambodia gave his sincere appreciation to the Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace and the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Cambodia for making and funding this important Conference and reaffirmed his personal view of the meaningful essence of this Regional Conference on "Cambodia and ASEAN: Managing Opportunity and Challenges beyond 2015" would contribute to the identification of new opportunities and challenges for ASEAN as a dynamic global player and to improve its relevance and enhance its central role, particularly in the evolving regional architecture in East Asia. He hoped that the outcome of this Conference would also spell out strategic and practical recommendations for Cambodia to address challenges which Cambodia is facing in the process of the ASEAN Community-post 2015. On its way forward, ASEAN will forge ahead together according to the vision stated in the ASEAN 2025 which is considered as a forward-looking roadmap to attain a politically cohesive, economically integrated, and socially responsible, and a truly rules-based, people-oriented, people-centered ASEAN. At the end of the keynote address, he was looking forward to fruitful discussion and the exchange of views to determine key issues that prescribe the ASEAN Community-post 2015 and provide concrete recommendations for ASEAN to retain its success and to play a central role in regional and global issues. Especially with the emerging and evolving regional architecture, it will be important to provide an assessment of the ability and contributions of Cambodia as an active ASEAN Member State to keep up with the ASEAN regionalism process as well as to identify strategic issues and initiatives for Cambodia's preparedness in the next phase of the ASEAN Community process beyond 2015.

The following key points that were discussed and some policy recommendations are:

COHESIVENESS AND CENTRALITY OF ASEAN

- Strengthen ASEAN identity among the population of ASEAN member states, such as creating an ASEAN Awareness, Affinity and Participation Index.
- Follow the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia which demands that disagreements are settled peacefully without the use of force.
- Government officials and citizens should understand better what centrality is and why it is important.

- Take the necessary steps for the successful implementation of ASEAN Vision of 2025, including deploying the required financial resources.
- ASEAN must work to maintain its centrality while fortifying its unity to address pressing issues that confront ASEAN as a whole or individually within particular member states so that ASEAN can speak with a unified voice which represents the wishes of each of its members and the majority of its citizens.
- Complete the task of eliminating tariffs within ASEAN in order to promote free trade and further stimulate economic growth in the region.
- Complete the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) to boost trade with regional traders and create a super trade zone with ASEAN at the center.

STRENGTHENING MEMBER STATES AND INSTITUTIONS

- Throughout ASEAN there must be a commitment to reduce corruption and strengthen the rule of law in order to build trust for FDI and increase trade partnerships abroad. These changes would also fortify human rights, provide greater funding for important institutions like schools and improve the global image of ASEAN and Southeast Asia.
- Narrow the development gap of the CLMV countries in comparison to the other 6 more established, well off member states of ASEAN.
- ASEAN member states must work to improve living conditions of its less well-off citizens by putting more resources into poverty reduction.
- Grant greater access to funds or low-interest loans for the owners of SME's.
- Strengthen and create laws that empower women, especially in terms of gaining access to education, promotion to positions of top leadership and entrepreneurial opportunities.
- ASEAN SME's need greater access to technology, training and human resource enrichment. To insure the competitiveness of future SME's it is important that educational institutions within ASEAN create graduates with the skills and ethics to be successful in Asia and abroad.
- Improve cultural exchange as a way to further people to people connectivity.

ASEAN COMMUNITY BUILDING

- For the region to stay economically competitive, ASEAN needs to continue improving the development of infrastructure, as this endeavor is critical to reduce transport time and distribution costs, especially for the global value chain production that spans across multiple borders and distant locations. In addition, ASEAN needs to push forward for the development of information and communications technology (ICT) as a core dimension of ASEAN connectivity for the region's economic and social transformation, which would allow the creation of a business-enabling environment to promote trade, investment and entrepreneurship.

- For equitable economic development, ASEAN must place greater emphasis on the role of SMEs as the backbone of ASEAN economies. SMEs represent 90% of enterprises in the region. The promotion of SMEs will allow the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) to enhance its competitiveness and improve access to finance, markets, information and advisory services as well as development of human resources, technology and innovation. ASEAN Member States must develop various projects with ASEAN Dialogue Partners to help SMEs. For instance, the US-ASEAN Business Alliance for Competitive SMEs was created to build the capacity of ASEAN SME entrepreneurs through the use of modern ICT and marketing principle.
- To become a globally-engaged region, ASEAN needs to elevate its free trade and economic partnership agreements towards the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). This means bringing together the five existing Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) between ASEAN and its six key trading partners of China, Republic of Korea, Japan, India, Australia and New Zealand. The RCEP will align various aspects including tariff rates, tariff elimination time-lines, rules of origin and the trade documentation processes. The RCEP has the potential to transform the region into the world's largest integrated market of more than 3 billion people, with a combined GDP of US\$22.7 trillion.
- To become a credible regional grouping, ASEAN must do more to strengthen the socio-cultural community which ranges from education and environment to migrant workers and poverty eradication. ASEAN's socio-cultural community (ASCC) must embrace fully the three strategic thrusts, namely: an inclusive and caring society; resilience and sustainability; and a deep sense of shared identity.
- To make the ASEAN society more inclusive and caring, progress must significantly reduce poverty reduction by closing the development gaps among the AMS. ASEAN must work harder to address the development gaps by rigorously promoting the SMEs which would entail also empowering women, improving access to the use of technology, finance, and better management in order to become more productive and more informed about the opportunities of ASEAN.
- To achieve sustainable development, ASEAN should focus on promoting a green environment policy and the protection of the natural resources. Regional cooperation in combating haze and environmental protection should be prioritized, including climate change and reforestation.
- To promote ASEAN identity, it is necessary to lift the spirit of unity in diversity through the promotion of ASEAN awareness, cultural heritage, cultural creativity and engagement with all segments of the population. Regional communication plans to support the ASEAN identity must move swiftly forward to disseminate multimedia materials on ASEAN identity and in support of school activities that promote ASEAN awareness as well as sponsoring sporting events and youth exchanges that can bring people closer together. This would help to elevate the performance of ASEAN and its people-to-people initiatives which are related to greater awareness, understanding and ownership of a common identity.

- ASEAN must go on with its mission to preserve regional peace and stability to create a united, inclusive, and resilient community, where people in this region live in a safe, harmonious, and secure environment. As such, the ASEAN Political Security Community (APSC) is regarded as a strong impetus for regional cooperation among the AMS in order to place regional aspirations above national egos.
- There must be further improvements to the ASEAN comprehensive approach to security. More efforts are required to enhance the capacity of the region to deal with emerging security challenges. The key point is to secure peace through the peaceful settlement of disputes and apply the rule of law covering international norms, rules and conventions.
- ASEAN security mechanisms such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), the East Asia Summit (EAS) and ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting Plus (ADMM plus) must be able to engage the major powers and the other countries of the Asia Pacific so that ASEAN can better manage peace and security in the region and thus balance the interests of the AMS and those outside Southeast Asia that could affect the security of the region.
- It would be wiser for ASEAN to act as a united front rather than allow the ten Member States to be left alone to deal with the major powers separately. The envisioned rules-based character of ASEAN and the reliance on the rule of law based on the international system will guarantee state independence and survival.

STRENGTHEN CAMBODIA - ASEAN RELATIONS

- It is important for Cambodia to realize that by working together as a community with a collective vision to help protect one another and forge common interests that the country can overcome its international isolation and bring forward much needed development for its people.
- Being a member of the ASEAN family, Cambodia can gain substantive benefits such as: safeguarding Cambodia's sovereignty and territorial integrity through the ASEAN principles of non-interference; increasing Cambodia's diplomatic voice ten times across the globe so when Cambodia speaks on any particular issue of regional concern, another nine countries' voices are added on to it; receiving due consideration in the regional and global context as Cambodia has been invited to participate in all ASEAN regional meetings annually, and other global conferences; improving the country's reputation and prestige in the global context and reintegrating into the international community; benefiting from the ASEAN Economic Community with an economy worth \$2.5 trillion, a population of more than 620 million, a single market and production base where goods, services and skilled labor can move freely, accompanied by freer movement of capital; and receiving other advantages created by the Free Trade Arrangements that ASEAN has been negotiating, including access to vast markets of the U.S., China, India, Japan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand and of course with the European Union (EU) - all of these nations are open to Cambodian exports.
- Notwithstanding these benefits, however, three questions emerge and pose serious concerns. Has ASEAN really been playing the key role in improving Cambodia's domestic political, socio-economic and external security situation over the past decade?

What can Cambodia do to gain more from this membership in the future? And as ASEAN is evolving to meet new challenges, how can Cambodia contribute to furthering the integration process for the benefit of all members?

What has ASEAN really done for Cambodia?

- There are still big challenges in narrowing the development gap among the older and newer ASEAN Member States. ASEAN is faced with some serious problems due to a combination of financial shortfalls, poor governance, and the inability of national governments to manage international and interdepartmental coordination, not to mention the structural incapacity of ASEAN to pull the AEC along.
- With these impediments, especially the shortage of capital, many of the projects identified in the ASEAN Master Plan on Connectivity and in the Initiative of ASEAN Integration (IAI), involving the road, railway, bridge and other infrastructure development cannot be met as planned. Unless ASEAN is more convincing about narrowing the development gap, Cambodia will not be able to effectively engage with ASEAN on an equal footing with other member states. As such the process of ASEAN Community building and regional integration will be a slow moving process which will affect ASEAN's centrality as a whole.
- There remains a lingering question as to what extent ASEAN can help resolve the thorny border dispute between Cambodia and Thailand. When Cambodia joined ASEAN, it hoped that the process of an ASEAN political security community would provide a catalyst for peace and stability with its neighbors. After the border conflict between Cambodia and Thailand over the 4.6 square kilometers of land surrounding the Temple of Preah Vihear erupted in 2008 and again in 2011, ASEAN has not been able to offer good office or mediation to resolve the dispute peacefully. Cambodia has been frustrated with the weakness of the ASEAN dispute settlement mechanism among member states as the bloc stood by and did nothing while a stronger nation stepped all over a weaker one. ASEAN has failed to recognize Thailand's aggression against Cambodia. As long as ASEAN remains unable to resolve disputes among its members, the group is unlikely to become a mature politico-security community.

What can Cambodia do to gain more from this membership in the future?

- Cambodia is keenly aware of the ASEAN's 'raison-d'être' since its inception on 8th August 1967. It was with the expectation that only by becoming a member of an enlarged ASEAN that Cambodia was able to reconfigure its foreign policy to reap appropriate benefits that ASEAN could offer and gain more leverage in regional affairs within the framework of regional integration and strengthened political, economic, and social cooperation along with the other 10 Member States.
- To reap more benefits from ASEAN, Cambodia must overcome several hurdles to improve not only the country's efficiency and competitiveness through greater participation in global production networks and value chains, but also exhibit a firm commitment to undertake swift reforms domestically to reduce corruption and strengthen the rule of law in order to build trust for attracting Foreign Direct Investment

(FDI) and increase trade partnerships abroad. More efforts should be undertaken to fortify human rights, provide greater funding for important institutions like schools and health centers and improve good governance in public services.

- Other important aspects for Cambodia to consider is to count on ASEAN to restore its positive image, Doing this would allow the country to look forward to instilling national unity, use peace and non-violence as ways to solve disputes, promote a democratic culture of accommodation, tolerance, and inclusion, and strengthen and institutionalize the legal framework to rebuild a new image of a peace-loving Cambodia.
- On ASEAN unity and centrality, Cambodia would be well off not to repeat the incident of not issuing the “Joint Communiqué” as was the case in 2012 which still haunts Cambodia. What appeared to happen was when Cambodia chaired ASEAN in 2012, Cambodia was perceived as supporting China by preventing ASEAN from making a strong statement regarding the South China Sea territorial and sovereignty dispute. Many people were quick to blame Cambodia as Chair of ASEAN for undermining ASEAN’s centrality and unity. However these critics failed to realize the bigger picture in relation to how China perceives its core interests and the overall U.S. pivot to Asia as part of a strategy to check China’s rise in the region which also played a part in what ASEAN can do or cannot do.
- With regard to the political security aspect, although ASEAN has been successful in extracting the region from major conflicts in the past, the building of an effective ASEAN Political and Security Community (APSC) is being challenged relentlessly with a gamut of traditional and non-traditional security issues as can be seen prevailing in the Asia-Pacific region. ASEAN is still unable to find a suitable resolution to properly manage and address the ongoing competition to secure access to sea resources such as energy and fisheries, the rising tension in the South China Sea and East China Sea as claimant states exhibit inflexible behavior toward their maritime claims, the issue of denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, the Cross-Straits Relations between China and Taiwan, and the proliferation of interconnected networks of transnational crime including terrorism, drug deals, piracy, trafficking in person, and smuggling. These manifestations remain major barriers for each individual country, Cambodia included, which would allow in ASEAN to come together in pursuing a desirable political-security regime which must remain open, inclusive, transparent and outward-looking. The 10-member states must work harder to gain more unwavering commitment from other EAS countries, especially the U.S. China, Japan, South Korea, Australia, Russia and India to address the persistent challenges caused by transnational and non-traditional security along with traditional security concerns.

WELCOME REMARKS BY HRH SAMDECH NORODOM SIRIVUDH

Chairman of the Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace

**At Regional Conference on
“Cambodia and ASEAN: Managing Opportunity and Challenges Beyond 2015”
28th March 2016, Cambodiana Hotel, Phnom Penh, Cambodia**

- Excellency Kan Pharidh, Under Secretary of State,
Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Cambodia
- Mr. Rene Gradwohl, Country Representative, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS),
Cambodia
- Esteemed High Officials of the Royal Government of Cambodia
- Excellency Ambassadors and Member of the Diplomatic Corps
- Distinguished International and National Speakers
- Members of the International Organizations, NGOs and Civil Societies
- Distinguished Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen

Good Morning! It is a great pleasure for me to welcome all of the distinguished participants to this Regional Conference on “Cambodia and ASEAN: Managing Opportunity and Challenges Beyond 2015”.

The Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace is privileged to collaborate with the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS), Cambodia to host this timely conference as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) have just commemorated the ASEAN Community 2015 at the end of last year.

As the ASEAN Community has just entered into a new phase, there are stronger expectations for this organization to prove that it can further enhance unity and forge stronger centrality both among the Member States and with the global community at large. The future success of ASEAN will depend on its continued ability to improve the quality of life of its 620 million people through the enhancement of the capacity to implement all action plans described in the blueprints of its three community pillars in the fast changing geo-political environment beyond 2015.

Therefore looking ahead beyond 2015, it is a crucial time for ASEAN to reflect on the way forward in order to maintain its credibility and be able to manage the emerging strategic currents that may pose challenges to its relevance in the years ahead.

Please allow me to mention that this regional conference is organized in three distinct sessions.

The first session will address ASEAN’s Post 2015 direction and draw fresh perspectives on various priorities in making Southeast Asia a region of peace and prosperity as it moves forward beyond 2015.

The second session will deal with key factors needed to enhance ASEAN centrality and explore how ASEAN can best improve its relevance and secure its interests in the longer term beyond 2015, while meeting the challenges and dynamics of regional and global development.

The third session is especially reserved for a deeper debate on Cambodia and ASEAN relations since Cambodia became a member in April 1999 and look at the benefits and challenges that this relation may bring and identify critical areas of cooperation that the two sides must take forward in the next phase of the ASEAN Community beyond 2015.

I am particularly pleased to welcome many prominent local and overseas speakers who will share their views on the future prospect of ASEAN from various backgrounds including economics, politics and security, social and cultural studies, and international relations. These distinguished experts possess deep knowledge and will deliberate on the issues of the three sessions I have just mentioned.

At the end of the conference, we will certainly know more about what the future might hold for ASEAN and what is required for Cambodia and ASEAN to work together for a better future of Southeast Asia and suggest appropriate recommendations to implement the three community blueprints – political and security, economic, and social and cultural pillar of the ASEAN Community beyond 2015.

At this time, I would like to express a special appreciation to His Excellency Kan Pharidh, Under Secretary of State who represents H.E. Deputy Prime Minister Hor Namhong, Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Cambodia who has taken his valuable time to come and deliver a keynote address which we will have the pleasure of hearing in a moment.

I would like to thank H.E. Ambassador Ong Keng Yong, Executive Deputy Chairman and Director of the Institute of Defense and Strategic Studies, S Rajaratnam School of International Studies, for coming all the way from Singapore to give his Special Remarks on “Where would ASEAN be beyond 2015?” at this conference.

I would also like to thank other imminent overseas and national experts, including His Excellency Tan Sri Rastam Mohd Isa of Malaysia, H.E. Ambassador Yong Chanthalangsy of Lao PDR, Dr. Termsak Chalermphanupap of Thailand, Mr. Andrew Mantong of Indonesia and the three Cambodian speakers, H.E. Ambassador Pou Sothirak, Dr. Chheang Vannarith, and Mr. Hing Vutha, all who have agreed to come and share their valuable perspectives to enrich this conference.

I shall not fail to express my sincere appreciation to Mr. Rene Gradwohl, Country Representative, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS), Cambodia for the valuable support in making this regional conference possible.

Last but not least, I would like to thank my Executive Director, H.E. Ambassador Pou Sothirak, and all his CICP team for diligently putting together an interesting program and coordinating all the administrative arrangement for this conference.

I look forward to learning more and actively participating in the discussion. I wish the conference a fruitful deliberation.

Thank you very much for your kind intention!

SPECIAL REMARKS BY AMBASSADOR ONG KENG YONG

At Regional Conference

“Cambodia and ASEAN: Managing Opportunity and Challenges Beyond 2015” Phnom Penh, 28 March 2016

- Thank you for inviting me to this regional conference. This is a useful event to discuss and exchange views about ASEAN and its future.
- The end of 2015 marks a key milestone for ASEAN as it has strengthened its position as a significant regional player within the international community. Hence, it is timely to examine ASEAN accomplishments in the context of the establishment of the ASEAN Community based on the three pillars of political security cooperation, economic integration and socio-cultural development. This will illustrate how far ASEAN has to travel for the new target of the ASEAN Vision 2025 to realise “a rules-based, people-oriented, people-centred ASEAN Community.
- It must be stressed that the ASEAN Community is a continuous learning process. It is important to understand that the depth and scope of building a community has evolved gradually. There are many challenges given the diversity of the ASEAN Member States (AMS) and the rapidly changing geopolitical dynamics. At the same time, the development of the ASEAN Community also presents many opportunities for the AMS, collectively as well as individually.
- Let me start with the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) as it has produced results in several areas.

ASEAN ECONOMIC COMMUNITY

- Economically, ASEAN has made extraordinary progress. In 2014, the ASEAN economy was the third largest in Asia and the seventh largest in the world, with a combined GDP of over USD2.5 trillion and an average GDP per capita of over USD4,000. Statistics from the ASEAN Secretariat show that the region has more than 622 million people. The youthfulness of this population is most significant as over 50% of the population is under the age of 30.
- ASEAN has widening regional and global markets. ASEAN statistics and UNCTAD World Investment Report 2015 put total ASEAN trade in 2014 at US\$2.5 trillion. Total FDI inflows into ASEAN in 2014 were US\$136 billion, accounting for 11% of global FDI.
- To realise the goal of creating a single market and production base under the AEC, tariff elimination has been the top priority. The ASEAN-6 (comprising Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand) have eliminated almost all their intra-regional tariff lines, while the CLMV (Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Vietnam) have removed over 90%.
- The continuous simplification of Rules of Origin and the ASEAN Self-Certification Project would substantially help traders and manufacturers meet origin certification

and help create a more open market. The Self-Certification scheme allows certified exporters the freedom to declare that their products have satisfied ASEAN origin criteria. Moreover, the ASEAN Single Window helps to facilitate trade across borders, as it serves as a single point of entry for trade-related documents and information thereby speeding up customs clearances and reducing transaction times and costs.

- For the region to stay economically competitive, the development of infrastructure is critical as it will help reduce transport time and distribution costs, especially for global value chain production that spans across multiple borders and distant locations. Despite numerous delays, road and rail connections are being developed and more air flight links are being added every month. These improvements have increased trade and tourist flows. ASEAN also recognises information and communications technology (ICT) as a core dimension of ASEAN connectivity for the region's economic and social transformation. ICT would allow for the creation of a business-enabling environment to promote trade, investment and entrepreneurship.
- In achieving equitable economic development, ASEAN places greater emphasis on the role of SMEs as the backbone of ASEAN economies. SMEs represent 90% of enterprises in the region. The AEC aims to enhance the competitiveness and expansion of SMEs through improved access to finance, markets, information and advisory services as well as development of human resources, technology and innovation. There is a Strategic Action Plan for ASEAN SME Development.
- In addition, the AMS have been developing various projects with ASEAN Dialogue Partners to help SMEs. For example, the US-ASEAN Business Alliance for Competitive SMEs was created to build the capacity of ASEAN SME entrepreneurs through the use of modern ICT and marketing. To date, the Business Alliance has provided training and workshops to over 1000 SME owners and is committed to continuously providing training to ASEAN SMEs until 2017. There is also the "ASEAN Online SME Academy" which provides useful business information and training resources for start-ups and also supports the development of ICT skills among SME entrepreneurs.
- In order to become a globally-engaged region, ASEAN has elevated its free trade and economic partnership agreements towards the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). This means bringing together the five existing Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) between ASEAN and its six key trading partners of China, Republic of Korea, Japan, India, Australia and New Zealand. The RCEP will align various aspects including tariff rates, tariff elimination time-lines, rules of origin and trade documentation processes. The RCEP has the potential to transform the region into the world's largest integrated market of more than 3 billion people, with a combined GDP of US\$22.7 trillion.

ASEAN SOCIO-CULTURAL COMMUNITY

- The socio-cultural community is arguably the most visible pillar of the ASEAN Community as it ranges from education and environment to migrant workers and poverty eradication. The focus of the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) is on three strategic thrusts: establishing an inclusive and caring ASEAN society,

building resilience and sustainability in ASEAN, and creating a deep sense of shared ASEAN identity.

- To make the ASEAN society more inclusive and caring, the region has achieved significant progress in poverty reduction by closing the development gap among the AMS. It was reported by the ASEAN Secretariat that the extent of absolute poverty (people living below US\$1.25 per day) has declined between 2000 and 2010 from around 29 to 15% in the ASEAN-6 and from around 45% to 16% in the CLMV countries. Furthermore, life expectancy at birth has improved from an average of 71.07 years in 2008 to 71.57 years in 2010.
- How do we achieve inclusive growth in ASEAN? Inclusive growth aims to address the development gap among the AMS. However, it poses many challenges on how to bring all the ASEAN economies to the “corridors of development.” One of the ways that could boost inclusiveness is to develop the SMEs which would also empower the women of ASEAN.
- According to Tan Sri Munir Majid of the ASEAN Business Advisory Council, SMEs need to have access to the use of technology, finance, and better management in order to become more productive and more informed about the opportunities in ASEAN. With that, it could spur development because SMEs represent 90% of enterprises in ASEAN. It is also an important vehicle for women’s empowerment, considering 38-47% of formal-sector SMEs are women-owned businesses.
- Resilience and sustainability is a high policy concern in the region. ASEAN is working towards achieving sustainable development and green environment by protecting the natural resources for economic and social development. The ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution was established to strengthen regional cooperation to prevent haze and to protect the environment. The ASEAN Environmental Education Action Plan 2008-2012 ensures the inclusion of environmental education and environmentally sustainable development in the education curricula. The ASEAN Climate Change Initiative is the result of ASEAN common understanding on climate change issues, which encourages interested parties outside ASEAN to participate in ASEAN’s afforestation and reforestation efforts.
- In strengthening the ASEAN identity, it is necessary to lift the spirit of unity in diversity through the promotion of ASEAN awareness, cultural heritage, cultural creativity and engagement within all segments of the population. ASEAN has a regional communication plan to support the ASEAN identity and disseminate multimedia materials on ASEAN identity. The plan also supports school activities that promote ASEAN awareness as well as sporting events and youth exchanges that bring people closer together. The Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA) in Jakarta, which works closely with the ASEAN Secretariat, suggested that ASEAN should develop an ASEAN Awareness, Affinity and Participation Index, which would help to evaluate the performance of ASEAN and its people-to-people initiatives related to greater awareness, better understanding and ownership of a common identity.

ASEAN POLITICAL SECURITY COMMUNITY

- To preserve regional peace and stability, ASEAN aims to create a united, inclusive, and resilient community, where people in ASEAN live in a safe, harmonious, and

secure environment. The ASEAN Political Security Community (APSC) is regarded as the most sensitive area of cooperation because the national instincts of the AMS are stronger than their respective regional identities.

- ASEAN adopts a comprehensive approach to security. It enhances the capacity of the region to deal with emerging security challenges. ASEAN has the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC) which promotes the avoidance of force to settle disputes. There is also the Treaty on the Southeast Asian Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone (SEANWFZ) which preserves the region to be free of nuclear weapons. The key point is to secure peace through the peaceful settlement of disputes and apply the rule of law: international norms, rules and conventions; in essence, have a rules-based regional regime.
- The ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), the East Asia Summit and ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting Plus (with Australia, China, India, Japan, Republic of Korea, New Zealand, Russia and the USA) were created by ASEAN to engage the major powers and the other countries of the Asia Pacific so that ASEAN could better manage peace and security in the region. ASEAN plays the key role in the regional architecture and therefore must be able to balance the interests of the AMS and those outside Southeast Asia impinging on the region.
- In non-economic terms, ASEAN is seen as having limited success. The fact is that there has been no rupture of inter-state relations among the AMS or a war involving the AMS since the withdrawal of Vietnam from Cambodia more than 30 years ago. To be sure, the ASEAN identity is still weak and nationalistic sentiments in some of the AMS remain too strong for more speedy and substantive progress on the APSC. External geopolitical developments are also making it difficult to move quickly on ASEAN cooperation in certain areas.
- Yet, it is still better to hang together as ASEAN than be left alone to deal with the major powers separately. The envisioned rules-based character of ASEAN and the reliance on the rule of law based on the international system will guarantee state independence and survival. In other words, ASEAN is the only inter-governmental organisation of its kind which can help safeguard the respective national interests of the individual AMS.

ASEAN COMMUNITY AND CAMBODIA

- It is germane to look at how Cambodia has made progress as a member state of ASEAN. The Cambodian economy has significantly improved due to the country's interactions through ASEAN. Studies have concluded that ASEAN boosted the country's GDP growth by an average rate of 7% per year from 2010 to 2014. The Ministry of Commerce of Cambodia noted that the country's total trade also increased from US\$2.7 billion in 2000 to US\$18.48 billion in 2013, while FDI inflows have also increased from US\$218 million in 2000 to US\$4.48 billion in 2013.
- Being part of the ASEAN Community is also beneficial for Cambodia because it helped improve the country's efficiency and competitiveness through greater participation in global production networks and value chains. The country's SMEs also benefited from larger market access and lower input and transaction costs through the elimination of tariffs and non-tariff barriers on goods and services. Furthermore, Cambodia will benefit from technical assistance provided by ASEAN-6

and ASEAN Dialogue Partners in terms of funds, capacity building programmes and educational scholarships.

- The AEC is significantly beneficial for developing countries such as Cambodia. The ASEAN-Korea Centre found that Cambodia has become part of the global value chain and also part of the ASEAN bloc, which attracts 11% of the global FDI inflow. The country's SMEs are likely to gain from lower input and transaction costs through improved trade facilitation such as dedicated customs procedures, logistical arrangements and transportation connectivity. Cambodian citizens now enjoy cheaper imported products and access to diversified services. Lastly, Cambodia can be provided with technical and financial assistance from economies of developed nations.

CONCLUSION

- Different studies have concluded that the ASEAN Community is a work in progress. Quite a few commitments under the ASEAN Community 2015 have not been fully implemented and they must be carried out to obtain credibility among investors and trust within the ASEAN family. There is no doubt that the depth and scope of the ASEAN Community building would bring even more opportunities for every AMS. ASEAN leaders are constantly setting goals to strengthen and accelerate the community building process in order to achieve stability and security for the region's future development.
- The changing regional and global environment requires ASEAN to continue its creative and innovative ways of managing challenges and addressing development issues in the region. There is no one-size-fits-all approach to live in a region which is so important to so many major powers. Ultimately, technological changes and their associated consequences will determine how the respective societies of Southeast Asia survive.

KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY H.E. MR. KAN PHARIDH

Under-Secretary of State
Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation
Kingdom of Cambodia

At Regional Conference on
“Cambodia and ASEAN: Managing Opportunity and Challenges Beyond 2015
28 March 2016, Phnom Penh, Cambodia

His Royal Highness Samdech Norodom Sirivuth, Supreme Privy Counsellor to His Majesty the King of Cambodia, Member of Constitutional Council and Founder and Chairman of Board of Directors of CICP,

His Excellency Ambassador Ong Keng Yong, Mr. Rene Gradwohl, Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen

- It is my great pleasure and honour to be here among great personalities and individuals and among many distinguish guests and participants, who are moderators and panel of speakers, attending this Conference today.
- At the outset, on behalf of His Excellency **Hor Namhong**, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, I would like to express our sincere appreciation to the Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace and the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Cambodia for making and funding this important Conference and making it possible. I would like to extend my warmest welcome to our honorable guests, speakers and all participants for taking part in this Regional Conference.
- Taking this opportunity, I would like to reaffirm my personal view that this meaningful Regional Conference on “Cambodia and ASEAN: Managing Opportunity and Challenges beyond 2015” is organized at the right time while many ASEAN people, specifically Cambodian people, are doubtful of the ASEAN Community process “Where would ASEAN be beyond 2015” as H.E. Ambassador Ong Keng Yong emphasized in his Special Remarks, and they are also sceptical about what and how ASEAN people gain benefits from the ASEAN Community process.
- In this regard, I strongly hope that this important Conference will contribute valuable thoughts to identify new opportunities and challenges for ASEAN as a dynamic global player to improve its relevance and enhance its central role, particularly in the evolving regional architecture in East Asia. The outcome of this Conference can also generate strategic and practical recommendations for Cambodia to address challenges which it is facing in the process of ASEAN Community-post 2015.

His Royal Highness, Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

- As we are all aware 49 years ago, five Foreign Ministers of Southeast Asian countries met on 8 August 1967 in Bangkok to declare the establishment of an Association for

Regional Cooperation known as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations – ASEAN, vowing to accelerate the economic growth, social progress and cultural development in the region through joint endeavours in the spirit of equality and partnership in order to strengthen the foundation for a prosperous and peaceful community of Southeast Asian Nations.

- An ASEAN Community was formally launched on 31 December 2015. ASEAN aspires to establish a Community where people can continue to participate in and benefit fully from the ASEAN Community is the culmination of nearly five decades of collective aspirations and tireless efforts of Leaders and people, which is a long way to seek out One Vision, One Identity, and One Community.
- Recognized worldwide as one of the most successful and resilient regional organisation with 10 sovereign Member States bound together for peace, security, stability and prosperity in Southeast Asia, the ASEAN Community no longer stands as a loose Association of ten countries or for officials dealing with deliberations, statements, declarations and so forth only, but a proud and promising Community. On the way forward, the ASEAN Community will follow the path of ASEAN 2025: Forging Ahead Together, which charts the future direction of ASEAN with a strong commitment to further consolidating ASEAN Community over the next 10 years. ASEAN 2025 is a forward-looking roadmap to attain a politically cohesive, economically integrated, socially responsible, and truly rules-based, people-oriented, people-centred ASEAN.
- Therefore, it is crucial for ASEAN to redouble its collective efforts to realise ASEAN 2025. ASEAN has now turned toward a new phase of regional cooperation where we emphasise a people-oriented and people-centred approach, to speed up the implementation of the ASEAN Charter and the three Blueprints which would ensure effective cross-pillars and sectoral coordination in ways that synergise outcome for the people, to accelerate narrowing the development divide and poverty reduction, to enhance connectivity, and to strengthen ASEAN capacity building and awareness. Throughout its history over the past years, ASEAN has gone through several turning points to tackle various challenges of the times. It has been proven that through different challenges, ASEAN with its unity, solidarity, cohesiveness and capacity to respond in a timely and efficient manner, has become stronger, bolder and more resilient, thus accumulating successful accomplishments.
- It is hoped that as a Community, ASEAN will bring to fruition the integration process that offers ASEAN people and its partners more opportunities such as a bigger, more open and rules-based market and a well connected region with the free movement of goods, services, capital and skilled labour, with a view to improving the lives of ASEAN people as well as with increased people-to-people connectivity through education and cultural exchanges, among others. On the economic front, ASEAN will strive to become a single market and production base, a highly competitive, dynamic and innovative economic region, while at the same time ensuring equitable economic development among its members and achieving full integration into the global economy.

His Royal Highness, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

- For its external relations, ASEAN has to be an open and outward-looking Community. The security and prosperity of ASEAN and of its citizens are best

promoted and protected through a proactive engagement with its partners, friends and other countries outside Southeast Asia. This is why ASEAN is committed to further enhance qualitatively and quantitatively its relations with its Dialogue Partners and other external partners. Those relations have expanded under various ASEAN-led mechanisms such as the ASEAN Plus One process, the ASEAN Plus Three, the East Asia Summit (EAS), the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and the ADMM Plus. ASEAN should also continue to tackle the existing and emerging regional and global challenges amidst a rapidly evolving regional architecture.

- In this connection, for a strong and successful Community, ASEAN has to maintain its centrality and be a primary driving force through ASEAN-led mechanisms. Therefore, ASEAN has to make sure that its central role will not be undermined by any initiatives of the evolving regional architecture and must ensure that all new emerging regional institutions in East Asia are complementary of each other and support ASEAN's centrality.
- We have to bear in mind that the quality of ASEAN's leadership in all ASEAN-led mechanisms and fora is the key requirement for ASEAN to maintain its relevance and enhance its centrality in spite of various major power's rivalries in our region. Thus, it requires ASEAN Member States to stay united, increase and promote the habits of coordination and consultation on all sensitive matters and issues as well as to participate as a cohesive group with a clear common goal and objectives in order to speak with one voice in dealing with regional and international issues.

His Royal Highness, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

- For a sustained Community, ASEAN also has to tackle existing and emerging challenges in the process of the community building amidst changing patterns of a rapidly evolving regional architecture while at the same time striving to secure sustainable development amidst the rapid depletion of natural resources and climate change that could trigger irreversible damage to our people. This should propel us to enhance our capacity to respond to those challenges in a timely and efficient manner, among others, through the strengthening of the ASEAN Secretariat and the capacity of each ASEAN Member State, particularly the role of ASEAN Chair, both in terms of institutional capacity and human resources.
- At the same time, generating financial resources to support the implementation of priority programmes and projects is still most challenging. In addition, ASEAN also has to further promote ASEAN's awareness and a sense of belonging to the ASEAN Community among its people to help them have a mind-set of how ASEAN is going to be.
- Last but not least, I strongly believe that today this important Regional Conference will serve as a useful forum for fruitful discussion and exchange views to determine key issues that prescribe the ASEAN Community-post 2015 and provide concrete recommendations for ASEAN to remain successful and play a central role in regional and global issues, especially in the evolving regional architecture. In addition, this can provide an assessment of the ability and contribution of Cambodia as an active ASEAN Member State to keep up with the ASEAN regionalism process as well as to identify strategic issues and initiatives for Cambodia's preparedness in the next phase of the ASEAN Community process beyond 2015.

Keynote Address by H.E. Mr. Kan Pharidh

- Finally, allow me to wish all of you a very productive discussion during the ensuing proceedings to make this Conference successful.

I wish you all happiness, prosperity and success in all endeavors.

Thank you for your kind attention.

THE ASEAN COMMUNITY: LESSONS FROM THE PAST AND PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE

Tan Sri Rastam Mohd Isa
Chairman and Chief Executive
Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) Malaysia

Phnom Penh Conference on Cambodia and ASEAN
28 March 2016

INTRODUCTION

ASEAN is a successful regional organisation. Some people may not agree with this statement. They see ASEAN as weak and prone to succumbing to pressure from major powers. They also see ASEAN as too elitist and slow to act. They regard the “ASEAN Way” of doing things as too slow and the countless declarations, communiques, visions, plans and programmes of action as mainly repetitive rhetorical statements and, to them, these do not provide adequate measures towards improving the lot of the people in the ten member states.

It is undeniable that ASEAN has achieved a lot since its establishment in 1967. However it have had its shares of both successes and setbacks. ASEAN has declared itself a community, as of January 2016, at the 26th ASEAN Summit held in Kuala Lumpur on November 2015. It has also adopted a new “Vision 2025” and is busy working to translate that vision into real action and implementable programmes. As ASEAN looks forward to its 50th anniversary in 2017, it is worth learning from lessons of the past while planning for the future.

GLOBAL AND REGIONAL STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT

ASEAN was established in 1967 during the Cold War. Competition and rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union was intense even in Southeast Asia. The US was getting itself deeply involved in Vietnam, gradually dragging its treaty allies, Thailand, Philippines and South Korea into the conflict. The Soviet Union naturally supported the North Vietnamese, their communist allies. China was in the grip of the “Cultural Revolution”. Superpower rivalry and competition provided the reason and basis for ASEAN to declare the region as a Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOPFAN) in 1971.

There was a clear division between the five ASEAN member states and the rest of Southeast Asia, in particular the Indochina states. This situation clearly persisted throughout the 1970’s and 1980’s. ASEAN’s persistence in opposing the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia and efforts at the UN and other international fora on the Cambodian issue throughout the 1980’s, helped to strengthen ASEAN unity and raise ASEAN’s international profile.

ASEAN is now preparing to celebrate its 50th anniversary in 2017. These celebrations come in the wake of ASEAN having declared the establishment of the ASEAN Community as of 1st January 2016. It is fair to say that the ASEAN Community has been established amidst global economic uncertainties and rising political tensions among major powers. The present situation finds some similarities with the days when the Bangkok Declaration was

adopted. The world is living through a period of strategic, political and economic doldrums, concern and uncertainty. Yet Southeast Asia is united, at least in the context of ASEAN.

The global economic situation continues to raise concern. Low oil prices have affected many economies, in particular the oil exporting countries. Slow growth in China and elsewhere and a strong US dollar against most other currencies could have a prolonged effect on trade, investment and tourism for ASEAN countries. Continuing conflict and tension in the Middle East and North Africa, the global threat of terrorism and violent extremism, especially the kind promoted by the Islamic State (IS), and the massive migration and refugee issues facing Europe and other parts of the world will inevitably have an impact on ASEAN. Added to these are the other major issues which need to be addressed: climate change, food security and new pandemic diseases which include the latest spread of the Zika virus. Increasingly governments in ASEAN will also have to deal with greater demands for freedom, democracy and human rights as well as cope with the tremendous influence of technology, in particular information technology, on communication, commerce and human interaction.

Currently there exists an interesting mixture of calm and tension in the Asia-Pacific region. ASEAN is experiencing a relatively peaceful environment after the region of Southeast Asia. Conflict among member states have been minimised with some serious efforts being made to resolve them, although some intractable territorial claims and disputes remain. Tensions exist in maritime areas of the South China Sea and in Northeast Asia. The differences between the United States and China over the South China Sea, is evidenced by China's increasing assertiveness on the issue and the prospects of greater militarization in the area. This could be a source of major concern and anxiety for ASEAN and others in the years to come. The North Korean nuclear issue is very much on the agenda with little prospect for any resolution in the near future. Russian assertiveness in Europe and the Middle East is certainly causing concern for to the Europeans but could also have its impact in Asia if and when Moscow decides to claim its position in the Asia-Pacific strategic landscape.

In spite of the global economic slowdown, there is still comparatively high economic growth and prosperity in ASEAN and China. Three of the world's largest economies (US, China and Japan) are part of the Asia-Pacific region. India which is also a strategic partner to ASEAN is now among the world's best performing economies and potentially could play a bigger role that could bring benefits to the ASEAN Economic Community. All these countries have links to ASEAN or ASEAN members, in one way or another, through the East Asia Summit (EAS) has yet to be concluded the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (RCEP) and the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPPA). ASEAN has developed mature and solid relationships with most of its external partners save a few. These will continue to benefit ASEAN for as long as ASEAN member states are able to maintain healthy relations with these countries and organizations, including the European Union and the United Nations.

In spite of recent developments, US economic, military and strategic dominance will likely continue and China may remain number two for decades to come. ASEAN will have to deftly manage and balance its relations with both superpowers. Major power competition between the US and China could affect ASEAN in many ways through both pressure and persuasion on ASEAN as a group and on individual member states. This would make it difficult for ASEAN to decide on important issues, thus putting further pressure on ASEAN solidarity, unity and cohesion. The South China Sea issue is a prime example of how ASEAN can be pressured from all sides - from the US, from China, from within and from other regional actors.

The establishment of the ASEAN Economic Community should increase the prospects for further expansion of the ASEAN economies through increased trade and greater flow of investments. Often, it has been said by the ASEAN leaders that with a population of 625 million people and a combined GDP of USD2.5 trillion, the ASEAN Community could become a formidable economic powerhouse. ASEAN member states are set to grow steadily in the years to come. Indonesia, for example, could become the world's seventh largest economy with a fairly young population in less than two decades. The ASEAN middle class is growing quite rapidly to become one of the drivers of growth and development in the ASEAN countries, however with a rising middle class juxtaposed against an aging population in some countries, ASEAN will face issues such as educational and skills gaps, brain drain and intra-regional migration. These are important issues that will have to be tackled head-on in the not so distant future.

A strong habit of cooperation has certainly been developed in ASEAN. This is a major achievement for ASEAN and its member states. There is clearly a major trust deficit in Northeast Asia. ASEAN should continue to leverage on this strength and on the recognition among outside powers of ASEAN centrality.

New and emerging issues are posing a greater challenge to ASEAN in terms of ASEAN unity and cohesion and ASEAN's ability and willingness to respond and act collectively to meet those challenges. Such issues include human trafficking and migration, globalised terrorism and violent extremism, climate change and the environment, and energy and food security. At some point in the future ASEAN will also have to deal with the issue of water security for member states.

In the near future too ASEAN will have to begin to meet, in a more rational and mature fashion, the challenge of new technologies: disruptive, elements such as hacking and computer viruses within the IT field and social media. These could have a tremendous impact on the competition for and management of the political, economic and socio-cultural spaces in all member states. ASEAN governments have to be sensitive to these developments and react to them in a manner that does not infringe upon constitutional and individual rights. One of the effects of this development could be a greater demand for participation among the people through civil society and non-governmental organizations to make ASEAN a truly people-oriented and people-centred organization.

ASEAN is now in the centre of the regional architecture in which ASEAN has been the driving force: the East Asia Summit, the ASEAN Regional Forum, the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting and ADMM+, the ASEAN Maritime Forum and Expanded AMF, the ASEAN Plus Three process and the ASEAN Plus One process. There are also multiple layers of regional organisations, fora, initiatives that are also not ASEAN centred: the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation, the Northeast Asian Peace and Cooperation Initiative, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and many others.

At the moment, ASEAN centrality is respected by others. Sooner or later, the question will have to be addressed as to whether the region actually needs a more comprehensive security architecture than the present structure and arrangements. It is undeniable that questions of duplication versus complementarity have arisen. These in turn lead to issues and problems of overlap, inefficiency, uneconomical use of resources and 'conference fatigue'. There should be a continual search for new ways, mechanisms, institutions and structures. Some people have pointed to the inadequacies of the EAS, the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and other existing mechanisms and have called for a revamp of the architecture or for new ones to be established. ASEAN should seriously ponder this as it commemorates its 50th anniversary.

ASEAN EXPERIENCE AND PRACTICES

History has shown that in experience and practice, ASEAN has moved slowly, step-by-step, on the basis of consensus, and at a pace comfortable to every member state. This has been the way from the original membership of five to the current complement of ten member states. In 1967 when the ASEAN Declaration was signed, emphasis was given towards economic and socio-cultural cooperation although the then prevailing international political situation and regional dynamics provided the underlying reason for ASEAN's establishment.

By way of illustration, let us remember that it was not until 1976 that the First ASEAN Summit was held in Bali and ASEAN's first major treaty, the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC) was signed together with the adoption of the First Bali Concord. ASEAN also only established the ASEAN Secretariat and appointed the first Secretary General of the Secretariat in the same year, nine years after ASEAN's establishment. While the Second ASEAN Summit was held in 1977, this saw the beginnings of ASEAN's leaders-level consultations with dialogue partners. The Third ASEAN Summit was only held ten years later. It was not until 1999 that the membership of all 10 Southeast Asian countries was achieved. The ASEAN Charter was adopted only in 2008 and the ASEAN Community came into being eight years later. With the establishment of the ASEAN Community, the case can be made for the need to have the 'ASEAN Way' pick up more steam for the sake of the people of ASEAN.

Through its own unique way of doing things, ASEAN has been able to build the power to attract, convene and influence other member states. This is embodied in the concept and practice of ASEAN centrality. But ASEAN centrality needs to be built upon. ASEAN cannot pretend that ASEAN centrality will give it the strength that it needs in its relations with its external partners if ASEAN itself does not continue to work to ensure its relevance. Quite importantly also, ASEAN needs to ensure the continued relevance of ASEAN centrality within ASEAN member states. This is particularly important as ASEAN moves toward being a more people-oriented and people-centred community of nations.

ASEAN works and moves on the basis of consensus which could be good or bad in different instances. This is also seen as a sign of success to some, but a recipe for failure to others. Despite this, the fact remains that ASEAN has become the most successful regional organization in the developing world. ASEAN has developed the habit of dialogue, cooperation and trust building among its members which others recognise and want to emulate. This is seen by some people as slow but eventually things come into place. What is significant is that ASEAN has evolved into a rules-based organization, developing its own norms and values which are increasingly observed and respected by others.

ASEAN has certainly provided the catalytic impetus for community building in the region, both in the context of Southeast Asia and the larger East Asian community. ASEAN-centred structures and institutions (ARF, ADMM Plus and EAS) have provided the foundation for confidence and trust building with the objective of promoting preventive diplomacy and conflict resolution.

ASEAN also has certain shortcomings, one of which is that for a long time, only the governments were seen as interested and willing to handle issues. For a long time ASEAN was mainly an intergovernmental venture. The participation and involvement of the private sector and NGOs/CSOs are only a recent phenomenon. It is increasingly acknowledged that the resolution of many issues nowadays requires the involvement of all stakeholders: governments, private sector, legislators, NGOs/CSOs, think tanks, and people. As we move beyond ASEAN's fifty years, there should be less of government and more involvement by others.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES AHEAD

As ASEAN moves ahead into its next half century, there are a few challenges that need to be confronted and addressed to ensure ASEAN's continued relevance, viability and vitality.

First, there is the challenge of preserving ASEAN centrality, solidarity, unity and cohesion. The episode in Cambodia in 2012 comes to mind as to how fragile some of ASEAN's ways of doing things and handling issues could turn out to be. In the future strategic environment, ASEAN will definitely have to face greater challenges and perhaps more intense pressure. ASEAN's Vision 2025 talks much about ASEAN centrality in its external relations. While this is important in keeping the external partners engaged, ASEAN needs to also address the issue of ASEAN centrality among members. Member states must be able to balance the Community's interests with their respective national interests in facing up to the numerous challenges while not sacrificing ASEAN solidarity and unity.

Second, ASEAN has to be deft in handling the impact of major power relations on the Community. This would not mean only in respect to China-US relations or even competition, but also in regard to the role and interests of others including Japan, India, Australia and Russia.

Third, ASEAN needs to be continuously sensitive to the global strategic and economic environment and landscape. It is important that ASEAN develops its own forecasting and projecting capabilities for 2025 and beyond, through the ASEAN Secretariat and other relevant ASEAN bodies.

Fourth, ASEAN must be able to face the challenge of ensuring successful elaboration and implementation of Vision 2025 and the community blueprints. Will ASEAN be able to adapt to future strategic and security demands that could crop up even before 2025 arrives? Will ASEAN be prepared to adjust? Will the member states be willing to deploy additional financial resources and human capital to meet the ASEAN goals and if so are they going to serve to complement national plans and programmes?

Fifth will there be the challenge of changing values and expectations in all the member states. The ASEAN population will be relatively young and their demands and expectations will be different as each member state prospers and economic opportunities are presumed to become better. There will a stronger demand for a greater role for youth and women, for instance. There will be stronger demands for freedom and democracy. ASEAN and member states will have to grapple with many issues of internal, regional and global governance.

Sixth, while ASEAN seeks to grow and prosper, the member states will have to deal with future issues of competition for resources: water, food, and energy. This could cause intra-Community friction and conflict that should be addressed through cooperative measures starting now.

Seventh is the challenge of population: growth, aging, and rural-urban ratio. This could have a major impact and place severe socio-economic pressures for member states internally and Community-wide. The issue of intra-regional migration and mobility will have to be tackled simultaneously with that of narrowing the development gap.

CONCLUSION

There are obviously many lessons from the past that can be learnt as ASEAN forges ahead beyond 2017. The success of the ASEAN Community is surely our main objective. But success cannot be achieved if the right ingredients are not recognised by everyone. These ingredients include:

- The continued commitment to regional integration among AMS and ASEAN's partners;
- The willingness and ability to cooperate both in words and deed as well as in terms of providing the necessary resources to support the full functioning of the ASEAN bodies, in particular the ASEAN Secretariat;
- A continuous process of building and maintenance of confidence and trust, including the willingness to settle pending bilateral issues;
- Political will among leaders and governments;
- A clear vision for peace and prosperity embraced by everyone involved;
- A strong conviction on the need to promote and protect collective interests;
- The wider and deeper involvement of the people.

The vision of the founding fathers should continue to be the guide for ASEAN even as various visions and blueprints are being elaborated. The goal of a people-oriented and people-centred community should not owe its achievement to documents and declarations alone. It should embody the true spirit of cooperation and community.

ASEAN CENTRALITY BEYOND 2015: OLD CHALLENGES, NEW QUESTIONS

By Termsak Chalermpanupap*

As ASEAN and its 10 Member States venture into the post-2015 community-building under the new (2016-2025) Roadmap, the ASEAN Centrality (AC) continues to face many perennial challenges. This paper first explains the meaning of the AC. Then it focuses on one major challenge confronting the AC: the power rivalry between China and the US in the South China Sea to show how it has adversely affected ASEAN unity.

MEANING OF THE ASEAN CENTRALITY

The evolving security architecture in the Asia-Pacific has attracted a great deal of attention. Discussions on this complex issue often involve scrutinizing the role of ASEAN and questioning the AC. Many outsiders dismiss the AC as irrelevant or, worse, caricaturize it as ASEAN's self-delusion of omnipotence. Therefore, it is important to get a better understanding of what the AC is about.

In my opinion, the AC has four basic components, of which the most visible one is in ASEAN leadership and management of its growing external engagements. In fact the more important part of AC is inside ASEAN-- it is the ongoing community-building endeavour to increase the weight to ASEAN. Both ASEAN's external engagements and community-building efforts are supported by the third component of the AC, which is the institutional framework of ASEAN based on the ASEAN Charter. And the most important part of the AC, albeit least visible one, is the political will, the shared responsibility in ASEAN and collective commitment to ASEAN of all the 10 ASEAN member governments in enhancing regional peace, security and prosperity.

:-----

** Termsak Chalermpanupap is a research fellow at the ASEAN Studies Centre of the ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute in Singapore. He presents this paper at the Regional Conference on “Cambodia and ASEAN: Managing Opportunity and Challenges Beyond 2015”, organized by the Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace, in Phnom Penh on 28 March 2016. Views expressed in this paper are Termsak's personal opinions. Termsak's e-mail address : termsak@iseas.edu.sg*

External Component of the AC

The ASEAN Charter prescribes the AC as an ASEAN principle in external relations in Article 2 Paragraph 2 (m). The AC calls for active, efficient, constructive, non-discriminatory and forward-looking leadership of all the dialogue and cooperation processes that ASEAN has initiated. They include ASEAN+1 with 10 Dialogue Partners and the UN, the ASEAN Plus Three (China, Japan and the RoK), the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), the East Asia Summit (EAS)¹, the ADMM-Plus², and the Expanded ASEAN Maritime Forum

¹ 18 EAS participants are 10 ASEAN members, and eight Dialogue Partners: Australia, China, India, Japan, the RoK, New Zealand, Russia, and the US. The other two Dialogue Partners, Canada and the EU, have not yet been invited to join the EAS.

² ASEAN engages in the ADMM Plus the same eight Dialogue Partners like those in the EAS. However, it is simply a coincidence that the same eight Dialogue Partners are participating in both

(EAMF).³The ASEAN member chairing ASEAN in a given year hosts and chairs these meetings. All participants accept the ASEAN Way of making policy decisions by consultation and consensus. ASEAN can rightfully claim the role of the primary driving force in managing these external engagements.

ASEAN also engages other regional groupings such as the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, the Pacific Islands Forum, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the Economic Cooperation Organization, and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). In recent years, ASEAN has found good prospects in pursuing close ties with the GCC, which consists of Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and UAE. Most of these Gulf states have oil wealth which can contribute to infrastructure investments in the ASEAN region. Another new and interesting group that ASEAN has started engaging is the Pacific Alliance of Chile, Colombia, Mexico, and Peru, which have a combined population of 216 million. Indonesia, Singapore, and Thailand have become observers at the Pacific Alliance.

At the sub-regional level, ASEAN Member States that are Mekong River riparian states (Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Viet Nam) have development cooperation with China and the ADB in the Greater Mekong Sub regional Economic Cooperation, with India in the Mekong-Ganga Cooperation, and with Japan, the RoK, the US and other "Friends of the Lower Mekong"⁴. In addition, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Viet Nam are in the Mekong River Commission (MRC).

LANCANG-MEKONG SUMMIT

China has not joined the MRC. China as well as Myanmar are only a special observer in the MRC, which is formed by Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, and Viet Nam. China refers to the upstream of the Mekong as the Lancang and treats it as an internal Chinese river. China has built five dams on the Lancang to generate electricity for its southern provinces. In the wake of the serious droughts in the five downstream countries in recent months, China has released more water to help the other Mekong countries cope with the water shortage.

Chinese Premier Li Keqiang hosted the First Lancang-Mekong Summit in Sanya, Hainan Island, on 23 March 2016. The Summit represents a new Chinese approach to working with the five downstream countries of the Mekong River to share the water resources of Southeast Asia's most important international river. Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen, Lao Prime Minister Thongsing Thammavong, Myanmar Vice President Sai Mauk, Thai Prime Minister General Prayuth Chan-o-cha, and Vietnamese Foreign Minister Pham Binh Minh attended the Summit.⁵

The Chinese Premier assured the five downstream countries of China's intention to work cooperatively with them on the water resource issues. He pledged to provide a US\$11.5 billion credit line and loans for the five to fund their national development projects. And he said China considers the Lancang-Mekong engagement as another new forum to foster cooperation between China and ASEAN.

the ADMM-Plus and the EAS. Membership in the ADMM-Plus was determined in 2006-2007; whereas the decision to expand the EAS to include Russia and the US was made in 2010.

³ All the EAS participating countries are also participating in the EAMF.

⁴ At the Fourth Meeting of Friends of the Lower Mekong in Nay Pyi Taw on 11 August 2014, the "Friends" of Mekong included Australia, the EU, Japan, the RoK, New Zealand, the US, the ADB, World Bank, and the Secretary-General of ASEAN.

⁵ See their Sanya Declaration at www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1350039.shtml

Myanmar⁶ and Thailand are active in the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), which includes Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, and Sri Lanka. Indonesia and the Philippines are prime movers in the West Pacific Forum, which involves Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, and Timor-Leste.⁷

ASEAN members have been participating in ASEM, the Non-Aligned Movement, the Asia Cooperation Dialogue, the WTO and the UN etc. Seven of them (excluding Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar) are participating economies in APEC. The Philippines chaired APEC in 2015. Indonesia is a regular participant in the G-20, and the ASEAN Chairman (in 2016 it is Laos), accompanied by the Secretary-General of ASEAN, has been invited to the G-20 summits. This year the G-20 Summit will be hosted by China in Beijing in September. The AC requires ASEAN members to try to speak with one unified voice when defending ASEAN and advancing ASEAN interests in international meetings. In the UN, for example, the ASEAN New York Committee, consisting of Permanent Representatives to the UN from the 10 ASEAN members, meets regularly to compare notes and coordinate its positions on UN issues. In the WTO, the coordination is done by the ASEAN Geneva Committee formed by the Ambassadors to the WTO from the ASEAN members.

ASEAN considers the growing popularity of the TAC as an international endorsement of its peace-oriented principles. Dr. Marty Natalegawa, when he was still the Foreign Minister of Indonesia (2009-2014), proposed internationalizing the TAC principles in a new Indo-Pacific treaty of amity and cooperation to overcome what he considers as “trust deficits” in the Asia-Pacific. But so far his idea has not gained regional support. The Jokowi Administration in Indonesia doesn’t seem interested in pursuing it now.

FOUR ASPECTS OF THE AC IN EXTERNAL RELATIONS

The AC in external relations can also be seen in four major aspects: membership of an external engagement process, modality, agenda setting, and outcome documents. ASEAN members develop the terms of reference for a new external engagement process and determine which countries will be invited to participate. They become the gatekeepers in charge of allowing additional participants to join after the process has been launched.

The modality of ASEAN is sometimes referred to as the “ASEAN Way”, which includes basic principles and practical standard operating procedures. Sovereign equality, non-interference in each other’s domestic political affairs, peaceful settlement of disputes, non-discrimination, and goodwill in cooperation are the basic principles in ASEAN. Standard operating procedures in ASEAN include chairing of meetings by the ASEAN Chair Country, respect and support for the ASEAN Chairman, decision-making by consultation and consensus, and low level of institutionalization to minimize operating expenditure.

The ASEAN Chair Country usually hosts all important external relations meetings⁸ and sets the agenda, in consultation with all others concerned. ASEAN issues such as

⁶ Myanmar hosted the Third BIMSTEC in Nay Pyi Taw, 3-4 March 2014, when BIMSTEC Leaders agreed to set up the BIMSTEC Secretariat in Dhaka, and to appoint Mr. Sumith Nakandala from Sri Lanka its first secretary-general.

⁷ Timor-Leste chaired the WPF in 2014; in 2015 Papua New Guinea was the WPF chairman.

⁸ Occasionally, ASEAN Leaders go out of the ASEAN region to meet their counterpart from an important Dialogue Partner country for a special meeting. ASEAN Leaders met with President Barack Obama in Sunnylands, California, on 15-16 February 2016. They will meet President Vladimir Putin in Sochi in May 2016 for an ASEAN-Russia Commemorative Summit. ASEAN Defence Ministers met with US Secretary of Defence Chuck Hagel in Hawaii on 1 April 2014 for a special

narrowing the development gaps and implementation of the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity often feature prominently in these meetings.

Outcome documents are usually drafted first by the ASEAN side and circulated to external parties for their comments and suggestions. However the ASEAN Chair Country would have the final say, especially when the documents are chairman's statements of meetings.

In Jakarta, the Committee of Permanent Representatives to ASEAN (CPR), consisting of the 10 Permanent Representatives (PRs) of the 10 ASEAN Member Governments, is ASEAN's frontline in engaging ASEAN external partners on a day-to-day basis. The PRs interact with a growing number of Ambassadors to ASEAN. At last count, 83 countries and the EU have accredited their Ambassadors to ASEAN. The US, Japan, China, the RoK, Australia, New Zealand, India, the EU, and Canada have set up their Permanent Missions to ASEAN in Jakarta headed by their respective resident Ambassadors to ASEAN. Russia now is the only Dialogue Partner without a resident Ambassador to ASEAN or a Permanent Mission to ASEAN in Jakarta.

EXTERNAL ECONOMIC ENGAGEMENTS

In external economic engagements, ASEAN is the driving force in the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) negotiations. The goal is to create new synergies among the 10 ASEAN economies with their free-trade-area counterparts from China, Japan, the RoK, India, and Australia and New Zealand. The RCEP is widely seen as ASEAN's solution to end the unhealthy rivalry between China and Japan: China preferred pursuing the ASEAN Plus Three FTA, whereas Japan advocated an East Asia Economic Community under the EAS framework. If successfully created, RCEP can rival the emerging Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) led by the US and Japan. Four from the ASEAN side are taking part in the TPP: Brunei Darussalam, Malaysia, Singapore and Viet Nam.

In finance, ASEAN members, China, Japan and the RoK have created a pool of US\$240 billion for currency swap under the Chiang Mai Initiative Multilateralization (CMIM). But the ASEAN Secretariat was deemed incapable of managing the highly complicated CMIM. Thus the ASEAN Plus Three Macroeconomic Research Office has been established in Singapore to do the job. So far this regional financial safety net has not yet been tested.

ASEAN and its members have been quite successful in attracting attention of the international community and support from their external partners. Canada and the EU want to join the ADMM-Plus, and the EAS. Others want to join the ARF. They include the UAE, Kazakhstan, Turkey, Chile, etc. The UN wants to undertake more cooperation activities with ASEAN. Now Norway has become a Sectoral Dialogue Partner of ASEAN, just like Pakistan has been since 1994. And since March 2011 Timor-Leste has applied for ASEAN membership. Ex-Secretary-General of ASEAN, Dr. Surin Pitsuwan, describes the popularity of ASEAN as the "ASEAN's convening power". When ASEAN initiates a new engagement process or cooperation activity, several external partners come and support ASEAN, because, according to Dr. Surin, they know and appreciate the fact that "ASEAN is welcoming all, and threatening none."

However, ASEAN and its members cannot be complacent. Publicly many foreign leaders and minister routinely praise ASEAN and voice support for the AC. The Sunnylands

informal meeting. They went to Beijing to meet with Chinese Defence Minister in October 2015. Now ASEAN Defence Ministers are considering another trip to Hawaii in October 2016 for an informal meeting with US Defense Secretary Ash Carter.

joint statement of the US-ASEAN Special Leaders Summit reiterated “*Respect and support for ASEAN Centrality and ASEAN-led mechanisms in the evolving regional architecture of the Asia-Pacific.*”⁹

Undoubtedly, foreign leaders can accept the AC by default, because ASEAN is the least objectionable convener of dialogue and cooperation. Privately, they and their senior officials might still harbour some doubts about the viability of the AC and the unity of ASEAN members in the wake of intensifying power rivalries in and near Southeast Asia. Beyond the ASEAN region, the AC often encounters doubt and disdain. Mr. Kevin Rudd, when he was prime minister of Australia, tried to bypass ASEAN in his short-lived initiative to establish a comprehensive Asia-Pacific Community. His grand idea didn’t gain international traction because Australia lacked the “convening power” that ASEAN has.

ASEAN and its members must be vigilant in strengthening and improving the AC with innovative leadership and thoughtful external engagement. At a minimum, the AC within the ASEAN region must be tenaciously defended and advanced for international recognition. External powers must be persuaded to believe that the AC will make Southeast Asia peaceful, stable and prosperous. When ASEAN and its members expand the scope of their external engagements, they must pay due attention to legitimate strategic interests of all their external partners. They must accept the fact that ASEAN is just one of the many players in this multi-polar international community. Outside of Southeast Asia, ASEAN must earn international support for the AC with careful action and consistent adherence to peace-oriented principles.

INTERNAL ASPECT OF THE ASEAN CENTRALITY

Active and efficient ASEAN management of dialogue and cooperation processes can win external recognition for ASEAN as the primary driving force in Southeast Asia. ASEAN must also increase its own weight through meaningful community-building beyond 2015 to make such recognition long-lasting. This is the crucial internal dimension of the AC. This is to gain acceptance of the AC for its own merit and design.

As a combined one ASEAN regional market and regional production base of over 630 million people, the ASEAN Economic Community is the world’s third largest market after China and India. A more integrated ASEAN market through increased infrastructure connectivity and harmonization of rules, regulations and laws will enhance the ASEAN economic competitiveness and attractiveness for trade, service and investment.

Harmony and unity will increase political and diplomatic weight of ASEAN, and enable ASEAN to speak with one authoritative voice, especially on Southeast Asian affairs. By the year 2022, ASEAN will have its “common platform” to formulate “a more coordinated, cohesive, and coherent ASEAN position on global issues of common interest and concern”.¹⁰ Then ASEAN will be in a better position to contribute as a responsible global player on important global issues.

One of the crucial strategic challenges facing ASEAN is how to continue to play its constructive role in maintaining regional peace and harmony in Southeast Asia in the wake of rising China and US rebalancing to Asia. Obviously China and the US are competing for ASEAN attention and support. As a group, the 10 ASEAN members need not and should not take sides, although individually some of them may be pro-US and others pro-China. Their most pragmatic and safest common stand is for all ASEAN members – when acting as a group in ASEAN – to be pro-ASEAN.

⁹ See the text of the Sunny lands joint statement at the website of the White House at www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2016/02/16

¹⁰ See the Bali Concord III of the 19th ASEAN Summit, issued in Bali on 17 November 2011.

Therefore, ASEAN members should continue to enhance the AC and build a successful ASEAN Community beyond 2015 under the new Roadmap for 2016-2025. A strong, unified, and prosperous ASEAN Community can cope with the dynamics of great power rivalries. It can also help shield its individual members from excessive external pressure, making it unnecessary for any of them to take sides and antagonize any external powers.

In community-building, the AC calls for giving due importance to ASEAN, with goodwill in exercising equal rights of the ASEAN membership, and best national efforts in fulfilling all obligations in ASEAN. In the ASEAN Charter, Article 5 Paragraph 2 says *“Member States shall take all necessary measures, including the enactment of appropriate domestic legislation, to effectively implement the provisions of this Charter and to comply with all obligations of membership.”*

All ASEAN members are obliged to ratify without delay and implement all ASEAN agreements signed by their Leaders and Ministers. Better still, they should also adjust their national policy to keep it in line with what they are doing in ASEAN at the regional and international levels.

Nowadays, national sovereignty is no longer absolute, especially when a country interacts with others in the international community, in the UN, and in ASEAN. Every ASEAN government must fulfil all obligations arising from the ASEAN Charter and ASEAN agreements. ASEAN member states need to develop a good balance between national interests (sovereignty) and ASEAN common interests. In the long-run, these interests should complement one another. After all ASEAN common interests are determined by the ASEAN members through the painstaking process of consultation and consensus.

INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT

To sustain and enhance its role as the premier regional player in Southeast Asia, as well as an emerging global player, ASEAN requires efficient and coherent institutional support and more resources. This is the institutional part of the internal dimension of the AC.

At the Twenty-Fifth ASEAN Summit in Nay Pyi Taw in November 2014, ASEAN Leaders endorsed a long list of recommendations from the High Level Task Force on Strengthening the ASEAN Secretariat and Reviewing the ASEAN Organs. Implementing these recommendations will involve investing more resources in ASEAN. The key ASEAN bodies that deserve urgent strengthening support are the CPR, the ASEAN Secretariat, the ASEAN Foundation, and the 10 ASEAN National Secretariats. These are the ones handling ASEAN affairs on a full-time basis.

After one year of new strengthening, ASEAN Secretariat’s staff reported a satisfying positive outcome.¹¹ Members of the CPR also reported positive changes which are enhancing the CPR’s role.

ASEAN is a poor organization. It has very limited resources to fund development cooperation projects, let alone to invest in major infrastructure construction. Some ASEAN member governments are reluctant to invest more of their scarce human and financial resources in ASEAN. Financial responsibility in ASEAN is, as a rule, equally shared by member governments. How to mobilize more resources remains a difficult question in ASEAN’s quest to strengthen its institutions, particularly the ASEAN Secretariat. In the current 2016 budget year, about US\$19 million has been allocated for the operations of the ASEAN Secretariat. This requires each member government to contribute US\$1.9 million.

¹¹ The author’s interviews with ASEAN Secretariat staff during a working visit as part of the team from the ASEAN Studies Centre, 21-22 March 2016. The team met the CPR in a working lunch on 21 March 2016.

POLITICAL WILL AND COMMITMENT TO ASEAN

At the 27th ASEAN Summit in Kuala Lumpur, 20-22 November 2015, ASEAN Leaders announced the formal establishment of the ASEAN Community by 31 December 2015. They adopted the new Roadmap for ASEAN 2025: Forging Ahead Together, which includes the three new community-building Blueprints.

ASEAN will be as strong as its member governments want it to be. If they truly believe in sharing their common destiny in ASEAN, then they must be serious about community-building, and fulfill their shared commitment and collective responsibility to ASEAN. In this regard, it is imperative that they promptly ratify and implement all the ASEAN agreements their Leaders and Ministers have signed. They must also comply in good faith with the ASEAN Charter.

Moreover, they should provide more resources to strengthen ASEAN institutions, especially those that are handling ASEAN affairs on a full time basis. They should take serious steps towards creating the ASEAN common platform on global issues, which is supposed to be put in place by the year 2022.

All the ASEAN member governments can pay more attention to implementing the ASEAN Communication Master Plan. The strategy of the Master Plan is to drive home the point that ASEAN is a “Community of Opportunities”.

If and when more ASEAN people see this point, they may pay more attention to ASEAN affairs. They may even monitor more closely whether ASEAN governments are implementing ASEAN agreements. Then new political will could arise to stimulate implementation of ASEAN agreements. This could lead to a new resolve in member governments to mobilize more resources for ASEAN institutions.

The future of ASEAN is in the hands of not only the ASEAN Leaders, Ministers and senior officials, but also with the ASEAN people. But the ASEAN people need first to discover ASEAN and realize that they can have a meaningful role. They need to learn more about ASEAN, about community-building towards ASEAN 2025. And they need to understand and appreciate ASEAN’s contribution to peace, security and prosperity in Southeast Asia.

PEACE AND SECURITY IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

For nearly 50 years, ASEAN’s *raison d’être* has been (and should continue to be) the maintenance of peace and security in Southeast Asia, especially among its Member States. Looking back to the year 1967 when ASEAN was established, it was the height of the Cold War when the armed conflict in South Vietnam was escalating and US military involvement was growing. The Philippines and Thailand, being US allies under SEATO¹², were soon dragged into the Vietnam War. Meanwhile, in the aftermath of the bloody border clashes during the *Konfrontasi* in early 1960s, Malaysia and Singapore were still wary of Indonesia’s new military dictator General Suharto, who in March 1967 toppled firebrand nationalist President Sukarno.

¹² Established in February 1955 with H.Q. in Bangkok, the South East Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) was a US-led anti-communist alliance among Australia, France, New Zealand, Pakistan, the Philippines, Thailand, the UK, and the US. SEATO did not have a role in the Vietnam War, because the national security of the Philippines and Thailand was not directly threatened. It was disbanded in June 1977. In 2003, both the Philippines and Thailand were accorded the status of Major Non-NATO Ally of the US. Singapore has declined to accept this formal MNNA status and chosen instead to treat the US as its “security partner” under a bilateral defence cooperation agreement.

The five founding members of ASEAN (Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand¹³) shared one common concern: they all wanted time and political space to concentrate on nation-building without external interference. In spite of their significant diversities, the ASEAN members have managed to survive the formative years of ASEAN and developed a new habit of regional consultation and cooperation for common interests on the basis of sovereign equality. ASEAN then expanded to embrace five more members: Brunei Darussalam (soon after independence from the British) in January 1984, Viet Nam in July 1995, Laos and Myanmar in July 1997, and Cambodia in April 1999. Timor-Leste in March 2011 applied for the ASEAN membership.¹⁴

Compared with the Middle East, South Asia, and Northeast Asia, the ASEAN region has enjoyed better relative peace and security. Southeast Asians can attribute their security and well-being to ASEAN's growing role in promoting political and security cooperation. For example: ASEAN's 1976 Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia¹⁵ helps guarantee sovereign equality, non-interference, and peaceful settlement of disputes. Peace-oriented principles in the Treaty have gained support from all the five permanent members of the UN Security Council and a diverse group of countries around the world, including India, Japan, the EU, Brazil, and the DPRK.

In Northeast Asia, the secretive nuclear weapon programme of the DPRK has created a continuing nuclear nightmare for South Koreans and Japanese people. But in Southeast Asia, the 1995 Treaty on the Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone (SEANWFZ) has kept the region nuclear weapon-free. Unfortunately, France, Russia and the UK still have some formal reservations. Therefore they cannot yet join China and the US in signing a protocol to pledge their recognition and support for SEANWFZ. Nevertheless, SEANWFZ remains in effect and it has provided the legal foundation for ASEAN Member States to establish in 2013 the ASEANTOM¹⁶ for regional cooperation on peaceful use of nuclear energy. Nuclear security, safety and safeguard will become a growing regional security issue if and when ASEAN Member States build and operate nuclear power plants.¹⁷ Under the ASEAN Charter, maintaining and enhancing regional peace and security is part of the "*shared commitment and collective responsibility*"¹⁸ of all ASEAN Member States. After

¹³ Thailand's Dr. Thanat Khoman, the last of the Five Founding Fathers of ASEAN, passed away on 3 March 2016 at the age of 102.

¹⁴ The ASEAN Coordinating Council (the ACC, is consisted of the 10 ASEAN Foreign Ministers) has set up a working group to consider all implications of admitting Timor-Leste into ASEAN. Two studies on economic and political implications have been undertaken and submitted to the ACC's working group. The author teamed up with Dr. Leonard Sebastian of the RSIS did the study on political implications in 2015. Another study (by ISIS-Malaysia) on social implications is underway.

¹⁵ The Treaty now has 32 High Contracting Parties: 10 ASEAN Member States, 10 Dialogue Partners of ASEAN (Australia, Canada, **China**, the EU, India, Japan, the RoK, New Zealand, **Russia**, and the **US**), Bangladesh, Brazil, the DPRK, **France**, Mongolia, Norway, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Sri Lanka, Timor-Leste, Turkey, and the **UK**.)

¹⁶ ASEAN Network of Regulatory Bodies on Atomic Energy (ASEANTOM) has been recognized as an ASEAN body under the APSC pillar. Its prime mover is Thailand's Office of Atoms for Peace (OAP). Cambodia's Ministry of Industry, Mines and Energy participates in ASEAN TOM's activities.

¹⁷ The Philippines was the first in Southeast Asia to build a nuclear power plant, in Bataan about 100 kms west of Manila. But corruption litigation and subsequent discovery of serious earthquake risk led to government decisions not to operate the nuclear power plant. Now it is open for tourists as about 40 million peso is needed annually to maintain the mothballed plant. In the wake of the nuclear disaster at Fukushima in March 2011, Viet Nam has decided to postpone until at least 2019 the start of the construction of its first two nuclear power plants in Ninh Thuan province. In the meantime, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Thailand all are seriously looking into the possibility of building nuclear power plants.

¹⁸ Article 2, Paragraph 2 (b).

almost five decades, it is reasonable to say that ASEAN has not failed in this mission. ASEAN Member States have lived and grown peacefully with one another despite their diversities, including their differences of political systems. The only serious act exception was when Cambodia and Thailand clashed intermittently over their *Preah Vihear / Khao Pra Viharn* temple dispute from 2008-2011, during which the Thai side declined the intervention of ASEAN on the ground that Cambodia and Thailand had bilateral mechanisms which could still be used to settle their differences.

THE SOUTH CHINA SEA

Growing international concerns about disputes in the South China Sea have once again reminded us, the people of Southeast Asian, of the strategic importance of Southeast Asia. This is the region where all the major powers in the world, as well as quite a number of middle powers, claim to have their national interests at stake; and therefore, they want some say in what is happening or not happening in the South China Sea.

It is well-known that as a group, ASEAN does not and cannot take sides on the merits of any individual claimants' claims in bilateral disputes (like in the Paracels between Viet Nam and China, and in the Scarborough Shoals between the Philippines and China) or in multilateral disputes (like in the Spratlys) involving Malaysia, the Philippines, Viet Nam and China as well as Taiwan with overlapping claims over islands, rocks, reefs and low-tide elevations as well as maritime rights associated with these features. ASEAN's common position calls for peaceful settlement of disputes in accordance with universally recognized principles of international law, including the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).¹⁹

Disputes in the South China Sea also arise from overlapping claims of coastal states for their respective exclusive economic zone (EEZ) under UNCLOS, which can go as far as 200 nautical miles outside of the 12-nautical-mile territorial water. China's infamous and mysterious nine-dash line of massive claims in the South China Sea appear to overlap with EEZ claims of all other coastal states, including Brunei Darussalam and Indonesia. Under UNCLOS, EEZ disputes in each particular area shall be handled by the coastal states concerned in order to work out some provisional arrangements until they can settle the delimitation by peaceful means. This need not involve ASEAN, which is not a party to UNCLOS.²⁰

Similarly, there are coastal states' overlapping claims of continental shelf beyond 200 nautical miles in the South China Sea. These claims are handled by the UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS).

The issue that directly concerns ASEAN is the implementation of confidence-building measures and projects under the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC), signed by 10 ASEAN Foreign Ministers and Chinese Special Envoy Wang Yi in Phnom Penh on 4 November 2002. The DOC includes a joint ASEAN-China commitment to develop and adopt a code of conduct in the South China Sea (COC) to further promote peace and stability in the region.

Officials of ASEAN members and China met at the 16th meeting of the ASEAN-China Joint Working Group on the DOC in Manila, 9-11 March 2016. But no substantive outcome was reported. Apparently, the Chinese side is waiting for the outcome of the Philippine legal case against China in the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA). In the meantime,

¹⁹ ASEAN's Six-Point Principles on the South China Sea, issued in Phnom Penh on 20 July 2012.

²⁰ In ASEAN, Cambodia, which signed UNCLOS on 1 July 1983, is the only country which has not ratified UNCLOS.

China is actively changing the situation on the ground in disputed areas, this time at Scarborough Shoals, in anticipation of an unfavourable decision from the arbitral tribunal.

Issues of common interest under the broad heading of maritime security, such as search and rescue, assistance to people in distress at sea, anti-piracy, typhoon warning, and illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, have been discussed in ASEAN-initiated processes such as the ARF, the ADMM-Plus, and the Expanded ASEAN Maritime Forum.

CHANGING US POSITION IN THE SOUTH CHINA SEA

However, in recent years, a new issue in the South China Sea has emerged to capture the world's attention: the growing rivalry between China and the US. The crux of the problem is the US insistence on undertaking military operations as part of freedom of navigation and overflight, and the Chinese fierce objection to all foreign military operations near its territorial sea and airspace. The Chinese side is apparently concerned about the security of its growing South Sea Fleet on Hainan Island, especially the nuclear ballistic missile submarine bases in the south-eastern part of Hainan Island.

While the US insists on taking no position on the merit of various claims of sovereignty and jurisdiction in disputed areas in the South China Sea, the US position has actually developed into something that the Chinese find as bitterly unpalatable. The major shift started when Ms. Hillary Clinton, as the US Secretary of State, declared at the 17th ARF in Ha Noi on 23 July 2010 that peaceful settlement of disputes in the South China Sea has become a "national interest" of the US. The US, she added, "opposes the use or threat of force by any claimant" in the South China Sea disputes. Her Chinese counterpart, Mr. Yang Jiechi was so upset with the new US stance that he launched an impromptu rebuttal in English, in which he matter-of-factly reminded ASEAN members that they are "small" and China is "big", and cautioned against drawing in the US and other external parties to gang up against China.²¹

The US disagrees with China on including the South China Sea as part of China's growing "core national interests" at par with sovereignty, national unity, regime stability (of the Communist Party of China), Tibet, Xinjiang, and Taiwan - these are off limits to external political interference and are non-negotiable. Neither has President Obama agreed with Chinese President Xi Jinping on a "new type of major power relations" between the US and China, which, according to the Chinese side would involve respecting each other's "core national interests".

The US welcomed the Philippine move in January 2013 in referring its claims to an international tribunal in its case against China's nine-dash line and alleged Chinese encroachment of Scarborough Shoals, Mischief Reef and other features claimed by the Philippines. The US has reiterated its call for China to clarify what China is claiming with the nine-dash line, which envelops international sea-lanes which are crucial to international commerce and transport in Southeast Asia, East Asia and Indo-Pacific. One oft-cited estimate puts the value of sea-borne international trade passing through the South China Sea at around US\$5 trillion a year. If China's nine-dash-line stands unchallenged, it will enable China to control about 90% of the South China Sea and practically turn it into a "Chinese Lake". In fact, Chinese authorities have regularly imposed unilateral seasonal fishing bans in disputed areas in the South China Sea and deployed its armed coastguard ships to enforce the Chinese laws. One new incident took place off Indonesia's Natuna Island on 19-20 March 2016. Eight Chinese fishermen were arrested for alleged illegal fishing in the

²¹ The author was present at the ARF meeting as a member of the delegation of the ASEAN Secretariat.

Indonesian waters. But a spokesperson of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs referred to the area as “traditional Chinese fishing grounds”.²²

The US has operated its warships, including aircraft carriers, and military surveillance planes within China’s nine-dash-line in order to uphold what it considers as freedom of navigation and overflight, as well as to challenge “excessive claims” of maritime rights by any coastal states. The US position which has been repeatedly asserted is this: “*The United States is going to fly and sail anywhere where international law allows, and we support the right of all countries to do the same.*”²³ The commander of the US Pacific Fleet, Admiral Scott Swift has pointed out that losing access to international waters claimed by China’s nine-dash-line would have far-reaching implications. But he emphasized that the US does not expect to lose the access.²⁴

Some international observers expect China to impose its air defence identification zone (ADIZ) over the Paracels first and around the Spratlys later in order to enhance defence security of its bases of the Chinese South Sea Fleet on Hainan Island. Each Chinese nuclear missile submarine of the Jin-class Type-094 reportedly carries 12 ballistic missiles, each is armed with 3-4 multiple nuclear warheads, with the maximum range of up to 7,500 kms. From the South China Sea, China can attack with ballistic missiles from its nuclear submarines against targets in South Korea, Japan, Guam, Southeast Asia, Australia, and India. The US Department of Defense reported to the US Congress in 2015 that China has deployed four Jin-class submarines and started deterrent missions and strategic patrols. In the near future, China plans to build the new Type-095 nuclear ballistic submarines, which will enhance the Chinese Navy’s anti-surface warfare capability as well as provide new more clandestine land-attack option.²⁵ Chinese diesel-powered submarines have openly sailed through the Straits of Malacca to operate in the Indian Ocean as well as patrolling around the Japanese archipelago in recent years. It is only a matter of time when Chinese nuclear submarines will follow suit and operate in the Indian Ocean and in the western Pacific, perhaps just to show the flag and boost the Chinese national pride of becoming a new full-fledged maritime power.

The ongoing Chinese naval build-up on Hainan Island and the Paracels has aroused more robust responses from the US. US Secretary of State John Kerry cautioned China against imposing any ADIZ over disputed areas in the South China Sea. He stated in Manila on 17 December 2013 that the US had “*deep concerns*” about China’s ADIZ in the East China Sea. “*The zone should not be implemented and China should refrain from taking similar, unilateral actions elsewhere in the region, and particularly over the South China Sea.*”²⁶

None of the ASEAN countries are expected to challenge China openly should China declare its ADIZ over any disputed areas in the South China Sea. But they would certainly welcome a robust US response; just like what the US did against China’s ADIZ over disputed areas near Diaoyu/Senkaku Island in the East China Sea in November 2013.

²² See Chinese MFA spokesperson Hua Chunying’s remarks on 23 March 2016 at www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399

²³ See the White House’s Fact Sheet: Advancing the Rebalance to Asia and the Pacific, dated 16 November 2015, at www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/11/16

²⁴ See a news report published in *Today* (of Singapore), 17 March 2016, Page 12. In the same report, Chinese Premier Li Keqiang stated in a press conference in Beijing that China was “comfortable” with US presence in the South China Sea and can engage the US in cooperation with the US in Asia-Pacific and “manage well our differences.”

²⁵ See details of the report at www.news.usni.org

²⁶ See marks of John Kerry at the website of the US State Department, www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2013/12/17

On 26 November 2013 two US unarmed B-52s flew into the Chinese ADIZ without identifying themselves to the Chinese air traffic control.

In 2014-2015, the growing and massive scope of China's "Great Wall of Sand" land reclamations and construction works in turning reefs into huge artificial islands began to alarm other claimants in the South China Sea. China's artificial island at Fiery Cross in the Spratlys now has a 3,000-metre long runway, a vegetable greenhouse and a pig farm producing foods for 200 Chinese military personnel, and is about three times the size of Itu Aba Island, which is occupied by Taiwan and was in the past the largest island (with its own natural sources of fresh water) in the Spratlys.²⁷ The long runway can certainly support landing and take-off of military aircraft. But the Chinese side would only say these new Chinese artificial islands can have civilian purposes, like in search and rescue, and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief operations.

However, the US saw the Chinese move as an attempt to strengthen claims of disputed areas and waters through militarization in the South China Sea, and responded with a freedom of navigation operation (FONOP) near the newly-built Chinese artificial island at Subi Reef by the USS Lassen on 26 October 2015. Under UNCLOS, artificial islands are not entitled to claim of any territorial waters around them. At most each can have a 500-metre safety zone around it. Also under UNCLOS, coastal states have jurisdiction to regulate construction of artificial islands within their EEZ. But this has not deterred the Chinese side to ignore all other claimants and to build what it wants in disputed areas in the South China Sea.

Another US FONOP took place on 30 January 2016; the USS Curtis Wilbur sailed under innocent passage within 12 nautical miles of Triton Island at the southernmost part of the Paracels. This time the US rationale was to drive home the point that the US needs no prior permission from China to sail there under an innocent passage. Quite expectedly, the Chinese side considers this US FONOP as serious provocations. In Beijing, US Ambassador Max Baucus was summoned to hear a Chinese protest.

Now the US is calling China and all other claimants to stop further land reclamations and construction works in disputed areas in the South China Sea, and also to avoid further militarization of the disputed areas. This may lead to little improvement in the South China Sea situation, because China seems to have completed most of its construction plans. China can point out that it was not the first to send military personnel to occupy disputed areas in the South China Sea. Taiwan has occupied Itu Aba or Taiping Island since the end of World War II. And China considers US FONOP as a provocative militarization of the South China Sea by a foreign power with no direct claim to any of the disputed areas. What China will continue to do now is to enhance "self-defence" through installation of radar and communication facilities, equipment for port facilities, and refurbishment of housing for long-term stationing of Chinese personnel.

The US supports ASEAN in engaging China in improving the implementation of the 2002 DOC and in speeding up the discussion on a COC to help reduce tensions and mistrust in the South China Sea. But China has sent mixed signals about the DOC implementation and the COC talks. As things stand now, it would be a miracle if ASEAN and China can agree on a COC within this year.

The US also supports ASEAN's common position on settling disputes in the South China Sea through peaceful means. President Obama and his ASEAN counterparts reiterated the principle of peaceful settlement of disputes in their joint statement issued at the end of the US-ASEAN Special Leaders' Summit in Sunnylands, California, 15-16 February 2016.

²⁷ See details of disputed areas in the Spratlys at the website of the Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, at www.amti.csis.org

QUESTION ABOUT ASEAN UNITY?

President Obama discussed disputes in the South China Sea and their implications on US strategic thinking with ASEAN Leaders during a working dinner in Sunnylands on 15 February 2016. But there was no ASEAN consensus support to mention the disputes or the South China Sea in the Sunnylands joint statement, which was issued on 16 February 2016. The joint statement mentioned UNCLOS twice but without connecting it to the disputes in the South China Sea. Neither did the joint statement touch on the Philippine case against China in the PCA arbitral tribunal. The highly sensitive legal case was hidden under the broad terms of “legal and diplomatic processes”.

One big question now is this: Will ASEAN be able to come up with a joint statement in support for the ruling of the arbitral tribunal, which is widely expected to be announced by mid-2016?

During the 45th AMM in Phnom Penh in July 2012, Laos, Myanmar, and Thailand sided with Cambodia on excluding from the draft joint communique any reference to recent incidents²⁸ in early 2012 in the South China Sea that the Philippines and Viet Nam had brought to the urgent attention of the AMM. Cambodia’s stance then was that the draft joint communique should not include “bilateral issues” of individual ASEAN members that involved an external party.

Now, based on what appeared in the Sunnylands joint statement, there may still be no ASEAN consensus on what to say if and when the arbitral tribunal announces its decision on the Philippine legal case against China. Should this be the case, ASEAN’s credibility and the AC on matters concerning peace and security in Southeast Asia will undoubtedly come under serious doubtful scrutiny in the international community.

A related question is: Can ASEAN members resist the push and the pull from the rivalry between China and the US and choose to stay “pro-ASEAN” when acting as a regional group?

Using the South China Sea as the test case, the answer to the above question is : Very seriously doubtful.

One imminent crucial test of ASEAN unity is looming ahead: What can or will ASEAN say if and when there is the announcement of the PCA arbitral tribunal’s decision on the Philippines’ case against China in disputed areas in the South China Sea, including the question of consistency with UNCLOS of China’s infamous but ambiguous 9-dash line? Chinese officials have dropped strong hints that China would not like to see any ASEAN statement supporting the decision of the arbitral tribunal, in which China has refused to participate.

In the wake of the rising tensions in the South China Sea, ASEAN Foreign Ministers have reportedly agreed in principle to go to meet Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi in China before this year’s 49th AMM (21-26 July 2016, in Vientiane).

The Philippines appears to have given up any hope of receiving ASEAN support because of the lack of ASEAN consensus. The Philippines has therefore reverted to relying more on US security support. The Philippines has agreed to allow US access to eight airbases, including one on Palawan Island facing the Spratlys, as part of the 2014 Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement between the Philippines and the US. The Philippine Supreme Court has ruled that the Agreement is constitutional.

²⁸ Viet Nam reported about incidents within its EEZ involving disruptions of oil exploration activities by Chinese armed ships. The Philippines reported the encroachment of Chinese navy ships in Scarborough Shoals, which is 120 nautical miles west of Luzon Island and well within the Philippines’s claim of 200-nautical-mile EEZ.

The Philippines has also increased security cooperation with Japan and requested Japan for coastguard ships, P-3C maritime surveillance aircraft, radar equipment and military training support.

Similarly, Viet Nam is also seeking closer security cooperation with the US and Japan in recent years. In addition, Viet Nam has received five of the six Kilo submarines purchased from Russia to enhance its defence capability. Individually it is clear that the Philippines and Viet Nam have little confidence in the ASEAN neutrality. In November 2015, the Philippines and Viet Nam became bilateral strategic partners.

Still unknown is the security orientation of the upcoming new government in Myanmar under President Htin Kyaw, which will start office on 1 April 2016. But it is plausible to assume that the new Myanmar government under Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's National League of Democracy will try to develop a more neutral stand in the wake of the growing China-US rivalry.

All 10 ASEAN member governments have joined the China's led AIIB. They are keen to take part in China's Belt and Road Initiative. Indonesia has awarded a train project to a Chinese group to build a new railway from Jakarta to Bandung. Laos and China have agreed on a rail project which will connect southern Yunnan with Laos, going all the way to Vientiane in order to connect with Thailand's northeast at Nong Khai. And just last week, on the sidelines of the Lancang-Mekong Summit in Sanya (23 March 2016), Thailand and China agreed on how to proceed with a Thailand-China railway project. The financial investment will come from the Thai side; the first priority is to build from Bangkok to Korat in Nakhon Ratchasima (Thailand's second largest province) in the Northeast; the construction will be done by a Chinese group. But operations of the railroad will be undertaken by the Thai side. Eventually, the railroad will be extended to Nong Khai to link up with the China-built railway from southern Yunnan through Laos to Vientiane. The rail connection can be built across the existing Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge.

One confounding factor is the participation of four ASEAN members (Brunei Darussalam, Malaysia, Singapore, and Viet Nam) in the TPP. The TPP, in which China has not joined, is widely seen as being led by the US with support of Japan to pre-empt China from dictating trade, financial and other economic terms in Asia-Pacific. Indonesia and the Philippines have expressed serious interest in joining the TPP. And Thailand may follow suit after the Thai military government gives way to an elected government in 2017.

Will ASEAN be able to stay united to celebrate its 50th founding anniversary in 2017? This is now a big question.

CAMBODIA AND ASEAN: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE DIRECTION

**Remarks By
Ambassador Pou Sothirak
Executive Director of
The Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace**

**At a Regional Conference on
Cambodia and ASEAN: Managing Opportunity and Challenges Beyond 2015**

28th March 2016, Cambodiana Hotel, Phnom Penh, Cambodia

I am delighted to be among the distinguished speakers at this Regional Conference on Cambodia and ASEAN: Managing Opportunity and Challenges Beyond 2015. I consider this conference quite important and timely as the Association of Southeast Asia Nations has just celebrated the ASEAN Community 2015 and launched the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) at the end of last year. ASEAN is set to move steadfastly beyond 2015 despite concerns on the future prospect of the ASEAN Community which remains unpredictable due to overly ambitious goals and too many unaccomplished tasks.

As this session deals specifically with Cambodia and ASEAN, I am privileged to share my views on this relationship and discuss some salient aspects regarding their past, present and future direction. More specifically, I intend to highlight the reason why Cambodia joined ASEAN, discuss the benefits and challenges deriving from Cambodia's membership, and conclude with some thoughts on what this relationship might bring in the next phase of the ASEAN Community beyond 2015.

CAMBODIA AND ASEAN IN RETROSPECT

25 Years ago today, the Agreements on a Comprehensive Political Settlement on the Cambodia Conflict were signed on 23 October 1991 in Paris. This signified the end of internal conflict and foreign occupation, allowing Cambodia to restore itself as a sovereign state and commence to rebuild the country into a peaceful, democratic, and developing nation. After the Paris Peace Agreements, Cambodia wanted to connect its relationship with ASEAN countries who were the signatories of the Accords. It should be recalled that the original ASEAN states, namely Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand, had agreed to help Cambodia find a lasting resolution because of the principle of non-interference and to stop the spread of communism.

After the national election on May 1993 organized by the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTACT), Cambodia emerged as a new nation with peace and stability and adopted a multi-party system with a foreign policy in favor of having diplomatic relations with other countries all over the world, especially with superpowers and Southeast Asian nations.

Ever since peace has been restored, ASEAN has encouraged Cambodia to be an ASEAN member. The first adventure in ASEAN was when Cambodia was cordially invited to be the distinguished guest in the 26th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting in Singapore on July 23-24, 1993. ASEAN, at that time, willingly wanted Cambodia to be its member in order to reach the whole regional collective to promote cooperation for maintaining peace, stability, and prosperity in Southeast Asia before the forthcoming 21st century. In the position of chairman of the meeting, the Singaporean Minister of Foreign Affairs, Wong Kan Seng, said that ASEAN would provide Cambodia with the hope of reconstruction of peace, security, and political stability which would tighten the good relations between Cambodia and ASEAN (Nareth, 2007).

As the distinguished guest for the 27th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting in Bangkok, Thailand, Cambodian Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, HRH Prince Norodom Sirivudh, made a speech that according to the geography, Cambodia is situated in Southeast Asia and that Cambodia highly admired ASEAN's accomplishments including political, economic, and socio-cultural development during the previous two decades (Nareth, 2007).

With a positive view of Cambodia, in early December 1994, ASEAN Secretary-General, Dato Ajit Singh, accompanied with his delegates undertook an official visit to Cambodia in order to familiarize Cambodia with the ASEAN mechanisms and to provide Cambodia with other technical assistance before Cambodia became an ASEAN observer.

On 24th January, 1995, H.E. Ung Huot, Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation signed the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) in Southeast Asia. A few weeks after the 27th AMM meeting, the Cambodia National Assembly ratified TAC. Subsequently, Cambodia was appointed as the formal ASEAN observer. This status was seen as a positive opportunity for Cambodia to gain access to the full membership of ASEAN in due course so that the country could pave the way for modernization and integrate itself together with other non-ASEAN members for lasting peace and sound socio-economic development.

During the 28th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting (AMM) meeting, Cambodia as the observer played the role of observing ASEAN activities and capacities before Cambodia decided to become an ASEAN full member.

During its first term of government, Cambodia often experienced political discontentment between the co-Prime Ministers. In May 1996, Malaysian Foreign Minister, Abdullah Badawi, warned Cambodia against an escalation of tension which could delay Cambodia's entry into ASEAN. This was followed with a strong message from Singaporean Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong who, during a November trip to Phnom Penh, stressed the link between political stability and increased foreign investment (Sorpong, 1998).

However, although tensions continued to mount, ASEAN decided in early 1997 to admit Cambodia, along with Myanmar and Laos, at its forthcoming 23 July annual meeting. Unfortunately, on 6th July, 1997 the internal political instability caused by an eruption of violence between the armed forces loyal to the two Prime Ministers led to the deterioration and collapse of national reconciliation. Cambodia's ASEAN membership, therefore, had to be postponed.

Nonetheless, Cambodia was not totally disregarded, and ASEAN still wanted Cambodia to become its member before the turn of the new century. But to be eligible, Cambodia had to fulfill some membership criteria such as to assure internal political stability, respect human rights and democracy, and hold free and fair elections in July 1998.

In order to assist Cambodia in fulfillment of those criteria as well as in appeasing the political pressure, ASEAN Troika – Foreign Ministers of Indonesia, Philippines, and Thailand – were commissioned to help restore normalcy by means of conducting political consultations between the two Prime Ministers, Prince Ranariddh and Hun Sen with the aim of bringing back internal stability to Cambodia. Meanwhile, Cambodia also welcomed The Friends of Cambodia consisting of the United States, European Union, Japan, China, Russia, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand in order to find suitable solutions for Cambodia to deal with its political crisis.

After the national election was held on 26 July 1998 and knowing that Cambodia had met all the criteria, ASEAN warmly welcomed Cambodia to be its 10th and youngest member on 30th April, 1999 in Hanoi, Vietnam, and strongly hoped that Cambodia's membership would contribute to peaceful, security, and development in Southeast Asia and in the world at large.

WHY CAMBODIA JOINS ASEAN?

Cambodia is a country known to have suffered many setbacks from civil wars to foreign interventions which created terrible problems of political isolation, inflicted severe economic damage and unthinkable social disorder. Since peace and stability have returned since 1993, Cambodia has realized that it has to adopt an outward looking national policy to redress these major stumbling blocks.

Being a country situated in Southeast Asia, naturally Cambodia is keenly aware of the ASEAN's 'raison-d'être' since its inception on 8th August 1967. It was with the expectation that only by becoming a member of an enlarged ASEAN that Cambodia is able to reconfigure its foreign policy to reap appropriate benefits that ASEAN can offer and gain more leverage in regional affairs within the framework of regional integration and strengthen political, economic, and social corporation along with all the other 10 member states.

Cambodia history helps shed light on why Cambodia wanted to join ASEAN. Marred with horrific tragedy of the Khmer Rouge and foreign occupation, Cambodia needs to reconstruct the negative image as a war-torn and conflict riddled country that had experienced before 1993 to build national resilience and maintain peace and political stability during its transitional period. Knowing that ASEAN is a regional organization that embraces peace and can help member states to get rid of conflicts and turmoil, Cambodia counted on ASEAN to restore its positive image, allowing the country to look forward to instilling national unity, using peace and non-violence as a ways to solve the dispute, promoting a democratic culture of accommodation, tolerance, and inclusion, and strengthening and institutionalizing the legal framework to rebuild a new image of a peace-loving Cambodia.

Perhaps, the most important awareness that Cambodia has with regard to ASEAN are the outstanding accomplishments that the organization of the 10 member states have produced since its inception in political, economic, and socio-cultural development.

As a result, Cambodia wants to be a part of the ASEAN's achievements including diplomatic recognition, legitimacy, security and social stability, and confidence on the economic side. For instance, Cambodia can rely on ASEAN's rich human resources to assist the country to develop a much needed soft infrastructure such as sound legal framework, upgrade the human resources and skills as well as rehabilitate other necessary physical foundations such as roads, ports, bridges, electricity, water treatment plans, schools, and hospital. Besides, membership in ASEAN, Cambodia is able to integrate its local economy into the regional and global economies which is the main goal that Cambodia wants to achieve to lift up livelihoods and rebuild the country. Furthermore, membership in ASEAN has a positive effect on the development of the

national economy, creating new industrial bases in Cambodia, and revitalizing the agricultural and tourism sectors as well.

The country's experience further shows that only by working together as a community with a collective vision to help protect one another and forge common interests can Cambodia overcome its international isolation throughout the 1980s. Being a member of the ASEAN family, the country can anticipate playing an active role in the process of regional community building, a landmark initiative of the grouping which has just been commemorated at the end of 2015.

BENEFITS OF CAMBODIA BEING A MEMBER OF ASEAN

There is no doubt that the ASEAN membership brings Cambodia critical and promising opportunities to polish its reputation with a regional and global context, enhance domestic governance, and set in motion the economic and tourism development.

Since becoming member of ASEAN in April 1999, Cambodia has gained substantive advantages in the following areas:

- Cambodia's sovereignty and territorial integrity are being safeguarded by the ASEAN principles of non-interference, fortifying the protection from external threats to its national security.
- Increase Cambodia's diplomatic voice ten times across the globe. When Cambodia speaks on any particular issue of regional concern, another nine countries' voices are added on to it. This is important for a small country like Cambodia, as on its own it does not have a voice with other bigger countries concerning regional issues that can affect Cambodia's strategic interest.
- Cambodia has been recognized gradually in the regional and global context and has been able to tighten its diplomatic relations with the regional and international community. Cambodia has been invited to participate in all ASEAN regional meetings annually, and other global conferences.
- Improvement of the reputation and prestige in the global context not only constitutes an important determinant to reinforce Cambodia's capacity in healing of the wounds of wars and in its nation-building efforts but also contributes to the ASEAN's common cause of strengthening peace and fostering cooperation for progress and prosperity of the grouping.
- It is expected that the ASEAN Economic Community, which had just been launched on 31 December 2015, will provide substantial benefits for Cambodia. Full integration will lift the game from the current ASEAN Free Trade Area to an economy worth \$2.5 trillion, a population of more than 620 million and create a single market and production base where goods, services and skilled labor can move freely, accompanied by freer movement of capital.
- Cambodia is expected to receive other advantages created by the Free Trade Arrangements that ASEAN has been negotiating with other ASEAN partners. Cambodian produced goods can have access to the vast markets of the U.S., China, India, Japan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand and of course with the European Union (EU); all of these nations are open to Cambodian exports.

CHALLENGES FACING CAMBODIA BEING A MEMBER OF ASEAN

Over the past 17 years of being an ASEAN member Cambodia has benefited to a large extent in the spheres of economics, politics and security. However, there still remain concerns whether ASEAN has really been playing a key role in improving Cambodia's domestic political, socio-economic and external security situation over the past decade. Other questions that should also be asked include: What can Cambodia do to gain more from this membership in the future? As ASEAN is evolving to meet new challenges, how can Cambodia contribute to furthering the integration process for the benefits of all members?

There are still big challenges in narrowing the development gap among the older and newer ASEAN Member States. CLMV is lacking behind the other six richer members. ASEAN is urged to narrow the development gap through sub-regional cooperation and technical assistance to help the new members grow faster and become further integrated into the regional economy. But ASEAN is faced with some serious problems due to a combination of financial shortfalls, poor governance, and the inability of national governments to manage international and interdepartmental coordination, not to mention the structural incapacity of ASEAN to pull the AEC along. With these impediments, especially, shortage of capital, many of the projects identified in the ASEAN Master Plan on Connectivity and in the Initiative of ASEAN Integration (IAI), involving the road, railway, bridge and other infrastructure development cannot be met as planned. Therefore, it is hard for ASEAN to achieve its goals, and to find an effective resolution to deal with all of these problems.

With regard to political security aspects, although ASEAN had been successful during the early state of its inception in the midst of the Vietnam War in 1967 for uniting against the potential threat of communist-led insurgency, and for building of an effective ASEAN Political and Security Community. Yet this is being challenged relentlessly with a gamut of traditional and non-traditional security issues as can be seen prevailing in the Asia-Pacific region. ASEAN is still unable to find a suitable resolution to properly manage and address the ongoing competition to secure access to sea resources such as energy and fisheries, the rising tension in the South China Sea and East China Sea as claimants states exhibit inflexible behavior toward their maritime claims, the issue of denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, the Cross-Strait Relations between China and Taiwan, and the proliferation of interconnected networks of transnational crimes of terrorism, drug deals, piracy, trafficking in people, and smuggling. These manifestations remain as major barriers for individual countries, Cambodia included, in ASEAN to come together in pursuing desirable political-security regimes which must remain open, inclusive, transparent and outward-looking. The 10-member states must work harder to gain more unwavering commitment from other EAS countries, especially the U.S. China, Japan, South Korea, Australia, Russia and India to address the persistent challenges caused by transnational and non-traditional security along with traditional security concerns.

Two specific political security issues related to Cambodia-ASEAN relations need to be highlighted here.

When Cambodia joined ASEAN, it hoped that the process of ASEAN political security community would provide a catalyst for peace and stability among its neighbors. When the border conflict between Cambodia and Thailand over the 4.6 square kilometers of land surrounding the Temple of Preah Vihear erupted in 2008 and again in 2011, ASEAN was not able to offer good office or mediation to resolve the dispute peacefully. Cambodia has been frustrated with the weakness of the ASEAN dispute settlement mechanism among member states as the bloc stood by and did nothing while a stronger nation intimidated and encroached

upon weaker one. ASEAN failed to recognize Thailand's aggression against Cambodia. As long as ASEAN remains unable to resolve disputes among its members, the group is unlikely to become a mature politico-security community.

On the other hand, the issue of the no "Joint Communiqué" in 2012 still haunts Cambodia. What happened when Cambodia chaired ASEAN in 2012, was perceived as supporting China by preventing ASEAN from making a strong statement regarding the South China Sea territorial and sovereignty dispute. Many people were quick to blame Cambodia as Chair of ASEAN for undermining ASEAN's centrality and unity without realizing a bigger picture in relation to how China perceived its core interests and the overall U.S. pivot to Asia as part of a strategy to check China's rise in the region. This plays an important part a part in what ASEAN can do or cannot do.

Other challenges for Cambodia being a member of ASEAN include:

- Cambodia needs to build national resilience to maintain peace and political stability, and focus greater attention to improving the well-being of the people, deal squarely with the issue of poverty and inequalities, address the development divide and raise livelihood of the rural and marginalized people to achieve a prosperous and cohesive society. More efforts must be directed to support the welfare and protection of citizens allowing them easy access to quality education, adequate health care and other public goods, such as clean water, sanitation, and basic shelter.
- Cambodia needs to do more to promote the culture of democratic accommodation and non-violence to resolve glaring domestic political grievance. In recent time, we have seen the culture of dialogue turned into escalating political tensions between the ruling and opposition parties. The two parties need to instill trust and avoid confrontation and violence as a means to resolves national issues in the spirit of a progressive democratic nation so as to keep the country peaceful and harmonious.
- Although was Cambodia experienced rapid growth, there is a needs to build effective institutions to address social justice more resoundingly. Cambodia would do well to continue working toward good governance, upholding the rule of law, and addressing the shortage of fiscal and human resource.
- Externally, Cambodia must focus on broader regional significance and should not sacrifice short term gain for long term benefits. Cambodia would be better off to adhere to the ASEAN principles, articulating a strong sense of mutual trust, shared responsibility, and common interest and should promote common regional interest over individual national interest.
- In recognition of the important role and contributions of all Dialogue Partners in the building of the ASEAN Community, Cambodia should work closely with other member countries together with all Dialogue Partners, especially the ASEAN+3 partners and the EAS in mobilizing the resources needed to spur continued economic growth, reduce the development gap and improve connectivity among and between Member States. Cambodian should help ASEAN to persuade all Dialogue Partners to reaffirm their willingness and to show their sincere commitment through practical action to cooperate with ASEAN as well as to contribute generously, ensuring that funds pledged are actually handed over, in order to implement ASEAN's priority projects as specified in

the Initiative for ASEAN Integration (IAI) Working Plan II 2009-2015 and in the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity (MPAC).

Addressing all these challenges will allow Cambodia to become a valuable member of ASEAN allowing the association to project its collective leadership on issues of regional and international concerns.

CONCLUSION

Cambodia needs to recognize the current world trend bearing the nature of interdependence and globalization. The country cannot behave in isolation and should stand ready to integrate itself into ASEAN in order to cope with a great number of difficulties including the development of its national economy, the building up of strong institutional mechanisms and good governance, the improvement of the legal framework and the opening up to liberalization process in trade, industry and investment.

There is no looking back on Cambodia's commitment to ASEAN as the block is a main supporter for the country in the international arena. ASEAN provides regional frameworks for Cambodia to secure peace and stability, and deal with external security problems, particularly with its neighboring countries. With the principle of non-interference into each other's internal affairs, Cambodia is at par with all countries in the world in its international relations. Having a footprint in ASEAN, Cambodia can interact freely with a world of friendly nations and can be expected to attract more tourists, the much needed foreign direct investment, generate abundant employment, and create better livelihoods so as to assure the equitable redistribution of wealth among all citizens in the country.

Beyond 2015, there will be more challenges for Cambodia and ASEAN as the region is faced with ongoing geopolitical changes by major regional powers. It is certain that old regional problems will continue to persist and new incidents will occur, albeit traditional or non-traditional. Whether ASEAN wants it or not, it has to face and address all these challenges effectively if the grouping wants to maintain its centrality. While, Cambodia's membership is also a source of strength for ASEAN, it is only so long as Cambodia is prepared to enable the Association to meet specific objectives such as to secure political and economic stability from the powerful countries and to eliminate and stop the conflict among its members. So, it comes to the role of individual ASEAN member states, Cambodia included, to maintain ASEAN cohesiveness and centrality in that context for a successful ASEAN Community beyond 2015.

CAMBODIA AND POST-2015 ASEAN

Dr. Chheang Vannarith
Consultant for Southeast Asia Program at the Nippon Foundation

REGIONAL CONTEXT

To survive and stay relevant in a multiplex world, particularly in a region brewing of strategic and economic competition, ASEAN needs continue reforming and staying innovative, so do its individual member states. ASEAN needs to be equipped with the capacity to predict multiple futures, assess risks and opportunities, identify weaknesses and strengths, develop collective leadership, strengthen regional multi-stakeholders' networks, and embrace changes.

The main security issues facing ASEAN in the next decade are maritime security, climate change, natural disasters, water-food-energy security nexus, human trafficking, and transnational crimes and terrorism. The main economic issues are the economic inequality /development gap, youth unemployment, and the capacity to overcome the middle-income trap. The main socio-cultural issues are religious and racial fundamentalism, nationalism, and a weak collective identity.

To address all these issues and challenges, ASEAN must strengthen institutional capacity and leadership, concretize regional connectivity and inclusive regional development, develop strong regional social networks, invest more in education and skills development, as well as harness new technology and promote cultural diversity. For ASEAN to be a fulcrum of evolving regional security architecture, ASEAN needs to promote both trust-based and rules-based international relations and conflict resolutions, and collectively work towards a regional order centering on international institutions/organizations.

The key shortcomings of ASEAN are the lack of coordination and implementation, weak link among public institutions, private sector, and civil society organizations, and the lack of people's participation. Therefore it is important to transform ASEAN into a responsible ASEAN, which means ASEAN and its member states bear responsibility in implementing regional community blueprints, promoting a people-centered ASEAN, and realizing an ASEAN community and promoting opportunities for all.

To transform ASEAN into a community of opportunities, ASEAN Member States need to reform political institutions in order to empower the people to participate and get benefits from regional integration and inclusive development. ASEAN needs to invest more in education and skills development, social protection, social innovation, social and ecological resilience, and local community development.

To ward off adverse impacts caused by major power competition and rivalry, ASEAN has to maintain and strengthen its unity and cohesiveness. ASEAN needs to earn its central role in shaping the evolving regional architecture, which is the collective embodiment of regional cooperation mechanisms. Rules-based international order and ASEAN-centric regional architecture should be part of the grand strategy of ASEAN.

NATIONAL CONTEXT

Due to its geographical location between two historically antagonistic bigger neighbors, and historical memories and experiences, Cambodia is vigilant towards its neighbors and major powers. However, after becoming the member of ASEAN, Cambodia became more confident in strengthening cooperation and integration with its neighbors and through ASEAN Cambodia can build trust and closer ties with major powers.

The Bangkok Declaration in 1967 and the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in 1976 are the political and legal foundations to promote regional peace and stability, and protect the sovereignty and interests of ASEAN Member States. The Treaty of Amity and Cooperation provides legal framework and principles of international relations include mutual respect for the independence, sovereignty, equality, territorial integrity and national identity of all nations, non-interference in the internal affairs of one another, and settlement of disputes and differences through peaceful means.

Cambodian membership in ASEAN in 1999 substantially promoted the international image and role of ASEAN as united regional organization consisting all ten countries geographically located in Southeast Asia. ASEAN membership fosters reforms of the public institutions and legal frameworks to meet the regulations and policies of the regional grouping. ASEAN is regarded as the cornerstone of its foreign policy and international economic integration. ASEAN provides diplomatic, political, and economic opportunities to Cambodia to implement its national development agenda.

Cambodia is building its identity linking with regional community. For its long-term survival, Cambodia has to stand firmly united with ASEAN countries, promoting ASEAN identity and norms, and strengthening ASEAN's institutions. ASEAN is regarded as a shield or golden cage for Cambodia to strengthen its international image and role, to ward off adverse impacts deriving from major power competition and rivalry.

As ASEAN continues to strengthen its regional community in the post 2015, Cambodia needs to show stronger commitment and leadership in strengthening ASEAN institutions and unity, deepening national legal and institutional reforms in line with the ASEAN blueprints and policies, promoting ASEAN identity and image on the international stage, and contributing innovative ideas and initiatives in promoting a people-centered ASEAN. Ideally, Cambodia should aim to become a role model in implementing the ASEAN Charter, which has not been fully implemented by other Member States.

TO BE RESPONSIBLE MEMBER OF ASEAN

Cambodia needs to continue reforming robustly its national policy and institutions to comply with the ASEAN Charter, policy blueprints, and action plans. Cambodia has to adhere to the principles of democracy, the rule of law and good governance, respect for and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms. Cambodia needs to ensure sustainable development for the benefit of the present and future generations and to place the wellbeing, livelihood and welfare of the peoples at the center of the ASEAN community building process.

Cambodia needs to demonstrate solidarity with and strengthen unity within ASEAN. Cambodia had successfully chaired ASEAN in 2002 and 2012, and has significantly contributed ideas, initiatives, and forged collective leadership in promoting and facilitating ASEAN Community building. For instance, under the Cambodian chairmanship in 2002, ASEAN and

China reached an agreement on the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC).

However, the image of the Cambodia was critically damaged due to the failure of issuing the joint statement of the 45th Foreign Ministers Meeting during its chairmanship of ASEAN in 2012. International media, observers, and even ASEAN friends put the blame on Cambodia. Cambodia has been accused as a proxy state of China. From the Cambodian point of view, such accusations are not accurate and fair. Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen stated in early February 2016 after meeting with the US Secretary of State John Kerry that: “Maybe it is time to return justice to me. I told John Kerry I was disappointed when they [critics] said that Cambodia’s closeness to China was the obstacle to realizing the Code of Conduct in South China Sea.”

Although the Cambodian Chair failed to convince ASEAN Member States to reach consensus on the South China Sea issues. Cambodia worked closely with Indonesia and other members to issue “ASEAN’s Six-Point Principles on the South China Sea”, which include (a) the full implementation of the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (2002); (b) the Guidelines for the Implementation of the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (2011); (c) the early conclusion of a Regional Code of Conduct in the South China Sea; (d) the full respect of the universally recognized principles of International Law, including the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS); (e) the continued exercise of self-restraint and non-use of force by all parties; and (f) the peaceful resolution of disputes, in accordance with universally recognized principles of International Law, including the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

Cambodia needs to contribute more initiatives to implement the ASEAN Charter and the ASEAN community blueprints and action plans. Cambodia initiated the creation of ASEAN demining center in 2012. Based on the experiences and expertise of some ASEAN member countries in peacekeeping operations (PKO), Cambodia should also propose the establishment of ASEAN Peacekeeping Training Center to be located in Cambodia to provide capacity building and training to ASEAN peacekeeping forces. As a country mostly affected by climate change in Southeast Asia, Cambodia should take leadership role in creating a regional research center on climate change adaptation and mitigation. Linking ASEAN’s future blueprints with the UN sustainable development goals should be encouraged.

The Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace would like to extend our sincere appreciation for the valuable financial support from Mr. Rene Gradwohl, Country Representative, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS), Phnom Penh for making this publication and its dissemination possible to a wider public audience.

CICP accepts no responsibility for facts presented and views expressed. Responsibility rests solely with individual contributor.

No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form without permission from CICP.

No. 204, Street 1966, Phum Paung Peay, Sangkat Phnom Penh Thmey, Khan Sen Sok
Phnom Penh, Kingdom of Cambodia
P.O. Box 1007, Phnom Penh, Cambodia
Tel/Fax : (855) 23 231 880
Email : cicp01@online.com.kh
Web : www.cicp.org.kh