

Keynote Address
by
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Deputy Secretary- General for ASEAN Political Security Community
at the 36th ASEAN Senior Officials Meeting on Drug Matters
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Honourable Minister Masagos Zulkifli

Excellencies, Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen.

Good Morning.

It is indeed an honour for me to be given this opportunity to deliver some thoughts and observations prior to the start of formal and professional

discussions among my esteemed colleagues on this important subject. And we are certainly grateful to Minister Masagos for his thoughtful comments and guidance in his opening address at this 36th ASEAN Senior Officials Meeting on Drug Matters or ASOD. We have our work cut out for us to explore and brainstorm innovative and novel methods of addressing this continuing and serious challenge to our region, and I use the word “continuing” deliberately.

At this point please allow me to express my sincere appreciation to our host and present Chair of ASOD, Singapore, for the warm hospitality and efficient arrangements for this important meeting, and also to record our appreciation to our previous Chair the Philippines for its leadership this past year.

In just four months when our Leaders meet in Kuala Lumpur in November 2015 for the 27th ASEAN Summit, we expect them to declare ASEAN as having achieved Community status. After 48 years of ASEAN’s evolution, this will be an important milestone in our regional integration efforts.

As our Leaders declared in their meetings in Brunei in 2013 and in Myanmar last year, we are striving towards a regional organization that is “politically cohesive, economically integrated and socially responsible”. With this step, we can state with pride that the long-aspired dream for an integrated, well-connected Southeast Asia as envisaged by our founding fathers is finally taking shape.

I must emphasize that declaring an ASEAN Community is just the start, a new beginning. It is a commitment from all of us, ASEAN Member States,

to continue the journey and work towards a united, integrated and a people-centered, people-oriented ASEAN.

Let me spend a few minutes on recent developments in ASEAN. As I mentioned earlier a key priority for our Current Chair Malaysia is to successfully launch the ASEAN Community. I think this is very much under control as we have realized ninety plus percent of the action lines identified in our current 2009-2015 Roadmap towards Community Building.

In geo-economics, ASEAN cooperation and integration are progressing well. Our overall GDP, trade and investment figures are impressive and above the global norm. And ASEAN together with our dialogue partners are working hard to realize a more connected region facilitating intra-regional trade and business activities and promoting closer people-to-people ties. It's not only about infrastructure but also connectivity in other areas such as ease of travel. And one important area that continues to receive emphasis is narrowing the development gap between ASEAN Members.

There are some concerns on the geo-political front. On the security side, the situation in the South China Sea bears watching. There are disturbing developments there which if not addressed or handled properly could lead to tension and perhaps even conflict. We are working with the concerned party to ensure that the situation does not spiral out of hand.

As a regional organization, we do face challenges that require collective response and action. One area is the management of natural disasters that has brought untold suffering and disruption to citizens in our region. Other challenges are primarily non-traditional and transnational such as cyber-crime, food security, irregular migration, human trafficking and people

smuggling, and more recently the threat of terrorism and violent extremism. These challenges, which have received significant attention in recent policy-level discussions, require not only national responses but also close regional cooperation and collaboration to combat.

We are also addressing important mechanisms such as the regional security architecture and working to ensure that ASEAN Centrality remains the key feature of the existing regional security mechanisms. After all ASEAN threatens none and wants to be friends with all. And we are well placed to play the central role in our region. Our external partners have so far accepted this arrangement.

One important mechanism is the East Asia Summit or EAS, which celebrates its 10th Anniversary this year. (To recap EAS comprises our Member States plus Australia, China, India, Japan, New Zealand, Russia, South Korea and the United States.) ASEAN together with the non-ASEAN EAS partners are looking into how this mechanism can be strengthened further to be a premier Leaders' led strategic forum for our region. All the major global powers are members of EAS, making this mechanism well placed to play an important role in the regional and perhaps even the global environment. ASEAN will benefit substantially through stronger and more effective cooperation with our non-ASEAN EAS partners either individually or collectively.

The ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), the ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting (ADMM), the ADMM-Plus and other sectoral mechanisms such as the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Transnational Crime (AMMTC), the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Drug Matters, the ASEAN Law Ministers Meeting, ASEAN Ministers Meeting on Disaster Management among

others, remain important platforms for furthering ASEAN as a region of peace and stability.

But more important will be our people and what ASEAN means to them. ASEAN is meaningless to them if they do not see and feel the benefits such as a secure environment, better opportunities and a higher quality of life. We do have important tasks ahead of us.

The drug menace that is your area of responsibility is not a new challenge. That this is the 36th Meeting of the ASEAN Senior Officials on Drugs reminds us how long we have been addressing this threat. The challenge is multi-dimensional having security, economic, social and moral consequences, to name a few.

Although we have had successes, the war on drugs is not over by a long shot, because the nature of the threat has changed. While the broad focus is to eradicate the drug menace, within the parameters of this threat we are now faced with new and emerging challenges that require new responses to combat. Traditional and time-tested methods, while still relevant might no longer be sufficient.

And to compound the problem, it is not only a law enforcement issue, but has other dimensions such as social, economics, education and the question of recidivism. The fact that we have institutionalized the ASEAN Ministers' Meeting on Drug Matters, which first met in 2012, is a reflection of the importance we are giving to combating this challenge in a holistic and determined manner.

I had a chance to read the Report of Drug Free ASEAN 2015: Evaluation and Recommendations Post-2015. The statistics and findings cited in the Report are indeed alarming and signals that the battle is far from over.

I understand that the Report will be reviewed and discussed by this Meeting. But what strikes me is the dynamic nature of the threat. The challenge is on multiple fronts – addressing plant based drugs and simultaneously tackling the proliferation of synthetic substances, which are equally destructive and addictive. And sadly the challenge has grown both from the demand and supply perspectives.

With this audience, there is no need for me to elaborate on the harmful effects of drugs to individuals, their families, to community, society and the nation, and the related concomitant effects of crime, corruption, resource drain and the economic costs.

You are the experts entrusted by our Ministers and Leaders to continue the fight to help realize the vision of a Drug – Free ASEAN. And I cannot do better than to repeat the points made by the ASEAN Ministers responsible for drugs at their Meeting in December last year and I quote:

“The Ministers noted that despite Member States relentlessly and continuously combating the trafficking, production and abuse of illicit drugs, the problem still persisted, and more New Psychoactive Substance (NPS) are found in ASEAN. The Ministers shared the view that the situation called for (i) to review current strategies used in combating drug crimes; (ii) to develop a more holistic and balanced approach between supply and demand reduction; (iii) to develop the re-integration of drug abusers to the society; and, (iv) to create a common regional mechanism to strengthen

and expand regional cooperation and cross-border collaboration”. End of quote.

Based on the data and statistics, there is still much work to be done. There has been the suggestion that ASEAN integration and the concomitant ease of travel and easier opportunities to cross borders could have contributed to the difficulties in combating the drug problem in ASEAN. The argument used is that the regional integration of economies, trade and transport has the deleterious effect of aiding illicit drug movements across borders. I do not know how strong the causal relationship is between ASEAN integration and the drug problem, but it is incumbent on us to find solutions. Integration is for the larger good of our people and our region.

Naturally there will be critics who will question our aspiration of a Drug Free ASEAN by 2015. Again I can do no better than to cite our Ministers who in their meeting in December last year *reaffirmed that ASEAN’s regional aspiration of Drug Free ASEAN, which was first set out by ASEAN Foreign Ministers since 1997, shall remain the region’s ultimate goal. The Ministers further underscored that, despite all the achievements, the regional drug situation continues to be more challenging. As such, more effective and firm regional collaboration between ASEAN Member States in combating the threat of illicit drugs was still required.* End of quote.

Looking forward, ASEAN is drafting the ASEAN Vision 2025 and the ASEAN Political-Security Community 2025 Blueprint to guide us beyond 2015. Both key documents will be presented to the Leaders for endorsement at the Summit in Kuala Lumpur in November this year. ASEAN is firmly committed to enhance our capacity to address effectively

and in a timely manner existing and emerging challenges, which include drug matters.

The new 2025 blueprint includes a number of action lines on drug matters that require the support of this body to implement. The inclusion of these action lines is a reminder that ASEAN's war on drugs is far from over. We have the political will and with continued close cooperation and joint action within ASEAN and with our external partner, we will make progress.

I wish this 36th Meeting of ASOD much success in its deliberations.

Thank you.