

**Keynote Speech by
H.E. Le Luong Minh
Secretary-General of ASEAN
At the 2014 ASEAN Sustainable Development Symposium
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Excellency Sommai Pha-See Finance Minister of Thailand,

Mr. Kan Trakulhoon, President and CEO, Siam Cement Group,

Excellencies,

Distinguished Participants,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I thank you all for the opportunity to be part of this year's ASEAN Sustainable Development Symposium, which is now one of the key platforms for sharing practical ideas and successful corporate practices to expand the opportunities for the sustainable development of the region.

With one year before the realization of the ASEAN Community by 2015, ASEAN policy makers as well as the business community need to take the decisions and actions to address critical sustainable development challenges confronted by the region. And more than ever, there is an urgent need to understand the parameters of sustainability and the resilience needed to take on the

defining and life-changing issues of our time such as climate change, water scarcity and food and energy concerns.

Let me to let me outline the essential ASEAN thinking and the strategies that ASEAN has developed to provide inputs to the wide-ranging discussions and potential transformative actions across the region relating to our pursuit of sustainable development.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

For ASEAN - what is at stake? As we have forged on with our regional economic integration efforts, we also have to ensure the judicious use of our rich natural resources which sustain vital life support systems; fostering economic growth without degrading the natural environment. As a people-centred ASEAN Community, we also need to meet the needs of nearly 625 million people of ASEAN who are rapidly moving up the human development ladder, while enhancing their resilience and social protection systems against natural and man-made disasters.

From the mainland to archipelagic Southeast Asia, we have rich natural resources that sustain essential life support systems not only for the region but also for the rest of the world. The region is blessed with unique ecosystems, abundant freshwater resources and surrounded by major seas and gulfs, with a long coastline stretching a total of 173,000 kilometres. While occupying only 3% of the world's total land area, the region holds around 80% of global biodiversity as it has three mega biodiversity countries: Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines. Our forests cover 45% of our lands compared to the world's average of 30.3%, providing the natural habitat for up to 40% of all species on Earth.

However, over the years, all these natural resources have been increasingly under threat. Fast-rising population and changing demographics, rapid economic growth, combined with the existing and region-wide social disparities among and within the ASEAN countries have exerted daunting pressures and have brought along various common or transboundary environmental issues, such as air, water and land pollution, urban environmental degradation, transboundary haze, and depletion of natural resources, particularly biological diversity. It has also led to increased consumption of resources and generation of waste, resulting in unsustainable development.

Therefore, despite an abundance of natural resources, ASEAN, as elsewhere in the world, is facing an enormous challenge in keeping a delicate balance of environmental sustainability and economic development.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

What, then, are the fundamental mechanisms to help navigate and develop a more effective regional framework? The ASEAN Vision 2020 calls for a clean and green ASEAN with fully established mechanisms to ensure the protection of the environment, sustainability of natural resources, and high quality of life of people of our region.

Consistent with the ASEAN Vision 2020, the theme of “Green ASEAN” in 2009 reflects the three-pronged challenge facing the region: (i) building an environmentally sustainable clean and green ASEAN Community, (ii) transforming the “green shoots” of growth in the face of the 2008 global financial crisis into an economically resilient ASEAN anchored upon green growth, and (iii) nurturing the new ASEAN to be a people-centred organisation respecting and living in harmony with nature.

To realise this ASEAN Vision, the Roadmap for an ASEAN Community (2009 – 2015) lays out the goals, strategies and actions to achieve this goal based on the principle of sustainable development through the three Community pillars and the Initiative for ASEAN Integration.

ASEAN is now working on several fronts to show its commitment in promoting green development. Attempts to quantify sustainability and/or environmental performance of countries have led to various benchmarking exercises. ASEAN has developed a set of key indicators for clean air, clean water, and clean land that is used for the selection of ASEAN Environmentally Sustainable Cities Award since 2008. The Award aims to showcase and promote exemplary efforts of these cities, and will work on initiatives such as low carbon society, compact cities, eco-cities and environmentally sustainable transport.

ASEAN is also actively engaged in ensuring sustainable production and consumption through promotion of environmentally sound technology and cleaner production processes. In the 2013 Joint Statement on the Implementation of Sustainable Consumption and Production in ASEAN, the Member States recognized that additional policy support as well as on-going public and private

sector investments on technical skills and institutional competencies are greatly needed.

ASEAN has also sought to participate in global efforts towards addressing global environmental challenges, including developing and adapting environmentally-sound technologies. Knowing that manufacturing industries account for a significant part of the consumption of resource and generation of waste in the region, ASEAN Member States have embarked on cleaner production as well as energy efficiency initiatives, including the manufacturing sector as one of the key partners. Several ASEAN Member States have also implemented eco-labelling schemes to encourage sustainable production. Driven in part by stricter environmental regulations and acceptance of larger environmental responsibilities throughout their value chains, manufacturing industries have the potential to become a driving force for the creation of a more sustainable region.

ASEAN is also actively engaged in various initiatives and activities to promote sustainable development. The ASEAN Environment Year (AEY) is held every three years aiming to raise people's awareness and to strengthen regional cooperation and implementation of actions on environmental conservation. The ASEAN Environmental Education Inventory Database (AEEID) is an interactive

online resource for networking, collaboration, and information exchange. The ASEAN Youth Portal on Sustainable Development was also established to enable young people to exchange information and share experiences as well as post blogs and photos relevant to sustainable development issues. The ASEAN State of Environment Report is also published every three years to offer a glimpse of the prospects and challenges facing the region and highlights ASEAN efforts to protect the environment and promote sustainable development.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This year, ASEAN has initiated the process for ASEAN's Post-2015 Vision, as part of its determination to shape a bold and forward-looking future for ASEAN. While discussions are still on-going in all three Community pillars, there have been suggestions put forward that seek to address the region's sustainable development challenges. These include:

- To continue to promote inclusive, sustained and equitable economic growth and sustainable development, consistent with the UN Post- 2015 development agenda. For this, ASEAN should consider crafting clear and

measurable development goals to serve as an internal benchmark for key socio-economic issues in the region.

- To further narrow the development gap and socio-economic divide among and within the ASEAN Member States while ensuring a proper balance between economic development and environmental protection. To do so, we need to continue investing on capacity building and providing opportunities to our peoples.
- To build a resilient community which is capable of responding to emerging trends and challenges, including strong regional mechanisms to address food security, energy security, natural disasters, among others. For this, we should continue to find ways to prevent and reduce the occurrence of natural and man-made disasters and minimise their damage to peoples and communities. Unless communities and properties are made safer from these challenges, the sustainable development of the region may be impeded.
- To address adequately the worsening air pollution, noise and congestion, lack of adequate infrastructure, worsening traffic conditions, increasing resource consumption and waste disposal and management especially in

urban areas, where the demographic profile of the region is shifting. At the same time, reverse the trend of land degradation, deforestation, depletion of natural resources and loss of biodiversity in many countries of the region and to promote the conservation and sustainable use of biological and genetic resources.

- And finally, to strengthen regional institutional arrangements to make them more effective in promoting environmental sustainability. A clean and green ASEAN Community will require strong institutions that are able to make binding decisions, mobilise resources and support initiatives as well as engage in meaningful partnerships and harness the support from all stakeholders of our Community. Strong multilateral coordination, collaboration, and communication among ASEAN Member States and all stakeholders are absolutely essential in promoting green development.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The path to a green ASEAN community has not been and is not going to be smooth and easy. The globalizing world which is driven by rapid technological

progress, intense economic competition and the unsustainable consumption of natural resources are realities that ASEAN has to face.

As a grouping of developing nations, with about 185 million people in ASEAN still earning less than US\$2 a day, economic growth and social development shall remain a priority. Thus, ASEAN must also continue to vigorously pursue its sustainable development framework. Efforts to alleviate poverty, providing adequate shelter and food, boosting national economies should go hand in hand with protecting the environment.

For next year and the years to come, ASEAN will have to confront and address these challenges. It is important that ASEAN strive to find a balance between economic development and sustainable environment that meet the current and future needs. We hope that through our efforts to build a politically cohesive, economically integrated and socially responsible, people-centred and people-oriented ASEAN Community, we are also building a Community not only for the present but future generations of ASEAN peoples.

Thank you!