Inaugural Speech by H.E. LE LUONG MINH
Secretary-General of ASEAN
At the
Transfer of Office Ceremony
09 January 2013

Excellency, Minister Marty Natalegawa,
Excellency, Secretary-General Surin Pitsuwan,
Excellencies, Ambassadors, members of the Diplomatic Corp, international organizations, businesses and the media,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,

As I am assuming my task as Secretary-General of ASEAN and speaking to you for the first time, let me first thank His Excellency, Minister Marty Natalegawa and the Government of the Republic of Indonesia for their continued support for the ASEAN Secretariat. Commitments to public good make us cross each other often again. I look forward to working with him in striving to fulfill our obligations to the Association we serve. Let me also thank His Excellency, Secretary General Surin Pitsuwan who, as the first Secretary General leading the Secretariat under the Charter, has served the Association with distinction. Though he is leaving us, I am sure his heart and mind will remain. I look forward to enjoying the comfort of his big shoes and wish him still greater successes in his future endeavors.

When I first walked into the ASEAN Secretariat building last September during my informal visit, I was at first sight struck by a feeling of togetherness. I saw in the lobby not only the flags of the ten ASEAN member states, but also those of ASEAN's partners. It is this feeling of togetherness that has made ASEAN a proud and strong organization, strong in itself and in
its will for co-operation. It is the same feeling of togetherness I am experiencing here today and I thank you all for honoring this handover ceremony with your valuable presence.

For the past 46 years since its birth, ASEAN’s consistent mission has been one to unite all countries in the region striving for peace, economic development, cooperation and integration. Building upon the achievements in carrying out that mission, in its process of building a Community on all the three important pillars, ASEAN has succeeded in many respects, but many challenges remain which demand more concerted actions.

On the political and security pillar, while progress has been made in promoting the role of the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation with more countries having acceded to the Treaty and the increasing interest from others to do so, in implementing the Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon Free Zone with the conclusion of the negotiations between ASEAN and the 5 Nuclear Weapon States on their accession to the Protocol of the Treaty, in enhancing co-operation to respond to non-traditional issues such as terrorism, transnational crimes, natural disasters and dialogue and co-operation in the defense and security areas, in strengthening the ARF for dialogue, co-operation and confidence building in the region, and in the recent establishment of the ASEAN Institute for Peace and Reconciliation, much remains to be achieved in ensuring effective and timely implementation of the ASEAN Political and Security Community Blueprints, especially the measures relating to shaping and sharing standard norms of conduct, to confidence building, conflict prevention and resolution. In this connection, in the face of complicated developments on the South China Sea, building on the progress reflected in the agreement between ASEAN and China on the Guidelines for Implementing the Declaration on Conduct of Parties in the
South China Sea, in ASEAN's 6-point Principles on the South China Sea and in the adoption of the ASEAN-China Joint Statement on the occasion of the 10th Anniversary of the DOC, ASEAN should speed up efforts towards an early start of negotiations with China with a view to achieving an early conclusion of a Code of Conduct on the South China Sea.

On the economic pillar, while ASEAN has achieved the establishment of a free trade area since 2010 allowing for free flow of goods within the region with tariffs having been reduced to zero for six member countries, the share of intra-ASEAN trade having increased to 25.4% in 2012, a comprehensive treatment of tariff liberalization and elimination of non-tariff barriers, trade facilitation, customs integration, and standards and conformance having been put in place to facilitate free flow of goods in the region, with only three years to achieve the target of building the ASEAN Economic Community by 2015, the challenges are enormous. The more open flow of investments, capital, labor, goods and services will pose different challenges and opportunities for our Member States. But it will also have a tremendous multiplier effect on the region. We have to maximize common grounds and minimize differences to ensure it adds value to every ASEAN Member State.

Our integration will be incomplete without the good work done and to be done in the social and cultural pillar. A lot of work is being done across a wide spectrum as reflected in the establishment of the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission for Human Rights and the adoption of the ASEAN Declaration on Human Rights, the establishment of the ASEAN Commission for Women and Children, the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on Disaster Management. Narrowing development gap is considered not just an economic target. Providing our young people
with good education is one of the most effective ways out of the poverty trap. This is one reason why we are so focused on education.

Despite the many challenges, I fully believe that ASEAN will emerge triumphant. The ASEAN Secretariat will continue to play active roles in supporting and coordinating with Member States to help facilitate and drive the establishment of the ASEAN Community. The provision of the needed technical support to all cooperation activities will have to be enhanced. The delivery of best possible advice to Member States in stirring our initiatives and achieving outcomes we desire needs to be strengthened. The Secretariat will also continue to strive to work more effectively with Member States and Dialogue Partners in the delivery of technical assistance. There is room to improve policy implementation across the political-security, economic and socio-cultural pillars, streamline the performance of our institutions, further prioritise issues with a view to improving national and regional coordination. The work of the Secretariat will be geared in this direction.

Our ability to reach the goals we set for 2015 and beyond lies in our collective efforts. As we approach that important date, I am certain that our attention will not just be on ourselves. Just as partners have helped us grow, we must be ready to share our experiences not just internally, but with the world as well.

The next five years will be an exciting and critical one. I and we in the secretariat are prepared to work closely with the ASEAN Member States to ensure that we are able to deliver our major commitments and objectives. As I am joining your journey, I look forward to enjoying more than your physical company.

Thank You and I wish all of you a fulfilling and peaceful New Year!