

### ASEAN Foreign Ministers met to prepare for Summit

On 27 February 2009, Mr. Kasit Piromya, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Thailand, gave a press briefing on the outcome of the meetings of the Foreign Ministers of ASEAN Member States held on the eve of the 14<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Summit.

Having expressed his appreciation for the other ASEAN Foreign Ministers for the cooperation accorded to him as Chair, the Thai Foreign Minister noted that from the evening of 26 February to the morning of 27 February, the ASEAN Foreign Ministers met on a number of occasions and capacities, including the Informal Working Dinner on 26 February, the Informal ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting, the Meeting of the ASEAN Coordinating Council as well as the meetings with the High Level Panel on an ASEAN Human Rights Body (HLP) and with the High Level Legal Experts' Group on follow up to the ASEAN Charter (HLEG), all of which were held on 27 February.

During these meetings, the ASEAN Foreign Ministers exchanged views and made decisions on a number of regional and international issues under their purview as well as discussed matters related to the preparations for the 14<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Summit, scheduled for 28 February to 1 March 2009.

Among the various issues discussed by the ASEAN Foreign Ministers was the issue of the Rohingya illegal migrants. The Ministers agreed that this issue needed to be resolved through both within the ASEAN framework and outside it, in particular the Bali process. Within ASEAN, they were of the view that the Tripartite Core Group established to deal with the post-Cyclone Nargis situation could serve as an example of how ASEAN could tackle the issue of the Rohingyas. The Meeting was also informed by the Foreign Minister of Myanmar that his country was willing to cooperate in sorting out those of the Bengali minority group from the non-Bengali, and that it was willing to take the former group back. As for the latter group, further consultations would be held on how to deal with them. In this connection, the ASEAN Secretary-General was assigned to chair an ad-hoc working group to coordinate with the Government of Myanmar to obtain the number of Bengalis in the country.

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Concerning the role of ASEAN in the Post Cyclone Nargis rehabilitation, the ASEAN Foreign Ministers agreed to extend the mandate of the Tripartite Core Group until the middle of next year. The Ministers also agreed on the accession of Turkey to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia, noting that discussions would continue on the issue of accession to the Treaty by a non-state entity such as the European Union.

Meeting as the ASEAN Coordinating Council, one of the new mechanisms under the ASEAN Charter, the Foreign Ministers took note of the results of the Meetings of the ASEAN Defence Ministers and of the ASEAN+3 Finance Ministers, both of which were held last week in Pattaya and Phuket respectively.

The Ministers also considered administrative issues, including approving a budget worth 14 million US dollars for the ASEAN Secretariat for the year 2009, approving the appointment of one additional Deputy ASEAN Secretary-General from Laos, and adopting a guideline for the ASEAN and non-ASEAN countries in sending their Ambassadors and Permanent Representatives to the ASEAN Secretariat. They also took note of the calendar of ASEAN meetings for 2009, including the tentative dates for the postponed ASEAN Summits with the 6 Dialogue Partners – China, Japan, the Republic of Korea, India, Australia and New Zealand. The Summits are now re-scheduled for 10-12 April 2009.

Minister Kasit also mentioned the ASEAN Foreign Ministers' meeting with the High Level Panel on an ASEAN Human Rights Body, during which the Ministers made a number of comments for the Panel to use in further revising the Draft Terms of Reference of an ASEAN Human Rights Body. The revised draft is to be presented to the ASEAN Foreign Ministers in July.

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27 February 2009