

# ASEAN—THE BEST HOPE

## REGIONAL CO-OPERATION IS VITAL FOR PEACE AND PROGRESS

*That the Association of Southeast Asian Nations is the best hope for regional co-operation to ensure the peace, progress and stability of the region and that the significance of ASEAN extends far beyond the immediate interests of the five countries were emphasised by Tun Abdul Razak when he delivered the following address at the second ASEAN Ministerial Meeting held in Jakarta on 6th August, 1968.*

This morning. His Excellency President Suharto, in his thoughtful and inspiring statement has set the tone on the right direction of our conference. Allow me, therefore, Mr Chairman, to express our sincere appreciation for that address and also our heartfelt response to His Excellency's eloquent words.

it has been a year since we last met in Bangkok and this year has seen the steady and resolute growth of ASEAN and for this achievement. Mr Chairman, we must pay you our highest tribute. As Chairman of the Standing Committee in Djakarta, you have steered the work of ASEAN with tact, with imagination and skill, as well as with the briskness that we have come to expect of you.

The experience gained by ASEAN during its first year of life under your able leadership would be invaluable for the future growth and development of this organisation. Let me also pay tribute to the Standing Committee, to the various National Secretariats and to the various *Ad HOC* Committees, whose patient and dedicated labours have laid a sure foundation for the years ahead.

Mr Chairman, the peace, prosperity and progress of Southeast Asia must be the primary responsibility of all of us in Southeast Asia. We must all co-operate together to shoulder that responsibility.

In the past one year Malaysia for its part has been consciously pursuing a policy of peaceful co-operation with our neighbours not only in a multilateral organisation such as ASEAN but also bilaterally; we have strengthened our border co-operation with Thailand on our northern borders, with Indonesia on our borders in East Malaysia, and with Singapore we have also resolved to maintain the closest co-operation in matters of defence.

We believe that these arrangements represent a positive contribution to the security and stability of our region. It is through such cooperation bilaterally as well as multi-laterally, on the basis of equality and mutual respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of one another and the self-determination of peoples, that the countries of Southeast Asia can ensure the peace, stability and neutrality of our region and safeguard our countries from interference and intervention by any force or power outside this region. I believe we can say that there has been progress in the year since we last met.

In the past year also we have seen a glimmer of hope in the tragic conflict which has bedevilled Vietnam for more than two decades. The talks which are currently taking place in Paris between representatives of the United States and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, although regrettably they have not yet shown the path to a peaceful settlement, represents a step forward in that direction. We pray for successful outcome of these talks so that peace may soon return to the Vietnamese people.

ASEAN for its part, through its various projects and by fostering an atmosphere of mutual trust and confidence, represents the best hope for regional cooperation in Southeast Asia to ensure the peace, progress and stability of the region.

We may say, that that first year of ASEAN was the year of preparation and planning. Ahead of us are the years of implementation, of translating these plans into action, to provide quick, fruitful results for our peoples.

The process of implementation will be more complex, most laborious and more challenging, but I have no doubt that if vigorously apply ourselves to our tasks and refuse to be distracted by extraneous and irrelevant matters, we shall speedily achieve our goals.

At our last meeting in Bangkok I expressed my confidence that our spaceship ASEAN was well and truly launched. I believe that in the last year it has begun to transmit its message of hope, of regional co-operation and regional development to all our peoples and to this region of Southeast Asia. Let us now begin to fulfill this message.

Let us now embark on a programme of action which is realistic and at the same time imaginative so that little by little, project by project, we shall build the edifice of regional co-operation and

regional solidarity. We could begin with quick-yielding projects which do not require the expenditure of much funds. Upon the solid foundation which would thus be laid, we can move on slowly but steadily to more ambitious projects. Looking at the future. Mr Chairman. I would say we have exciting and challenging tasks ahead of us.

Indeed. Mr Chairman, our theme and our message at this meeting in Jakarta should be this: let us forge ahead to meet these exciting challenges, let us not look back, let us not allow any differences between any of us to detract us from the more important responsibility of ensuring the peace and progress of our region. Inspired by common ideals of regional co-operation, of good faith, goodwill and good neighbourliness, our five countries gathered together a year ago in Thailand to enunciate the historic ASEAN declaration.

The significance of ASEAN extends far beyond the immediate interests for our five countries for ASEAN represents our collective efforts, acting on our own initiative and fashioning our own methods, to co-operate together to ensure the economic and social development of our respective countries and of this region. We know that the path of regional co-operation will not be easy; many of us have been subjected to colonial domination and influence which are foreign to us and these have tended to keep us apart. But it must be our common resolve not to be distracted by these differences and divisive forces which are rooted in the past and which are completely irrelevant to the challenges and the needs of the present day. It must be our common concern to do nothing—and to ensure that nothing is done—which could jeopardize the future of ASEAN.

Let, therefore, the voice of ASEAN which emerges from this meeting be a firm, clear and united call to action in the service of our peoples to ensure their peace, their progress and their prosperity. It cannot be the pre-ordained fate of the countries of Southeast Asia to remain divided and apart. It must be our destiny to come together, to live together, and to work together in a spirit of friendship, harmony and understanding.

We, the countries of ASEAN, have already embarked on that road in the last year; let us now pursue that path with vigour and determination to fulfil the hopes and expectations not only for our respective peoples but also for millions of others in the region of Southeast Asia.