

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY
YAB DATO' SERI ABDULLAH BIN HAJI AHMAD BADAWI
AT THE OPENING OF THE 28TH A.I.P.A GENERAL ASSEMBLY
AT SHANGRI-LA HOTEL, KUALA LUMPUR
20 AUGUST 2007**

Yang Berhormat Tan Sri Ramli Ngah Talib
President of the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly (A.I.P.A)

Yang Berhormat Tan Sri Dr. Abdul Hamid Pawanteh
President of the Dewan Negara Malaysia

Honourable Speakers and Heads of Delegation

Honourable Ministers and Delegates

Your Excellencies and Distinguished Observers

Ladies and Gentlemen

First, let me wish all of you 'Selamat Datang', and a very warm welcome to Malaysia especially to all the distinguished delegates from other ASEAN countries.

2. Malaysia is indeed very honoured to have this privilege of being host to the 28th General Assembly of the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly or A.I.P.A. This is a debut event for this Assembly under this new identity, after changing its name from A.I.P.O to A.I.P.A. I believe this change of name reflects the dynamic changes taking place in the workings of your Assembly as an important institution in a changing ASEAN.

3. The times are changing because we are now on the threshold of transforming ASEAN as an Association of regional countries into an ASEAN Community of nations. The objective of the transformation is to make ASEAN more effective in keeping the peace and stability of the region, and more dynamic in supporting the efforts of its member countries to bring prosperity to their respective peoples. Indeed, the time has arrived for bringing ASEAN and the organization closer to the people.

4. To be a true community, the ASEAN Community must be a 'people-centered' body. It is timely that A.I.P.A should also be focusing on activities and programmes which would bring ASEAN closer to the people.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

5. The member states of ASEAN are now actively putting the finishing touches to the blueprint of a project which shall stand out as one of the most important documents in ASEAN history. I am referring to the ASEAN Charter which, hopefully, shall be adopted by the members of ASEAN in the near future. As such, it is important that the activities of A.I.P.A move in tandem with the progress towards the adoption of the ASEAN Charter.

6. I strongly believe that the adoption of an ASEAN Charter would rejuvenate ASEAN and reaffirm our commitment to the ideals upon which it was founded. The ASEAN Charter will lend our regional organization a "legal personality" and thus afford its programmes and projects the prospects of greater legitimacy in the context of the law, both national and international.

7. I am also convinced that the Charter will be a landmark constitutional document embodying fundamental principles, goals, objectives and structures of ASEAN cooperation, which would be capable of meeting the needs of the forthcoming ASEAN Community. I do believe that the ASEAN Charter, once adopted, will facilitate and accelerate the formation of the ASEAN Community. This is because the concept of an ASEAN Community will then become very much part of the ASEAN lexicon.

8. It is our hope that the ASEAN Charter will assist in implanting three fundamental principles of living as a community. First, all members must refrain from taking any action which violates community rules. Second, community decisions must be made enforceable. Third, a common set of community values must be developed and adhered to.

9. To that effect, Malaysia would always assume a constructive role every step of the way, through means and measures, through processes and procedures, that will culminate in the creation of a dynamic community within an equally dynamic and fast growing Asia. In fact, the theme of this year's celebration of ASEAN Day on 8 August 2007 was "One ASEAN at the heart of Dynamic Asia".

Ladies and Gentlemen,

10. For us in Malaysia, ASEAN has been, for a long time, the cornerstone of the country's foreign policy, especially so vis-à-vis the linkages we forge with our neighbours in the region.

11. It is heartening indeed that in advancing the ASEAN grouping towards a community which shares common values and strategic objectives, the ASEAN leaders have given due recognition to the time tested principles enshrined in the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation of 1976. ASEAN will thus be able to strengthen its unity based on commonalities without sacrificing the individuality of each member state as guaranteed by that Treaty.

12. Even more inspiring is the fact that the ASEAN Vision 2020 clearly articulates the leaders' vision of an ASEAN which exemplifies, and I quote, "... a concert of Southeast Asian nations, outward looking, living in peace, stability and prosperity, bonded together in partnership, in dynamic development and in a community of caring societies..." Unquote.

13. For most of us here, we would also recall the significance of the Cebu Declaration of 2007, entitled "Towards One Caring and Sharing Community", which cited the need to reduce poverty, protect the rights of children and women, improve education, and cherish the environment leading to closer integration by 2015.

14. This effort at community building will, in due time, translate into an amalgam of cooperation which - God willing - will create a convergence of values through collective understanding of the need to realize a people-centered ASEAN. Members of Parliament, being representatives of the people, are those best placed to carry out

this task in various ways. That is why A.I.P.A is equally poised to play an important role in the process of ASEAN community building.

Ladies and Gentlemen

15. It is noteworthy that the 12th ASEAN Summit in Cebu recognized parliamentarians as important stakeholders in the ASEAN enterprise, in line with the goal of accomplishing a people-centered ASEAN. In this context, the A.I.P.A is undoubtedly an appropriate platform to bring together people, especially regional Parliamentarians, to strengthen cooperation within ASEAN.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

16. Malaysia is fully committed to the strengthening of ASEAN as a regional organization. That is why Malaysia will make all efforts to contribute to keeping the time table for bringing into being, by 2015, the ASEAN Security Community, the ASEAN Economic Community and the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community. These three communities will make up the overarching ASEAN Community of nations.

17. However, we have to accept the truth that community building is a long term process. We cannot establish a community simply by signing a single treaty. A community has to be brought into being by a process of evolving and nurturing.

18. We must first strengthen the common attributes which all members must subscribe to. However, diversity should be allowed and cherished as our strength. We must work hard to free ourselves from the animosities of the past.

19. There must be good relations between member states at the bilateral level. A community is only as good as the quality of the relationships that exist amongst its members. And it goes without saying that Parliaments can play a viable role, as second-track institutions, in strengthening the diplomatic relations between members of the community.

Ladies and Gentlemen

20. I am aware that the idea of establishing an ASEAN Parliament has been mooted in past Assemblies of the A.I.P.O, perhaps based on the model of the European Parliament.

21. At this juncture, I can only say that all significant discoveries start as dreams in the minds of men and women of vision. We may or may not live to see our dreams materialize, but if the objective is worthy of our efforts, we should not be deterred from carrying the idea forward. The ASEAN Parliament may yet be a forum that will come into existence after the process of regional integration has sufficiently matured.

22. A supranational system of governance, modeled after Europe, is undoubtedly too grand a scheme to conceptualize at this stage of development. We could perhaps more modestly aim to develop A.I.P.A into a forum which can effectively channel public opinion of common interest to all the people of ASEAN.

23. While it is important that we prepare ourselves for the future, we should also strengthen the cooperation now already in place. Therefore, A.I.P.A should move

along, and keep in line with other developments taking place in ASEAN. Where appropriate, A.I.P.A should play its part to help bring into reality the ASEAN Community, as scheduled.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

24. After 40 years, ASEAN has now arrived at a critical juncture. On one hand, it is imbued with ideas and ideals to sustain itself as a regional body endowed with the drive and the clout to share a common future and speak with one voice. On the other hand, it has to keep tabs on its performance in all spheres of cooperation, to maintain its relevance in a futuristic setting. The least we could do, and this is where A.I.P.A can effectively contribute, is to sustain our commitment to ensure the relevance of ASEAN to its member states.

25. We shall look nowhere but forward. We shall celebrate our differences, yet speak no other way but with one voice. We shall strive for nothing less than attaining superior economic cooperation and we shall work towards enhanced political stability in our region. Only then will we be able to ensure greater opportunities for everyone in Southeast Asia through strengthened cooperative endeavours, mutually beneficial to all.

26. Through the widening of possibilities and the enhancement of people-centeredness in ASEAN, the concept of ten nations one community is certainly not an improbability.

27. With that and with the grace of God, it now gives me great pleasure to declare open the 28th A.I.P.A General Assembly and I wish all of you success in your deliberations.

Thank you.