

Response To President Megawati's Farewell Remarks

Bali, Indonesia, 7 October 2003

Thank you for your generous words and the gift. It is very kind and thoughtful of you.

2. To be honoured by my fellow leaders in ASEAN is indeed something special. As you are all aware, this will be my last participation at the ASEAN Summit. The time has come for me to leave, after 22 years in office. I am grateful to all of you for your support, assistance, and above all friendship.

3. I have had the privilege of attending most of the ASEAN Summits. During these years, I have seen many changes take place in ASEAN. Today, ASEAN encompasses the whole of South East Asia and it is one of the most successful regional organisations. Though in the early years, ASEAN was written off as an irrelevant organisation, we have proved that we are very relevant. How else can we explain the willingness of the countries of Northeast-Asia and South Asia to hold dialogues with us. In fact many outside the region have expressed the desire to be a member of ASEAN.

4. While ASEAN has made notable progress, we must not rest on our laurels. We need to address our challenges squarely. To address these challenges, we need to have the political will and commitment to continue to nurture and nourish ASEAN into an ASEAN Community. Here we can take a leaf from the process which led to the formations ultimately of the European Union. Malaysia, as one of the founding members of ASEAN, remains totally committed to ASEAN. Indeed, ASEAN will continue to be the cornerstone of Malaysia's foreign policy.

5. While ASEAN remains open and progressive, it must continue to deepen its relations with East Asia. An East Asian Community, with ASEAN at its core, is inevitable. It is important that we as ASEAN play our part to drive this cooperation in the right direction.

6. Finally, I wish to stress that as we move forward, we must not disregard nor erode the principles that have kept us together. The principles of non-interference, of consensus-based decision making, national and regional resilience, respect for national sovereignty, the renunciation of the threat or the use of force in the settlement of differences and disputes, must always be upheld by the ASEAN countries.

7. Finally may I take this opportunity to wish all my colleagues the best in your future undertakings. May ASEAN

continue to flourish for the benefit of all our peoples and the peoples of this world. Thank you.