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"ASEANAPOL: CONSOLIDATING FRIENDSHIP, INTENSIFYING COOPERATION"

Assalamualaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuh and good morning

Y.Bhg. Tan Sri Mohd Bakri Bin Haji Omar,
Inspector-General Of Police,

ASEAN Chiefs Of Police,

Excellencies,

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

First of all allow me to express my deepest gratitude and appreciation to the Inspector General of Police and the ASEANAPOL Secretariat for inviting me to join all of you here today. On behalf of the government and people of Malaysia, it gives me great pleasure to welcome all National Chiefs of Police, delegates and observers of the 26th Conference Of Chiefs Of Police (ASEANAPOL) of ASEAN to Kuala Lumpur. Malaysia last played host to this conference a decade ago, and I consider it an honour for Malaysia to once again play host to this annual conference of ASEAN Police Chiefs.

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Globally and regionally, much has changed since ASEANAPOL was founded twenty-six years ago. The cold war era, which was the central pre-occupation of the world in those days and which was marked by conflict and tensions between east and west, is now history. The world today is faced with new challenges in the economic, political and social spheres, most notably the blurring of borders and the so-called war against terror.

ASEAN today is faced with a plethora of issues that need to be dealt with collectively. Beyond economic and trade issues, ASEAN member countries must foster closer cooperation on matters that are absolutely critical for the stability and prosperity of the region. The most vital among these is of course the matter of regional security.

ASEANAPOL, in my view is a pivotal platform for effective discourse towards formulating concrete plans of action to enhance regional security.

Ladies and gentlemen,

ASEANAPOL has come a long way since it came into being. It has contributed much to the enhancement of regional cooperation in law enforcement and the promotion of peace and security through collaboration in dealing with terrorism, sea piracy, arms smuggling, narcotics and human trafficking, fraud and money laundering and other major transnational crimes. Today it is recognized by Interpol, Europol and by countries throughout the Asia-pacific region.

But the road ahead is still a long one. There is still much to do and many improvements can still be made to ensure that ASEAN remains a safe and stable region in spite of global challenges to security. ASEANAPOL still has a lot to do to strengthen its role as an organization whose scope and depth of cooperation can and should decisively confront the challenges of transnational crime. In my view, the following are some of the challenges that ASEANAPOL must address, in the name of regional security.

Firstly, the need for better information sharing, information which is quality, timely and pre-emptive. The preservation of peace and security and the maintenance of law and order require cooperation beyond national boundaries and an emphasis on information sharing between countries in the region. Pledges of cooperation and the sharing of information between regional police forces must be followed through with concrete actions. For indeed, it is our responses and actions that will determine how ASEANAPOL can cope with the challenges ahead and secure the peaceful environment that we seek to establish. Only then will there be significant advances in police cooperation that would serve as a deterrent to terrorists, perpetrators of crime and those who intend to inflict harm.

In this regard, I am delighted to note that significant progress has been achieved on the implementation of the electronic ASEANAPOL Database System (e-ads). I am told that after years of development and negotiations, the e-ads project is now finally ready for implementation. This is indeed a significant step in the growth and development of ASEANAPOL as a cohesive regional organization and reflects the desire of its members to collectively share information for their common good. But more importantly it augurs well for the future of regional cooperation between police forces. I would like to congratulate the chiefs of police of ASEAN on this achievement.

Secondly, the security paradigm post 9/11 has changed considerably. No nation, however mighty, is safe from a determined, well organized and stealthy enemy. Terrorism, now more so than ever before, has exposed the vulnerability of our cities and resorts and made security from attacks that much more difficult to anticipate. The bombing incidents in Bali in 2002 and 2005, in Jakarta in 2004, Casablanca in 2003, Madrid in 2004 and London in 2005 clearly demonstrate the real dangers and

difficulties that confront us. For many of the victims, the anguish and pain of destruction will linger forever.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Terrorism is a scourge that ASEAN leaders view as a direct challenge to the attainment of peace, progress and prosperity of ASEAN and the realization of ASEAN vision 2020. In confronting these threats, there must be a unity of focus among us in building up regional law enforcement capabilities. ASEANAPOL can move forward by intensifying training, consultation and the sharing of intelligence and experiences in combating terrorism.

The "globalised" or "borderless" nature of these threats means that the pursuit of a peaceful and secure environment can no longer be confined within national boundaries. It must of necessity extend well beyond our national frontiers. And that means, international cooperation and collaboration must remain a key element in the national policies of governments and our police forces. Acting unilaterally is no longer the answer and will not guarantee adequate protection from threats.

Thirdly, as a regional body whose national governments are members of ASEAN; who are united and enjoined in the common objective of establishing the ASEAN community by 2020 as embodied in the Bali Concorde II declaration; it is crucial for ASEANAPOL to share the responsibility in making this objective a success. ASEANAPOL has much to offer and contribute to the ASEAN security community (ASC), the first of three pillars of the ASEAN community. The ASC as you may recall reflects the ASEAN vision for a peaceful, stable and prosperous South East Asia.

How can ASEANAPOL meaningfully contribute to these aspirations? In my view, ASEANAPOL would first have to take stock of the situation and re-examine its objectives so that it not only supports the ASC but also makes practical contributions in achieving the desired objectives. By working together and deepening cooperation in law enforcement, ASEANAPOL can play a significant role in advancing the goals of the ASEAN security community.

Fourthly, to be effective in dealing with transnational crime and threats to the security and stability of the region, ASEANAPOL must continue to work with international agencies and specialized bodies of the United Nations, the International Criminal Police Organization (Interpol), Europol and other organizations of similar standing globally. I am happy to note that, this has already been done and more areas of cooperation are being planned. Regionally, under the work programme of the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Transnational Crime (AMMTC) and the Senior Officials Meeting on Transnational Crime (SOMTC), many ASEAN police and law enforcement officials have benefited from the capacity-building programmes to combat transnational crimes and terrorism. This is indeed very encouraging.

Fifthly, there is ever-growing concern that while numerous measures to combat transnational crimes have been put in place, the ASEAN region generally still faces obstacles and challenges. Narcotics-trafficking, for instance, is a major concern for governments in the region. The United Nations estimates that the illicit drug market worldwide is worth US\$ 322 billion. East and South East Asia alone account for about 6.5 percent or us\$ 21.1 billion of the total market value.

Unless drastic measures are taken, we may eventually have to pay a higher economic cost brought on by the attendant cost of treatment and rehabilitation of drug dependants, interdiction and prosecution of drug peddlers and traffickers and the economic opportunities lost to crime. There must be a greater resolve and commitment on the part of member states to root out the drug scourge collectively. ASEANAPOL must focus on promoting closer cooperation on the sharing of information on drug trafficking.

Efforts must also be intensified in identifying, tracing and confiscating the ill-gotten assets of drug syndicates. To this end, the cooperation of law enforcement and drug enforcement agencies from outside the region such as Australia, New Zealand, the United States, China and others must be encouraged in our efforts to comprehensively combat the illicit drug trade.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I have spoken of the need for ASEANAPOL to enhance cooperation, share information and focus on the threats of terrorism and other transnational crimes. But in advancing forward ASEANAPOL must have the mechanism and legal framework in order to ensure that the measures taken in combating transnational crimes become a success. All our efforts would come to nothing without a mechanism to punish the guilty.

In this regard, we are indeed fortunate that within ASEAN there is already in place the ASEAN treaty on mutual legal assistance in criminal matters that was signed and acceded to on 29th November 2004 in Kuala Lumpur. Thus far, Brunei Darussalam, Malaysia, Singapore and Vietnam have ratified the treaty. It is hoped that the rest of the ASEAN states would soon follow suit.

Having such a treaty will provide member countries a distinct advantage in dealing with transnational crimes. The sooner we take cognizance of the importance for governments to have this instrument in their arsenal the better it is for the whole region. Law enforcement and the search for a secure environment cannot be done in isolation and neither can it be done to the exclusion of any country. It must have inputs and the cooperation of member countries as well as international organizations such as Interpol to make it succeed.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Although the ASEAN region is blessed with a rich mix of people of diverse ethnic backgrounds, cultures and beliefs, it is by no means so completely divergent that it is unable to determine its own future. Just as ASEAN is able to find common ground on a host of issues, ASEANAPOL too has succeeded in finding convergence in a number of areas. Among the most significant ones I am told is the success of joint training programmes such as the joint ASEANAPOL Senior Police Officers Course (JASPOC), which is already in its fifteenth year, as well as joint training programmes in combating specific crimes such as illicit-drug trafficking and fire arms smuggling.

In the future, ASEANAPOL would be wise to consider training programmes against bio-terrorism given the growing concerns of the international community of such a threat. All of these joint activities and multi-lateral arrangements reflect the growing cooperation and solidarity among member countries. It is hoped that such programmes will not only continue in the years ahead but also underpin the cooperative ventures of ASEANAPOL.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am sure that the 26th conference of ASEAN chiefs of police beginning today will have much to discuss. Although regional security has improved considerably in light of the recent successes against terrorist groups in the region, transnational crimes still continually occur at a rate faster than our capability to stop them. Putting our heads together and sharing experiences is one way to defeat the enemy.

A meeting at the highest level of the police hierarchy is important for it provides a forum for top police officers to exchange views, compare notes and make decisions on ways to consolidate friendships, intensify cooperation and more importantly find solutions to outstanding issues for the common good. It is my hope that this conference will be able to strengthen our resolve in seeking long-term solutions to the threats that confront the region. I wish you success in your deliberations.

On that note, it is with great pleasure that I declare the 26th Conference Of ASEAN Chiefs Of Police In Kuala Lumpur open.

Thank you.

Assalamualaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuh.