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Title : OPENING OF THE 33RD ASEAN MINISTERIAL MEETING

MR. CHAIRMAN,

YOUR ROYAL HIGHNESS,

EXCELLENCIES,

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

ON BEHALF OF THE MALAYSIAN DELEGATION, I JOIN MY ASEAN COLLEAGUES IN EXPRESSING OUR DEEPEST APPRECIATION TO HIS EXCELLENCY PRIME MINISTER CHUAN LEEKPAI FOR HIS MOST INSPIRING ADDRESS.

I CONGRATULATE HIS EXCELLENCY SURIN PITSUWAN ON HIS ELECTION AS THE CHAIRMAN OF THE 33RD ASEAN MINISTERIAL MEETING. WE LOOK FORWARD TO PRODUCTIVE DELIBERATIONS IN THE DAYS AHEAD UNDER HIS ABLE CHAIRMANSHIP. MY DELEGATION AND I WISH TO EXPRESS OUR APPRECIATION TO THE GOVERNMENT OF THAILAND FOR THE EXCELLENT ARRANGEMENTS MADE FOR THE MEETING AND THE KIND GENEROSITY EXTENDED TO ALL OF US. FURTHER, I CONGRATULATE THE FOREIGN MINISTER OF VIET NAM, HIS EXCELLENCY NGUYEN DY NIEN, ON HIS ELECTION AS VICE CHAIRMAN AND WARMLY WELCOME THE FOREIGN MINISTER OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA AS OBSERVER AT OUR MEETING.

MALAYSIA LOOKS FORWARD TO THE DISCUSSIONS WE WILL HAVE IN THE DAYS AHEAD. WE SHOULD REFLECT ON DEVELOPMENTS THAT HAVE TAKEN PLACE AND FORGE COMMON APPROACHES TO THE MANY CHALLENGES CONFRONTING US, INCLUDING THE CHALLENGES OF INTEGRATION, SUSTAINING ECONOMIC RECOVERY, THE IMPACT OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY, GLOBALISATION AS WELL AS ENTRENCHING PEACE AND STABILITY.

MR. CHAIRMAN,

GLOBALIZATION AND THE RAPID ADVANCES IN TECHNOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENTS ARE CONSTANTLY REDEFINING THE STRATEGIC LANDSCAPE WE LIVE IN. THEY ALREADY HAVE AFFECTED IN A MAJOR WAY THE VARIOUS SPHERES OF OUR INDIVIDUAL LIVES, OUR NATIONAL POLICIES AND OUR REGIONAL ENDEAVORS. THEY ALSO REPRESENT RISKS.

MALAYSIA, FOR ITS PART, WILL PAY CAREFUL HEED TO THE IMPORTANT LESSONS WE HAVE BEEN TAUGHT BY THE FINANCIAL CRISIS. WE SHOULD CONTINUE TO

ENHANCE OUR CAPACITY TO ANALYZE AND ANTICIPATE INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL TRENDS AND DEVELOPMENTS. EQUALLY IMPORTANT, WE SHOULD BE FEARLESS TO ADOPT POSITIONS AND PURSUE POLICIES THAT BEST SERVE OUR CIRCUMSTANCES AND SITUATIONS.

OUR GATHERING TODAY TAKES PLACE UNDER CONSIDERABLY HAPPIER CIRCUMSTANCES THAN AT THE 32ND ASEAN MINISTERIAL MEETING. THE GLOBAL ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL CONDITIONS HAVE IMPROVED DRAMATICALLY DURING THE PAST YEAR. ALTHOUGH THE EFFECTS OF THE FINANCIAL CRISIS ARE STILL BEING FELT IN SOME PARTS, OUR REGION HAS STAGED A REMARKABLE TURNAROUND. OUR RECOVERY IS DUE TO THE NATIONAL MEASURES WE HAVE PURSUED, THE REGIONAL INITIATIVES UNDERTAKEN AS WELL AS COOPERATION DEMONSTRATED AT THE INTERNATIONAL LEVEL. BUT, WE MUST REMAIN EVER WATCHFUL AND BE ALERT TO PREVENT THE RETURN OF THE UGLY SIDES OF CERTAIN ACTION TAKEN IN THE NAME OF GLOBALISATION.

MR. CHAIRMAN,

AS NATION STATES, WE MUST INCREASINGLY STRENGTHEN THE RESILIENCE AND THE CAPACITY BOTH OF OUR PEOPLE AND OUR INSTITUTIONS IN ORDER TO MEET THE HIGHLY COMPETITIVE DEMANDS OF A GLOBALIZED WORLD AND REALIZE OUR VISION OF A CARING SOCIETY. MALAYSIA THUS FULLY SHARES THE PRIORITY THAT ASEAN ATTACHES TO THE IMPROVEMENTS OF SOCIAL STANDARDS AND TO THE UPGRADING OF HUMAN RESOURCES. MALAYSIA HAS ALWAYS CONSIDERED ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AS TOP PRIORITY IN NATION BUILDING. HOWEVER, DEVELOPMENT MUST NOT ONLY CATER TO THE MATERIAL BENEFITS BUT ALSO THE SPIRITUAL NEEDS OF THE PEOPLE. IT MUST NOT ONLY BE SUSTAINABLE BUT ALSO SHARED EQUITABLY AMONG THE POPULATION.

MALAYSIA IS DETERMINED TO SUSTAIN ITS ECONOMIC RECOVERY. WE WOULD THEREFORE MAINTAIN CONTINUED VIGILANCE IN THE MANAGEMENT OF OUR NATIONAL ECONOMY. WITH YOU, OUR PARTNERS IN ASEAN, WE ARE COMMITTED TO MOVING REGIONAL ECONOMIC INTEGRATION FORWARD. WITH THE EAST ASIAN COUNTRIES, WE ARE RESOLVED TO COLLABORATING IN A MORE COHESIVE MANNER, IN UNDERTAKING STRATEGIC INITIATIVES TO ENABLE THE REGION TO AVOID ANOTHER ONSLAUGHT OF THE FINANCIAL CRISIS. WITH OTHER LIKEMINDED COUNTRIES, WE WOULD ENDEAVOR TO WORK TOWARDS THE EVOLUTION OF A MORE CONDUCIVE INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL REGIME. OUR REGION AND THE WORLD REQUIRE STABILITY, NOT ONLY IN THE POLITICAL AND STRATEGIC SENSE BUT ALSO IN ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL AFFAIRS.

MR. CHAIRMAN,

THE IMPERATIVES OF GREATER INTERDEPENDENCE AND MOBILITY OBVIOUSLY PROMPTED ASEAN LEADERS IN MANILA IN 1999 TO AGREE TO MOVE FORWARD ASEAN COOPERATION ON TRANSNATIONAL ISSUES. IN THIS REGARD, MALAYSIA

WISHES TO HIGHLIGHT ONE ISSUE AT THIS TIME, NAMELY HIV/AIDS AND THE URGENCY FOR ASEAN ACTION IN THIS MATTER. WE DO SO BECAUSE HIV/AIDS NOT ONLY REPRESENT A MAJOR PUBLIC HEALTH AND SOCIAL PROBLEM BUT IS A SERIOUS CHALLENGE TO DEVELOPMENT AS WELL. ONCE HIV/AIDS HAS MADE ITS ENTRY INTO A COUNTRY OR REGION, THE EPIDEMIC WOULD GROW WITH STARTLING SPEED AND SPREAD RAPIDLY TO THE GENERAL POPULATION. WE MUST CREATE THE MEANS FOR EFFECTIVE NATIONAL AND REGIONAL RESPONSES TO THIS SCOURGE OF THE MODERN AGE.

THE UNAIDS ORGANISATION HAS REPORTED THAT SOUTHEAST ASIA HAD 1.3 MILLION NEW HIV INFECTIONS IN 1999 ALONE. OUR REGION IS ALSO EXPERIENCING THE MOST DRASTIC INCREASE IN HIV INFECTIONS AMONG THE YOUNG PEOPLE. SINCE COMMITMENT AT THE HIGHEST POLITICAL LEVEL IS INDISPENSABLE TO SUSTAINING EFFECTIVE RESPONSES TO THE THREAT POSED BY HIV/AIDS, MALAYSIA HEALTH MINISTERS AT THEIR MEETING IN APRIL 2000. THE MINISTERS HAD RECOMMENDED THAT HIV/AIDS BE INCLUDED AS AN ISSUE FOR DISCUSSION AT THE 4TH ASEAN INFORMAL SUMMIT IN SINGAPORE, AND THAT AN ASEAN HEADS OF GOVERNMENT SUMMIT ON HIV/AIDS BE CONVENED IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE 7TH ASEAN SUMMIT TO BE HELD IN 2001 IN BRUNEI DARUSSALAM. MALAYSIA IS COMMITTED TO COOPERATING WITH OUR ASEAN PARTNERS IN REALIZING THESE TWO RECOMMENDATIONS.

MR. CHAIRMAN,

MALAYSIA WISHES TO RECALL ALSO THE IN-DEPTH DISCUSSION WE HAD AT THE RETREAT IN SINGAPORE LAST YEAR WHEN WE RESOLVED TO PROMOTE ASEAN DYNAMISM THROUGH STRENGTHENING ITS COHESIVENESS AND RELEVANCY. AMONG OTHERS, WE HAD AGREED THAT ASEAN NEEDED TO ADAPT TO CHANGES IN THE EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT. WE HAD ALSO REAFFIRMED OUR COMMITMENT TO THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES ON WHICH ASEAN WAS FOUNDED. WE NEED TO CONSTANTLY RENEW OUR DETERMINATION TO STRENGTHEN ASEAN TO CONFRONT THE CHALLENGES AHEAD. WE NEED TO HOLD FAST TO THE AGREEMENTS AND THE COMMITMENTS WE HAVE MADE IN SINGAPORE AMONG OURSELVES.

IT HAS BEEN OFTEN SAID THAT ASEAN MUST ADJUST TO THE CHANGING SITUATIONS IN ORDER TO REMAIN RELEVANT. WHILE CHANGES OR ADJUSTMENTS MAY BE NECESSARY, IT IS IMPORTANT THAT WE SHOULD NOT CHANGE MERELY FOR THE SAKE OF CHANGING. ANY CHANGE SHOULD SAVE THE INTEREST OF ASEAN MEMBER STATES AND BE APPROPRIATE TO OUR OWN CIRCUMSTANCES. IT IS IMPORTANT THAT ASEAN HAS CONFIDENCE IN ITS OWN CONVICTIONS. WE SHOULD NEVER COMPROMISE ON OUR RIGHT NOR RENEGE ON OUR RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT AND PROMOTE ASEAN INTERESTS. THIS IS BECAUSE WE OURSELVES ARE THE ONES BEST PLACED TO KNOW THE COMPLEXITIES OF OUR OWN REGION AND BEST ABLE TO UNDERSTAND THE DYNAMICS OF OUR OWN LOCAL SITUATIONS.

AT THE SAME TIME, WE MUST BUILD CAPACITY TO MEET THE CHALLENGES OF GLOBALISATION. INDEED GLOBALISATION IS HERE TO STAY BUT IT IS NOT A NATURAL FORCE THAT IS BEYOND CONTROL BY MAN. IT IS IS A MAN-MADE PROCESS THAT CAN BE CONTROLLED AND MODIFIED BY MAN. THE PROCESSES ARE NOT SACROSANCT. IT IS THE RESULT THAT ARE MORE IMPORTANT. WHERE TH RESULTS ARE DETRIMENTAL TO OUR INTERESTS, IT IS OUR DUTY TO ASK THAT THE PROCESSES BE CHANGED OR MODIFIED SO THAT THE RESULTS DO NOT HARM SOME OF US BUT BRING BENEFIT TO ALL.

MALAYSIA IS A STAUNCH BELIEVER IN THE COLLECTIVE STRENGTH AND POTENTIALS OF ASEAN. STANDING ALONE, ASEAN COUNTRIES WOULD BE MARGINAL PLAYERS. BUT STANDING TOGETHER AS MEMBERS OF ASEAN, WE CAN BE INFLUENTIAL. WE NEED TO KEEP REMINDING OURSELVES OF THE NECESSITY TO BE FIRMLY TOGETHER ON ISSUE AFFECTING ASEAN SPECIFICALLY, AS WELL AS N O LONGER REGIONAL AND GLOBAL ISSUES THAT EFFECT US GENERALLY.

MALAYSIA REMAINS CONFIDENCE THAT ASEAN HAS THE CAPACITY AND RESILIENCE TO EMERGE MORE UNITED AND STRONGER IN THE POST CRISIS PERIOD. FOR THIS TO BE ACHIEVED, ASEAN MEMBER STATES MUST RETURN TO THE BASICS, NAMELY TO STRENGTHEN ITS NATIONAL RESILIENCE, TO NATURE POSITIVE AND CONSTRUCTIVE BILATERAL RELATIONS WHILE ACCELERATING REGIONAL ECONOMIC INTEGRATION.

THANK YOU, MR. CHAIRMAN.