

By : DATUK SERI SYED HAMID ALBAR
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Title : CLOSING CEREMONY OF THE SEMINAR ON ASEAN AFFAIRS FOR EAST TIMOR OFFICIALS

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Director-General, Institute of Diplomacy and Foreign Relations,

H.E. Hideki Harashima,
Ambassador of Japan to Malaysia

Excellencies, Heads of Mission of ASEAN member countries,

Distinguished Guests,

Course Participants,

Ladies and Gentlemen.

At the outset, let me express my sincere thanks and appreciation to the Institute of Diplomacy and Foreign Relations Malaysia (IDFR) for inviting me to say a few words and to formally close this Seminar on ASEAN Affairs for East Timor Officials this evening.

2. I note that this is the second program undertaken by IDFR within a span of a few weeks under a wider assistance program the Malaysian government has agreed to extend towards the human resource development of East Timor. The successful completion of this Seminar, as well as the Diplomatic Training Course for East Timor Officials organised recently by the Institute speak volumes of Malaysia's commitment to our friends in East Timor.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

3. Let me also take this opportunity to convey Malaysia's appreciation to the Japanese Government, through the Japanese International Co-operation Agency (JICA), for partially sponsoring these programs. We are also grateful for the support and co-operation extended by the Japanese Embassy and the JICA Representative office in KL as well as the Economic Planning Unit of the Prime Minister's Department for helping to make this program a success.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

4. As East Timor prepares itself to become an independent and sovereign state within the world community of nations, its strategic location in the South East Asian region makes it imperative for its officials, administrators and diplomats to get to

know more about ASEAN. East Timor's understanding of the issues, the latest trends and developments affecting ASEAN member countries, as well as the challenges facing the organization, is indeed essential. I am glad to learn that this Seminar has given a comprehensive treatment of the subject.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

5. ASEAN is one of the most successful regional organisations ever established. While it has provided the South East Asian region with over 30 years of peace, stability and economic progress, it takes cognizance of the many challenges that lie ahead. Let me touch briefly on some of them.

6. As is universally acknowledged, the world today has undergone fundamental changes. The end of the Cold War has altered the global and strategic environment resulting in uncertainty in international relations. New issues have emerged in external relations such as human rights, labour rights, environmental conservation, good governance and democracy. New international mechanisms have been created and existing ones strengthened to manage the changes through regional cooperation and multilateral dialogue. All these, as well as the pressures of globalisation that forces regional economies to become more interdependent demands that the changes be carefully managed to ensure that ASEAN remain relevant and competitive in the international fora.

7. The financial crisis experienced by the region 3 years ago and the opportunities of globalisation have compelled ASEAN to give more focus towards several critical areas such as human resource development, the digital divide, science and technology, regional integration and the promotion of competitiveness. Emphasis on these vital areas are important in order to face the challenges of the post-financial crisis era and to keep up with the demands of the changing global economy.

8. The challenges that emanate from the international financial system and the World Trade Organisation are also important in ASEAN's external relations. Such challenges made it imperative for ASEAN to push for a regulated international financial architecture and a balanced trade regime.

9. As ASEAN moves towards East Asia by establishing institutional linkages under the ASEAN plus 3 framework, the emerging challenge for the organisation is to ensure that it will serve as a complementary effort to the existing internal cooperation of ASEAN.

10. ASEAN must also integrate the newer members within the organisation. An important strategy would be to increase the capacity of the newer ASEAN members to contribute and benefit from their membership of ASEAN. The Initiative for ASEAN Integration represents the broad framework to accelerate this integration process, with the more advanced ASEAN members, as well as our Dialogue Partners, helping the newer members.

11. On the political front, ASEAN is playing a major role in bringing together major powers of the world within the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) to discuss and address political-security issues confronting the region. The challenge for ASEAN is to ensure that the Forum will continue to move forward at a pace comfortable to all members concerned. The Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC) and the Treaty on the South East Asia Nuclear Weapons – Free Zone (SEANWFZ) are two instruments that are important to ASEAN. The challenge for ASEAN is to ensure the successful accessions of non-Southeast Asian states, particularly the Dialogue Partners to these two instruments.

12. In the light of all these challenges ASEAN's future and continued relevance as a regional organisation depend to a large degree on its ability to adapt to the changing regional and international environment. This calls for inter alia concerted effort on the part of ASEAN to continuously review its external relations perspective whilst preserving its regional solidarity.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

13. While ASEAN and other regional and international cooperative relations remain important in the context of Malaysia's foreign policy, considerable importance is attached to the promotion of bilateral relations. Malaysia recognises the need to expand the network of friendly bilateral relations. We believe that it is in our interest as a small developing country to establish and develop mutually beneficial relations with as many countries as possible.

14. It is in this regard that Malaysia sees it important to extend a hand of friendship towards East Timor. East Timor's participation in Malaysia's Technical Cooperation Programme provides a useful mechanism for the promotion of contacts and dialogues that bring trust, goodwill and understanding beneficial to both sides. Malaysia looks forward to the establishment of its Liaison Office in Dili and to the promotion of greater exchange of visits between the two sides.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

15. To all participants, I hope the knowledge and experience gained while attending the Seminar will be useful in helping you in the performance of your responsibilities. You certainly have a challenging career ahead. I am confident that with determination and unwavering commitment, you and many others like you who are being sent abroad for training to help prepare for the process of nation building upon attaining full independence will succeed. Undoubtedly, East Timor's future relations with the world community rely to a large extent on you and your other East Timor colleagues.

16. As you prepare to leave Kuala Lumpur, I hope you will not make this your first

and last visit to Malaysia. Rest assured that you are always welcome to this country. I wish you all bon voyage with the hope of meeting you again.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

17. On that note, I now have great pleasure to declare this Seminar on ASEAN Affairs for officials of East Timor, closed.

Thank you.