

**By : DATUK SERI SYED HAMID ALBAR**  
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*"TOWARDS BUILDING THE ASEAN COMMUNITY: MALAYSIA'S ROLE AS CHAIR OF THE ASEAN STANDING COMMITTEE (ASC)"*

Assalamualaikum warahmatullahi wabarakatuh and good morning,

Yang Berbahagia Dato' Prof. Dr. Abdul Halim Mohd. Nawawi

Deputy Vice Chancellor of Universiti Teknologi MARA  
Yang Berusaha Prof. Dr. Rahmat Mohamad

Director, Institute for Knowledge Advancement and  
The Centre for ASEAN Studies

Excellencies;

Distinguished Guests;

Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the outset, I wish to extend my heartiest congratulations to the UiTM's Centre for ASEAN Studies for organizing this ASEAN Lecture Series today in conjunction with the 38th Anniversary of ASEAN. I am glad to note that the Centre, established last year, is up and running.

2. I am also honoured and delighted to be invited as the first speaker in the ASEAN Lecture Series. As you are aware, Malaysia has just assumed the chairmanship of the 39th ASEAN Standing Committee (ASC) in Vientiane, Laos less than two weeks ago. The holding of this event is indeed timely as a follow-up to the National Colloquium organized by the university to commemorate ASEAN Day on 8 August last year, for the purpose of providing some inputs and identifying some do-able activities in preparations for Malaysia's chairmanship.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

3. I have been asked to speak on Malaysia's role as the ASC Chair in building the ASEAN Community. Let me begin by giving a brief historical background of ASEAN and ASEAN's perspective in its community building efforts. We all know that ASEAN was born as a result of a common vision of its five founding fathers, namely the Foreign Ministers of Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. They

envisioned a regional grouping of Southeast Asian nations willing to work towards a common destiny on the basis of regional cooperation and a shared objective to live in peace, freedom and prosperity.

4. From the ideals of the Bangkok Declaration of 1967, the common desire of ASEAN Member Countries was reaffirmed in the 1971 Kuala Lumpur Declaration on the Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOPFAN), and also, the Declaration of ASEAN Concord (Bali Concord) of 1976 which provided a basic framework for regional cooperation.

5. The Bali Summit also saw the signing of the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC). TAC's key principles of mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, non-interference in internal affairs, peaceful resolution of disputes, renunciation of the threat or use of force and effective intra-ASEAN cooperation, have become an effective code of conduct governing relations between states as well as a diplomatic instrument for the promotion of regional peace and stability.

6. Another important development was the signing of the Treaty on the Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapons Free Zone (SEANWFZ) in 1995 which provides for the complete disarmament of nuclear weapons in the region, an essential component of ZOPFAN.

7. By 1997, after 30 years, the seed of an ASEAN Community began to germinate when an ASEAN Vision 2020 was adopted by the Leaders here in Kuala Lumpur on 15 December 1997. The ASEAN Vision envisaged the creation of an ASEAN Community by the year 2020. The Community is portrayed as a concert of Southeast Asian nations, outward-looking, living in peace and stability, bonded together in partnership in dynamic development and in a community of caring societies that is conscious of its ties of history and cultural heritage and bound by a common regional identity. By the time ASEAN expanded to 10 in 1999, a 6-year Hanoi Plan of Action (HPA), adopted in December 1998, was in place to propel ASEAN towards attaining its long term Vision.

8. The 9th ASEAN Summit in October 2003 in Bali saw a renewed commitment on the part of the ASEAN leadership towards developing an ASEAN Community, with the signing of the ASEAN Concord II (Bali Concord II). As we all know, the ASEAN Community comprises three pillars of cooperation namely, the ASEAN Security Community (ASC), the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), and the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC). Each Community has its own Plan of Action, of which the AEC Action Plan was adopted at the same occasion.

9. These documents reflected the collective political will of the ASEAN Leaders that ASEAN was committed to continue its journey in an integrated and holistic manner towards building an ASEAN Community, after being derailed by the devastating regional financial crisis, SARS and the bird flu epidemics in the intervening years. The Bali Concord II also strengthened ASEAN cohesion, solidarity and unity.

10. With the signing of the six-year Vientiane Action Programme (VAP), and the Plans of Action to achieve the Security Community and the Socio-Cultural Community by the Leaders at the 10th ASEAN Summit in Vientiane, ASEAN now has a clear roadmap for the next 6 years towards achieving its objectives.

11. Allow me to mention briefly, the three pillars of cooperation of the ASEAN Community.

- The ASEAN Security Community envisages the adherence of Member Countries to the principle of comprehensive security as having broad political, economic, social and cultural dimensions. The ASC however, does not envisage the establishment of a defence pact like NATO. What is important is the renunciation of the use of threat or force as a mode of resolving disputes and the sharing of a collective responsibility in maintaining peace, security and stability in Southeast Asia. The region should also be kept free of nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction. Transboundary issues such as communicable diseases, transnational crimes and international terrorism must also be addressed collectively through regional and international cooperation.
- The ASEAN Economic Community is the realization of the end-goal of economic integration as stated in the ASEAN Vision 2020. Member Countries as a group will work towards the creation of a single market and production base. They must undertake collective efforts to create a stable, prosperous and highly competitive ASEAN economic region, in which there is a free flow of goods, services, investment and skilled labour, a freer flow of capital, equitable economic development and reduced poverty and socio-economic disparities by 2020.
- The ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community envisages a community of caring societies, whereby human resource development is a key strategy for employment, poverty eradication, addressing socio-economic disparities and ensuring economic growth with equity. It represents ASEAN's aspirations to lift the quality of life of its peoples, promote sustainable use of natural resources and strengthen its cultural identity through a people-centered ASEAN. It is the key area of regional cooperation that directly touches on the well-being of the people.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

12. I have highlighted ASEAN's landmark documents, marking its journey heading towards an ASEAN Community, as envisaged by the ASEAN Vision 2020. I hope it will provide you with a better understanding of the historical background of ASEAN and its future direction.

13. After 38 years, ASEAN has gone through various ups and downs. Its most pressing times were probably the tough experiences of the regional financial crisis of 1997- 1998, and then, the life-threatening epidemics of the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and the Avian flu. The recent tsunami catastrophe provided yet another major challenge to ASEAN. Through it all, I believe ASEAN has emerged stronger and has attained a certain level of maturity.

14. There is no doubt that Member Countries realized that regional collaboration, particularly on issues that cut across borders, is the most effective way to deal with them, while a united front from ASEAN is necessary to cope and withstand the multi-faceted challenges. Current issues such as international terrorism and other trans-boundary crimes, rising oil prices and development issues, will continue to pose as challenges to ASEAN.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

15. As I have recently returned from the 38th AMM/PMC/12th ARF in Vientiane, Laos, in end July, I wish to take this opportunity to share with you some highlights of the successful outcome of the meetings under the able chairmanship of Laos.

16. I think the issue that generated the most interest was the issue of Myanmar's ASC chairmanship in 2006, after Malaysia's turn. However, it turned out to be a non-issue. Myanmar's Foreign Minister took the initiative to inform me and his other ASEAN colleagues of Myanmar's decision to relinquish its turn to be the Chair of ASEAN in 2006. The reason he gave was because his country wanted to focus its attention on the ongoing national reconciliation and democratization process, which was entering a critical phase next year.

17. Myanmar's decision was entirely its own, conveyed without any prompting. We, the Foreign Ministers, warmly welcomed it. It too showed that the "ASEAN Way" is still relevant, reflecting the spirit of working together and understanding the importance of ASEAN unity and cohesiveness. The Philippines will thus assume the 40th ASC Chair in 2006 after Malaysia.

18. On the ASEAN Charter, I am pleased with the concurrence achieved by the ASEAN Foreign Ministers to work towards its establishment which will reaffirm the objectives, goals, and principles of the ASEAN Community and beyond. The ASEAN Charter, I believe, will contribute towards strengthening ASEAN as an organisation. In this regard, the agreed draft text of the Kuala Lumpur Declaration on the Establishment of an ASEAN Charter will now be recommended for approval and signature by ASEAN Leaders at the 11th ASEAN Summit in Kuala Lumpur on 12 December 2005. Provision is also made to establish an Eminent Persons Group (EPG) comprising a representative from each Member Country. Pending their Terms of Reference (TOR) to be drawn up in due course, the EPG is expected to submit their report and recommendations to the ASEAN Leaders in due course.

19. Another key outcome is the establishment of an ASEAN Development Fund (ADF). The ADF represents a crucial element in ASEAN's work programmes for it is intended to provide ASEAN with a common pool of financial resources to support the implementation of the VAP. The ADF is a transformation of the now defunct ASEAN Fund, which had a minimum amount of UDS10 million that consisted of equal contributions from the ten ASEAN Members Countries. It is an innovative way of

resource mobilization. With the ADF, ASEAN can now undertake its own projects of strategic nature, provide some co-funding for certain projects and seed funding for initial studies/activities of large scale projects, without depending solely on Dialogue Partners or others.

20. Currently, the ADF has a minimum amount of USD10 million transferred from the old ASEAN Fund. Member countries have also agreed to contribute USD 100,000 each before the end of 2006. As a reflection of our commitment to the effective implementation of the VAP, I have announced Malaysia's additional contribution of USD 500,000 to be made to the ADF during our chairmanship. We hope that more Member Countries would also do so.

21. I am also pleased to inform you of the conclusion of the ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response (ADMER). This is a follow-up to the Special ASEAN Leaders' Meeting in the Aftermath of Earthquake and Tsunami held in Jakarta last January. With the Agreement, it is my hope that we will be able to enhance regional cooperation by establishing a framework for the development of operational procedures to respond collectively and expeditiously to natural disasters. ASEAN must be prepared to handle unexpected disasters through more effective collaboration efforts.

22. I am also happy that both New Zealand and Mongolia acceded to the TAC, while Australia signed a Declaration of Intent to accede to the Treaty in Vientiane. I have been informed by Australia that it plans to formally accede to the TAC once it has completed its parliamentary process. In this respect, we hope that the signing ceremony could take place prior to the 11th ASEAN Summit and Related Summits here in Kuala Lumpur this December. With the accession to the TAC or the intention to accede to the TAC, both New Zealand and Australia are now qualified to be invited to the First East Asia Summit (EAS) in addition to India.

23. The Post Ministerial Conferences (PMCs) also saw the separate signing of the Joint Declaration on Cooperation to Combat International Terrorism between ASEAN and New Zealand, the Republic of Korea and Pakistan. With that, I am happy to note that nine Dialogue Partners and one Sectoral Partner have now signed such a Declaration with ASEAN. Canada, I understand, is expected to sign a similar Declaration at the next PMC to be held here in Malaysia next year.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

24. On the whole, I am pleased with the overall outcome of the AMM/PMC/ARF and we congratulate Laos for a job well done. Now, it is Malaysia's turn. With the groundwork laid down for the realization of the ASEAN Community, the challenge is for Malaysia to develop and sustain the momentum to implement the VAP and the three pillars of the Bali Concord II. Given the continued support and commitment of all Member Countries, I am confident that ASEAN will be successful in achieving its vision of building an ASEAN Community.

25. So, this brings me to what will be Malaysia's role and priorities as the ASC Chair in the context of building the ASEAN Community. I would like to share with you some general thoughts that Malaysia may carry out during our chairmanship.

26. I wish to start by reviewing where ASEAN is today. Firstly, I am proud to say that ASEAN today is recognized as a viable and successful organization, one that has kept itself progressive and relevant. It is an outward-looking organization that has maintained substantive cooperation with its Dialogue Partners as well as relations with other organizations. Kofi Annan, the UN Secretary General, once said that *"...ASEAN is not only a well-functioning, indispensable reality in the region. It is a real force to be reckoned with far beyond the region. It is also a trusted partner of the United Nations in the field of development..."* While that may speak volumes for ASEAN, more need to be done to further strengthen the organization under Malaysia's chairmanship.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

27. The Bali Concord II clearly reaffirms the commitment of the ASEAN member countries in shaping a cohesive, stable, secure, resilient and integrated ASEAN Community. In community building, I think we are aware that the process is essentially about people and creating a state of mind. It is also about creating a sense of belonging and involvement with the community, and without doubt, a collective venture. To inculcate the mentality of an ASEAN Community, people must be conscious of ASEAN and its contributions.

28. In this context, I would like to say that Malaysia hopes to pursue a people-centered agenda for the benefit of the entire community. Our people-centric approach is aimed at increasing people's awareness of ASEAN and the positive benefits ASEAN has generated for the people and the society, particularly in the implementation of the VAP and the various Plans of Action. This emphasis will cut across the implementation of the VAP involving the three pillars of cooperation of the ASEAN Community, and an underlying priority of Malaysia as it steers ASEAN towards an ASEAN Community. It is in line with our own desire of "bringing ASEAN to the ordinary people" in Malaysia. I believe that people must be made aware of the implementation of the VAP and the Plans of Action in Member Countries, and those projects should relate to the lives of the ordinary people of ASEAN. Only then, could ASEAN become relevant to them.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

29. As we are aware, community-building is clearly a team effort and long-term process. It is my sincere hope that together with Malaysia, Member Countries may consider making the effort to carry out several measures or actions over a period of time to create ASEAN consciousness among the people. Member Countries should give prominence to the contributions of ASEAN and its activities that have a direct impact on them. This would enable their citizenry to see the relevance of ASEAN in

their daily lives, community or society. In short, unless the shared goals and vision of Member Countries are able to reach out to the hearts and minds of their respective citizens, the goal of the ASEAN Community will very much remain a dream.

30. I would like to propose that more efforts be made as follows:

- Instill the sense of the "we feeling" among ASEAN countries based on a common set of ASEAN values evolved over the years ;
- Highlight the Initiative for ASEAN Integration (IAI) and its Work Plan, especially its positive impact on the CLMV countries whose populations are the direct beneficiaries;
- Disseminate information on the VAP, especially the two key objectives of the VAP i.e. narrowing the development gap and the deepening of ASEAN's integration, and its contribution to the overall development and stability of the region.
- Enlighten the public on the respective role of Member Countries in contributing towards the building of the ASEAN Community, based on the three pillars.
- Educate the public about the benefits of ASEAN membership and highlight ASEAN's contribution to their national economy, and in improving the lives of the people.
- Encourage the practice of good governance, promote democracy, strengthen the rule of law and respect for internationally recognized human rights and fundamental freedom.

31. In this regard, I heartily welcome our joint decision to undertake concerted efforts to celebrate this year's ASEAN Day on 8 August 2005. This is a right step in the awareness-building exercise of ASEAN that will facilitate the community-building process. The adoption of a central theme of "ASEAN Community Building for ASEAN People" is most apt now that ASEAN countries have established the roadmap to build the ASEAN Community by 2020. I do hope we could do this annually.

32. Some of the activities that my Ministry has initiated or carried out included a televised ASEAN Day speech by YAB Prime Minister a few days ago, an ASEAN Day Supplement in the local papers on 8 August and a flag-raising ceremony. Indeed we will be flying the ASEAN flag at Wisma Putra throughout our ASC chairmanship. For the first time, I also hosted an official Reception in conjunction with the 38th ASEAN Day last night.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

33. On Malaysia's priorities during its chairmanship, we have identified a list of doables that could be implemented. The overall objective is to ensure that ASEAN remains relevant, effective and united in the face of existing and emerging challenges. We hope to carry them out based on three broad priorities.

34. The first priority is for Malaysia to ensure that ASEAN carries out an integrated and balanced implementation of the VAP and the Plans of Action of the respective

pillars that make up the ASEAN Community. This would refer to the implementation of the specific projects under the broad programme areas, measures and activities outlined in the VAP and the respective Plans of Action. We hope that the human dimension would not be overlooked in carrying out the activities, in order to ensure that its implementation is in line with Malaysia's people-centered agenda for ASEAN.

35. The second priority is to strengthen ASEAN as an institution. In this regard, there is already an ongoing overall review of ASEAN's institutional framework and its existing structures and mechanisms. Streamlining ASEAN meetings, by virtue of its estimated 700 meetings a year, is of priority as it has become a heavy burden not only on the resources of the ASEAN Secretariat, but also the respective National Secretariats of ASEAN Member Countries.

36. It should also be our priority to give emphasis to the establishment of the ASEAN Charter, an important aspect to the strengthening of the ASEAN Secretariat. This should be done in parallel with the overall institutional review of the ASEAN framework. The completion of the Charter itself should be given an utmost priority as it will guide the building of the ASEAN Community. The Charter will also provide the basis for the development of the new institutional framework of ASEAN. The Charter, once established, would in addition provide a legal personality to ASEAN while clearly defining the rules of engagement among Member Countries.

37. The third priority is to strengthen ASEAN's relations with its Dialogue Partners while remaining in the driver's seat. Of priority will be ASEAN's dialogue with the Plus Three countries of China, Japan and the Republic of Korea, individually or within the ASEAN Plus Three cooperation framework. The ASEAN Plus Three cooperation has expanded into some 17 areas involving 49 meetings since the Plus Three process started in 1997 here in Kuala Lumpur. Such cooperation is continuing to expand it is my hope that it will propel the process towards building an East Asian community.

38. With the first EAS to be convened in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, together with the other ASEAN Member Countries and the Plus Three countries look forward to engaging constructive dialogue with countries outside the region on broad policy and strategic issues for the benefit of ASEAN and the region.

39. On the basis of the above priorities, Malaysia will undertake the following specific doables and initiatives during its chairmanship:

- Holding an ASEAN Civil Society Conference, as a side event of the 11th ASEAN Summit here in Kuala Lumpur in December 2005 to create awareness of ASEAN. The UiTM is expected to play an important role.
- Hosting the 5th Workshop for an ASEAN Regional Mechanism for Human Rights in 2006.
- Setting up an EPG on the ASEAN Charter as a follow-up to the adoption of the Kuala Lumpur Declaration on the Establishment of the ASEAN Charter to ensure continued progress on the establishment of the Charter.
- Strengthening the institutional framework of ASEAN including a review of its existing structures and mechanisms and streamlining ASEAN meetings, introducing changes where necessary to enhance its effectiveness and optimize use of resources.

- Ensuring the effective implementation of the VAP, the Plans of Action, as well as the IAI.
- Focusing on resource mobilization efforts to support the VAP implementation, by highlighting the ASEAN Development Fund (ADF). In this regard, ASEAN will approach Dialogue Partners and international organizations and other parties to contribute to the ADF.
- Ensuring that ASEAN remains a pro-active and progressive regional organization that is fully attuned to current international developments.
- Giving continued importance to the ASEAN + 3 process for the realization of an East Asian community with the adoption of a Kuala Lumpur Declaration of the ASEAN+3 Summit.
- Setting the direction for the East Asia Summit with the adoption of a specific Kuala Lumpur Declaration on EAS.
- Concluding an ASEAN-Russia Agreement on Economic and Development Cooperation, and a 10-year Comprehensive Programme of Action to Promote Cooperation between Russia and ASEAN (2005 – 2015).
- Convening the First ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting.
- Working towards the conclusion of an ASEAN Non-Aggression Treaty. This is in line with the principles of the TAC.
- Working towards the integration of the 11 priority sectors through the implementation of the ASEAN Framework Agreement for the Economic Integration of the Priority Sectors, a crucial step in the creation of a single market and production base.
- Facilitating and encouraging the conclusion of the FTA (Free Trade Area) or CEP (Comprehensive Economic Partnership) negotiations with the various Dialogue Partners.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

40. What I have outlined above is what Malaysia hopes to carry out to the best of our ability during our ASC chairmanship. It is certainly not a complete list. We believe these initiatives in three broad areas will contribute to the further development and stature of ASEAN, while serving the interest of the region. While it is an honour for Malaysia to be the Chair, it is also a great responsibility. We must ensure that ASEAN continues to be progressive and outward-looking while holding dear to its "ASEAN Way" and its key principles. Most importantly, Malaysia must count on the continued support of ASEAN Member Countries to do the best we can for the benefit of all the people in the region, particularly our citizens, the peoples of ASEAN.

Thank You.

11 August 2005.