

ADDRESS BY
YB DATO' SRI ANIFAH AMAN
MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, MALAYSIA
ON THE OCCASION OF THE ASEAN ANNIVERSARY FORUM
“ASEAN COMMUNITY 2015: A PEOPLE-CENTRED ASEAN”
INSTITUTE OF DIPLOMACY AND FOREIGN RELATIONS (IDFR)
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(Delivered by YB Senator A. Kohilan Pillay
Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Malaysia)

Yang Berbahagia Tan Sri Radzi Abdul Rahman,
Secretary General, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Yang Berbahagia Ambassador Aminahtun Karim,

Yang Berbahagia Associate Professor Dr. Jasmine Ahmad,
Dean, Faculty of Administrative Science and Policy Studies,
Universiti Teknologi MARA

Yang Berbahagia Tan Sri-Tan Sri, Dato'-Dato',
Excellencies, Ambassadors and High Commissioners,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good Morning, Salam Sejahtera and Salam Satu Malaysia,

First and foremost, I would like to thank all of you for coming to the Institute of Diplomacy and Foreign Relations (IDFR) to join us at this years' ASEAN Anniversary Forum. The Honourable Minister of Foreign Affairs could not be here today. I have therefore been tasked to represent him and to deliver his remarks, which are as follows:

2. I wish to congratulate the Institute of Diplomacy and Foreign Relations (IDFR) and the Institute of ASEAN Studies and Global Affairs (INSPAG), Universiti Teknologi MARA for organizing this forum in conjunction with the 45th anniversary of ASEAN. The theme for this year's forum, namely, "The ASEAN Community 2015: A People-Centred ASEAN", is indeed significant and timely.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

3. There is every reason to believe that the Asia-Pacific region will continue to be the main engine for global economic growth in the years to come. This presupposes that the region will continue to enjoy peace and stability during that time. This in turn, can only be achieved if there are in place rules and norms to govern the behaviour of States, as well as promote predictability and transparency. Regional peace and stability also require robust institutions to serve as platforms to establish these rules and norms, as well as to promote their enforcement.

4. There is also every reason to believe that ASEAN will be central to efforts to establish these rules and norms as well as to create these institutions. ASEAN's ability to do so however, requires us to be strong, innovative and neutral.

5. Many of you are aware that Malaysia is to assume the Chairmanship of ASEAN in 2015. We appreciate fully the importance of this role and the historic responsibility that we will soon shoulder.

6. We recognise that in cooperation with our ASEAN colleagues, we will need to ensure the continued strength, innovation and neutrality of ASEAN, and in so doing firmly place ASEAN at the heart of the evolving regional architecture.

7. We know that in tandem with our ASEAN colleagues, we will need to take measures to ensure the fullest implementation of all the action lines contained in the three ASEAN Blueprints – Political-security, Economic and Socio-cultural, and in so doing establish the ASEAN Community.

8. We are aware that marching in-step with our ASEAN colleagues, we will need to outline a bold vision of ASEAN integration beyond 2015.

9. In the analysis that Malaysia is conducting in the run-up to our Chairmanship of ASEAN, we find that the three overarching goals mentioned earlier can be achieved only if we place the people of our ASEAN family at the centre. Our people are our best asset. They are the fuel needed if we are to put `more horsepower' into the engine of ASEAN integration. We must therefore involve our peoples fully in our region-building efforts.

10. For this reason, I believe that we must move beyond the vision of a `People-Oriented ASEAN' contained in the ASEAN Charter to a bolder `People-Centred ASEAN'. I am pleased to point out to you that the creation of a `People-Centred ASEAN' will be one of the key planks of Malaysia's Chairmanship of ASEAN in 2015.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

11. The task of promoting a people-centred ASEAN by 2015 and beyond is a challenging one. We need to:

11.1 Firstly, foster a change in the mind-sets of Governments;

11.2 Secondly, create a sense of belonging amongst peoples of ASEAN; and

11.3 Thirdly, institute arrangements that can foster `People-Centredness'.

12. I will share some of my thoughts on these challenges and measures to address them.

Changing the mind-sets of Governments

13. Creating a truly `People-Centred ASEAN' requires a change in mind-sets among governments. I suspect that this would be difficult, given that the ASEAN project has been led by governments. Further, bureaucrats are also accustomed to thinking nationally rather than regionally. The distinction is often made between what is `national' and what is `foreign', with no reference being made to what is `regional'. Rules

pertaining to the financial sector are a case in point. This has impeded the expansion of companies, especially Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) whose objective is to become an ASEAN-wide business. If we are to encourage businesses to take advantage of ASEAN's total market of 600 million and economy of US\$1.9 trillion, mind-sets need to change.

14. Fostering a 'People-Centred ASEAN' also requires a change from the 'Power to the Government' mind-set to a 'Power to the People' mind-set. Governments all across the ASEAN region, including Malaysia, are more responsive, attentive and attuned to the needs and aspirations of the people. Such an effort is very much in tandem the concept of "1Malaysia: People First, Performance Now", introduced by The Honourable Prime Minister, YAB Dato' Sri Mohd Najib Tun Abdul Razak, which suggests that in order to achieve development in Malaysia, the people must progress first beginning with the creation of an attitude of acceptance among the different races that will lead to unity. When unity is achieved, the country's development will be expedited. I believe that the same analogy could also be applied in the context of ASEAN regional integration.

15. To create a truly 'People-Centred ASEAN', governments must encourage active and meaningful bottom-up participation from the stakeholders in the ASEAN decision-making process. They should be given the appropriate platforms to voice out their views and ideas, so as to create a sense of ownership and belonging. It is also important for the governments to continue engaging all relevant stakeholders on issues which have direct and indirect impact on the political and socio-economic development of the region.

16. This is not to say that no efforts have been made in this regard. We have, for example, the ASEAN Social Forum, the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly and Malaysia's own – ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ASEAN Peoples' Forum which is held on an annual basis. In this connection, I wish to highlight that during the 33rd ASEAN-Interparliamentary Assembly (AIPA) which was recently held on 19 September 2012 at Lombok, Indonesia, the ASEAN Parliamentarians have agreed to transform the action-oriented programmes to people-centred and people-friendly programmes which involve civil society as well as public participation. I believe that more initiatives of similar nature

should be encouraged in tandem with the current political, economic and social dynamics that are taking place in this region.

Creating a sense of belonging amongst peoples of ASEAN

17. One of the main challenges facing ASEAN Member States is how best to nurture and create a sense of belonging, a sense of the “we feeling” amongst the peoples of ASEAN. Their regular contacts are important factors in the effort to foster greater mutual understanding as well as the sense of shared values and norms. While many efforts and initiatives have been undertaken by the governments of ASEAN to facilitate and encourage such contacts and interactions, they would not be sufficient without the help and support from other stakeholders such as the private sector, civil society organisations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

18. In order to convince the peoples of ASEAN to be fully involved, they must first be informed of what ASEAN is all about and the objectives that it is trying to achieve. They must be made aware of the potential and true benefits of ASEAN and what they can contribute in return. They too must also be inspired by the vision of ASEAN and convinced that the future of their children is very much dependent on the realisation of that grand vision.

19. To increase the level of awareness of ASEAN, the governments need to adopt a more sustained, aggressive and inclusive approach, targeting specific groups in society especially the youth.

20. I must emphasise what I feel to be an important point – efforts to engage the various sectors of society must be done in a manner that appeals to them, rather than what is the norm and therefore convenient for bureaucrats. This is especially true of efforts targeting youths. I would like to highlight two ideas in this regard:

- 20.1 Firstly, the production of ASEAN-wide reality TV shows involving activities that all ASEAN youths undergo, such as the tribulations of sitting for exams; and

20.2 Secondly, convene a Model ASEAN Summit, in which university students in ASEAN represent different countries in an ASEAN Summit setting, similar to the Global Model United Nations;

21. At the same time, strategies to promote ASEAN awareness should adopt a multi-sectoral approach, namely through education, arts and culture and tourism. The media too, both print and electronic, can play a positive complementary role in the process by promoting more robust people-to-people connectivity through existing regional media networks. The popularity of the Internet, Face-book, Twitters and Blogs, must be exploited as they hold tremendous potential for bridging both the digital and people divide.

Instituting arrangements that can foster `People-Centredness`.

22. Efforts to foster `People-Centredness` should be buttressed by putting in place arrangements that would facilitate the peoples' involvement in ASEAN-related activities. Let me illustrate by way of example. Activities such as a civil-society or a business summit held just prior to ASEAN Summits, and the mode of their interaction with the Leaders, remain the exclusive prerogative of the ASEAN Chairman. In my mind, it would be better for ASEAN governments to decide conclusively that these activities would be held every year. Further, the mode of selecting CSO and business representatives should also be standardised.

23. A consistent, predictable and standardised method of engagement between stakeholders and the ASEAN Leaders would signal to them that `you are at the heart of what we do`. Further, ancillary activities could be organised by them which would be part of the preparatory process leading up to the Summit. Finally, it would have the merit of strengthening the `rules-based approach` that we are trying to promote in ASEAN.

24. The ASEAN Connectivity agenda can be the key arrangement to promote a `People-Centred ASEAN`. All the ingredients are there. Physical connectivity would help to move the peoples of ASEAN safely, easily and cheaply. Improving institutional

connectivity will help facilitate cross border interaction. People-to-people connectivity will help people to understand others in ASEAN better.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

25. Let me conclude where I began – in today’s challenging global and domestic environment, creating a truly ‘People-Centred ASEAN’ is no longer an option. It is an imperative. So rather than be fearful, let us be bold. Rather than calcification, let us choose change. Rather than neglect the potentials of our people, let us harness them.

26. It is my hope and expectation that today’s forum would serve as a platform to exchange views and generate ideas that will contribute to the promotion of a people-centred ASEAN Community. I wish you all the best in your deliberations.

Thank you.