

KEYNOTE ADDRESSES

VIETNAM AND ASEAN: REINFORCING COOPERATION AND COMMUNITY

*Fidel V. Ramos**

INTRODUCTION

On behalf of the people and government of the Philippines, I bid you all welcome to Manila for this third meeting of our continuing dialogue on ASEAN-Vietnam Cooperation.

It reflects some measure of success on this laudable undertaking that our countries are meeting for the third time in just a little over two years and that today we are joined by representatives from Myanmar, Laos and Cambodia.

When this dialogue began in Hanoi, Socialist Republic of Vietnam in August 1991, we had no more than an idea of bringing together senior policymakers and experts from ASEAN and Vietnam to exchange ideas and insights, in the hope that it could put in motion the wheels of cooperation between Vietnam and ASEAN. In a sense, it was no more than a utopian hope that by talking, we could build more confidence in each other and that with confidence would come mutual understanding.

Today, we aspire for much more than confidence-building and mutual understanding. This Symposium addresses the issues of how the process of interaction can be accelerated, particularly with respect to Vietnam's membership in ASEAN.

The times could not be more opportune for an acceleration of our timetable and objectives. In recent weeks, major developments have taken place in our Asia Pacific region that collectively have enhanced peace and cooperation throughout the region.

I refer firstly to the recent meeting hosted by United States (US) President Bill Clinton of leaders of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) in Seattle, in which I had the privilege to take part.

Although the APEC meeting was informal and did not aspire to reach

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definitive agreements, it produced a fresh consensus for a united effort in the building of the Asia Pacific future. As one, we agreed that the Asia Pacific will continue to lead the world in growth and that our countries could best secure their prosperity by strengthening economic cooperation between and within our respective shores of the Pacific.

The Seattle Meeting marked a new beginning. From there now follow major undertakings in erecting the mechanisms and instruments to foster greater cooperation and community, to promote trade and investments, and to resolve outstanding differences among member countries.

In the light of this trans-Pacific initiative, this dialogue — which seeks to foster closer cooperation between ASEAN and Vietnam, and eventually between ASEAN and the whole of Indochina — takes both added meaning and impetus. I venture to say that this effort of Vietnam-ASEAN Cooperation has received a big boost from the APEC consensus. At the same time this effort — brought finally to fruition — will contribute greatly to all that we envision for the entire Asia Pacific region.

TOWARDS A NEW ORDER

How then can we further the objectives that this Interaction for Progress has uniquely brought before us?

To begin with, I believe we must adhere closely and build upon the approaches and understandings already reached in the earlier staging of this ASEAN-Vietnam dialogue.

Whatever we stress in this cooperative effort — be it economic progress or regional security or both — our overriding task is to ease the transition of Southeast Asia from the Cold War to a new order. We are agreed that our respective and collective interests are best served if we turn our attention away from the old competition for political and military influence to the tasks of economic growth, investment and trade.

For Vietnam and the other countries of Indochina, no less than for us in ASEAN, we have come to realize that our security needs are better defined more and more in economic terms. Our countries achieve stability to the extent that we take part in the dynamic growth of the Asia Pacific region. And our collective security is similarly advanced to the extent that all in our region are able to share in the benefits of progress.

It goes without saying, of course, that not all of our countries are opening up and taking part in the global economy at the same time and at the same pace. Some among us are still in the process of settling internal instabilities and conflicts. Others are still trying to undertake the reforms that will enable them to take part in the regional effort more effectively.

And then, of course, there are also in our part of the world lingering territorial disputes and rivalries that must be faced.

It is our view within ASEAN that these difficulties can best be hurdled, not separately, but together. Multilateralism is our most useful tool in these times of opportunity and challenge. Working closer together, we can hurdle the obstacles in the political, security and economic spheres.

THE SECURITY DIMENSION

While we acknowledge the tremendous opportunities that are opening before us, we would do well to be guided by our heads and not by our hearts. Security and economic issues, while related, are not reducible to one another. In each area, there are clear tasks that must be tackled and we must attend to them with dispatch and resolve.

With respect to security, Vietnam and ASEAN must strive together to arrive at a common approach in defusing the greatest threat to peace and stability in Southeast Asia — the South China Sea. We must try to transform this sea we share among us into “a lake of peace, prosperity and growth” in which all can share and take part.

In ASEAN, we nurture no greater goal today than to bring both Vietnam and China into such a peaceful, collective effort.

And beyond our concern for the South China Sea, we aspire to involve all other states in Southeast Asia to join us in building such a new order for our region.

Our policy, as I have put it in several forums, is not containment but engagement. We want to draw all countries into a network of regional ties that emphasizes cooperation.

By the same token, ASEAN also recognizes the great importance of getting the major powers in the Asia Pacific region — the United States, Japan and China — engaged in cooperative interaction with each other and

with us. This is why we assign such great importance to the understandings reached in the APEC meeting.

ECONOMIC COOPERATION

Though security concerns create sources of anxiety among us, they are undeniably also eased by the extent whereby the countries in our region succeed in their labors for economic development, especially where this is aided by economic cooperation with neighbors.

In this country, the opening up of trade and investment and the enhancement of mutual support and interdependence are necessary measures for us to attain our national vision of "Philippines 2000".

For the first time since World War II, it is possible to speak of our respective national security as crucially dependent, not on arms or military alliances, but on the interdependence of our economies.

I do believe this change — now underway, and that is one reason why this dialogue between ASEAN and Vietnam is full of promise.

Today, none of our countries need aspire to hegemony in order to feel secure. We can attain our security goals through peaceful commerce and integration with our neighbors.

By engaging in commerce and economic cooperation, we can attain what our peoples desire most — the achievement of sustainable development and modernization. We know a measure of this is already existing in ASEAN.

With Vietnam, we are beginning to see how its opening to the regional global economy can help its own development.

We can no longer be in doubt that with Vietnam in ASEAN, both Vietnam and ASEAN will reap dividends in greater regional stability and growth. This is why this dialogue will reach its valued destination of bringing Vietnam into the ASEAN community — sooner or later, but it is certainly best that we do this soon.

THE GROWTH OF REGIONALISM

In seeking greater community among us in Southeast Asia, we

enhance our ability to compete profitably and contribute to growth in the world economy as a whole. Today, as is well-known to all, economic regionalism is on the march in every corner of the globe.

We in Southeast Asia must strive for no less. But we must stand for regionalism that is open and outward-looking. We must think globally even as we think of the welfare of our region.

Regional groupings answer the current need for scale, specialization, the pooling of talents and skills, and the reduction of national anxieties in a new world without definitive centers.

But such groupings would be bad for global growth if they only result in protectionism on a wider scale. We in ASEAN believe that such regional groupings can link up with each other in a truly global economy. Here in Southeast Asia, we do well to work towards greater regional unification, for in this way we can enhance our collective competitiveness in the global economy.

And it is certainly useful for us in ASEAN to reach out to our other neighbors in Southeast Asia because today, more than ever, we can transcend our traditional differences. Today, when the promise of modernization is within our grasp, many of these problems can be reduced to irrelevance by our collective and mutual growth. This is the overriding significance of this dialogue for Southeast Asia and the Asia Pacific region.

CONCLUSION

To sum up, I believe we no longer need to engage in this third dialogue in order to discuss why there should be interaction between Vietnam and ASEAN. Our principal concern now would be how we can facilitate and speed up interaction.

During the recent past, it has been a great boost that we have involved in this dialogue not only decision-makers in government but many from the private sector and academe. In this way, the discussion has examined all relevant issues and produced invaluable insights.

Now, we can focus on practical issues and measures for action. Now, we can begin to establish the mechanisms and the linkages that can bring Vietnam and ASEAN closer together — as partners in peace and growth.

VIETNAM IS PREPARED TO JOIN ASEAN

*Tran Duc Luong**

Since the second round of the symposium held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, the global and regional situation has rapidly and profoundly changed, bringing about new opportunities and challenges to our countries in Southeast Asia.

The danger of a world war of annihilation has been pushed back: the tendency to dialogue and cooperate has gained increased momentum with new modalities and mechanism in the region and the world over. Progress made in the peace process in various parts of the world, especially in Cambodia and the Middle East, constitutes positive international developments and demonstrates that even fierce and lingering conflicts can be resolved through peaceful negotiation.

However, mankind's conscience and reason are still shadowed with misgivings and concerns about bloody regional conflicts either between states or among internal forces, religious and ethnic factions that sow death and grief to human beings and cause instability in various parts of the world. The trend towards armament carries risk of war in other parts of the world: the hurtful situation of poverty and deprivation of hundreds of millions of people; the widening gap between the developed and developing worlds, alongside all other global problems of population explosion, environmental devastation, deadly diseases, and inter-state crimes, and so forth.

In Asia and the Pacific, the trend for peace, stability and cooperation continues to develop strongly. Every nation needs regional stability so as to secure its economic development. Many countries, including those in Southeast Asia, continue to enjoy high growth rates. Economic cooperation among states of the region is further increasing. All big powers as well as politico-economic centers have been shifting to concentrate on, and attach great importance to, Asia and the Pacific, especially expanding economic ties with countries in the region of Southeast Asia in particular, and seeking a new balance of power in a fundamentally changing world. The initiatives and strides aimed at establishing the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA), the East Asian Economic Caucus (EAEC), as well as the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Conference held in Seattle, United States, stand as

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a fresh manifest to the above tendencies.

Compared with other regions of the world, Asia and the Pacific continue to enjoy relative stability with the countries in the region and other major powers trying to reach a compromise to settle such potentially explosive issues as the Cambodian problem in Southeast Asia and the Korean issue in Northeast Asia. Yet, potential elements of instability still remain. The question of security in Asia and the Pacific is a subject of great attention and discussion by many countries at numerous forums in the region and the world over.

In that context, the continuously enhanced bilateral and multilateral cooperation among our countries in Southeast Asia is of great significance. It is noted with satisfaction that ASEAN, as a regional grouping, has become more vibrant and has played an increasingly important role in world affairs including regional security matters. The ASEAN initiative to set up the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) to be held in Bangkok in July 1994 with the participation of almost all countries in Asia and the Pacific has been welcomed and highly valued, thus creating a premise for the search for an Asian Pacific security framework in the new situation.

I believe you all share my pleasure at the fact that since the first Vietnam-ASEAN Interaction for Progress symposium held in Hanoi, Socialist Republic of Vietnam in August 1991, many big efforts have been exerted by Vietnam and ASEAN to overcome an unpleasant past legacy so as to strive for a Southeast Asia of peace, stability, friendship and cooperation for the sake of common prosperity and progress. A vivid indication of these endeavors can be seen through the exchanges of even the highest-level visits, and ever growing contacts, exchanges of views and consultations on global and regional matters of mutual concern. Having entered upon a new era, the Vietnam-ASEAN relationship has seen many encouraging developments in recent years. Following its accession to the Bali Treaty and becoming an ASEAN observer in July 1992, Vietnam participated for the first time in the annual ASEAN Ministerial Meeting and then to the ASEAN-Vietnam Consultative Meeting (6 plus 1 Meeting), held in July 1993 in Singapore. Also, Vietnam will attend the ARF on regional political and security matters to be convened in July 1994 in Bangkok, Thailand as well as participate in projects of ASEAN functional cooperation in five fields, namely, science and technology, culture and information, environment, health, and tourism. We greatly appreciate those gestures of goodwill from ASEAN.

Alongside rapid and meaningful improvement of political relations between Vietnam and ASEAN, ties in other fields like trade, investment,




science and technology, culture and arts have been further promoted and developed. As set out in its foreign policy, Vietnam gives priority to the development of relations with neighboring countries including the ASEAN countries. Vietnam's cordial friendship and active cooperation with each individual ASEAN country and with the ASEAN organization as a whole constitute a very important factor for peace and security in the region. The firmer those relations are, the better peace and security in the region is secured. In the light of this perception, Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) General Secretary Do Muoi has recently stated:

Vietnam is for strengthening its multi-sided cooperation with each and every neighbouring country in the region as well as with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) as a regional organization. Vietnam is prepared to join ASEAN at an appropriate time.

Vietnam is ready to take part in bilateral and multilateral dialogues, first of all with countries in the region in order to seek for effective measures to ensure peace and stability in the region on the basis of guarantee and respect for each other's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, maintaining and developing mutually beneficial relations with each and every participating country and refraining from doing any harm to a third country.

For this Forum, I would like to reaffirm that Vietnam advocates settling through peaceful negotiations all disputes between countries in the region, including those over territorial waters and islands in the East Sea. In the spirit of equality and mutual respect for international laws and the 1982 Convention on the Law of the Sea, and respect for the sovereignty of seabordering countries over their exclusive economic zones and continental shelves. We hold that while active efforts are being made to promote negotiations for a fundamental and sustainable solution to the issue, it is necessary to maintain stability on the basis of the status quo. The concerned parties should exercise self-restraint, refrain from any act to further complicate the situation and from use of force or threat of force, and join each other in seeking appropriate forms of cooperation, including development cooperation with forms in places acceptable to concerned parties. In the immediate future, this cooperation can be carried out in the fields of hydro-meteorology, maritime navigation, environmental protection, salvage, anti-piracy and anti-drug trafficking, etc.

With the steady and rapid development in the Vietnam-ASEAN relationship, we hope this Symposium would surely lay more intellectual bricks on the foundation for confidence-building and long-lasting friendship



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and multifold cooperation between Vietnam and ASEAN for a Southeast Asia of peace, stability and development. I believe the Vietnamese and ASEAN scholars and policymakers attending this Symposium would find it a noble mission to come to a common view through discussions and put forth recommendations on concrete measures aimed at facilitating the creation of a new order in Southeast Asia. It will be a contribution to the maintenance of durable peace and stability in the region, ensuring legitimate interest of each and every country, as well as laying a solid ground to develop and prosper.

Within that general framework, it is our conviction that the Vietnam-Philippine relations which have been improved in recent years will make further progress in many fields in the interest of the two countries and of the whole region.