

CONCLUDING REMARKS

*M. Rajaretnam**

As we are coming to the end of this Third Symposium on "ASEAN Vietnam Interaction for Progress," I would like to make a series of concluding remarks not only on this symposium, but also on the whole process of informal interaction we have contributed to engage three years ago.

In 1990, the ASEAN-Vietnam "Interaction for Progress" Project was initiated by the Information and Resource Center based in Singapore with the aim of facilitating the dialogue between the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and Vietnam. This initiative was realized when we received the support and patronage of Malaysian Finance Minister Anwar Ibrahim and some key leaders in Vietnam. As with the first two symposia, this one has been successfully conducted. They have contributed to facilitate and deepen the mutual learning and understanding process. They have also contributed to lay the ground for a steady process of Vietnam's involvement within the mainstream of Southeast Asia. Looking back at the road we have pursued in the last three and half years, we cannot help but take great satisfaction at the fantastic rapprochement between ASEAN and Vietnam, particularly when we have used what I would call "a historical shortcut" in overcoming decades of neglect in our relations.

Of course, these achievements are due to a collective effort, which transcend old systemic cleavages and old habits of thinking and doing things. If they were made possible by the collapse of old political structures elsewhere, which inevitably impact on the old mental structures in our own region, they were also, and mainly, the results of a great deal of effort deployed by a committed group of men and women of vision who dream of a new Southeast Asia, and as Anwar Ibrahim has put it, "who have the courage to change the sets, rewrite the scripts as well as the scores in the perpetual struggle for human freedom, equality and dignity". If I am given the permission to express on behalf of all of us our gratitude to all the institutions and the people who have been engaged in this collective effort in the last three years, I could not find any other encompassing words and expressions to show our indebtedness; the list of persons and institutions would be too long to enumerate.

* Director, Information & Resource Center, Singapore

What is important is that in this short period of time we have held four important meetings in Hanoi, Kuala Lumpur, Bangkok and Manila and in the process have educated ourselves about Vietnam and our Vietnamese friends have educated themselves about us.

Members of the Study Group are also gratified with the expressions of support for the report, *Shared Destiny* at this Symposium. Three months ago Tan Sri Ghazali Shafie, the former foreign minister of Malaysia and who was a signatory to the Bangkok Declaration said that the Report provided the framework to achieve the aspirations expressed by the founding fathers of ASEAN. If that is indeed the case, the Study Group members are most glad that they have been able to contribute to this effort of regional stability and prosperity.

Now let us look towards the future. We believe that the challenge before us is a highly complex one and that, to be successful, the process of integrating Vietnam into the region's cooperative framework has to be multidimensional and comprehensive. In his keynote address at the opening of this Symposium, Philippine President Fidel V. Ramos talked about the need to "focus on practical issues and measures for action" that will bring Vietnam and ASEAN closer together as partners in peace and growth. While Vietnamese Prime Minister Vo Van Kiet in his message to the Symposium has pointed to the "constructive proposals" in *Shared Destiny* to achieve this goal.

Our contribution could only be sustained if the ASEAN countries and Vietnam lend their renewed support by showing their respective commitment to this collective effort. The ASEAN-Vietnam Interaction for Progress Project has only a catalytic function, and we do not want and we do not have the capacity to develop activities which are beyond our resources and which, in fact, are of the final responsibility of the governments. Therefore, as Mr. Ajit Singh, Secretary General of ASEAN mentioned earlier, the issue of funding of future activities has to be seriously addressed. We are very confident that with the moral and practical support of the ASEAN Secretariat and of the concerned authorities in ASEAN and Vietnam, we will be in a position to develop a new cycle of interactive activities in order to consolidate, deepen and accelerate the process of regional integration.

It is with the same reasoned sense of optimism that a great deal of progress can be made in the task of creating a Southeast Asian Community as portrayed in the ASEAN-Vietnam Study Group report: *Shared Destiny*, that is one Southeast Asia, which is rich in diversity but one in commitment

to the causes of common security, common prosperity and shared opportunities. The extension of ASEAN membership to include Vietnam and Laos, be it in principle or in fact, is an act of expanding Southeast Asia's regional order. We need to reach out to Cambodia and Myanmar as well, in order to fully embrace the regional dialogue process. In this respect, the promoters of the 'ASEAN-Vietnam Interaction for Progress' express the wish to see the Canadian International Development Agency renew its support to a new cycle of activities. I would also like to call on our Japanese friends to join this regional dialog process in whatever way they can in order to contribute to the building of a peaceful and prosperous region, which could not see its economic development without Japan's role in terms of investment, technology transfer, and cultural exchanges.

I should not leave this forum without expressing our collective gratitude to the following persons and institutions that have made this effort possible:

- a. Philippine President Fidel V. Ramos for his keynote address, and Vietnamese Deputy Prime Minister Tran Duc Luong for his opening address;
- b. This project was realized because Mr. Anwar Ibrahim, Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister of Malaysia had given his patronage and support in early 1990. He was completely committed to the success of the project and, I believe, he would have come to Manila to attend this third symposium if pressing political commitments had not kept him at home. In fact he has sent his best wishes for the success of this symposium;
- c. Secretary Jose T. Almonte, Presidential Security Adviser and Director-General of the National Security Council (NSC) for his endorsement and support of the project ever since he attended the Bangkok meeting in early 1993, and for his closing address this afternoon;
- d. Philippine Foreign Affairs Secretary Roberto Romulo, Trade and Industry Secretary Rizalino Navarro, and Tourism Secretary Vicente Carlos for the courtesies and hospitality they extended to Symposium delegates;

- e. Dr. Carolina G. Hernandez of the Institute for Strategic and Development Studies-Philippines (ISDS), Kamarudin Jaffar of the IKD Malaysia, Dr. William Saywell of the Asia-Pacific Foundation, Ian Robertson of the Canada-ASEAN Centre for joining in co-sponsoring this third meeting.
- f. A special thanks must go to someone who should have been here in Manila. Ambassador Dao Huy Ngoc, the Director of the Institute of Internal Relations of Vietnam who coordinated the meeting on the Vietnamese side. Illness kept him from coming to Manila.
- g. Stephen Heeney, Canadian Ambassador to the Philippines, for his interest and support.
- h. The Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and particularly Mr. Jack Kuhns, director of CIDA's Management for Change Program, who sustained CIDA's support in the project for three years running.
- i. The panelists and chairpersons of the Symposium for their contributions to enhance the quality of the discussions.
- j. The members of the Symposium Secretariat Staff who had worked tirelessly over the last few weeks and especially in the last few days to ensure the smooth running of the symposium. My special thanks go to Romy Hernandez of NSC and Herman Kraft of ISDS for their quiet dedication of running the secretariat effectively.

On behalf of the organizing institutions, I thank all participants and, for those who have come to Manila, I wish them a safe and pleasant journey home.