

**Remarks of M Rajaretnam, at the Opening Ceremony at the
“Building A Better Asia: Future Leaders Dialogue”,
held at Peking University, Beijing, him on 10 September 2007.**

Dr Surin Pitsuwan, ASEAN Secretary-General Designate
Dr Min Weifang, Chairman, University Council, Peking University
Distinguished Guests
Participants of the 2nd Building a Better Asia Dialogue
Ladies and Gentlemen

Good morning and let me extend a warm welcome to all of you to this Building a Better Asia Young Asian Leaders Dialogue and Retreat official opening ceremony.

This Building A Better Asia Young Leaders retreat was initially conceptualized two years ago as a process that can bring together young people from all over Asia to interact with one another. It was natural that The Nippon Foundation, a leading philanthropic organization in Japan, took the initiative. The Nippon Foundation sees itself as a “Hub” and a “Bridge” to Create a “Better World”. In its own words “The Nippon Foundation envisions a world in which we have transcended politics and ideology, religion and race, a world where we no longer suffer from hunger and disease”.

In their wisdom the Nippon Foundation group proposed that the initial group of participants to this programme should come from its diverse pool of talented beneficiaries from the various projects that had been implemented by the group which includes the Sasakawa Peace Foundation and the Tokyo Foundation over the last 3 decades.

It was also natural that if Asia is to construct a better future for future generations that the first partner and main venue of this retreat is Peking University, one of the leading universities in this world. Peking University and China’s young will have an important role to shape this better future for Asia.

Dr Min Weifang should be recognized for his foresight last year in locating this in Peking University and in doing so he also gave life to this dialogue among Asians.

The first retreat was held here exactly one year ago. Last year we had 16 participants from 10 countries. This year we have 23 participants from 14 countries. Last year we started with one retreat. This fiscal year we shall have two retreats. This second one will be held in India. I am sure these numbers will expand.

The title of this dialogue, BUILDING A BETTER ASIA, expresses fairly correctly and clearly the intent of this programme which is to contribute to the promotion of a region that is global and inclusive in terms of cultural, economic, political, social and intellectual leaderships. Invariably,

as citizens of this large continent we envision an Asia that is at peace, that is free from small and big wars, exploitation and diseases, an Asia that is economically vibrant, tolerant of diversity, and where people are economically, politically and legally empowered, and an Asia that can play a role with her friends in shaping the world of the future.

This means that it should be an ASIA that is more open, just, egalitarian, and more livable, that promotes the values of Human Freedoms, Press Freedom, Regional Integration, Greater Political Participation, Education of Minorities, Intellectual Cooperation, and Human Development in general.

This ASIA that we envisage must therefore be ONE THAT IS *BETTER* THAN HER PAST AND AN ASIA THAT IS *GREATER* THAN HERSELF.

Asia's diversity is expressed in many different ways but it is imperative now and in the future that we believe that Asia's strength lies in its tolerance and acceptability of differences. The dangers arising from intolerance and poverty are obvious but what is important is that Asians should come together to contribute to finding solutions to the problems of Asia and the world.

The objective of these retreats, therefore, is twofold: firstly, it is to give opportunity to the participants in these exchanges to introduce new thinking on finding creative solutions and to promote mutually beneficial cooperation and, secondly, to establish networks of people throughout Asia and the world.

The theme for this year's dialogue is "Building the Common Good in Asia" and will focus on issues such as the ecology, social disparities, good governance amongst others.

These networks of future leaders will grow and I hope will become advocates of peace and progress in the world. For instance, yesterday the APEC leaders in their Sydney Declaration did express their willingness to strengthen cooperation to save the earth. But retreats like this here in Beijing, I hope, should go beyond the symbolic expressions of concern for the environment.

To complement these dialogues the participants of the first dialogue established a website called [www. buildingabetterasia.com](http://www.buildingabetterasia.com)

Before I end allow me to take this opportunity to express my appreciation on behalf of the Academic Committee of this programme and the Nippon Group of Foundations to thank Dr Surin Pitsuwan for his keynote address and his special interaction with the participants; Dr Min Weifang for his keynote address this morning; to Peking University for its support of this dialogue series; to our 6 resource persons – Prof Amitav Acharya of the University of Bristol, Ms Yuli Ismartono from Indonesia; Dr Rajiv Kumar from India; Prof Sachihiko Harashina from Japan; Prof Pang Eng Fong from Singapore; and Prof Wang Jisi of Peking University – for their collaboration in this retreat.