



Keynote Address

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Samdech, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

Very good morning!

It is my great honor, as an ASEAN citizen, to be given an opportunity to deliver this morning's keynote address at such momentous conference to share Cambodian perspectives on ASEAN as a whole and Cambodian expectations and experiences from her membership in ASEAN in particular. I believe that this event will generate a lot of useful inputs which could serve as recommendations to improve Cambodia's regional integration strategy in ASEAN and other international bodies in general. Before I begin, please allow me to express my special thanks to Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) for spiritually and financially supporting this conference. I would like to extend my sincere gratitude and respect to our respected panelists, national and international guests for devoting your precious time to be with us today. This is the spirit of New ASEAN in which government officials, private sectors, and civil society work together to realize ASEAN Community and deepen people centered regional integration. This conference supports the vision of the Bali Concord II which officially recognized the importance of “fostering cooperation in social development together the active participation of all sectors of society, in particular, women, youth, and local communities”.

ASEAN was established on 8 August 1967 by the original members namely Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand. In 1984, Brunei joined ASEAN. In 1995, Vietnam joined the association and in 1997 Lao PDR and Myanmar joined the family. Finally, Cambodia marked the milestone of ASEAN by realizing ASEAN 10 in 1999.

Since Cambodia became the member of ASEAN in 1999, we had various achievements in comprehensive fields namely economics, politics and security. The most visible achievement of Cambodia's membership in ASEAN is seen in the field of economics. Specifically, Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) inflows from ASEAN to Cambodia rose from an insignificant amount in 1999 to US\$37.2 million in 2001 and US\$240.9 million in 2008. At this point, it is worth noting that ASEAN market factor also contributes to the rise of the FDI inflows from other ASEAN's dialogue partners such as Japan, China, South Korea, and EU into Cambodia. For example, the FDI inflows from Japan to Cambodia were at an extreme modest level in 1999. However, the figures increased to US\$3.5 million in 2004 and US\$30.9 million in 2007. Similarly, the FDI from China was approximately US\$2.9 million in 2001, and rose to US\$164.9 million in 2007. For South Korea, the number also increased from an insignificant level in 1999 to US\$2.2 million in 2001 and US\$119.3 million in 2007. For EU, the figure rose from an insignificant amount to US\$9.8 million in 2001 and US\$79.7 million in 2007. Cambodia's membership in ASEAN not only brings about the increase in FDI but also in trade. Cambodia's export to ASEAN increased from US\$76 million in 2000 to US\$273.5 million in 2008. Despite the rise in the export, Cambodia has also faced the increasing trade deficit with other ASEAN member countries. The deficit soured from US\$473.1 million in 2000 to US\$2.6 billion in 2008.

Samdech, Excellencies, Ladies, and Gentlemen!

In the field of politics, ASEAN regionalism has also helped to raise Cambodian prestige in the international arenas. The membership gave the country credibility in becoming the 148th member of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2004. Another noticeable achievement which ASEAN regionalism has brought about for Cambodia is the continuous hosting of international meetings such as the 8th ASEAN Summit, the 36th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting, and the 17th ASEAN-EU Ministerial Meeting. The hosting of these major events reflects the increasing confidence of the international community in the competence of Cambodian leadership and in the development of democracy in the country.

Apart from the successful hosting of the aforementioned meetings, the most visible achievement which the membership has brought for Cambodia is related to the adoption of the ASEAN Charter. Now, Cambodia has the ASEAN Charter which could serve as a legal document in resolving political differences and conflict with the other ASEAN members without resorting to forces. In Section 2 of Article 2 of the Charter, it clearly states that:

ASEAN and its Member States shall act in accordance with the following Principles:

- (a) respect for the independence and collective responsibility in enhancing regional peace, security and prosperity;
- (b) shared commitment and collective responsibility in enhancing regional peace, security and prosperity;
- (c) renunciation of aggression and of the threat or use of force or other actions in any manner inconsistent with international law;
- (d) reliance on peaceful settlement of disputes;
- (e) non-interference in the internal affairs of ASEAN Member States;
- (f) respect for the right of every Member State to lead its national existence free from external interference, subversion and coercion;
- (g) enhanced consultation on matters seriously affecting the common interests of ASEAN...

The Charter could also serve as the legal basis in promoting human rights and democracy in Cambodia. The Charter plays an important role in institutionalizing ASEAN to be a more rule-based regional organization. The Charter is a catalyst to bring ASEAN to another level of regional integration particularly in assisting the realization of ASEAN community (political-security community, economic community, and socio-cultural community) by 2015. But in order to make sure Charter works, ASEAN requires an efficient and effective Charter monitoring and enforcement body which has authority to enforce the Charter on the member states. .

Sound security is Cambodia's another expectation from ASEAN regionalism. The security which I wish to emphasize here is the security of state and the security of the people or in other word it is called "human security". Concerning the state security, we can see that ASEAN has created a rather stable environment conducive to peace and development for Cambodia in relation with her neighboring countries. Cambodia-Vietnam border tension which began in the late 1970s has been significantly eased. The ASEAN factor convinces both parties to opt for peaceful settlements of the dispute rather than resorting to the use of force. Up to now, the process of border demarcation between the two countries has shown a positive sign as both sides already completed one-third of posting the border poles, and pledged to finalize their demarcation by 2012. Even though the ASEAN factor positively contributes to the settlement of the border tension between Cambodia and Vietnam, it seems to prove its limitation in the case of Cambodia-Thailand rift over Preah Vihear. ASEAN institutions such as the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) and the ASEAN Charter have shown little impact in providing conflict resolution for the Cambodia-Thailand border issue. This relates to the aforementioned issue, that is, the lack of enforcement mechanism of the ASEAN Charter.

In addition to the state security, human security has been taken into consideration quite seriously. For instance, ASEAN helped Cambodia to successfully contain the spread of the Avian Influenza or Bird Flu through providing Cambodian experts with trainings on how to control, detect, and prevent the spread of the viruses, and sharing the information of the diseases. As a result, the threat of Bird Flu disappeared. Now swine flu that started from Mexico has been spreading to the Southeast Asian region. Regional leaders have been trying to coordinate regional policy to counter with the spread of swine flu. ASEAN has established a system to distribute the antiviral drug stockpile in the event of a pandemic. ASEAN health officials convened several meetings together with dialogue partners to discuss and find suitable solutions to cope with the widespread pandemic.

By and large, Cambodian expectations from joining ASEAN have been met. Cambodia could enjoy peace and stability in the region plus economic development. Intraregional trade and investment has been increasing quite remarkably, benefits Cambodian economy. A good Cambodian image has been promoted regionally and internationally. Cambodian voices have been heard at regional and international stages. Through ASEAN, Cambodia was able to strengthen bilateral relationships with various countries in the region and the world at large.

Samdech, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

Now I would like to turn to reflect on the past, present and future of ASEAN. ASEAN is said to be one the most successful regional groupings in the world. Trust building, non-interference, consensus based decision making, peaceful settlement of disputes, mutual respect and equal relationship, active engagement, economic integration, and balanced external relations are argued to be the core principles of the ASEAN success story. ASEAN member states have ratified many important documents concerning the security community,

economic community, and socio-cultural community. For the security community, there are major political declarations such as: ASEAN Declaration in Bangkok on 8 August 1967; Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality Declaration, Kuala Lumpur on 27 November 1971; Declaration of ASEAN Concord, Bali, on 24 February 1976; Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia, Bali, 24 February 1976; ASEAN Declaration on the South China Sea, Manila, 22 July 1992; Treaty on the Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon Free Zone, Bangkok, 15 December 1997; ASEAN Vision 2020, Kuala Lumpur, 15 December 1997; Declaration on ASEAN Concord II, Bali, 7 October 2003. These political declarations pave the way for the realization of an ASEAN Security Community but of course of serious implementation.

Regarding economic community, ASEAN launched ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) in 1992. The objectives are to increase the region's competitiveness advantage as a single production unit and marketplace. The recent Agreements on ASEAN trade in goods and ASEAN comprehensive investment are necessary for the realization of a single market and production base of ASEAN in which there is a free flow of goods, services, and investments in the region. Other efforts on the integration of production network of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) assists equitable economic development in the region.

As far as socio-cultural community is concerned, ASEAN has been undergoing several activities such as: ASEAN Work Program for Social Welfare, Family, and Population; ASEAN Work Program on HIV/AIDS; ASEAN Work Program on Community-Based Care for the Elderly; ASEAN Occupational Safety and Health Network; ASEAN University Network; ASEAN Students Exchange Program; The Annual ASEAN Culture Week; ASEAN Media Exchange Program; and Framework for Environmentally Sustainable Cities and ASEAN Agreement on Trans-boundary Haze Pollution.

ASEAN in general has a great deal of political declarations and agreements which are backbone of ASEAN regional integration and community construction.

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To realize the ASEAN community and make ASEAN stay relevant in East Asian and Asia Pacific regional integration process, ASEAN needs to be more assertive in the implementation of the ratified documents and declarations. ASEAN people should be much encouraged to get involved in this regional integration process. I believe that ASEAN leaders recognize this shortcoming and try to move ASEAN forward with more concrete implementation and results.

Thank you very much for your kind attention.

End Note.