

Statement by
His Excellency Mr. Saleumxay KOMMASITH
Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Lao PDR
at the 30th Asia-Pacific Roundtable
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 30 May-1 June 2016

Plenary session 2: The ASEAN Community: Integration in an Age of Contending Interests

Madam Moderator,
Distinguished participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my honor and privilege to participate in the 30th Asia-Pacific Roundtable held here, in Kuala Lumpur, the beautiful capital city of Malaysia and I would like to express my sincere thanks and appreciation to the host for warm welcome and hospitality extended to me as well as for the the excellent arrangements made for this significant event.

Let me also thanks ISIS Malaysia for inviting me to address this Roundtable.

Distinguished participants,

After almost a half century of its existence, ASEAN's aspiration has become a reality as ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), one of the three ASEAN Community Pillars, was formally launched on December 31, 2015. This has already constituted an early stage of the ASEAN integration process. The launch of AEC or ASEAN Community as a whole would have

been considered a nearly accomplishment in 20 years earlier, however, the start of AEC has occurred at a very critical period of time that poses both challenges and opportunities to ASEAN as a whole. Opportunity is very obvious. Among other things, ASEAN is one of the biggest single market in the region with a population more than 600 million, endowed with the most diverse culture and political systems in the world leaving in harmony. ASEAN strives to build its unity based on the principle of consensus that truly reflects Asian value, ASEAN resolves to consolidate a community through building upon and deepening integration process to realize a rule-based, people-centered/people-oriented ASEAN Community, where people enjoy human rights and fundamental freedoms, higher quality of life and the benefits of community building, reinforcing their sense of togetherness and common destiny.

The Challenges faced by ASEAN today are characterized by the nature of its diverse level of development, ranging from the most advanced economies to the least developed nations. The rise of non-traditional security presents yet a new challenge for ASEAN's journey towards becoming a more integrated community, such as increasing natural disaster, new form of terrorism, migration, environmental issues and human rights issues. All this non-traditional security phenomenon has posed a major threat to ASEAN. Furthermore, the new political landscape in the world has already created an environment in which ASEAN Community is tested. Therefore, it is imperative for ASEAN to be united to resolve the issue effectively.

Distinguished participants,

One of the principles that ASEAN always advocates is the concept of ASEAN Centrality. ASEAN has been striving to develop dialogue with its key partners and to create a regional architecture that works for ASEAN and the wider region. ASEAN Centrality means that ASEAN is in the driver's seat of the key existing Asian regional institutions and processes including the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), East Asia Summit (AES), ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting (ADMM), ASEAN Plus Three (APT), ASEAN Plus and other political, economic and social cooperation between ASEAN and its external partners in the region.

In this regard, it is important that ASEAN's centrality continues to be strongly upheld in its external undertakings whereas maintaining a balanced and mutually beneficial dialogue with other partners, as ASEAN has the good reputation of being friendly to all and threatening none, it remains constructive, positive and neutral. Lao PDR strongly believes that all of ASEAN's Dialogue Partners would continue to support its neutrality and to avoid turning it into a "rugby scrum".

On its part, ASEAN would further consolidate ASEAN regional integration through the implementation of ASEAN Community, and encourage ASEAN plus 10 to support ASEAN Political and Security Community (APSC) in order to strengthen ASEAN's role as a bridge builder between ASEAN's internal institutions and ASEAN-led regional initiatives.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This year, the Lao PDR has another opportunity and honor to chair ASEAN, which is relatively different from what ASEAN was a decade ago.

Today, with the establishment of AEC, ASEAN has become more mature in its integration and with its persistent unity and ASEAN Centrality, it would be ready to overcome the emerging challenges and tests it face. I am confident that with support and cooperative spirit of all ASEAN members and its partners, the Lao PDR would be able to lead the ASEAN Community building to another level.

In conclusion, ASEAN Community building is a continuous learning process for ASEAN. ASEAN scope of integration within the organization and international community has gradually evolved and will continue to evolve, much depending on ASEAN's own effort but also depends on the regional environment that ASEAN is bound to. The current changing regional environment presents a major opportunity for ASEAN to enhance its relevance and role in the regional architecture, thus mobilizing support for its Community building effort. However, the new environment also poses many critical challenges to the organization. ASEAN must therefore find a balanced approach to its external relations and internal community building process that best serve its interests.

Thank you very much.