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**SPEECH BY DR AHMAD MATTAR, MINISTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT,
AT THE OPENING CEREMONY OF THE ENVIRONMEXASIA/WATERMEXASIA '92
HELD AT THE WORLD TRADE CENTRE, HALL 3
ON TUESDAY, 18 FEBRUARY 1992 AT 10.00 AM**

Let me first of all thank the ASEAN Environment Ministers and their senior officials who are in Singapore for the Fifth ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on the Environment (AMME) for taking time off to join us for the opening ceremony of the EnvironmexAsia/WatermexAsia Conference and Exhibition. It is my pleasure to welcome them and the distinguished participants of EnvironmexAsia/WatermexAsia to Singapore. I am also pleased to welcome experts of the UNEP Adhoc Committee on CFC Destruction Technologies who are in Singapore for their final meeting, which is being hosted by my Ministry.

Even as I am speaking now to this gathering of distinguished people who devote themselves to caring for the environment, many similar gatherings are being held throughout the world. It is heartening to know that we are contributing in a small way to resolving the complex global environmental problem. With our continued co-operation, I am confident that we are nearer to achieving a better world for ourselves and our future generations.

Barely 50 days into the year and world leaders are speaking of a new world order. ASEAN too, is poised to enter into a new era of regional co-operation. The ASEAN Heads of Government Summit, recently concluded here in Singapore, has produced several epochal decisions that will change the course of the ASEAN region. These changes will bring about a more closely-knit ASEAN. There will also be greater inter-dependency amongst ASEAN member countries, not only on trade and security, but also on joint efforts to address environmental concerns at bilateral, regional and global levels.

The ASEAN Governments have long recognised that environmental protection transcends all cultural, ideological and geographical boundaries. The recognition that regional co-operation is essential for ASEAN's environmental well-being led to the convening of the triennial AMME, first held in 1981.

The AMME has served as an effective forum for the assessment of the region's state of the environment. It has enabled the ASEAN Ministers responsible for the environment to discuss regional strategies aimed at protecting the ASEAN environment. This is the first time that Singapore has the privilege of hosting the AMME. Singapore is proud to be accorded the honour of hosting the Fifth AMME.

The decision of the ASEAN Heads of Government to establish an ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) is much heralded by the people of ASEAN. AFTA holds the promise of closer trade linkages between the ASEAN countries. It will also bring about economic co-operation and healthy competition in the region. An open regional market will undoubtedly lead to a greater flow of commercial activities as industries and businesses become more mobile in search of more favourable factors of production.

As a region, ASEAN would benefit from the free trade concept. However, this free market condition should not be exploited by unscrupulous operators who shift their environmentally sub-standard operations from place to place, in an attempt to escape compliance with local environmental standards.

One way to minimise these undesirable movements is for ASEAN member countries to consider the adoption of common environmental practices and emission standards. ASEAN countries need not immediately adopt measures comparable to the industrialised world. We can work towards that in the long-term. In the interim, ASEAN member countries can consider the adoption of minimum, practicable emission standards. These interim standards can be progressively upgraded to reflect the

environmental needs of the region. They will also reflect the state of development in the individual ASEAN countries and their capacities to upgrade.

To help chart the course for the regional effort, ASEAN can set long-term environmental emission goals for air and water quality, which the region can aim to achieve by the year 2010. Given the serious concern as demonstrated by all the ASEAN Governments and people, it will not be an unsurmountable task.

Another important factor that will determine the rate of progress in ASEAN in achieving its long-term goals is environmental technology. Not all of the technology available in the developed world today is suitable for use in the ASEAN region without appropriate research and development. There is also the question of affordability. This is where I would like to see the active participation of the environmental technology sector.

The issue of technology transfer is a keenly debated topic in global environmental fora. There are many proposals on the mechanisms to effect technology transfer. Each of the proponents has offered perfectly logical arguments in favour of its proposal. Ultimately, I believe the solution lies in the private sector, especially the environmental technology sector.

For the ASEAN region, the environmental technology sector can help to address the issues of technology transfer, affordability and technological appropriateness by conducting more of its research and development activities and manufacturing operations in the region. The ASEAN region is not bereft of qualified and skilled human resources. With proper transfer of skills and technology, ASEAN can improve your competitiveness in the global market. In return, ASEAN will benefit from the expertise and technology transfers, and the lower costs.

This direct approach between the transferer and the transferee on a semi-commercial basis is, in my opinion, one of

the ways to achieve results as we push for better environmental protection and quality.

I am pleased that some of the more prominent environmental technology companies are taking part in EnvironmexAsia/WatermexAsia. I hope that while you are in Singapore, you will be able to make valuable contacts with the private sectors in the ASEAN region. They may become your partners for the transfer of technology to the ASEAN region.

In closing, I wish all participants of EnvironmexAsia/WatermexAsia and members of the UNEP Adhoc Committee on CFC Destruction Technologies a fruitful and enjoyable time in Singapore. I hope that while in Singapore, you will also take advantage of the current "Visit ASEAN Year" to visit our ASEAN neighbours.

On this note, it is my pleasure to declare open the EnvironmexAsia/WatermexAsia Conference and Exhibition.

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