

PARLIAMENT OF SINGAPORE

PRESS RELEASE

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1 HIGH STREET
SINGAPORE 179429

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WELCOME SPEECH BY MR TAN SOO KHOON
PRESIDENT OF AIPO AND SPEAKER OF SINGAPORE
PARLIAMENT AT OPENING CEREMONY OF THE 21ST
GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF ASEAN INTER-
PARLIAMENTARY ORGANISATION
ON 11 SEPTEMBER 2000 AT 9.45 AM

Acting Prime Minister BG Lee Hsien Loong
Honourable Speakers and Leaders of Delegations
Honourable Delegates and Observers
Excellencies
Ladies and Gentlemen,

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1 On behalf of the Government and Parliament of Singapore, I would like to extend a warm welcome to all distinguished delegates and observers to the 21st General Assembly of the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Organisation.

2 This is the 21st General Assembly of AIPO since its inception in 1977. Over the years, AIPO has been an important vehicle for frank dialogue among parliamentarians in the Southeast Asian region. These interactions have helped to build up the comfort level among the parliamentarians of the ASEAN member countries and our Dialogue

Partners and contributed to the promotion of friendship and goodwill in the region. The networks of contacts we have built up over the years are also valuable in promoting the bilateral ties among the ASEAN countries as well as with the Dialogue Partners. This is important to maintain ASEAN's strength and relevance as a regional organisation.

3 As lawmakers in our respective countries, we are in a position to galvanise domestic consensus and work out appropriate policies that would help each in the development of our countries. Ultimately, national resilience will help to foster regional resilience and cooperation. AIPO must continue to play this crucial role in complementing the efforts of our respective governments and make ASEAN a strong regional organisation that meets the needs of its members while maintaining its relevance to the broader international scene.

4 This year's General Assembly is taking place at an important juncture for ASEAN. ASEAN faces several major challenges as we embark into the 21st century.

5 ASEAN economies are recovering from the financial crisis that struck the region three years ago. Most economies have stabilised and growth rates are robustly positive. To restore our economic dynamism and investor confidence, we must continue our individual economic reforms and ASEAN's economic integration efforts. At the 3rd ASEAN Informal Summit in Manila last year, ASEAN Leaders agreed to accelerate the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) from the 2015 and 2018 deadlines for the older and newer members to 2010 and 2015 respectively, with special flexibility for sensitive products. ASEAN must send a strong and clear signal to the international community and investors that ASEAN is committed to maintaining the momentum towards regional integration and that we will remain open and confident to submit ourselves to market discipline.

6 ASEAN has also taken steps to prepare itself for the challenges of globalisation and revolution in information-communications technology (ICT). The e-ASEAN initiative that was endorsed by the ASEAN Leaders

at the 3rd ASEAN Informal Summit in Manila was intended to help ASEAN to meet the rapid changes brought about by this new and powerful phenomenon.

7 With the realisation of ASEAN-10 last year, ASEAN has now achieved the vision of its founding fathers. The Hanoi Plan of Action signed by our Leaders in December 1998 was intended to help in the integration of the newer members. Its implementation is critical to demonstrate that ASEAN is committed to being a cohesive organisation to meet its challenges. This is critical to achieve the objectives of ASEAN Vision 2020.

8 These are some of the key issues that I hope could be the focus of discussion over the next few days. They are fundamental questions that must be discussed frankly and openly. AIPO has a role to play to support our ASEAN Leaders to address these issues. These are difficult challenges. But, it is imperative that ASEAN demonstrates that it is determined to face these challenges squarely, while at the same time remaining cohesive and united. ASEAN will then be able to confidently step into the 21st century as a vibrant and forward-looking organisation fully aware of its role in the region and in the world.

9 On our part, AIPO has continually supported the goals of ASEAN and worked towards ASEAN parliamentarians' better understanding of the issues involved. Just two months ago, Singapore hosted the AIPO Ad Hoc Committee on Comparative Study of ASEAN National Legislative Policies on Hazardous Wastes Control and the Report of the Committee's study will be tabled before this General Assembly for its endorsement. This is an example of AIPO's effort to promote mutual understanding and exchange of information among member parliaments on areas of common interest in ASEAN and I am confident that this process will be continued by my successors. Within ASEAN, the close relations between AIPO and ASEAN have aided in the regular dissemination of ASEAN initiatives to AIPO member parliaments and the support of AIPO in the achievement of ASEAN goals is noteworthy. AIPO will continue to enhance this linkage and promote

regional cooperation both on the governmental and parliamentary levels.

10 On the international front, AIPO is widening its presence by being actively engaged in world forums such as the Inter-Parliamentary Union Conferences. Its participation in IPU activities has resulted in greater networks created between ASEAN and world parliamentarians and is instrumental in bringing to the organisation a useful world view of the global issues at stake.

11 AIPO, as a growing organisation, has also tapped on the resources of the Internet to further widen its reach to the world community. I am therefore pleased that the official website of AIPO will be launched at this Opening Ceremony of the 21st General Assembly in the presence of our distinguished ASEAN parliamentarians and guests. I hope that the website will be a well-used avenue of obtaining information on AIPO's various activities and its constituent member parliaments.

12 Last but not least, I would like to wish all distinguished delegates and observers a pleasant and memorable stay in Singapore. I hope that our discussions will contribute to a successful 21st AIPO General Assembly and that our arrangements for this meeting will meet with your expectations.

Thank You.

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