



**ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Organization  
21st General Assembly  
10-15 September 2000, Singapore**

**(TO BE EMBARGOED UNTIL AFTER DELIVERY)**

**SPEECH BY MR TAN SOO KHOON, PRESIDENT OF AIPO AND  
SPEAKER OF SINGAPORE PARLIAMENT AT THE CLOSING  
CEREMONY OF 21ST GENERAL ASSEMBLY ON 13 SEPTEMBER  
2000 AT 2.45 PM AT SHANGRI-LA HOTEL**

Honourable Speakers and Leaders of Delegations  
Honourable Delegates and Observers  
Excellencies  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

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1 We have come to the end of 3 days of intensive and fruitful discussions on a variety of topics of importance to AIPO and ASEAN. I am pleased to report that the 21st General Assembly has successfully completed its deliberations on the range of issues on its agenda. The active participation and thoughtful comments of all delegations have helped to make this General Assembly a productive and meaningful event. I am confident that the resolutions and decisions that we have reached will contribute to the further strengthening of AIPO and ASEAN cooperation.

2 Since its founding in 1967, ASEAN has entrenched a habit of cooperation among its members that has helped to create conditions for the region to achieve rapid economic growth. We agree that for ASEAN to remain

as a dynamic regional organisation, it must be able to respond effectively to changes in the regional and international environment.

3 We agree that political cohesiveness is a critical element for ASEAN to be strong. With the expansion of ASEAN to ten members, an immediate priority for us is to integrate the newer members into the organisation. We recognised that there is an economic gap between the older and newer members. The older members must play its part in assisting the new members. AIPO therefore welcomes the development of the Mekong sub-region as a rallying point for ASEAN integration. AIPO also welcomes the recognition by the ASEAN Foreign Ministers at the recent ASEAN Ministerial Meeting in Bangkok that ASEAN members with IT capabilities should help the newer members.

4 ASEAN's economic dynamism was due to it being plugged into the global economy. Despite the setback of the crisis, we agree that ASEAN must continue to be an active participant of the world economic system. Enhancing ASEAN's economic competitiveness is a fundamental prerequisite. In this respect, AIPO reiterates the call for ASEAN member countries to continue the structural reforms and to remain committed to ASEAN's economic liberalisation agenda through the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) and the ASEAN Investment Area (AIA). To position ASEAN in the New Economy, AIPO welcomes the e-ASEAN initiative that would transform ASEAN into a seamless and borderless market, instead of ten fragmented markets. These steps are critical to maintain ASEAN's position as an attractive and vibrant destination for investors.

5 We agree that globalisation is a reality that ASEAN must confront. It is not a matter of choice. Globalisation, however, does not only pose an economic challenge for ASEAN. Its impact is felt in every sector of our societies. Neither can issues be dealt with by anyone of us alone. That was clearly demonstrated by the regional economic crisis. ASEAN must therefore take steps to prepare our societies to adjust to the transformation brought about by globalisation. Globalisation compels us to work even more closely.

6 Our discussions on issues like the environment, education, the role of women in society and drugs reflect the myriad of problems the region faces as well as the common need for ASEAN to study these problems and come up with practical solutions. Social issues are also becoming increasingly globalised and can no longer be neatly categorised in this "borderless" age.

7 I believe that the discussions on these issues have given AIPO parliamentarians a deeper insight into the main challenges facing ASEAN in this era of globalisation. It is my hope that through the discussions over the past few days, we would have learnt from each other the steps we could take to meet the challenges of globalisation. As lawmakers, we have a vital role to play to forge a consensus in our constituents and put in place appropriate policies that would enable our societies to make the necessary adjustments. Collectively, ASEAN can move forward into the 21st century as a strong and dynamic organisation confident in meeting its challenges just as it had in the past three decades.

8 The closing of the 21st AIPO General Assembly also marks the completion of my tenure as President of AIPO. Let me once again say that I am grateful and indebted to all of you for your kind support and cooperation throughout the course of the past year and especially throughout this General Assembly. It is now my pleasure to introduce the incoming President of AIPO, His Excellency Mr Bhichai Rattakul, Speaker of the House of Representatives and the President of the Thai National Assembly. Mr Rattakul is a former Minister of Foreign Affairs and Deputy Prime Minister and was appointed as Speaker in June this year. I am confident that AIPO will benefit tremendously from the leadership and guidance of Mr Rattakul.

9 I would also like to congratulate Mrs Sirilak Panbamrunakit, Secretary-General of the Thai House of Representatives, on her appointment as the Secretary-General of AIPO. I am confident that Mrs Panbamrunakit with her vast experience and knowledge of AIPO affairs will make an effective contribution to the work of AIPO in her capacity as Secretary-General.

10 Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to express my appreciation for your cooperation and guidance during the course of this General Assembly. My task has been made easier by your kind support. I am thankful for your valuable contributions, which have helped to make this General Assembly a productive and successful one. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Ms Ng Sheau Juann of the Singapore Parliament for having contributed her services as Secretary-General of AIPO for the past one year. Apart from her regular duties in the Singapore Parliament, Ms Ng has shouldered the responsibilities of dealing with the business of AIPO and its Secretariat. I would also like to thank all the staff of Parliament and everyone involved for the hard work they have put in into the organisation of the 21st General Assembly, and in ensuring its smooth running and successful

conclusion.

11        May I now, on behalf of the Parliament of Singapore, wish all our AIPO delegates and observers a safe journey home. Thank you.

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