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STATEMENT DELIVERED BY THE LEADER OF THE SINGAPORE DELEGATION,
MR. S. RAJARATNAM, MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS AT
THE ELEVENTH ASEAN MINISTERIAL MEETING, PATTAYA, THAILAND
ON WEDNESDAY, 14 JUNE 1978

First of all, Mr Chairman, may I congratulate you on your election as Chairman of the 11th Ministerial Meeting. As one who has been associated with the founding of ASEAN eleven years ago I have seen many Foreign Ministers come and go. It is heartening to see new colleagues who will add lustre to these Ministerial meetings, just as it is saddening to lose the experience and guidance of former colleagues. One such colleague is His Excellency Adam Malik who has now been elevated to Vice-President of the Republic of Indonesia. He was associated with ASEAN from its inception and made substantial contributions to the growth and development of our organisation which, in its early years, many said would not outlast the Foreign Ministers who launched it. The fact that it has outlasted many Foreign Ministers is evidence of its innate vigour and is due in great measure to the faith and efforts of leaders like His Excellency Adam Malik. I offer this modest tribute in recognition of his great service to the cause of ASEAN.

I would also ask you to convey to His Excellency the Prime Minister of Thailand our thanks for his thoughtful and hopeful address this morning. The Prime Minister has a profound understanding of ASEAN, having been associated with its work for many years. His address will no doubt help us in our deliberations.

My delegation welcomes His Excellency, the Foreign Minister of Papua New Guinea, who is attending this meeting as an observer and as a friend. We count his country as being among the growing number of nations sympathetic to ASEAN and its objectives.

Mr Chairman, /2.

Mr Chairman, I prefaced my opening statement at the 10th Ministerial Meeting with the observation that the world and the region in which we live had changed profoundly since we last met. I must once again preface my remarks with the same observation. The world and the region has changed, even more profoundly than we thought possible. This demonstrates the validity of the contention that mankind has not merely entered a period of permanent change but also into a period of accelerating change. Change may be disconcerting, but disconcerting or not, there is no way of reversing its gathering momentum. Those who do not adjust to the fact of accelerated change become the victims rather than the beneficiaries of change.

I do not want to try your patience with a philosophic discourse on the nature and implications of the phenomena of political and social change which today affects almost every aspect of human activity. All I would like to say is that basically change implies the death of the old and the irrelevant and the emergence of new forms to which the future belongs. If we can clearly distinguish between the death throes of what is dying and the birth pangs of the new struggling to be born, then we would be better equipped to cope with change.

ASEAN is of the future. Not many of us fully appreciated this when it was launched 11 years ago. For some of us it was perhaps no more than an instinctive response to immediate fears and passing problems generated by the convulsions of the war in Vietnam. Some saw it as no more than an anti-Communist front.

Fortunately ASEAN did not operate these past 11 years without this narrow, negative perspective. Had it done so I believe that ASEAN would have gone the way of other abortive and earlier regional efforts in our part of the world. I am not saying that this narrow perspective is to-day without its adherents within ASEAN but they have less influence than those who see ASEAN in the broader perspective of creating a regional community. True the five nations now composing ASEAN are non-Communist and are quite determined to preserve their non-Communist commitment against those within and

without ASEAN who proclaim that they have a mission to "liberate" us from this commitment.

But more than just "non-Communism" holds the five ASEAN states together. It is also an effort to demonstrate that five developing countries, four of whom were imperial dependencies, can by pooling resources and experience narrow the gap between the developed and underdeveloped nations not only in the shortest possible time but also with a minimum of pain and suffering to its people as any other system.

That is one objective of ASEAN.

The other is to demonstrate that non-Communism can just as effectively promote justice, liberty and better living standards for its people as any other system.

Another objective of ASEAN regional cooperation is to demonstrate that nationalism in the Third World need not act as a catalyst for fratricidal conflicts and destructive wars between developing states.

In the 11 years of ASEAN's history it has demonstrated that these three objectives are realisable. By Third World standards the ASEAN group of nations are a picture of dynamic economic growth and political stability. The standard of living of its people may not be comparable to that in the rich industrialised countries but neither are its people enveloped in the kind of desperate, hopeless poverty so often equated with the Third World. The economies of ASEAN countries are not without shortcomings but they are also vigorous developing economies.

The five ASEAN states embrace a diversity of races, languages, religions and different historical backgrounds. As nation states their interests are not always identical. Yet despite these differences they have over the past 11 years not allowed these differences to become sources of conflicts or to blind them to common regional interests.

It is because there was an underlying sense of regional unity and purpose that ASEAN was able to confound those who predicted that with the emergence of Communist states in Vietnam, Kampuchea and Laos there would be a falling of non-Communist dominoes in South-East Asia.

Some three years have passed since the ending of the war in Vietnam and the emergence of three Communist states in South-East Asia. Not a single ASEAN domino has fallen. Not a single square foot of ASEAN soil has been liberated. True there has been an upsurge of activity by so-called revolutionary liberationist groups in a number of ASEAN countries but the foundations of ASEAN states are as intact as they ever were. In fact some of us could even analyse the present situation in South-East Asia that there is no such thing as falling dominoes or prospects of it in the non-Communist states of ASEAN, but there could well be a reverse of falling dominoes in other areas of South-East Asia.

Perhaps of some significance is that the international status of ASEAN has been enhanced rather than diminished since the emergence of Communist states in South East Asia. Since then that is after the end of the Vietnam war and only since then many countries which had taken no more than a cursory interest in ASEAN have now initiated a series of dialogues with our organisation. The United States, the EEC, Japan and Australia and New Zealand are just as keen as we are to establish long term cooperative links with ASEAN. This happened after the end of the Vietnam War, when there should have been fallen dominoes.

The People's Republic of China has abandoned its earlier suspicions and reservations about ASEAN in favour of public support for its aims and objectives.

The new regimes in Vietnam and Laos which were openly hostile to individual ASEAN states and ASEAN as a whole have in recent months ceased or suspended attacks on ASEAN and stated their willingness to establish friendly bilateral relations with each of the ASEAN countries.

The Soviet Union, which for years has been highly critical of ASEAN, has qualified its attitude somewhat. As I understand its present position is that it is not against ASEAN in-so-far as its aim is consolidating regional cooperation but only against it becoming a military bloc to serve the ambitions of those it describes as imperialists. Since ASEAN is not a military bloc, if it is, Singapore would opt out of ASEAN and this is true of all the ASEAN members (and has no intention of becoming one) and since it has no intention of becoming the cat's paw of any outside power, it is hoped that with the passage of time the Soviet Union too would see ASEAN in a different light.

If ASEAN were a feeble, disintegrating organisation -- a domino ready to tip over -- I don't think that ASEAN would be treated seriously by an increasing number of nations. As you are no doubt aware, Mr Chairman, in this somewhat harsh and unfeeling world nobody likes to back losers or even appear to be identified with one. I believe increasing attention is being given to ASEAN because more and more nations think that ASEAN is a winner. Those with a feel for historical movements realize that in a shrinking interdependent world, those nations who refuse to go beyond the intellectual, political and economic constraints of old fashioned nationalism belong to the forces which are dying. The nation states -- even as powerful and self-sufficient as the United States or the Soviet Union -- find they have to come to terms with the imperatives of an interdependent world.

We in ASEAN have managed, in a regional context, to move beyond nationalism but without abandoning the positive aspects of nationalism. We have yet a long way to go before we can harmonise nationalism with regionalism but we have gone further in this direction than in most Third World countries where refusal to go beyond nationalism is breeding inter-state wars which in turn provide new opportunities for intervention by and dependence on outside powers. This is the genesis of a real neo-colonialism.

The question for us in ASEAN is that if the world outside is taking us very seriously and is convinced that ASEAN is of the future, that even realises our potentialities -- that it can be a

factor of great consideration, how seriously do we in ASEAN take our organisation. How much further are we prepared to go in the direction of regional cooperation. There is no doubt that the road we have taken is the right road because it is the road to a reassuring future. But the further we ascend the slopes of regionalism the more demanding and exhausting the climb becomes. But these difficulties can be endured and overcome if we are truly convinced ourselves that regionalism is the only guarantee we have of our future as non-communist nations and as thriving, truly independent peoples. ASEAN has helped us ride the uncertainties of the so-called post-Vietnam period. This is why the dominoes did not fall in Southeast Asia. I can speculate that if there had been no ASEAN the consequences for us after the ending of the Vietnam war will be totally different. This is proof that ASEAN regionalism is something more than mere posturing for us.

I believe the stronger ASEAN regionalism becomes, the greater it can help us cope with the new and as yet undisclosed and unexpected uncertainties that will confront us. When we met a year ago, there was not yet in Southeast Asia, a war between Vietnam and Kampuchea. We believed that there was such a thing as proletarian solidarity. Now we know that nationalism can act as a virus for communists and non-communists. There was no conflict between Vietnam and China one year ago. Today there is. There was no open confrontation between the Soviet Union and China one year ago. Today there is. So much so that the Foreign Minister of China went to Zaire. These are unexpected developments suggesting that world events are now uncontrollable. Nobody is in control, not the US nor the Soviet Union and we are moving into seas which are going to be very stormy even in our part of the world. The consequences of all this for us when we next meet in Jakarta may be even more dramatic and more unexpected. If our ASEAN Club is a frail one, then we are in trouble. So time is on our side. At the moment ASEAN countries are politically and economically stable. It is now time to solve our problems, to unite and to build up our strength, and not during a time of crisis, as is happening in Africa. If it is only when you are in trouble that you want to unite and fight it will be too late.

I am certain that when we meet in Jakarta next year, I will preface, if I am still around, my statement for that occasion with the same remarks I began this address:-

"The world and the region in which we live has changed profoundly since we met last in Pattaya"

I hope too that by that time ASEAN would have moved forward appreciably by then to take advantages of a crisis which can provide new opportunities and avert fresh danger which changes invariably bring in their wake. If we do that then I think that whatever unpredictabilities in South East Asia, with ASEAN we can always be assured of a sound secure future for all of us.

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