

Opening Message
by H.E. Le Luong Minh
Secretary-General of ASEAN
High Level Forum on ASEAN at 50
Manila, 19 October 2017

(To be delivered by DSG AKP Mochtan)

Excellencies,
Distinguished Speakers and Participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning!

I wish to extend appreciations to the Government of the Philippines and the Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia for organising this Forum that will reflect on ASEAN's journey of peace and progress over the past 50 years. Several discussions and seminars around similar themes have been organised in various places throughout this year. Nonetheless, this Forum stands out as it brings together those who had been directly involved on ASEAN matters, and in one way or another, contributed in shaping up ASEAN's agenda and its progress.

Let me begin by stating the bottom-line: The region has grown from strength to strength since the ASEAN Declaration was signed in 1967. From a humble beginning, today's ASEAN is recognised as one of the world's most successful regional organisations.

It was indeed a huge feat for ASEAN. Perseverance, commitment to a common purpose and objectives, and a strong bond and sense of togetherness have enabled ASEAN to overcome challenges and expectations. It is the accumulation of progress and successes that led to the realisation of the ASEAN goals and aspirations as we know of today.

ASEAN's list of achievements is long. They range from promotion of norms such as trust and confidence building and preventive diplomacy, to tangible legal instruments that ensure peace, stability and security in the region, such as the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation, the 1997 Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon Free Zone Treaty, the 2002 Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC), among others.

Progress and achievements in the economic and socio-culture pillars have been equally strong and encouraging. The widely quoted figures that position ASEAN, collectively, as the

6th largest economy in the world, as well as the 4th largest trade power house and a preferred investment destination, provide vivid illustrations of the success of ASEAN economic integration.

These achievements are the fruits of ASEAN's hard labor in pushing economic cooperation initiatives for all, from market opening through the elimination of intra-regional tariffs, gradual opening of the services sectors and continuous improvement of investment regime; the reduction of costs of doing business by way of streamlining and modernising customs procedures, harmonisation of standards; as well as putting in place business-friendly regulatory frameworks. True to the spirit of open regionalism, ASEAN economic integration is further fostered by the region's reach to the global markets through free trade agreement and comprehensive economic partnerships as well as enhanced economic cooperation.

In the same vein, improvements in the enrolment rate of primary school-age students, which presently stands at 96%; the reduction in infant mortality ratio which today is only a third of what it was in 1990; as well as the significant decrease in the proportion of people living below national poverty lines, which is now half compared to the figures of the past two decades, all provide irrefutable proof of ASEAN's unwavering commitment in promoting human development, resiliency and sustainable development.

We have many more examples showcasing the benefits that ASEAN has brought to the region, its citizens, as well as to the international community. By virtue of its own successes, ASEAN Community building is now irreversible, necessitating ASEAN to remain cohesive and to act in unison to realise the action plans and goals as encapsulated in the ASEAN Vision 2025.

To ensure the effectiveness of our regional integration processes, ASEAN is introducing a number of new initiatives that include strengthening monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the ASEAN Community Blueprints. This will enable us to go beyond tracking implementation progress and to also look at the outcomes and impacts of implemented measures on the stakeholders.

Another important initiative is in the area of outreach and communication to raise awareness and promote understanding about ASEAN and its agenda of regional integration to the citizens. An inclusive, people-centred and people-oriented ASEAN Community requires a strong sense of ownership by its peoples. Toward that end, ASEAN has been implementing

the ASEAN Communication Master Plan, and a new strategy is in the pipeline to enhance ASEAN's outreach and dissemination to the public at large.

Excellencies, Ladies & Gentlemen:

While we have achieved much over the past 50 years, and have been hard at work to continuously strengthen our cooperation and coordination mechanism, I would like to underline that challenges are still abound and ASEAN must continue to be vigilant and stand united to address various issues that include, among others, maintaining ASEAN centrality; translating regional economic commitments into national legal and policy frameworks; building a community identity across diverse nations; and in coming up with collaborative solutions to address common problems.

It is my sincere wish that the insights and foresight of the distinguished participants of this Forum will give guidance and inspirations as ASEAN charts a new course and turns a new page in its history. The future of this region and that of our peoples depend on the directions we shall take now. I hope that the retrospectives and perspectives that will emanate from this forum will lead us to the right path as we journey together for the next 50 years.

I wish the Forum successful deliberations.

Thank you!