

**REMARKS BY H.E. HIRUBALAN V P**  
**DEPUTY SECRETARY-GENERAL**  
**FOR ASEAN POLITICAL-SECURITY COMMUNITY**  
**38<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the ASEAN Senior Officials on Drug Matters (ASOD)**

Ha Noi, Viet Nam, 25 July 2017

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- ***Honourable Pol. Sr. Lt. Gen. Mr. Le Quy Vuong  
Deputy Minister of Public Security of Viet Nam,  
  
ASEAN Senior Offiicals on Drug Matters  
Excellencies, Distinguished Guests,  
  
Ladies and Gentlemen;***

Good Morning.

Thank you for the invitation to participate in this Opening Session of the 38<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the ASEAN Senior Officials on Drug Matters (ASOD). It is an honor.

I will touch briefly on developments in ASEAN in general, followed by some observations and remarks on our efforts to address the issue of illicit drugs in our region. The scourge of drug abuse in ASEAN remains a key concern and continues to require dedicated, resolute and innovative responses. It is a fight for the long-term that we must never give up for the sake of our people and well-being of our region.

Before I proceed, please allow me to thank the Government of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam, and in particular the Standing Office on Drugs and Crime of Viet Nam's Ministry of Public Security for the warm hospitality and the wonderful arrangements for the 38<sup>th</sup> ASOD Meeting. There is no doubt that Viet Nam will be a

great host and an effective Chair as it sets the pace and tone that will be carried to the next ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Drug Matters (AMMD) that Viet Nam will host next year in 2018.

*Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,*

In exactly two weeks on 8 August 2017, ASEAN will celebrate its 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. The Philippines, the ASEAN Chair this year, has planned a grand celebration in Manila to commemorate the occasion. I make this point not to remind us of the day ASEAN was established nor how long we have been in existence as an organisation, but more to reflect on how much ASEAN has achieved in these 50 years.

The ASEAN story was born of determination by Member States to cooperate and work together to promote regional peace and stability, and enhance the economic well-being and livelihood of our people. Remember that at the time of ASEAN's inception, we were in the throes of the Cold War, facing external threats, internal challenges and in the nascent stages of economic development. Our Founding Fathers recognised that if we did not work together then our efforts to promote development and progress will be much more difficult.

ASEAN has made tremendous progress over the past 50 years. We have achieved a high degree of maturity as a regional organisation, although we in ASEAN never fail to acknowledge that we still have a long way to go. We are still a grouping of ten sovereign nations at different levels of economic and social development. But what we have, and this is a very important trait, is the recognition by each ASEAN Member State on the importance and relevance of this Community, individually to each member and collectively for our region, and each has the political

will and commitment to ensure the continued success and progress of ASEAN. Our habit of working together and getting agreement on key issues has become second nature for us. And from a cautious start, we have expanded cooperation even in sensitive areas such as defense and military cooperation.

*Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,*

ASEAN was declared a Community on 31 December 2015 and we are now 18 months into our Community building efforts. As is well known, our aspiration is to realise an ASEAN Community that is rules-based, people-oriented and people-centred, goals reiterated by our Leaders when they met recently in Manila for their 30<sup>th</sup> Summit.

A key priority continuously emphasised by our Leaders is that the ASEAN Community must be about our people, in other words inclusiveness. Translated this means that the nationals of each Member State must not only derive tangible benefits from ASEAN but must also recognise that they are better off because of ASEAN—in terms of security, safety as well as economic and social well-being. More can be done and this challenge will remain high on ASEAN's agenda as we move forward.

ASEAN as an organisation is clear of its plans for the next 8 years as elaborated in the various documents we now have such as Vision 2025, the Blueprints, Work Plans, including the latest editions of the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity and the Initiative for ASEAN Integration. We are confident that by 2025, we would have a better developed and more integrated ASEAN. And in the mid-way mark of the implementation of these Plans and Blueprints, namely the year 2020,

Viet Nam will assume the ASEAN Chairmanship and will have the responsibility to move this community building process forward.

*Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,*

The irony is that the more successful our integration efforts in particular the success of our economic community in enhancing ASEAN trade both intra and external, for instance through open borders and seamless transport to facilitate faster and efficient flow of goods, we face the concomitant risk of increased flow of contraband including cross-border flows of illicit drugs. We have to be conscious of such unintended consequences and need to act on them without undermining our Community building aspirations.

I would like to close by sharing three observations on the efforts being made by ASEAN, in particular by sectoral bodies such as ASOD, AMMD and others in combating the drug problem in our region, and the challenges ahead.

First, the abuse of illicit drugs is not a regional problem but a global one. Regardless of the state of the country, whether advanced, developed or least developed countries (LDCs), all face similar challenges and as a global challenge, it is not abating. ASEAN is not alone in facing this challenge. In fact, it is commendable that ASEAN recognised the dangers of this scourge relatively soon after ASEAN's establishment as reflected in the fact that the first regional mechanism to address this challenge, the ASEAN Drug Experts Meeting was convened in 1976 in Singapore. This paved the way for regional cooperation. We are now into our 38<sup>th</sup> Meeting of ASOD, which is a clear manifestation that combatting the drug menace has always been a priority for ASEAN.

Our efforts over the past few decades to work together as a region to address the drug issue have made progress. Mechanisms to combat drugs in our region have been institutionalised such as the ASEAN Airport Interdiction Task Force and a similar force for Seaport Interdiction. We have been taking systematic ASEAN style approaches to this issue, for instance through the development and implementation of Work Plans, as well as other activities and projects. And we have also enhanced cooperation with our key dialogue partners who have stood ready to help ASEAN in its fight against drugs. An ASEAN Narcotics Cooperation Center (ASEAN-NARCO) has been established in Thailand to carry ASEAN wide cooperation in areas of reporting and assessment of drug matters afflicting our region. And recently we have agreed to also cooperate to address challenges emanating from the infamous Golden Triangle. The regular meetings of ASOD and the AMMD have instilled a high degree of comfort level and meeting of minds among the Ministers and Officials.

However, we have to be realistic and recognise that the drug problem in ASEAN is still persistent and remains at the same level if not higher than the late 2015 level when ASEAN was declared a Community. Of course, our aspiration then was also to realise a “Drug-Free ASEAN” by 2015. This was one of the rare ASEAN targets that we could not realise. Since then, we have replaced the tagline of a Drug-Free ASEAN with “*Securing ASEAN Communities Against Illicit Drugs.*” Our drug officials are certainly making best effort to eliminate if not reduce significantly the drug problem in our region. But it is obvious that much more needs to be done. We recognise that this 38<sup>th</sup> ASOD Meeting is ideally suited for the officials to discuss and raise new ideas and strategies that our Ministers could consider and perhaps endorse, when they meet next year in Viet Nam.

Second, we know that the drug problem is a cross-sectoral, cross-pillar issue, and not one that is the sole responsibility of the Ministers and Officials responsible for drug matters. Beyond the security and criminal aspects associated with the drug problem, there are economic, social, education and health dimensions to name a few. We would need to facilitate an effective cross-sectoral and cross-pillar approach so that we can address this challenge in a comprehensive manner. Our Leaders and Ministers, have in their recent Summits and Meetings emphasised the importance of addressing cross-cutting issues and for the three Pillars and the various sectors to work together. If we want to address this challenge in a comprehensive manner, we have to guard against taking a silo approach. Perhaps this meeting can consider how to further broaden the fight against the abuse of illicit drugs by involving entities from the other pillars and sectors that do suffer consequences or can contribute to the prevention of drug abuse. Such cross-sectoral, cross-pillar cooperation and collaboration are already taking place at national level. We hope such cooperation could take place at the regional level to facilitate the sharing of best practices as well as promote a holistic and comprehensive ASEAN approach which is necessary in combating this particular scourge. Some thought has to be put into this, but without a multi-dimensional approach, we will not be handling this problem in a holistic way. There is already such a cross-sectoral approach being taken by entities addressing the trafficking in persons issue. The fight against drugs must be more than enforcement and reaction. We must understand regional and global trends and be proactive.

Third, we are aware of the recent trends in Europe and the United States towards a more tolerant approach towards abusers and to decriminalise the abuse of illicit drugs. Western societies are promoting this approach as the better way to

handle the drug problem – namely tolerance and decriminalisation. ASEAN does not have the luxury of taking a benign attitude to the drug problem. I believe that we have too much to lose as a community if we take the soft approach towards abuse of illicit drugs. Thankfully, we have collectively agreed that ASEAN will continue with its zero-tolerance approach towards drug abusers. We must continue to maintain our guard and not fall sway to emerging pressures and differing approaches on how best to deal with the drug problem.

Drug abuse continues to pose serious challenges to our community building efforts. Our Leaders recognise this and have urged us to take resolute action. We must take continuous effort to address and mitigate the effects of the drug problem in our region. I am sure the discussions over the next few days within ASEAN and with our external partners, under the effective guidance and control of our host, Viet Nam, will throw up new ideas and approaches to handle this issue. We wish this 38<sup>th</sup> Meeting of ASOD much success in its deliberations.

Thank you.

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