

**OPENING REMARKS**  
**by H.E. Mr. Thongloun SISOULITH, Prime Minister of the Lao PDR**  
**at the Opening Ceremony**  
**of the 49<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting**

24 July 2016, Vientiane  
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- **Excellencies, ASEAN Foreign Ministers,**
- **Invited Foreign Ministers,**
- **Secretary-General of ASEAN,**
- **Excellencies,**
- **Distinguished Guests,**
- **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

On behalf of the Government and people of the Lao PDR, it is my great honour and privilege to officiate the opening ceremony of the 49<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting (AMM) today.

I would like to take this opportunity to extend my warm welcome to Foreign Ministers and spouses, all distinguished guests and delegates to Vientiane for the 49<sup>th</sup> AMM and related Meetings.

Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Southeast Asia is a diverse region. However, this diversity has not been an obstacle for countries in the region to come together as regional grouping of ASEAN. Over the past 5 decades, ASEAN has gone through various kinds of test and has become a region of peace and stability. The region's economy has continued to grow and people-to-people exchange has been enhanced. All this has enabled ASEAN to establish the ASEAN Community on 31 December 2015, which provides opportunities not only for over 620 million people that are bound by geography, common objectives and shared destiny, but also other countries and organizations outside the region, as ASEAN has become a single market and production base with a combined gross domestic product (GDP) of 2.6 trillion US dollars, ranking as the 7<sup>th</sup> largest economy in the world, and with GDP per capita increased by 76 percent from USD 2,341 in 2007 to USD 4,135 in 2014.

The remarkable achievements that ASEAN has gained thus far have been the result of cooperation within ASEAN and between ASEAN and external partners, through the ASEAN-initiated mechanisms based on the ASEAN way of cooperation and is consistent with the particularity and reality of the region, the spirit of which ASEAN should continue in the future.

Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

ASEAN Community building is an on-going process. In light of this, the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 and Blueprints for the three community pillars adopted at the 27<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Summit at the end of 2015 in Kuala Lumpur set out the future direction for ASEAN to further strengthen and advance the ASEAN Community, in line with the prevailing trends in regional and international cooperation for the next ten years.

It is the great honor for the Lao PDR to be entrusted to assume ASEAN Chairmanship for the second time in 2016, which is an important and meaningful year for ASEAN, as it is the first year that ASEAN opens up a new chapter as the ASEAN Community, and also implements the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 and the three community Blueprints.

Based on this spirit, the theme ***“Turning Vision into Reality for a Dynamic ASEAN Community”*** and 8 priorities had been proposed by the Lao PDR as the theme of ASEAN Chairmanship 2016, which were subsequently endorsed at the ASEAN Foreign Ministers’ Retreat in February 2016 in Vientiane. In addition, the two important documents, namely the IAI Work Plan III and Master Plan for ASEAN Connectivity 2025 will also be adopted by the ASEAN Leaders in September 2016 to form integral parts of the ASEAN Community Vision 2025.

It has now been 7 months since the Lao PDR assumed the ASEAN Chairmanship, therefore, I would like to take this opportunity to extend my sincere appreciation to ASEAN Member States, ASEAN’s Dialogue Partners and other external partners, friendly countries and regional and international organisations for the continued cooperation, assistance and support extended to the Lao PDR as Chair of ASEAN throughout the past 7 months. I do hope that such valuable cooperation, assistance and support will continue throughout our chairmanship and beyond. The Lao PDR, as ASEAN Chair, will continue to work closely with you all to further strengthen and advance the ASEAN Community,

thereby contributing to the common cause of maintaining and promoting peace, stability and development in the region and the world at large, as well as to the implementation of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals.

Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

With the inception of ASEAN in 1967, AMM was the first ASEAN forum established under the Bangkok Declaration. The AMM constitutes an important mechanism to deliberate and follow up to the implementation of the agreements and decisions by ASEAN Leaders on cooperation within ASEAN and between ASEAN and external parties, which has made continued successes.

The 49<sup>th</sup> AMM and related Meetings are taking place at a crucial juncture, when ASEAN focuses its efforts on implementing the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 and enhancing cooperation with external partners with ASEAN playing a central role. At the same time, the regional and international environment continues to undergo rapid changes that present both opportunities and challenges. Many regions of the world are facing various traditional and non-traditional security challenges such as territorial disputes, extremism and terrorism, natural disasters, climate change, irregular migration, refugee issues, human trafficking and others. Moreover, some developments happened in different parts of the world, including the recent Brexit, require us to follow closely. I do hope that the ASEAN Foreign Ministers and external partners will engage in frank and constructive discussions with a view to preparing for successful conclusions of the 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Summits and related Summits to be held in early September 2016 in Vientiane, as well as to contributing to the maintenance and promotion of peace, stability and prosperity in the region and the world.

In conclusion, I believe that we all appreciate the remarkable achievements attained by ASEAN over the past 49 years. During this period, we have established the ASEAN Community, comprising 10 diverse Member States, and we have fostered effective cooperation with one another. We also have deepened and broadened our cooperative relations with external partners. Moreover, we have enhanced the role and raised the profile of ASEAN in regional and international fora. These achievements have been made possible thanks to our consistent adherence to the established objectives and principles of ASEAN. In this

connection, I would like to reiterate that ASEAN should continue to maintain and enhance ASEAN role in the evolving regional architecture, particularly ASEAN's centrality, ASEAN's way and the principle of moving forward at a pace comfortable to all. All this, in my view, will help ASEAN to remain relevant in all regional and international cooperation frameworks.

On this auspicious occasion, it is my great pleasure to declare the 49<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting and related Meetings officially open, and I wish the Meetings great success.

Thank you.

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