

**Remarks by the Secretary-General of ASEAN, H. E. Dr. Surin Pitsuwan,
at the Signing Ceremony of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)
between the ASEAN Secretariat and Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO)
ASEAN Secretariat, 29 June 2009**



Mr. Yasuo Hayashi, Chairman of JETRO,

Distinguished Chairpersons of Japanese Chambers of Commerce and Industry as well as equivalent entities in ASEAN Member States,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This is indeed a historic moment because never before has a collection of private sector come to the ASEAN Secretariat and enter into such a meaningful dialogue in our effort to support ASEAN Community building and to promote ASEAN-Japan cooperation.

Japan is a long-standing partner of ASEAN, one that spans thirty-six years since 1973. The scope of our cooperation is wide; it spans from the political, security and economic development, to the social and cultural realms. Our cooperation also goes deep. ASEAN-Japan relations are beyond just government-to-government, it also extends to the private and non-profit sectors.

At the government level, ASEAN and Japan signed the ASEAN-Japan Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement on 14 April 2008, which came into force in December the same year. This was expected to strengthen economic relations between ASEAN and Japan, which are both important trading partners to one another.

In 2008, Japan became ASEAN's top trading partner, contributing around 12.4% or US\$211.4 billion to ASEAN's total trade. This was an increase of about 22% from 2007. Japan is also the top two sources of foreign direct investment inflows to ASEAN, Japanese direct investment to ASEAN was US\$7.7 billion in 2008, accounting for 12.8% of the total foreign direct investment inflows to ASEAN. For this very reason, our MOU today is very timely and important indeed, because it will put us on a road of closer cooperation between us.

The MOU focuses on four key areas of cooperation. First is to strengthen the human resources capacity in ASEAN and the ASEAN Secretariat; second is to improve the investment climate in ASEAN; third, to expand trade and business opportunities between Japan and ASEAN; and lastly, to alleviate poverty and narrow the development gap within ASEAN.

It is extremely fortunate that we together have agreed and come to this agreement that we shall have a more formal cooperation in the form of the MOU between the ASEAN Secretariat and JETRO, under the leadership of Mr. Hayashi. The only part that will make this framework work would be the private sector, because you are the nuts and bolts of integration of building the ASEAN Economic Community and realising the ASEAN-Japan Comprehensive Economic Partnership. We must bring this message to the people of ASEAN and Japan, that the relationship and cooperation between ASEAN and

Japan are critical to the wellbeing of our peoples. I am confident that with our concerted efforts, the MOU we are about to sign will deliver the benefits it promises.

Thank you