

## **JOINT PRESS STATEMENT**

### **6<sup>TH</sup> MEETING OF THE ASEAN DIRECTORS-GENERAL OF IMMIGRATION DEPARTMENTS AND HEADS OF CONSULAR AFFAIRS DIVISIONS OF THE MINISTRIES OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS (DGICM)**

**4-6 September 2002, Bangkok, Thailand**

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1. The 6<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the ASEAN Directors-General of Immigration Departments and Heads of Consular Affairs Divisions of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs (DGICM), which ended on Friday, 6<sup>th</sup> September 2002 was held in Bangkok. It was chaired by Pol. Maj. Gen. Sothorn Vanisthian, Deputy Commissioner of the Immigration Bureau, Royal Thai Police. The Meeting was attended by the Heads of the Immigration authorities from all the 10 ASEAN Member Countries.
2. ASEAN immigration authorities have agreed to further enhance their cooperation on a wide range of issues ranging from combating trafficking in persons and terrorism to convening joint training programmes on building their respective capacities in dealing with new challenges facing them.
3. The Meeting also adopted a comprehensive Work Programme detailing practical initiatives and measures to be carried out by all the 10 ASEAN Member Countries. The Work Programme implements the ASEAN Plan of Action on Immigration Matters, which was earlier adopted in 2000 in the Philippines.
4. The issue of counter-terrorism was high on the agenda of the Meeting this year. "We have an added responsibility towards securing our borders against the movement of terrorists into our countries as the immigration authorities are the nation's front-line agencies" said Pol. Maj. Gen. Sothorn Vanisthian in his remarks on being elected chairman.
5. The Meeting also agreed to work together with other ASEAN bodies involved in combating transnational crime such as the trafficking in persons, particularly women and children by stepping-up joint training and coordination in intelligence gathering among the law enforcement officials. This includes the exchange of information to safeguard the integrity of passports and their security features.
6. The Meeting also endorsed an ASEAN Declaration against Trafficking in Persons, Particularly Women and Children for the consideration of the ASEAN Standing Committee.
7. The immigration authorities also reaffirmed their interests to work towards visa-free travel, where feasible, for ASEAN nationals in all the ASEAN 10 Member Countries. This is an important step as the ASEAN Tourism Agreement, which is scheduled to be signed in Phnom Penh later in the year has called for the facilitation of not only international travel but also intra-ASEAN travel.
8. ASEAN immigration authorities also recognize the need to work towards regional minimum standards for national policies and legislation dealing with immigration

matters, where possible. Regular exchange of information on policies, administrative measures and the enhanced network among the region's immigration officials are already in place.

9. To make the relevant information more accessible to the public, especially tourists to the region, the immigration websites of Member Countries would soon be linked on cyber-space via the ASEAN Secretariat based in Jakarta.
10. To assist in developing the technical capacities of the immigration departments in the newer Member Countries, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Viet Nam, the older members of ASEAN have expressed an interest to offer their training establishments for this purpose. One such programme has already been conducted last year where Lao PDR, Myanmar and Viet Nam immigration officials were trained at the Malaysian Immigration Academy.
11. The 7<sup>th</sup> DGICM is tentatively scheduled to be held in Ha Noi in September 2003.
12. The Meeting was held in the traditional spirit of ASEAN solidarity and cordiality.

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