

**Press Statement by Dr. Surin Pitsuwan, Secretary-General of ASEAN
On the Occasion of the
Visit of the U.S. Secretary of State, the Honourable Hillary Rodham Clinton, to the ASEAN
Secretariat, 18 February 2009**

Madam Secretary, Ladies and Gentlemen, Members of the Press

It's a pleasure and privilege to welcome you to the ASEAN Secretariat, home of the regional organisation representing 576 million people.

Your visit is important and historical; it is the first by a US Secretary of State and you are the highest ranking US official to visit us.

Your visit shows the seriousness of the US to end its diplomatic absenteeism in this region. You have said "the US is ready to listen". We too are ready to listen. Madam Secretary, your willingness to listen will go a long way to winning friends and partners, and reassuring allies here in the region.

Your visit also emphasizes the importance of ASEAN in the regional architecture. ASEAN, with its 41-year history, has been an anchor of stability, peace and harmony for this region. As a region, ASEAN - East Asia is ready, able and willing to work with the US in the search for solutions to global impasses, including bridging the cultural divide.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This evening, Secretary Clinton and I had a constructive conversation about a "more robust engagement" of the US with the ASEAN region. We touched on several issues; global economic security was one of them. We agreed that we will join hands to coordinate and consolidate, and create synergy to cope with the impact of the global financial crisis and to find the best means to cushion our communities from economic distress.

In this connection, I welcome Secretary Clinton's strong commitment not to erect trade and other barriers. "We must remain committed to a system of open and fair trade" – she has said. I hope, with this commitment, the Doha Round will have a new push.

I warmly welcome the Obama administration's commitment to launch its interagency process to pursue accession to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation. It is a reaffirmation of the US's political and security commitment to this region.

The US has been a Dialogue Partner of ASEAN for more than three decades. The commemorative summit between ASEAN and the US to celebrate that occasion is still waiting to be realised. We hope this important milestone will be fulfilled soon.

Through the 32 years of formal Dialogue Relations with ASEAN, the US has embarked on many initiatives to assist ASEAN, including ADVANCE (ASEAN Development Vision to Advance National Cooperation and Economic Integration) which is designed to support ASEAN integration goals and ASEAN community building; and TIFA (Trade and Investment Framework Arrangement) to strengthen trade and investment ties. We also thank the US for its timely support of ASEAN's humanitarian efforts in Myanmar following Cyclone Nargis last May.

Madam Secretary, your presence here represents the beginning of "a new era of diplomacy and development" using "smart power" that you have articulated recently. ASEAN is honoured to be a part of that new beginning.

Thank you once again and I look forward to meeting you at the ASEAN Post Ministerial Conference and at the 16th ASEAN Regional Forum in Thailand this year.

Thank you.
Madam Secretary.