

Keynote Speech

by

H.E. Mr. Don Pramudwinai, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Thailand,

“ASEAN in 2019: Thailand’s Chairmanship”

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Narathip Auditorium, Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests,
Friends of ASEAN,

Maybe we haven’t said enough to our friends from Singapore who have helped us become more resilient and innovative this year. So I would like to begin by warmly congratulating Singapore for a successful year as Chair of ASEAN in 2018. Not just congratulate, but to thank and extend our appreciation as well.

As you can see from the video clip of the Handover Ceremony, the gavel of the ASEAN Chairmanship has already been passed, from the Prime Minister of Singapore to the Prime Minister of Thailand. Indeed, this historic gavel is right here next to me, but I will resist the temptation to tap it and call this meeting to order!

Thailand's ASEAN Chairmanship term will officially begin on the 1st of January 2019, as stipulated by the ASEAN Charter, Thailand's work can only be in the state of readiness.

As a people, we are ready -- to welcome you, with our traditional hospitality, to some 180 meetings at various levels and countless other events throughout our Kingdom next year.

As a country, we are ready -- to discharge our responsibilities and realize the theme of "**Advancing Partnership for Sustainability**". We seek to develop an ASEAN Community that is people-centred, leaves no one behind, and looks to the future.

But to fully appreciate where we will be heading in 2019 and beyond, let me take a brief moment to reflect on how ASEAN got here.

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ASEAN was born in Bangkok in 1967, at a time of conflict in our region and a global Cold War. But we managed to hang on together in our early years, by embracing what I refer to as the original 3Cs.

These are **Consultation, Cooperation and Consensus**.

These original 3Cs were essential as we tried to build confidence in an association that was still very young and composed of diverse countries and peoples. Slowly but surely, Member States worked together to find common solutions based on mutual respect and interests. This allowed ASEAN to endure and move to its next stage.

When ASEAN evolved from an Association of five to a Community of ten, we developed a new set of 3Cs, and that is what we have today.

The current 3Cs are: **Community-building, Connectivity and Centrality**.

When ASEAN ratified a Charter in 2008 and became a rules-based Community in 2015, we moved to a higher level of cooperation and integration.

In the area of **community-building**, we have seen the development of a single market and production base. With the push for **connectivity**, which was initiated by Thailand ten years ago, our economies and peoples were brought closer together. And enhancing **centrality** saw the establishment of ASEAN-led platforms that brought the major powers together to reinforce the regional architecture. This has been the foundation for our dynamic growth.

Since ASEAN's inception in 1967, the GDP per capita of ASEAN countries has grown 33 times. Today, ASEAN is the sixth largest economy in the world and could move up the list as the ASEAN Community fulfills its potential fully.

So where does ASEAN go from here?

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As ASEAN moves to the next stage of enhanced cooperation and integration, it is also facing a time of great change and uncertainty. This ranges from the disruptive technologies of the Fourth Industrial Revolution to the rising competition among major powers. From the global challenges of climate change and transnational crime to the erosion of trust in regionalism and multilateralism.

The challenge of change and uncertainty is confronting ASEAN as never before.

In the face of this, ASEAN needs to re-think its strategies and approaches, if it is to remain relevant and central to the region. It needs to increase its strategic value-added by becoming more effective in both overcoming challenges and taking advantage of opportunities.

It is therefore in this context that we need to consider the next generation of 3Cs that will help guide the ASEAN Community through the next few decades.

What is the next generation of 3Cs for ASEAN?

Well, I propose that the first C for the future is **Creativity**.

As change unfolds ever more rapidly and challenges emerge beyond what the region or the world had expected, ASEAN will need to be creative in coming up with solutions and in preparing for future problems.

The current problems within our region need to be addressed effectively by us. If we do not take the lead in solving our own intra-ASEAN problems, whether it be the challenges of non-tariff barriers or humanitarian crises or development gaps, then ASEAN risks losing our credibility.

At the same time, creativity means that ASEAN has to prepare for the future. That is why we need to move towards becoming a Digital ASEAN to take advantage of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. We need to use new ICT to reinforce our MSMEs as well as to enhance financial connectivity and accessibility, through Fintech and other smart means. Indeed, the effective functioning of an ASEAN Single Window in 2019 will depend on secure digitalization.

That is why it is also important to reinforce our cybersecurity to safeguard our Community's integration with the Internet of Things. To this end, we are proposing an ASEAN Digital Agility Leaders' Meeting next year as well as enhancement of the ASEAN-Japan Cybersecurity Capacity-Building Centre based here in Thailand.

Our region unfortunately generates 100 billion US dollars in transnational crime activities and the trend is likely to increase. That is why Thailand proposed developing an ASEAN-wide border management arrangement to help safeguard our Community that has become more interconnected.

To prepare for the future by finding more creative solutions for ASEAN, Thailand has sought the cooperation of the Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia, or ERIA, to come up with an assessment of future trends affecting ASEAN and recommend creative solutions for ASEAN to consider. We look forward to receiving this study next month.

The second of the 3Cs is **Complementarities**.

There needs to be complementarities of policies in multiple dimensions. This is because the challenges facing the region and the world have become increasingly complex. Therefore, no single policy approach is likely to be completely successful by itself.

Partnerships are therefore needed, and promoting complementarities is the best approach to sustaining such partnerships.

Look at sustainable development, for example.

By enhancing complementarities between the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 and the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, ASEAN has managed to make sustainable development cooperation an important regional strategy. This was recognized by international institutions, as seen at the ASEAN Leaders' gathering with the UN, World Bank and IMF in Bali. Indeed, ASEAN has agreed to launch the ASEAN Centre for Sustainable Development Studies and Dialogue next year to take this forward. This will be one of seven ASEAN centres located in Thailand

Complementarities is also essential if we want to enhance regional connectivity which is a key driver of partnerships.

That is why Thailand is proposing an approach called “connecting the connectivities”, to build complementarities between these connectivity strategies and the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity, or MPAC 2025. In this way, we hope to develop synergies and increase the strategic value-added of the Seamless ASEAN.

New proposals regarding the regional architecture also need to complement existing frameworks of cooperation and the ASEAN-centred regional architecture. That is why ASEAN is working on a common approach on an Indo-Pacific concept that complements existing frameworks such as the Indian Ocean Rim Association or IORA.

Complementary trade diplomacy will also be critical to realizing the Leaders' determination to conclude the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, or RCEP, in 2019, during Thailand's ASEAN Chairmanship.

In essence, complementarities lead to effective partnerships, and this is what we need in this increasingly interconnected and interdependent world.

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The third of the new 3Cs is **Continuity**.

It is impossible for any ASEAN Chair to address all of ASEAN's challenges in one year. Therefore, there needs to be continuity in ASEAN's policies across the various chairmanships. Only through continuity can we be assured of sustainability in ASEAN's policies.

That is why, for example, we will continue to develop further the ASEAN Smart Cities Network and reinforce it, by ensuring that it contributes to sustainable cities as well as strong cultural ties with one another.

Indeed, ASEAN's efforts to advancing partnership for sustainability next year is based also in part on continuity of policies of our ASEAN friends in the past, for example, the Philippines' ASEAN Chairmanship theme of 2017 "Partnering for Change, Engaging the World".

Continuity of policies will help ASEAN attain a Sustainable ASEAN, with sustainability in all dimensions. This could lead to a sustainable future, not just for ASEAN, but also for all our partners and friends near and far.

This includes addressing marine debris and protecting the marine environment; promoting sustainable fisheries through an ASEAN Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) Task Force and workshop, as well as an ASEAN General Fisheries Policy.

It includes promoting a green economy and tackling climate change as well as reinforcing human security through the launching of an ASEAN Centre on Active Ageing and Innovation and an ASEAN Training Centre for Social Work and Social Human Welfare in Thailand.

It also includes building human capital through an international conference with the World Bank and other international partners next year as well as promoting greater awareness of the ASEAN identity through a Network of ASEAN Associations and the ASEAN Cultural Centre. The latter is especially important since 2019 will be the ASEAN Year of Culture.

Thus far, only matters pertaining to the two pillars of ASEAN are referred to, economic and social cultural. So you can see, continuity helps ensure sustainability. But for all that matters, sustainable harmony and peace sustainability are certainly most desirable.

As we get ready to start advancing partnership for sustainability in 2019, I am reminded by the last few words of the Bangkok Declaration, which states that the collective aspiration of ASEAN, even as early as in 1967, is "to secure for their peoples and for posterity the blessings of peace, freedom and prosperity". It is therefore incumbent on us, the generation of today, to help realize them all for the benefit of our future generation.

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Creativity, Complementarities and Continuity, will be important principles to help ASEAN in "**Advancing Partnership for Sustainability**", at a time of greater promise in our Community-building as well as a time of change and uncertainty in our world.

These remarks here this morning in 2018 is by no means meant to be part of a mini-series in the set of "what" in the 3 sets of 3Cs of 1967 to 2018. Next to come in 2019 is the continuity of "why" and "how to" in realizing the Thai theme of SOT or the "Sustainability of Things." Please stay tuned.

Thank you.
