

ASEAN's 50th Anniversary and Cambodia's Common Journey

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ASEAN @50

Cambodia jointly cherishes with all the ten members of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) as we are celebrating the group's 50th anniversary this year.

This regional bloc has come a long way since its foundation in 1967 weathering economic and security storms and challenges. Currently, ASEAN is being looked upon as one of the most successful regionalism models and it is taking a center stage in shaping agenda for peace and prosperity in the region and beyond. ASEAN shows how integration becomes plausible despite differences in background, culture and stages of development.

Following half a century of evolution of open regionalism, the establishment of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) at the end of 2015 was seen as one of the greatest achievements that ASEAN has been undertaking. The AEC Blueprint 2025 provides broad directions and strategic measures towards achieving a highly integrated community along with other principal documents namely the ASEAN Community Vision 2025, the ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC) Blueprint 2025 and the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) Blueprint 2025.

If we think of ASEAN as a single country, today, it is a global economic and trade powerhouse, ranking sixth worldwide in terms of its combined GDP. In 2015, ASEAN's total trade ranked fourth after China, USA and Germany. In the same year, ASEAN attracted US\$121 billion or 7% of total global foreign direct investment inflows.

Politically, ASEAN is a magnet for regional architectures.

ASEAN has initiated and carefully nurtured many crucial regional architectures that have kept the region stable and prosperous, namely the ASEAN Free Trade Area, ASEAN Regional Forum, ASEAN Plus Three, East Asia Summit, and the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus (ADMM Plus).

Countries within and beyond the region highly regard the ASEAN-led fora as credible platforms to address common concerns and challenges. ASEAN's approach of seeking dialogue, consultation and engagement has served the region well. Core regional instruments like the Treaty of Amity and Co-operation in Southeast Asia (TAC) and the Declaration on Conduct of Parties in the Southeast China Sea (DOC), which was adopted in 2002 in Phnom Penh, among others, have been widely recognised as guidelines for inter-state relations.

Gradually, Dialogue Partnerships have been established with Australia, Canada, China, the EU, India, Japan, the Republic of Korea, New Zealand, the Russian Federation, the United States and the United Nations. To date, 35 countries, including all ASEAN member states, are High Contracting Parties to the TAC. 87 sovereign states

and one regional organization have accredited their ambassadors to ASEAN. Interest from countries outside the region and other regional organizations in Asia, Africa and Latin America to forge cooperation with ASEAN continues to grow.

As the region is increasingly integrated, ASEAN has also been instrumental in addressing non-traditional security challenges such as climate change, pandemics, natural disasters, trans-national crimes in various forms and protection of rights of migrant workers, etc.

Cambodia's Common Journey

Cambodia, as the latest member of ASEAN, joined the group on 30 April 1999. It is our pride to be part of the community and to build this community together in the later half of the group's history.

Integration into international community has always been the interest of Cambodia's foreign policy and national development strategy following long-term suffering from civil war, international isolation and economic embargo.

In bidding for membership, ASEAN was attractive for Cambodia in terms of joint commitments and collective responsibility for peace, stability and prosperity based on the principles of respecting independence, sovereignty, not interfering in other countries' internal affairs and equal treatment without impositions. ASEAN works with consensus, whether the country is rich or poor, big or small, and every member has one voice equally.

On top of the above principles, economic and diplomatic integration were also among other decisive factors.

We have benefited a lot from this vibrant and increasingly integrated community, where flows of goods, capital and peoples are being constantly facilitated and improved. ASEAN has come thus far under a consensus-based community building through the regional institutional building with open-end evolutionary approach which allows flexibility and room for members' collective adaptation toward common goals.

With enhanced hard and soft connectivity, flow of people is one of the simplest examples of integration. For instance, back in 2008, Cambodia received only half a million visitors from ASEAN member states, or 25% of total inflow visitors, but this number reached 2.1 million in 2016 accounting almost half of total visitors. It was a significant four-fold increase.

Internally, ASEAN in itself is playing both the roles of supply and demand factors. To put into perspective, in 2016, intra-ASEAN trade constituted 23.48% of total trade and remained as the largest market for ASEAN. At 24.76%, intra-ASEAN was the second largest source of total FDI inflows to the region.

Externally, with a population of more than 600 million, ASEAN is seen as a strong single market and production base that is increasingly attractive and competitive and Cambodia has directly and indirectly benefitted from such strengths.

Apart from economic integration, Cambodia also received opportunities to play international role in setting agenda for peace and prosperity of the region. Within this role, Cambodia has contributed to further increase engagement with external partners that helps maintain ASEAN's centrality and keep ASEAN in the driver seat.

Cambodia has raised ASEAN's profile and led the region's endeavor in terms of mine action. The ASEAN Leaders' Statement on the Establishment of the ASEAN Regional Mine Action Centre (ARMAC) was adopted at the 21st ASEAN Summit, in 2012 in Phnom Penh. The ARMAC is now up and running following the inauguration of the Centre in May last year.

Cambodia undertook twice ASEAN chairmanship in 2002 and 2012. The historic document such as the DOC was adopted in Phnom Penh in 2002 with a lot of fanfare. Meanwhile, ASEAN has also been critically challenged and that has pushed us to strengthen our resilience so that we can stand firm on our strong commitment to the maintenance of peace and stability.

Cambodia has always been consistent on our neutrality because it is our constitutionally inherent policy and because we believe that peace that ASEAN has developed so far can only be achieved through trust, dialogue and consultation and not through polarization or worse still agitation over the already heated tension.

The COC framework is also the result from the so-called "Bali-Siem Reap Spirit" under which all concerned parties agreed to exercise flexibility and to put only agreed elements in the draft framework following the meetings in Bali and Siem Reap in early 2017.

Cambodia believes that it is the interest for all that ASEAN being stable and peaceful, the ASEAN that can maintain a level of trust and well-balanced distance among various regional powers that are relying on ASEAN's regional architecture for region-wide peace and stability.

Cambodia will continue to join hands with all ASEAN member states in the common endeavor to strengthen the community that is highly integrated, resilient, inclusive, people-oriented and people-centered for the sake of peace and prosperity of our region and the world at large.

Indeed, such endeavor does not belong to the government alone. Everyone has a stake in shaping ASEAN's future. How much we could determine our potentials from the integrated ASEAN, it is us to decide. It is for all of us to engage and to take a more active role in setting agenda for ASEAN. Let us consciously grow with ASEAN that is made by and for all of us.
