

**ASEAN Secretariat Symposium on  
Methods of Stakeholder Involvement in Regional Organizations**

**Organized by the ASEAN Secretariat and the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung of Germany**

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**Welcome Address by Dr Surin Pitsuwan, Secretary-General of ASEAN**

As a people we have the power to manage our lives and community. In modern communities even the power of one individual can be considerable. When people realize they have a role in the governance of their own communities, big and small, it is the beginning of a revolution for all of us to improve our lives. Just now, our moderator, Mechai Viravaidya gave us an account on how he has created the awareness of why we need to improve our lives.

Why do we need to hold this Symposium on the Methods of Stakeholder Involvement in Regional Organizations? This is an important question. We, the people of ASEAN, are now living under a new social contract -- the ASEAN Charter. The political philosopher, Jacques Rousseau introduced the idea of the social contract which is a contract explaining our political rights.

Our obligation is to support the 10 governments who signed the ASEAN Charter on behalf of 582 million people and ratified it to commit to this social contract. With the ASEAN Charter, we will soon be a rules based organization and there are therefore legal obligations that the governments have to comply with. If we don't there will be damage done.

We have this social contract called the ASEAN Charter, and we say we are a people-oriented organization. We will be rules based and will be building an ASEAN Community by 2015 based on 3 community pillars. But the task of building the Community is not only the job of our governments: the governments alone cannot do it. Senior officials and diplomats in the 10 governments cannot accomplish the task of Community-building by 2015 alone. ASEC alone cannot achieve it. However, ASEC, member state officials and the people of ASEAN can collectively achieve this.

There must be a sense of ownership, participation, and the awareness that we, as a collectivity of individuals own the process and can shape this Community in our own image. We must strive to create a Community of caring and sharing societies, but without the participation of people, we will not make it. We will need the contributions of people from all walks of life as well as the support of ASEAN's dialogue partners.

We should also acknowledge the great diversity among us: some of us are more comfortable with engaging with a wider spectrum of players, while others will prefer tighter forms of engagement. Some want to keep the process more effective, others more controlled. This is

understandable and we have to respect this caution as much as we expect understanding and support of the new methods of engagement.

As a result of this diversity, we will have to embark on a new journey on a new road. We need to learn to communicate and reach out to one another. We also need to know that there is a new generation which is used to different ways of doing things. We need to monitor compliance on every agreement. As Secretary-General of ASEAN, I submit a periodic scorecard to the ASEAN Leaders, on which ASEAN Member States have succeeded, and on who is falling behind. We are intrusive in a friendly way. That is a new way of communicating within our ASEAN family.

I recall that the idea to engage civil society organizations is as old as the AFTA. In 1992, the Working Group on the Human Rights Mechanism was set up, and since then, it has been going around working on the issue and in 1997, it decided it should start work on it. The idea, the seed of awareness that we need to engage with ASEAN was planted then. The question is: how do we manage this relationship incrementally in a civil and civilized way, to pay attention to it in a way that is manageable? How do we manage the hostility, suspicion and mistrust? If there is any antagonism, it is because each of us lacks the full understanding of the relationship rather than the ideological opposition to the idea of engagement.

We have asked our friend the Friedrich Ebert-Stiftung (FES), a political foundation, whose political tradition is social democratic, with experience in engaging the wider spectrum of the community, to help us. The FES has a wealth of experience, with offices located around the world -- even more offices than in the ASEAN Member States. We have asked the FES to bring the experts from other parts of the world to share their experiences on state-civil society engagement. We need to learn and share and be open minded about this new experience. It is only right that we ask who is capable, ready and willing.

We have asked the experts from other regional organizations to share their experiences of engagement and involvement of multiple stakeholders because our goal is to build a compassionate and sharing community in ASEAN. How do we create that community if we don't involve all stakeholders in the discussion? In Europe, they have the "social dialogue", where employers and employees sit with officials in the dialogue to design and define policy that would help with the management of social relations. The International Labour Organization (ILO) also has a dialogue process. I have asked my deputy Dato' Misran Karmain and officials from the ASEAN Secretariat to take part and understand these processes.

We cannot underestimate this challenge of how to make ASEAN a people-oriented organization, as indicated in the Preamble, Purposes and Principles of the ASEAN Charter. That is a sacred obligation for all of us. This is also an important assignment from the 15<sup>th</sup> Summit in Hua Hin, Thailand. We have the directives of the ASEAN Leaders.

On the issue of engaging with ASEAN's stakeholders, the 15th ASEAN Summit Joint Chairman's Statement on engaging with stakeholders states, "We fully recognized that the successful building of an ASEAN Community that is truly people-oriented by 2015 requires the

cooperation and contribution of all sectors of ASEAN society and the participation of ASEAN peoples in all aspects of community-building. We welcomed the fruitful meetings between ASEAN Leaders and representatives from the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly (AIPA), ASEAN Youths, ASEAN Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and the ASEAN Business Advisory Council (ABAC).”

“We emphasized the important role of ASEAN parliamentarians in promoting harmonization of laws to facilitate community-building and the development of a rules-based ASEAN community. We recognized the importance of ASEAN youths as the potential leaders of tomorrow in further reinforcing the ASEAN Community. We acknowledged the continuing contribution of CSOs in ensuring the close engagement of peoples in the community-building process. We stressed the contribution of the private and business sector in forging a dynamic and competitive ASEAN community. We looked forward to similar engagements with these stakeholder groups in the future and encouraged continued close cooperation at all levels between governments and all sectors of society in the community-building process. We entrusted the Secretary-General of ASEAN to help coordinate the meetings with the view to ensure the smooth conduct and concrete outcome of such meetings.”

We will need this knowledge from next year until 2015, when an ASEAN Community of compassionate society will be created. Let’s deal with our preconceptions and transformation our thinking. This ASEAN is a new ASEAN. ASEAN is expected to behave as an international organization. Thirty countries outside ASEAN have appointed Ambassadors to ASEAN. After the US sets up its office in Jakarta, I expect China, Japan, Korea, Australia, New Zealand, India, etc, will also establish their missions. People will take us very seriously, because they believe that our Community is within sight. ASEAN will be taken seriously, so we have to take ourselves, our Charter and the wisdom of our Leaders seriously. We will make this region more stable and prosperous.

The ASEAN Leaders have entrusted the Secretary-General of ASEAN to coordinate this engagement. The ASEAN Secretariat has been tasked to do this job, and we encourage people to take their lives into their hands. We are part of the 6 billion people on this planet who want to put their own stamp on the community and for their families. We have asked experts to come to this Symposium to share their experiences with us and I hope all of you – the ASEAN officials, my Secretariat staff and civil society organizations - will give your full attention and focus for the next 3 days to the Symposium.

Thank you.

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