

Overview

ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS

ESTABLISHMENT

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations or ASEAN was established on 8 August 1967 in Bangkok by the five original Member Countries, namely, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand. Brunei Darussalam joined on 8 January 1984, Vietnam on 28 July 1995, Lao PDR and Myanmar on 23 July 1997, and Cambodia on 30 April 1999.

The ASEAN region has a population of about 500 million, a total area of 4.5 million square kilometers, a combined gross domestic product of almost US\$ 700 billion, and a total trade of about US\$ 850 billion.

OBJECTIVES

The ASEAN Declaration states that the aims and purposes of the Association are: (1) to accelerate economic growth, social progress and cultural development in the region and (2) to promote regional peace and stability through abiding respect for justice and the rule of law in the relationship among countries in the region and adherence to the principles of the United Nations Charter.

The ASEAN Vision 2020, adopted by the ASEAN Leaders on the 30th Anniversary of ASEAN, agreed on a shared vision of ASEAN as a concert of Southeast Asian nations, outward looking, living in peace, stability and prosperity, bonded together in partnership in dynamic development and in a community of caring societies.

In 2003, the ASEAN Leaders resolved that an ASEAN Community shall be established comprising three pillars, namely, ASEAN Security Community, ASEAN Economic Community and ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community.

FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES

ASEAN Member Countries have adopted the following fundamental principles in their relations with one another, as contained in the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC):

- mutual respect for the independence, sovereignty, equality, territorial integrity, and national identity of all nations;
- the right of every State to lead its national existence free from external interference, subversion or coercion;
- non-interference in the internal affairs of one another;
- settlement of differences or disputes by peaceful manner;
- renunciation of the threat or use of force; and
- effective cooperation among themselves.

ASEAN SECURITY COMMUNITY

Through political dialogue and confidence building, no tension has escalated into armed confrontation among ASEAN Member Countries since its establishment more than three decades ago.

To build on what has been constructed over the years in the field of political and security cooperation, the ASEAN Leaders have agreed to establish the ASEAN Security Community (ASC). The ASC shall aim to ensure that countries in the region live at peace with one another and with the world in a just, democratic and harmonious environment.

The members of the Community pledge to rely exclusively on peaceful processes in the settlement of intra-regional differences and regard their security as fundamentally linked to one another and bound by geographic location, common vision and objectives. It has the following components: political development; shaping and sharing of norms; conflict prevention; conflict resolution; post-conflict peace building; and implementing mechanisms. It will be built on the strong foundation of ASEAN processes, principles, agreements, and structures, which evolved over the years and are contained in the following major political agreements:

- ASEAN Declaration, Bangkok, 8 August 1967;
- Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality Declaration, Kuala Lumpur, 27 November 1971;
- Declaration of ASEAN Concord, Bali, 24 February 1976;
- Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia, Bali, 24 February 1976;
- ASEAN Declaration on the South China Sea, Manila, 22 July 1992;
- Treaty on the Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone, Bangkok, 15 December 1997;
- ASEAN Vision 2020, Kuala Lumpur, 15 December 1997; and
- Declaration of ASEAN Concord II, Bali, 7 October 2003.

In recognition of security interdependence in the Asia-Pacific region, ASEAN established the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) in 1994. The ARF's agenda aims to evolve in three broad stages, namely the promotion of confidence building, development of preventive diplomacy and elaboration of approaches to conflicts.

The present participants in the ARF include: Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Canada, China, European Union, India, Indonesia, Japan, Democratic Republic of Korea, Republic of Korea (ROK), Lao PDR, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar, New Zealand, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, the Russian Federation, Singapore, Thailand, the United States, and Viet Nam.

The ARF discusses major regional security issues in the region, including the relationship amongst the major powers, non-proliferation, counter-terrorism, transnational crime, South China Sea and the Korean Peninsula, among others.

ASEAN ECONOMIC COMMUNITY

The ASEAN Economic Community shall be the end-goal of economic integration measures as outlined in the ASEAN Vision 2020. Its goal is to create a stable, prosperous and highly competitive ASEAN economic region in which there is a free flow of goods, services, investment and a freer flow of capital, equitable economic development and reduced poverty and socio-economic disparities in year 2020.

The ASEAN Economic Community shall establish ASEAN as a single market and production base, turning the diversity that characterises the region into opportunities for business complementation and making the ASEAN a more dynamic and stronger segment of the global supply chain. ASEAN's strategy shall consist of the integration of ASEAN and enhancing ASEAN's economic competitiveness.

In moving towards the ASEAN Economic Community, ASEAN has agreed on the following:

- institute new mechanisms and measures to strengthen the implementation of its existing economic initiatives including the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA), ASEAN Framework Agreement on Services (AFAS) and ASEAN Investment Area (AIA);
- accelerate regional integration in the following priority sectors by 2010: air travel, agro-based products, automotives, e-commerce, electronics, fisheries, healthcare, rubber-based products, textiles and apparels, tourism, and wood-based products.
- facilitate movement of business persons, skilled labour and talents; and

- strengthen the institutional mechanisms of ASEAN, including the improvement of the existing ASEAN Dispute Settlement Mechanism to ensure expeditious and legally-binding resolution of any economic disputes.

Launched in 1992, the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) is now in place. It aims to promote the region's competitive advantage as a single production unit. The elimination of tariff and non-tariff barriers among Member Countries is expected to promote greater economic efficiency, productivity, and competitiveness.

As of 1 January 2005, tariffs on almost 99 percent of the products in the Inclusion List of the ASEAN-6 (Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand) have been reduced to no more than 5 percent. More than 60 percent of these products have zero tariffs. The average tariff for ASEAN-6 has been brought down from more than 12 percent when AFTA started to 2 percent today. For the newer Member Countries, namely, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Viet Nam (CLMV), tariffs on about 81 percent of their Inclusion List have been brought down to within the 0-5 percent range.

Other major integration-related economic activities of ASEAN include the following:

- Roadmap for Financial and Monetary Integration of ASEAN in four areas, namely, capital market development, capital account liberalisation, liberalisation of financial services and currency cooperation;
- trans-ASEAN transportation network consisting of major inter-state highway and railway networks, including the Singapore to Kunming Rail-Link, principal ports, and sea lanes for maritime traffic, inland waterway transport, and major civil aviation links;
- Roadmap for Integration of Air Travel Sector;
- interoperability and interconnectivity of national telecommunications equipment and services, including the ASEAN Telecommunications Regulators Council Sectoral Mutual Recognition Arrangement (ATRC-MRA) on Conformity Assessment for Telecommunications Equipment;
- trans-ASEAN energy networks, which consist of the ASEAN Power Grid and the Trans-ASEAN Gas Pipeline Projects;
- Initiative for ASEAN Integration (IAI) focusing on infrastructure, human resource development, information and communications technology, and regional economic integration primarily in the CLMV countries;
- Visit ASEAN Campaign and the private sector-led ASEAN Hip-Hop Pass to promote intra-ASEAN tourism; and
- Agreement on the ASEAN Food Security Reserve.

ASEAN SOCIO-CULTURAL COMMUNITY

The ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community, in consonance with the goal set by ASEAN Vision 2020, envisages a Southeast Asia bonded together in partnership as a community of caring societies and founded on a common regional identity.

The Community shall foster cooperation in social development aimed at raising the standard of living of disadvantaged groups and the rural population, and shall seek the active involvement of all sectors of society, in particular women, youth, and local communities.

ASEAN shall ensure that its work force shall be prepared for, and benefit from, economic integration by investing more resources for basic and higher education, training, science and technology development, job creation, and social protection.

ASEAN shall further intensify cooperation in the area of public health, including in the prevention and control of infectious and communicable diseases.

The development and enhancement of human resources is a key strategy for employment generation, alleviating poverty and socio-economic disparities, and ensuring economic growth with equity.

Among the on-going activities of ASEAN in this area include the following:

- ASEAN Work Programme for Social Welfare, Family, and Population;
- ASEAN Work Programme on HIV/AIDS;
- ASEAN Work Programme on Community-Based Care for the Elderly;
- ASEAN Occupational Safety and Health Network;
- ASEAN Work Programme on Preparing ASEAN Youth for Sustainable Employment and Other Challenges of Globalisation;
- ASEAN University Network (AUN) promoting collaboration among seventeen member universities ASEAN;
- ASEAN Students Exchange Programme, Youth Cultural Forum, and the ASEAN Young Speakers Forum;
- The Annual ASEAN Culture Week, ASEAN Youth Camp and ASEAN Quiz;
- ASEAN Media Exchange Programme; and
- Framework for Environmentally Sustainable Cities (ESC) and ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution.

EXTERNAL RELATIONS

The ASEAN Vision 2020 affirmed an outward-looking ASEAN playing a pivotal role in the international community and advancing ASEAN's common interests.

Building on the Joint Statement on East Asia Cooperation of 1999, cooperation between the Southeast and Northeast Asian countries has accelerated with the holding of an annual summit among the leaders of ASEAN, China, Japan, and the Republic of Korea (ROK) within the ASEAN Plus Three process.

ASEAN Plus Three relations continue to expand and deepen in the areas of security dialogue and cooperation, transnational crime, trade and investment, environment, finance and monetary, agriculture and forestry, energy, tourism, health, labour, culture and the arts, science and technology, information and communication technology, social welfare and development, youth, and rural development and poverty eradication. There are now thirteen ministerial-level meetings under the ASEAN Plus Three process.

Bilateral trading arrangements have been or are being forged between ASEAN Member Countries and China, Japan, and the ROK. These arrangements will serve as the building blocks of an East Asian Free Trade Area as a long term goal.

ASEAN continues to develop cooperative relations with its Dialogue Partners, namely, Australia, Canada, China, the European Union, India, Japan, the ROK, New Zealand, the Russian Federation, the United States of America, and the United Nations Development Programme. ASEAN also promotes cooperation with Pakistan in some areas of mutual interest.

Consistent with its resolve to enhance cooperation with other developing regions, ASEAN maintains contact with other inter-governmental organisations, namely, the Economic Cooperation Organisation, the Gulf Cooperation Council, the Rio Group, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, the South Pacific Forum, and through the recently established Asian-African Sub-Regional Organisation Conference.

Most ASEAN Member Countries also participate actively in the activities of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), and the East Asia-Latin America Forum (EALAF).

STRUCTURES AND MECHANISMS

The highest decision-making organ of ASEAN is the Meeting of the ASEAN Heads of State and Government. The ASEAN Summit is convened every year. The ASEAN Ministerial Meeting (Foreign Ministers) is held annually.

Ministerial meetings on the following sectors are also held regularly: agriculture and forestry, economics (trade), energy, environment, finance, health, information, investment, labour, law, regional haze, rural development and poverty alleviation, science and technology, social welfare, telecommunications, transnational crime, transportation, tourism, youth. Supporting these ministerial bodies are committees of senior officials, technical working groups and task forces.

To support the conduct of ASEAN's external relations, ASEAN has established committees composed of heads of diplomatic missions in the following capitals: Beijing, Berlin, Brussels, Canberra, Geneva, Islamabad, London, Moscow, New Delhi, New York, Ottawa, Paris, Riyadh, Seoul, Tokyo, Washington D.C. and Wellington.

The Secretary-General of ASEAN is appointed on merit and accorded ministerial status. The Secretary-General of ASEAN, who has a five-year term, is mandated to initiate, advise, coordinate, and implement ASEAN activities. The members of the professional staff of the ASEAN Secretariat are appointed on the principle of open recruitment and region-wide competition.

ASEAN has several specialized bodies and arrangements promoting inter-governmental cooperation in various fields including the following: ASEAN Agricultural Development Planning Centre, ASEAN-EC Management Centre, ASEAN Centre for Energy, ASEAN Earthquake Information Centre, ASEAN Foundation, ASEAN Poultry Research and Training Centre, ASEAN Regional Centre for Biodiversity Conservation, ASEAN Rural Youth Development Centre, ASEAN Specialized Meteorological Centre, ASEAN Timber Technology Centre, ASEAN Tourism Information Centre, and the ASEAN University Network.

In addition, ASEAN promotes dialogue and consultations with professional and business organisations with related aims and purposes, such as the ASEAN-Chambers of Commerce and Industry, ASEAN Business Forum, ASEAN Tourism Association, ASEAN Council on Petroleum, ASEAN Ports Association, Federation of ASEAN Shipowners, ASEAN Confederation of Employers, ASEAN Fisheries Federation, ASEAN Vegetable Oils Club, ASEAN Intellectual Property Association, and the ASEAN-Institutes for Strategic and International Studies. Furthermore, there are 58 Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), which have formal affiliations with ASEAN.