

**Opening Plenary Remarks by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong at the
ASEAN Summit
Singapore, 20 November 2007**

Your Majesty,

Excellencies,

INTRODUCTION – A NEW ASEAN

At 40, ASEAN can look back with pride at the peace and stability that it has brought to a complex and diverse region. We have come a long way since the Bangkok Declaration in 1967. Cooperation within the region now spans many fields. ASEAN is recognised as a regional player with substance, and has become an indispensable part of the evolving regional architecture. But we cannot be satisfied with what we have achieved. The regional landscape is dramatically changing. New economies like China and India are rapidly emerging on the global stage. Globalisation has made nations much more dependent on one another, and on a stable regional order. ASEAN is not immune to these wider forces. For ASEAN to stay relevant, and to respond to the new strategic environment, it must transform itself into a more effective grouping. We need a more coherent institutional framework to organise our growing scope of activities. We also need a different way of thinking about ASEAN. While national interests remain paramount, they must be increasingly balanced with regional and international interests. ASEAN priorities must feature more prominently on our respective national agendas.

DEEPENING INTEGRATION

To make ASEAN strong and relevant, we must accelerate and deepen regional integration. The ASEAN Charter is a crucial step in this process. The Charter will qualitatively change the way we approach and think about ASEAN. It will make ASEAN into a more effective and cohesive organisation, with a rules-based governing framework, and streamlined decision-making processes. All this will pave the way for closer integration in the years ahead.

The Charter also crystallises our aspirations to be a strong and cohesive ASEAN Community, supported by three pillars – economic, social and security. Today we will be adopting the Blueprint for the ASEAN Economic Community, which sets out specific timelines and targets for economic integration measures that will make ASEAN more competitive as a region. Security and Socio-Cultural blueprints are similarly being developed. These efforts will ensure a balanced ASEAN, progressing evenly on all three fronts.

ASEAN integration is a constant work-in-progress, and what we have achieved so far is surely far from the ideal state. The signing of the Charter later today therefore is just the beginning of a longer, continuing journey that all ASEAN members must take. In particular, we must endeavour to ratify the Charter quickly, so that it enters into force by the next Summit in Bangkok. ASEAN must gradually adapt to a culture of compliance and implementation. Only then can we make sustained progress and forge ahead as a grouping.

This is why integration is a strategic priority for ASEAN. Last night, the ASEAN Leaders had a full and open discussion on the situation in Myanmar. As ASEAN Chair, Singapore put out a statement to clarify ASEAN's role and stand. ASEAN Leaders will strive to prevent the Myanmar issue from obstructing our efforts to deepen integration and build an ASEAN Community.

PLAYING A BIGGER ROLE

Integration is just not an end in itself, but also a means by which ASEAN expands its economic and political space. A more integrated ASEAN will be in a stronger position to engage external partners, and enhance our links to the major economies in the region and beyond. By presenting ourselves coherently, we can fully exploit the opportunities opening up around us, and play a bigger role in regional affairs. At the same time, we must also do our part as responsible stakeholders of the international community, and respond to pressing issues of global concern.

This is why we will be discussing the inter-related issues of "Energy, Environment, Climate Change and Sustainable Development" at this Summit. ASEAN cannot ignore the increasingly obvious and worrying signs of climate change, which affect our countries directly, and the urgent need to address and mitigate its adverse effects. As a start, we will be signing two environment-related Declarations later today. The first maps out initiatives and measures

that ASEAN will undertake to address regional environmental challenges, such as pollution and conservation. The second reaffirms our support for the UNFCCC process, and in particular for the meeting in Bali in a fortnight's time, chaired by Indonesia, which will set out the basis for international negotiations towards a more effective post-2012 agreement.

CONCLUSION

We gather here today with high hopes and aspirations. There is much work to be done, and the road ahead will not be easy. But I am confident that every member around the table shares the vision for a new ASEAN, and the commitment to make this vision a reality. I look forward to productive discussions with my colleagues on how we can work together to build a vibrant ASEAN Community, to improve the lives of our people, and secure a brighter future for our region.