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**RETHINKING ASEAN AND ITS RESPONSES
TO A CHANGING ASIA-PACIFIC**

by

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Distinguished Luncheon Address:

Rethinking ASEAN and its Responses to a Changing Asia-Pacific

The 27th Asia Pacific Roundtable

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Address by

YB Pehin Orang Kaya Pekerma Dewa

Dato Seri Setia Lim Jock Seng

Second Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade

Brunei Darussalam

Ladies and Gentlemen. Good afternoon,

It's nice to see you all again and I would like to thank ISIS-Malaysia, in particular Tan Sri Dato' Mohamed Jawhar and Dato' Dr Mahani for inviting me to share my thoughts at this annual Roundtable. I wish to commend ISIS-Malaysia for successfully organizing this annual gathering of policy makers and academics.

Over the years, ASEAN has evolved into a robust regional organization, able to effectively respond to challenges on behalf of its peoples.

ASEAN has come a long way in its 46-year history. Before its formation in August 1967, Southeast Asia was deeply and severely fractured in many ways. The region faced many challenges. Domestic upheavals, confrontation with one another, territorial disputes among neighbours, security threats from insurgents and being caught up in the big power rivalries.

It was in these uncompromising circumstances that the five founding members decided to raise above their differences, prevent their disputes from erupting into conflict and strengthen relations and cooperation among neighbours. They were also determined to free the ASEAN region from being dragged into the big powers conflict.

Although at the time of its establishment, ASEAN deliberately declared its cooperation on economic, social and cultural matters, member states were grouping together more for political and security objectives. It was only after ten years of its formation, at the first ASEAN Summit in Bali, Indonesia, in 1976 that 'political and security' issues were officially included as part of the ASEAN cooperation.

In its early years, ASEAN also devised a few formal instruments for the advancement of peace and stability in the region. This included the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia which provides the code of conduct governing inter-states relations in the region.

Eventually the three pillars of ASEAN Cooperation evolved political/security, economic, socio/cultural' and the idea of an ASEAN community to be realized by 2015 became the focus of ASEAN.

ASEAN also introduced many institutions along the way with its dialogue partners; The 10 Plus 1, 10 Plus 3, ARF, FTA's and eight years ago the Leaders-led East Asia Summit. So, ASEAN became the important central focus for the creation of many of the architecture in the Asia Pacific, be it Economic or Political Security matters.

The question now is how effective is ASEAN and whether it has the capacity in responding to the profound regional and international developments affecting the region?

Is the ASEAN way of 'consensus building' adequate? How can ASEAN preserve its central role in the ever changing architecture of the Asia Pacific region?

These two questions are important and I will attempt to answer these fundamental questions.

ASEAN's effectiveness as a regional organization is often measured in terms of its ability to address challenges arising out of the prevailing strategic environment. These included managing power shifts amongst major powers as well as other developments which have the potential to affect regional peace, stability and prosperity.

I do not doubt that ASEAN will continue to play a significant role in contributing to peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific region.

ASEAN's relations with its Dialogue Partners are essential and have been progressing well. The creation of 10+1 processes, the ASEAN + 3 framework, ARF and East Asia Summit (EAS) have helped promote peace and stability to the region. They provide frameworks for strategic discussions and productive exchange of views on many issues affecting the region.

ASEAN is also aware it needs to manage its many ASEAN led processes. One example is the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). It has played an important role in confidencebuilding as well as the enhancement of political and security cooperation in the AsiaPacific region. I certainly believe there is further room for the ARF in moving forward on preventive diplomacy.

ASEAN also realizes the importance of enhancing the region's competitiveness and ensure that our work will be both beneficial and practical to our business community.

The very process of integrating the ASEAN economy serves to strengthen the fabric of peace by raising the stake of each ASEAN member in the prosperity of all. ASEAN has accelerated AFTA, liberalized trade in services and created investment and working towards the realization of our ASEAN economic community by 2015 and it also has FTA's with many of its dialogue partners.

Today, we are working on the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) aimed at broadening and deepening ASEAN's existing free trade arrangement with its partners. It is potentially one of the world's largest trade pacts and another building block to further integrate ASEAN members into the global economy.

ASEAN has an abundance of programmes and plan of actions. Institutionally, it is also imperative for ASEAN to have an effective and strong Secretariat to help assist in implementation.

A Secretariat with sufficient resources and expertise, a Secretariat that can provide ideas, concepts and research capacity, and a Secretariat that can provide input to some of our economic and strategic issues.

In order to be effective and to preserve its central role, ASEAN needs to be:-

- a. Relevant in terms of ideas, addressing issues of the day and in shaping its agenda at its various meetings;

- b. It must be innovative and be able to look at many aspects of any issue;
- c. It must be inclusive so that all members feel they are not left out. Thus consultation is very important;
- d. It must be seen to be fair and even handed especially when dealing with many big powers;
- a. Implementation of the decisions reached at meetings are important so that members can see results;
- e. In order to follow this, an efficient Secretariat with adequate resources have to be established; and
- f. On top of all these, ASEAN needs to be dynamic and must be always at the forefront of the regional issues of the day be it, disaster management, climate change, pandemics or the bigger and longer term issues.

Before ending, I would like to share my view on 'the ASEAN way' of consensus-building. Is this method of operation still valid? Can it be effective in the ever fast changing landscape of the 21st Century?

My answer is yes but it must also be accompanied by some decision-making process where answers are needed quickly, depending on the circumstances and situation and the matter at hand.

The consensus-building or 'ASEAN way' may be laborious but it teaches us 'tolerance' in trying to understand each others' position. In the end 'meetings' are not debating chambers and we are not scoring points but seeking views and try to build a consensus. It is more difficult but more lasting. From my own experience, there are lots of frustrations but at the end of the day one comes out with the habit of 'give and take'.

We do not call each other 'a spade spade' there is a question of saving face. Maybe this is the 'ASEAN way'. So the path of 'Musyawarah'-to find a consensus in my view is still valid and useful and even fundamental in a world where distrust and misunderstanding exists and impedes cooperation in our 21st century world.

The last point I would like to make is that at the end of the day whatever we do as ASEAN and with our partners, it must have relevance to our people, it must benefit them.

ASEAN also sees the need to translate ASEAN's achievements and success into practical benefits for its people, by addressing real issues faced by them such as poverty and creating employment.

There is also greater consciousness of involving our people deeply in the community building process. I believe it is crucial for ASEAN to continue to promote understanding and awareness of ASEAN as well as instilling the culture of peace and consultations among our young generation.

The older generation experienced the struggle to preserve independence, maintain national unity against communist insurgents and against the divisive pull of different powers.

However, the younger generations have no memories of past conflicts. They may take the last 46 years of ASEAN peace and prosperity as a normal course of events. It is therefore important that they learn to value ASEAN's relations and goodwill and actively participate in the ASEAN community building efforts. This is to make our peoples feel that they are truly citizens of ASEAN.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

ASEAN's continued success as a dynamic regional organization lies in its pragmatism in adapting to the changing regional and international environment whilst pursuing its common goal of community-building.

In my view, it requires a great deal of hard work and consultations with its dialogue partners and I believe ASEAN is doing so. ASEAN member states are committed to work together and its dialogue partners through goodwill to maintain peace, stability and prosperity in the region for all our people.

Thank you.