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Statement

By

H.E. Mr. Abhisit Vejjajiva

Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Thailand

At the Opening Ceremony of the

42nd ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting

20 July 2009, Sheraton Grande Laguna, Phuket

**Your Royal Highness,
Ministers,
The Secretary-General of ASEAN,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

1. It is indeed my great pleasure to welcome all of you to the 42nd ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting (AMM) and to the island of Phuket, the "Pearl of the Andaman Sea."
2. We gather here today in a city and province with a rich history – a city that has grown from a mining centre into a world famous tourism destination; a province that bravely weathered the devastation of the Tsunami of 2004 and has revitalised itself with the dynamic local economy that we see today. It would therefore be appropriate if we all congratulate the people of Phuket for their resilience and for their success, and to thank them for their warm hospitality.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

3. ASEAN and Southeast Asia likewise went through similar transformations throughout its forty-two year history. We were previously a region marked by ideological divide. But we are now a Community of ten nations united with a common purpose.



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4. As a region, we have faced many challenges – from being one of the arenas of the Cold War to where the 1997 financial crisis began; and from the Tsunami to SARS, the avian flu and so on.

5. But each time and as a group, we have been able to overcome those challenges; we have proven our resilience time and again and are on our way to building a Community that will be more competitive, relevant and caring for our peoples.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

(Thailand's ASEAN Chairmanship – Goals Set, Progress Made)

6. Our coming together as a Community of diverse nations and peoples for a better future defines the essence of our mission during Thailand's Chairmanship of ASEAN.

7. When Thailand assumed the **Chairmanship** last July, we set out **three important goals to achieve**. Through joint effort and collective action, we are attaining them.

8. **First**, we are **implementing** the **ASEAN Charter** and making our **Community more rules-based**.

9. To this end, we are creating dispute settlement mechanisms under the Charter; developing new ASEAN organs including the Committee of Permanent Representatives; setting in motion the various Community Councils that will drive our Community-building forward under the Cha-am Hua Hin Roadmap for an ASEAN Community.

10. **Second**, we are **building an ASEAN that is more people-oriented** – an ASEAN that is truly for the peoples.

11. In Cha-am Hua Hin, the ASEAN Leaders and I met with representatives of the private sector, youth, parliamentarians and civil society. This is part of a broader effort to engage with all sectors of society at all levels and to build a greater sense of ASEAN citizenry by involving people in decision-making within ASEAN.



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12. To protect our peoples, we are also “on track and on time” to launch an ASEAN human rights body at the upcoming Summit in October. I am pleased to learn that the draft Terms of Reference of the ASEAN human rights body has been finalised by the ASEAN Foreign Ministers yesterday.

13. **Third**, we will **make ASEAN more effective in meeting the challenges** of our region and the world. In doing so, we will work with our friends and partners in the international community.

14. In the past year, ASEAN has already put in considerable collective efforts to ensure the human security and safeguard the welfare of the peoples of our region. In response to the global economic and financial crisis, we agreed, among other things, to multilateralise the Chiang Mai Initiative (CMI); to stand firm against protectionism; and to work closely with our friends in the international community, such as those in the G-20, to bring about global economic recovery. We responded swiftly to the crisis in a unified effort. The world is now closely watching ASEAN, pinning on us the hope that we will be a dynamic growth pole for the global economy in this time of crisis.

15. Food and energy security are expected to become key concerns once again when the world economy recovers. And we in ASEAN have been working to prepare for this eventuality. Our work on making the ASEAN Plus Three Emergency Rice Reserve a permanent mechanism in the region is a good example; and so is our work to strengthen energy cooperation for energy security and sustainability.

16. And in response to the outbreak of Influenza A (H1N1), ASEAN very quickly convened the ASEAN Plus Three Health Ministers’ Special Meeting. We should now seek to build on this by enhancing cooperation to produce affordable vaccines for Influenza A, in cooperation with the World Health Organization (WHO).

Ladies and Gentlemen,

(Looking to the Future)



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17. In October, Thailand will host the 15th ASEAN and Related Summits, where we expect concrete results in achieving the shared goals of our Community. And in December, we will pass on our Chairmanship to the next Chair, Vietnam.

18. ASEAN will continue to move forward towards the goal of becoming a Community by the year 2015. To this end, we should begin to think about what type of Community we want to see. And in a region as diverse as Southeast Asia, I am sure that our ideas will be varied. But I hope that, as we get to the year 2015, our ideas will converge.

19. In Thailand's view, the **ASEAN Community** should, first of all, be a "**Community of Action.**"

20. ASEAN must be able to act decisively and in a timely manner to address both internal and external threats and challenges to the security and welfare of its Member States and peoples. Effective action must replace extended deliberation. We must show to the world that ASEAN is ready to meet any challenge and is well-prepared to act decisively. We must continue to nurture a culture of concerted action in our organisation, which will help to reinforce ASEAN centrality.

21. For instance, if there is a major pandemic spreading across the region, our public health agencies must be able to set up quarantine and inspection measures, share information and laboratory results, mobilise volunteers and vaccines on a region-wide basis through common procedures and arrangements that can be quickly activated.

22. Or when there is an emergency somewhere within our region or even beyond and a request is made for assistance, ASEAN must be able to effectively respond as a group and in a timely manner.

23. Second, the ASEAN Community should be a "**Community of Connectivity.**"

24. This means goods and peoples, investment and initiatives, can travel obstacle-free throughout the region – from Sumatra to Luzon, from the Ayeyawady Delta to the Mekong Delta. A fully integrated ASEAN



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economy as a single market and production base must have such connectivity built into both its hardware and software.

25. On the hardware side, for example, the region-wide transportation linkages must be in place and user-friendly, whether they be the East-West or North-South economic corridors, maritime routes through the Malacca Strait, or air links across airports throughout the region.

26. On the software side, there should be harmonisation of relevant rules and regulations governing region-wide transportation, trade and investment. We must be visa-free within the region and offer an ASEAN Single Visa for those outside the region.

27. Only through a well-connected Community can we realise our full economic potentials as well as take maximum advantage of our strategic location linking the massive economies of South Asia on our West and Northeast Asia to our North.

28. Third, the ASEAN Community should be a “**Community of Peoples.**”

29. The peoples of ASEAN are the region’s most important resources. We need to ensure that they have equitable access to human development opportunities. And we should do this by promoting and investing in education, life-long learning and other capacity-building. That is what we call making a long-term investment in the Community’s future that will, in turn, help make the Community-building process sustainable.

30. Regional integration will succeed only if our peoples contribute to, and benefit from it. Globalisation will be beneficial only if the people in the region are competitive, prepared and able to take advantage of it. And the ASEAN Community will be self-sustaining only if the peoples of ASEAN are its driving force as well as its beneficiaries.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

31. I wish to leave with you one last thought – and that is who we are and who we can, together, aspire to become. We are a region comprising diverse peoples of different faiths and beliefs, but have managed to live in



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harmony with one another. Many of us have multi-cultural societies. We appreciate cultural differences and respect diversity. Many of us are key proponents of inter-faith and inter-civilisational dialogue in international forums.

32. I therefore hope that we can build on our own experiences and continue to pursue such dialogue amongst ourselves here in our region so that Southeast Asia will be recognised worldwide as a model region of harmony and unity in diversity – one which will bring about new ideas for peace and prosperity.

33. I wish the 42nd AMM and other related meetings every success in taking forward ASEAN Community-building and partnership with the international community. Thank you.
