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Keynote Speech
"Challenges for ASEAN in the Changing Regional and Global Landscape”
H.E. Dr. Surin Pitsuwan,
Former Secretary-General of ASEAN (2008-2012)

H.E. Dr. Surin Pitsuwan
Your Excellency Bansarn Bunnag, the Ambassador of the Kingdom of Thailand to Japan, our co-host today with Mr. Fujita, the Secretary General of Japan-ASEAN Center. Director General of the Department of ASEAN from Bangkok, who had offered you what he call a sorbet. And he was telling you to expect the main course. I think the main course will need some Tabasco. Excellencies, the Ambassadors of Laos, Cambodia, the Philippines, and Indonesia, and Vietnam, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, it is great honor and a great pleasure for me to be with you at this very, very special event recognizing celebrating the 50th Anniversary of ASEAN.

I played a small part in that first half of the century of this organization, but I was also instrumental in many decisions that ASEAN and Southeast Asia have made together during my time as Foreign Minister and Deputy Foreign Minister of the Kingdom of Thailand. So, I have seen the evolution of ASEAN from the very, very formative years, first one or two decades into its maturity, and now celebrating the Golden Anniversary.

I guess many of you must have had a lot of information, a lot of knowledge already about the growth of ASEAN since 1967 up to now. But the fact that it could evolve into a community and could face and successfully manage a lot of contending pressures, conflicting interests around us and within us, and also a lot of changes in the environment of Southeast Asia, of East Asia, of the global community. How did we survive along the way?

I think it would be better for me to talk to you about the steps, the decisions, the improvisations that our leaders, that our officials have made along the way handling some of those very, very difficult challenges. So with that kind of understanding, together we will see that we will continue to grow and will continue to flourish into the future amidst the changing environment that we are now witnessing.

I would describe ASEAN as 50 years of balancing acts. It was born out of atmosphere of conflict and contention in Southeast Asia. It was born out
of conflict between Malaysia and Indonesia. It was born out of tension and conflict between Malaysia and the Philippines. This was the ’60s. It was born out of the conflict and tension in Vietnam, in Indochina.

We formed together only five and we issued the Bangkok Declaration on the 8th of August 1967, and we were born within the environment of a lot of skepticism about us in Southeast Asia. The British Embassy in Bangkok sends a telegram to the Foreign Office in London saying that, “These new countries have tried many architectures of cooperation before among themselves, but they have all failed.” The cable continues, “This one seems to have some promise – ASEAN. But we the British do not have to give them any birthday gift because we have given them the most important gift of all, ‘The English language’.” That is in a cable to the Foreign Office in London. You could see that there is a lot of skepticism, a lot of uncertainty about how ASEAN could survive. But we have survived and we have managed those challenges and those contending pressures quite well to the point where we could accommodate countries across the Mekong River, who in the beginning was the other and ASEAN was us five: Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Singapore.

But through the first 3 decades we were able to accommodate and integrate the Indochina countries into our tent, into our camp. And later on Myanmar joined, complete 10 Southeast Asian countries as the name denotes the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

We were born out of this euphoria about newly independent countries forming together into something called the “Non-Aligned Movement”; Bandung Conference Indonesia, Africa-Asia Afro-Asia Conference. We were born out of this Third World, First World, Second World conflicts. Our leaders decided that the global stage was too big and it was too large, and it was full of major personalities like Nehru of India, like Nasser of Egypt, like Tito of Yugoslavia, like Zhou Enlai of China. The ASEAN countries would lose our identity, would lose our own space to maintain ourselves into the world. Therefore, the idea of ASEAN was conceived.

Now, when we organized ourselves into this small manageable size, if you think of it, we reversed the way in which the European Union got together. In the case of the European Community, major countries, former enemies came together: France, Germany and Italy, and formed something called the “Common Market” based on steel, based on energy. In the case of ASEAN, small and medium sized countries came together and trying to maintain our identities, trying to protect and defend and promote our own interests later on through dialogue partnership, which is an ASEAN invention. We brought in Japan, bigger, larger, and in the words of Prime Minister Mahathir “More important to us.” We brought in China, we brought in Korea, we brought in India, we brought in Australia, we brought New Zealand, we brought in the US, we brought in Russia, we brought in Canada all the way, and we brought in the EU. It is the reverse process of the EU; smaller-medium sized getting together and bring the bigger ones to be associated with us.
Now, we have been successful in again offering the platform for the contending powers, contending interests from around the world to play on our platform, on our stage. And somehow they found ASEAN threatening none, welcoming all. So, we have been able to create a platform that everyone – every player regardless of size could feel welcome and could feel that they get something out of it. In the end through the years ASEAN has gained this very important tool that we have in our hands and I would call it the ‘Convening Power.’

We convene a meeting, everybody wants to come because everybody feels comfortable, everybody feels that they could get something out of it to go home, could articulate their hopes, their aspirations, their interests, whether or not other parties would agree but they have articulated and they would walk away and next year they would come and go over many of those issues together again.

ASEAN has secured for ourselves that power to convene. And in this landscape called East Asia, we are different from Europe according to Henry Kissinger. And that difference is we do not have the processes, we do not have the system, we do not have the institutions. And in the language of Kissinger, if something happened, I do not know what telephone number to call. Not here in East Asia, because there is no institution, there is no process, there is no system.

ASEAN has been trusted with that institutional building here in the region. And through that effort of building processes, systems, and institution to manage our own differences, our own historical baggage, our own flashpoints, ASEAN have earned and have gained a lot of trust, a lot of confidence along the way. We did not have summit until 1976. It was born in 1967; nine years later we had the first summit in Bali. And that was when we conceived of a new instrument for the region called the ‘Treaty of Amity and Cooperation – TAC.’ Everyone has to join, accede to that treaty and every dialogue partner from anywhere in the world will have to accede to that instrument. So it is one instrument region-wide, in fact global, that ASEAN has contributed to the global community so that we can manage this powerhouse.

Fifty years of ASEAN, first half century of ASEAN coincides with the growth, the flourishing, and the development of East Asia to the point where some would argue that this could be the century of the Asia-Pacific. We have been present at the creation of that century.

Why did I say this? I say this because we had a lesson back in 1997-1998 when the first Asian Financial Crisis came. After growth, growth, growth, double digit growth in Southeast Asia, growth, growth, growth until July 1997, our currency was devalued. We all failed. First was Thailand, second was Malaysia, third was Indonesia, Philippines; a lot of turmoil, a lot of instability, a lot of failures. What did that tell us? It told us that we were more connected than we thought we were. Otherwise, it would not happen in Thailand, the next day Malaysia, the next week Indonesia, and the next week the Philippines all the way to Korea, because we were more connected than we thought we were. Somehow we learn the lesson and that lesson
was getting together and establishing something called the ‘Chiang Mai Initiative.’ Putting aside US$122 billion as this contingency fund so that when any economy of the 13 countries: ASEAN 10, plus China, plus Japan, plus Korea, 13, any got into trouble like we did in 1997, the first line of defense would not be the IMF. ASEAN, Southeast Asia, and East Asia, must show to the world that we know how to manage our problem. That is the response that we have given out to the world. This US$120 billion, when I was at ASEAN the leaders decided, no, not enough, because we have all grown. By the year 2003 we were performing bigger, faster, quicker, than before the crisis. By the time I got to ASEAN in Jakarta, they decided to double that number US$240 billion. So much so that countries of G-20 decided that that is the kind of instruments that all the regions of the world would want; look at what they did in East Asia, ASEAN and the three countries of East Asia.

So, after one or two of these examples I will tell you what is that principle of survival or in our language ‘resiliency’ that we keep on going in spite of these challenges that we are facing in the region, in the wider region of Asia-Pacific and in the global community now.

We face the issue internal to us, the issue of East Timor. We could not go in as ASEAN, because there was a difference of opinions about how ASEAN should respond to the request from Indonesia, but we went in as neighbors; happen to be a lot of the ASEAN member states, not all.

The request from the Government of Indonesia was to help restore law and order on the island of East Timor. And the response from us was, yes we would go in. But remember, 1999 we were in the middle of the crisis, we had no money. How do we sustain 1800 troops from Thailand, 1600-1700 troops from the Philippines and other countries? What did we do? We came to Japan. I and my colleague from the Philippines, former ambassador here, cornered your representative at the UN, Ambassador Sato. The heart is willing from ASEAN, but the pockets are empty. You cannot send troops. We can but we do not have the money. We improvise. We put together elements, we put together network of goodwill in order to help us to do what we need to do in the region. Ambassador Sato said, “Give me 24 hours. I will contact Tokyo. I will let you know tomorrow. How much you want?”

Both Siazon and I were not finance ministers. We do not know. We are not military commanders either. We do not know how much it would take. And we all looked at each other and said, 50 million. But Ambassador Sato said, “Okay, fine I will ask Tokyo.” At dinner time in New York, less than 24 hours, he called me up and he said, “I have good news for you. I have been authorized to tell you that Tokyo asked me to inform you that the Government of Japan is willing to put in US$100 million, double, for you Southeast Asian countries to go on to the island, or half of the island of East Timor to restore law and order.”

To me as Chair of ASEAN at that time, Thailand, if we fail to address such problem, fire in the front yard, in the backyard of ASEAN, we would have lost the credibility and the confidence that we have earned along the way
through our economic progress. And we did it, but with the helping hand from Japan.

We have done these kinds of things and I have many other examples, but let me just point to the principle that we have used: incremental and improvisation. We improvised along the way. Not solid and rigid rules of agreements among us, but flexibility of implementation among those who are willing to move on. ASEAN has been able to improvise, to accommodate problems and challenges along the way. There was this doubt about ASEAN of not interfering in each other’s internal affairs. Every regional organization will have to have that principle, since the time of the Congress of Westphalia. Otherwise there would not be this principle of sovereignty. Even the UN Charter has that. But the point is in modern time, in integration, in community-building you do not have that absolute sovereignty to exercise because you are dependent on each other.

Integration means you gain, but you also are exposed to the problems of others; not only goods, not only services, but the people, and the diseases, and the crime, and all the challenges, and the smoke. Forest fire would also come through integration. There is a downside of integration. So, we learn that and we learn to accommodate each other. The US$240 billion fund requires an office in Singapore and that office is sitting there monitoring the macroeconomic performances of the 13 countries. Now what is more intrusive than having someone looking at your figures, asking for the report of the way you manage your macroeconomics inside your country. But ASEAN will have to accommodate that because integration would require, because you are going to spend my money tomorrow. Something happens, you fail, my money is going to be drawn out of this fund. So I have the right to know how you are doing things. That is a concession of ASEAN to the principle of absolute sovereignty to the requirement of integration.

About political issues inside, the one who introduced the change was an unlikely person who had little experience in international affairs, in politics, but he was realistic enough to know that ASEAN would need some tweaking in that principle. It happened at the Summit in Manila with President Estrada in the Chair. The President from the Republic of Indonesia was Abdurrahman Wahid. He came in late, led by the hand, sat down, and he said, “I know all of you are worried about East Timor and Aceh. You do not have to ask me questions I will volunteer the information for you.” That is how ASEAN got around that principle of non-interference in internal affairs, because for ASEAN to ask questions about problems inside already interference, sensitive. But President Abdurrahman Wahid said, “I volunteer the information for you all” and that has been the tradition. Later on, Thein Sein from Myanmar chose to inform, to brief his colleagues about the situation in Myanmar until Myanmar became the Chair of ASEAN in 2014. We improvised along the way. We handle sensitive issues in an ASEAN way and a lot of people, observers are rather annoyed by this phrase 'ASEAN Way’ ‘ASEAN Way’ meaning no way. Not quite, the fact that we could hang together for 50 years is because we have learned to improvise, to accommodate pressures and expectation along the way.
Things are drastically changing now. We are now facing the consequence of what I would call “Blowback Globalization.” You all remember the time when every time IMF and the World Bank and the G-7 meet or met in the past, there would be demonstration from Third World countries, from civil society, against globalization, remember that. Because we were all afraid that globalization would take over, would dominate, would somehow buy up everything that we own, so we were against the force of globalization. Coming from where? Coming from the west, from the developed part of the world, from the First World.

We have learned to accommodate the force and the wave of globalization to our advantage: Southeast Asia, China, India, Africa, Latin America, Mexico, what happened? The First World; the origin of globalization are now saying, we are losing, they are gaining. We are losing jobs, we are losing factories, we are losing balance of trade, we are losing in the balance of payment, we are losing everything. So, we are now anti-globalization, I mean the west – Brexit and whatever happened in America. We are pro-globalization because we learn to tame the force of globalization and we accommodate them to our advantage. We have lifted our people out of poverty to the hundred, to the billion, our people out of poverty. So, we have learned to live with globalization.

Now, we have to live that consequence. Now, we are facing the pressure. And 50 years of ASEAN or even Post-War global community we have worked on multilateral relations, and systems, and platforms. ASEAN is one regional, APEC is one, TPP is one or was one, RCEP is one in the making, EU is one. Multilateral system in the world is now being challenged and that is a big, big challenge not only for us, not only for ASEAN, East Asia, but for the global community. What are we going to do about it when multilateral arrangements of everything: security, strategy, trade, investment, all these things are being challenged. And it is a consequence of blowback of globalization. The only thing that I can think about is more of a regional cooperation and integration here in East Asia. For us in Southeast Asia, more ASEAN, not less ASEAN; because you cannot depend on markets away from our own anymore, you have to deal with this pressure of my country first, pressure of border tax, pressure of inward-looking, pressure of anti-everything out there.

I think 50 years of ASEAN has somehow prepared us for this moment, moment that we are being challenged, that you have stolen everything from us: jobs, factories, investment, balance of payment, balance of trade, what do we do? I think East Asia, ASEAN have sowed that seed of regional integration and regional cooperation going forward into this turbulent sea of international cooperation, international trade, international investment that we are facing now.

When we talk about East Asian community, we have that seed of ASEAN and we have that second seed of East Asia, ASEAN plus three, and now we are working on the third architecture called ‘RCEP – ASEAN Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership’ meaning ASEAN-10, China, Japan, Korea, India, Australia, New Zealand. RCEP, we have laid the groundwork
for East Asian cooperation and I am very, very careful to say that I am
talking about a small ‘c’ community, because every time we say big ‘C’
community there will be protest and opposition from around the world that
East Asia are going to build their own fortress Asia.

Mr. Hatoyama tried it once, you remember? I mean Asia-Pacific community.
Mr. Rudd in Australia tried it once. Both failed. Now we cannot really be
too aggressive about it, but we know it is coming, it has to come if we are
going to survive in this challenging global situation that we see.

Yes, the Director General of ASEAN Kun Suriya is right and I am glad that
the leaders raised this issue. ASEAN-10, US$2.6 trillion combined GDP.
About US$2.7 trillion trade combined, but the trade among ourselves stands
for a long, long time at 24%-25%. Three-fourths of our trade of US$2.7
trillion we trade with the rest of the world, not among ourselves. I am glad,
because I have been calling for this since I was there at ASEAN in Jakarta
that you have to have a timeline. By the year 2020, you must have 27%;
by the year 2030 you must have 30%; by the year 2035 you must have
35%. You have to grow. Because compared to the EU, compared to NAFTA,
which is not very popular now, trade figures among themselves, the
members, are over 60%. In the case of the EU I think it is 70 plus percent.
So, East Asia together will have to think about that small ‘c’ community.
And in this strategy or vision of small ‘c’ community in East Asia, Japan has
a lot of contribution to make and Japan has made a lot of contribution
already because Japan came to Southeast Asia first.

ASEAN was born in 1967; the first articulation of Japan’s relationship with
us, cooperation with us was articulated by former Prime Minister Fukuda,
the first one, the father, who said Southeast Asia and Japan will have to
have this heart-to-heart relationship. And since then, investment, trade,
network of production, a lot of exchange, a lot of cooperation, transfer of
technology, science, technology between Japan and countries of Southeast
Asia have been going on very, very steadily.

All the ASEAN countries are at risk of being caught in the middle-income
trap, except Singapore, because we do not have our own technology, we
do not have our own science, we do not have our own innovation. We
produce products designed somewhere else with intellectual property put
in; we only supply the labor and the space. Japan will have to help ASEAN
transform its own science, education, technology and I think that is what
exactly is going on. Because you do not want to have this unequal
partnership. You do not want to have a group of countries being dependent.
They must be able to produce, create, and innovate so that they can
strengthen their own economies, so that they can be complementary to
yours, so that you can be complementary to them, not supplementary.

I visualize a time when Southeast Asia ASEAN is something like the
European landscape. Research, development, innovation could take place
anywhere: Scotland, Helsinki, somewhere in Spain, somewhere in Sweden,
somewhere in the Netherlands. But when you want to build a plane, you
send everything, the products of your research in aviation, in avionics, to
Toulouse to produce that Airbus.
I like to see contending centers of excellence in science, in technology, and in innovation on the entire landscape of ASEAN, same as in North America. I mean research, development, and innovation can take place anywhere. But once you want to produce something, it has to go to the production line somewhere. ASEAN will have to conceive of that vision. And again, a country with technology, a country with achievements in science, in innovation is here. The question is can you share these things, the question is how do you guarantee intellectual property rights, the question is how do you know that these technologies are not going to be abused and misused. Well, there must be ways to build in to this relationship, that there are certain levels of science, of technology and innovation that you can help. And they can contribute, and they will feel the ownership of the products that they produce – not just produce, based on everything else from outside except a small fee for the labor. That will not be healthy for the future of East Asia.

We have many more challenges ahead of us and this will be my last point, and I think it is on your mind, the Korean Peninsula. Strategic, political, and security, and you all feel very, very uncertain about the situation up there. All six party talks’ members are members of the ASEAN Regional Forum. Meaning, every year they would sit together, six countries, every year they will talk about the Korean Peninsula, every year they express concern about the development or lack of development in the Korean Peninsula. But not one reference to ARF has ever been made in this effort. Not one role being assigned to ARF – ASEAN Regional Forum where the foreign ministers of 26-27 countries sit together because it is not only ASEAN but the entire region. I was Foreign Minister of Thailand in the year 2000. Thailand was in the Chair. We brought in North Korea into ARF because we could not leave them, because we talk about North Korea. We talk about the Korean Peninsula, but the Korean partner was never there. So we brought them in and they are still a member.

But what I would like to see is this: for those who are interested in strategic and security issues, I like to see the appointment of an ARF special envoy on the Korean Peninsula because six of them are all ARF. ARF should be given a role. If ASEAN and ARF are too weak, too feeble, and too ineffective to handle this big challenge, the question is when is it going to grow up? The US is there, Russia is there, China is there, Japan is there, South Korea is there, North Korea is there. And my assumption is if any country is going to make a concession to anyone, it is not going to be to the next adversary: North to the South, or North to the US, or to anybody. But there might be a whisper, there might be a signal to an ARF envoy roving among the six capitals of the six party talks.

I have made this proposal and it is in the air, in cyberspace, and it is being mulled over and I am glad the ASEAN ministers resisted the demand and the pressure from the US to keep North Korea out of ARF. I think it is going to make the situation worse rather than better. So, ASEAN still has a role to play, ASEAN has made contributions, ASEAN will continue to make
contributions because there are a lot of flashpoints here in the landscape of East Asia.

But the ASEAN countries, more ASEAN not less; for the East Asian countries, hurry up on RCEP; get it done because we need each other more here in the region: ASEAN, China, Japan, Korea, India, Australia, New Zealand. Almost half of humanity. Largest trading bloc if you can make it, then we can be that platform of the century of Asia-Pacific 21st century. And we need each other. And I think 50 years of ASEAN we have shown the way, and the next 50 years are going to demand more of us from us – to weave, to knit, all these disparate elements in the region to become a stronger, more solid platform for all of us to walk into the future together. In the phrase of the ASEAN Declaration on the 8th of August 1967, 50 years ago, we bind ourselves together through sacrifices and cooperation to secure peace and prosperity for our people and our posterity, the future generation.

I think these challenging times make those phrases, those words even more true and more inspiring. Let us work together for the region, for the future, and for the posterity. Thank you very much.

Moderator
Your Excellency, thank you very much for that presentation.

Q&A

Moderator
As this is a very valuable opportunity, we would now like to take questions from the floor. If you have any question, please be mindful of the interpretation, if you could be very brief and succinct. And please be sure to utilize the microphone. And also, could we ask you to identify yourselves. So, we would like to start. We will start with the first question. In the center please, please wait for the microphone to be brought over to you. Thank you.

Questioner 1
When you talk about the next 50 years of ASEAN – well, AIIB was recently established. With the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the AIIB, how does the ASEAN utilize to use these two different banks. That is my first question. My second question, when you consider the next 50 years of ASEAN ‘One Belt One Road’ initiative, what are your thoughts about the ‘One Belt One Road’ initiative of China. I would appreciate your insights, sir. Thank you.

H.E. Dr. Surin Pitsuwan
Thank you very much. I think those are initiatives in response to the vacuum, to the need of the region. We are all under pressure to build our connectivity. And I think China has seen the need, the vacuum, the opportunity, and the resources. So putting the ways in which China has been helping, into a framework, into a concept, and call it bank for infrastructure, call it ‘One Belt One Road’. These are concepts that somehow encapsulate the activities that China would want to engage with
the neighbors or with the world, for that matter. So, I think that has to be welcomed. It depends on countries or member countries how to deal with the opportunities and the offer, so that you can make the maximum benefits with the least cost in using these resources. Because institutions like the World Bank, institutions like Asian Development, or regional development banks, all may not have enough resources to help or to finance all these demands and these projects. So in a way, I think it is good that it is encapsulated in a framework with rules, regulations transparent, terms and conditions known to every member. It is up to the borrowers and the clients to make the best out of the offer. I think most of the ASEAN countries are quite comfortable and welcome, but each is negotiating based on the terms and the conditions available to them. And I think it is good that it is a framework known to everyone that it is transparent, so it is all right.

I think Japan has been doing this with your ODA for a long, long time. JICA has been on the ground for a long, long time, and Japan has been engaged with many other activities more than just infrastructure, because the soft side of infrastructure is as important as the hard physical infrastructure, the human resource development, education, science, technology. I think those are areas that cannot be ignored either. And for your information, 620 million ASEAN, almost half now into the middle-income, and that middle-income will require a quality of life, a better education, better healthcare, better training, better science, better innovation. Human resource development, human infrastructure, soft infrastructure cannot be ignored and I think Japan has an expertise in that. And if you would continue to concentrate on that, it would be fantastic.

**Moderator**
Thank you very much. Any other questions? Since this is a good opportunity, if you raise your hand I would like to call on you. Then the gentleman in the back, we will bring the microphone to you. Could you please raise your hand one more time? Thank you.

**Questioner 2**
As for the ASEAN’s future, now looking back upon 50 years in the past, and what about going forward in the 50 years. You talked about East Timor including the participation by East Timor. To what extent ASEAN is going to expand? I would like to hear your opinion on that.

When is East Timor expected to join? There are other countries such as Papua New Guinea, is ASEAN going to expand more or should it expand more?
Second question is ASEAN is different from European Union, so you are not aiming for EU type of organization. But in order to strengthen connectivity in the future, rather a lax connectivity is enough or are you going to strengthen connectivity more like EU in the future?

**H.E. Dr. Surin Pitsuwan**
First question, the application of East Timor is active. I think we need again to – leaders are quite sympathetic to the application of East Timor because it is in the middle of the landscape of ASEAN, it is in the middle of Indonesia. And the most active champion of East Timor into ASEAN is Indonesia. We just want to make sure that there will not be – at least that is the signal that I got, to make sure that East Timor is stable and secure enough not to be a problem once inside the membership. And that is being communicated, and that is being discussed quite actively with East Timor.

For us, the definition of Southeast Asia does not include Papua New Guinea. Papua New Guinea chose from the very beginning to be an observer to ASEAN and it has that status as observer, but it is outside of the landscape or the footprint of Southeast Asia, as we defined it, as the founders defined it, as current leadership of ASEAN defines it, so it is a bit outside there.

The other question is on EU. Yes, as I said, we are inspired by the EU but we are not constructing our community based upon the EU model. So I said we draw inspiration from but EU is not our model, because of the diversity within ASEAN. In every which way you want to look at it, it is a diverse region, more diverse than any same size of landscape on this world, about 4% of the global space. And we have everything there: political, governance, legal, tradition, religion, civilizations, languages, everything is there. The EU, you need to raise certain indicators and standards up to the same level before you can join. ASEAN does not have that. So, ASEAN will continue to be diverse and will continue to be different.

And what has developed in the EU has not given us much confidence anyway that we should go for a single currency, that we should go for one legal system in whatever area of law that we should subscribe to one legal system, it will be quite a long way yet. But still, managing this diversity and managing the challenges that we are facing, hanging together, trying to accommodate each other, trying to enhance our bargaining power through our own integration, I think that those are the priorities. And as the Director General said, the most important thing is how to implement all those agreements so that we can benefit from all the potentiality that we have with each other, among each other, 10.

But I can tell you that we are very attractive still to the rest of the world because they keep coming. Of all the antagonism to regional organizations, ASEAN is being perceived as something necessary in the region for the region. And I am glad that the new President of the US, what is his name, has made the announcement that he would come to Manila at the end of this year in spite of all the rhetoric against anything multilateral, it will have to be on our term, we first, but he would still come. So in that sense, ASEAN continues to attract attention, and attract confidence. I think the onus is on us. I think the responsibility is on us to show that we can deliver. And an activity like this Mr. Ambassador Bansarn, is extremely important, Mr. Fujita, is extremely important so that we can communicate that vision, that aspiration and that ways in which we managed things up to this point.

We improvised, yes, but we need to improvise because we do not have the tools, solid, legal as effective as in the EU. But somehow we managed to
move along and handle the challenges along the way quite effectively in our own way and that is the only way that it is possible within the frame of all this diversity that we have.

I think Japan realizes that well and Japan has chosen to strengthen ASEAN in every which way, because a strong ASEAN is good for everyone in the region and that is the kind of goodwill that we appreciate.

**Moderator**
Thank you very much. Any other question? We will go to you first. The person in the fifth row, please raise your hand again. Please wait for the microphone.

**Questioner 3**
I have two questions: one is a North Korea question. Is Japan ‘pressured’ in the North Korea crisis and problem? On the other hand, in Malaysia this winter North Korea dictator brother assassination have happened in the public space. What is the policy of North Korea as ASEAN in your opinion?

Another question is Rohingya problem. So, last month in ASEAN meeting I heard no discussion about the Rohingya problem, so what do you think about Rohingya problem? Thank you.

**H.E. Dr. Surin Pitsuwan**
Thank you very much. I think I have had my own personal experience on the activities of North Korea’s ‘Diplomats’ when I was foreign minister, and we handled the issue quite decisively that we cannot tolerate activities of that nature of interfering, of violating our own domestic law. So, we dealt with it very, very firmly and strongly. I think they understand and they appreciate. Because later on as foreign minister I invite them to join ASEAN, they came. I think there is a need to somehow keep the communication line, the space open in order to engage them. I think all the countries in ASEAN would not tolerate similar thing that happened in Malaysia, and Malaysia had dealt with the issue quite firmly too. So, it is not a kind of thing that you can have the freedom to do whatever you want to do on the international arena landscape, so that is one.

The other one is if ASEAN were to be active in – I mentioned something about the peninsula that we have the instrument, we have the platform and we should go for strengthening that kind of relationship and cooperation with the peninsula, both North and South Korea, because that is what the instrument is for. It is called ASEAN Regional Forum, but it is for the entire East Asian region; India is there, Pakistan is there too. So, in that sense I think ASEAN should show our own willingness and our own ability to work on that.

There is no consensus on the issue of Rohingya, but all ASEANs are concerned. Whether or not this should be left to Myanmar with cooperation and support from the rest of ASEAN? If you notice, Malaysia has adopted one approach, Indonesia has adopted another approach. Both are Muslim
countries. Thailand is a transit point. They would want to go somewhere else. It is an unfortunate situation. And no less personality than Kofi Annan had come in to offer advice through that commission, and they have issued that report. And I think with the personal appeal of Madame Aung San Suu Kyi to Kofi Annan that please come and look at the landscape and help us see the way through.

To me, I think the Kofi Annan report is a good beginning point for all the ASEAN countries – Japan too, and Japan has been engaged already – to pick one element each: education, housing, health, livelihood, occupation, for these people it would be helpful because the report identifies those areas where these people need help. It would be good if each of the ASEAN member states would pick up one, each according to its ability, each according to its preparedness, what do you want to engage in? Thailand may be health, Malaysia may be education, Singapore may be education, Indonesia may be technical training. You know what I mean. So each will pick up from that report, I think could be helpful.

As the Ambassador to Japan said, I was the lead person leading ASEAN and the UN and the international community into Myanmar in the aftermath of Cyclone Nargis. I still remember the date, 2nd and 3rd of May; 140,000 people perished overnight in darkness, much, much worse than Sendai Tsunami. Three million more were under threat of disease, of hunger, of all sorts of challenges if the world would not go in. But Myanmar was under sanction, so ASEAN was instrumental in opening up that what we call ‘Humanitarian Bridge or Window’. And we set up what the Ambassador just said, the tripartite core group, with Myanmar sitting on top, but the UN, international community, and ASEAN working together.

I think now is similar. If the space is open I think for us to help based on the Kofi Annan report which is the result of the appeal of the Government of Myanmar itself, it would be good not just for Myanmar but for ASEAN and for East Asia because we do not want these kind of problems on our space anytime anywhere because that would be a stigma on us all. And I appreciate what Japan has been doing, what JICA has been doing, what your own private sector has been doing, trying to improve the economic prospect of Myanmar so that the fruits of that development – and I appreciate what Madame Aung San Suu Kyi has said, “It has to be an inclusive equitable kind of foreign investment into Myanmar, not just for any particular group but equitable to everyone. How do you guarantee that?” And maybe the Kofi Annan report would be a good beginning.

Moderator
I understand you may have more questions, but it is time. So, is there something that you would like to ask to Dr. Surin lastly?

H.E. Dr. Surin Pitsuwan
I express my own personal appreciation for 40 plus years of cooperation between Japan and ASEAN. You were our first dialogue partner and you have been most helpful and most supportive in the evolution of ASEAN. Many good ideas came from Japan to resolve the problems, to initiate new ideas and new beginning. ARF was created by friends of ASEAN that you
cannot just talk economic, trade, investment, forever into the future without talking about security, and stability, and strategy.

So, Japan was one of the countries who introduced this idea into the process of ASEAN and we have that ASEAN Regional Forum. I remember in 1999 when ASEAN was mediating the conflict between the two co-Prime Ministers in Cambodia: Prince Ranariddh and His Excellency Hun Sen, the formula that had led to the reconciliation was also from Japan or the diplomat who was helpful to Japan. And that was the four issues: to create the senate, because there was no Senate in Cambodia before. To accommodate personalities important in the Cambodian political circle, create the senate. And they did create the senate. And speaker of the senate was given to one faction. And then the role of Monarchy. All these things were pretty much a contribution of our Japanese participant in the process; not as instrument of mediation, because that is ASEAN troika: Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines, but friends of ASEAN helped with the ideas, with the support.

So through the years, and now Japan has established the mission to ASEAN, meaning in Jakarta there are two ambassadors, meaning in Jakarta there are two embassies: one is to the Republic of Indonesia, one is to ASEAN. Which means Japan has given much importance, attaches much importance to ASEAN through the past 40 plus years that we have been dialog partners together.

And I think Japan has gained tremendously from this relationship, as much as the countries of ASEAN have gained tremendously from the relationship. You are on all of the 10 landscapes of ASEAN, but you never got together as a private sector. When I was there I proposed the idea of Federation of Japan Chambers of Commerce in ASEAN. So 10 Japanese Chambers in 10 ASEAN countries got together into a federation. Later on, the Europeans did that, later on Korea did that, later on Australia followed through and it strengthened your relationship with ASEAN and with ASEAN member states.

I have seen this evolution, I have seen your willingness, I have seen your goodwill. So, I can say, 50 years of ASEAN, 40 plus years has been the result of our close cooperation and close friendship and goodwill. And I think the ASEAN people expect no less into the next 50 years. As an ASEAN personality, I want to express my appreciation and my gratefulness to the things that the Japanese Government, Japanese people, Japanese private sector, Japanese officials, Japanese civil society, have given to us and we expect this kind of relationship to grow even closer and stronger into the next half of the century.

Thank you very much for your attention.

**Moderator**
Dr. Surin, thank you very much.