



PARLIAMENT OF MALAYSIA

**41<sup>ST</sup> GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE  
ASEAN INTER-PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY (AIPA)**

**PARLIAMENTARY DIPLOMACY FOR A COHESIVE AND  
RESPONSIVE ASEAN COMMUNITY**

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Addressed by  
His Excellency YB Datuk Azhar Azizan Harun  
Speaker of The House of Representatives  
Parliament of Malaysia

8 – 10 September 2020  
Ha Long City, Viet Nam

**[Salutations]**

Nguyễn Thị Kim Ngân  
**President of AIPA**

Nguyen Tuong Van  
**AIPA Secretary-General**

Honourable Delegates, Distinguished Guests,

Bismillahirrahmanirrahim.

Assalamu'alaikum warahmatullahi wabarakatuh.

*Xin Chào* (Hello).

It is my great honour and privilege to address this 41<sup>st</sup> AIPA General Assembly despite these difficult times. I am assured and hopeful that this blessed region of ASEAN will endure and come out of this adversity stronger than ever. For now, let us stay to the task that has always been at hand – one which urges for greater regional representation in order to spur the development and growth of

ASEAN for the sake of its people. As Cicero once wrote, “*salus populi suprema lex esto*” – that is, the welfare of the people shall be the supreme law.

2. Against a backdrop of political uncertainty and economic doubt, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations - or what we have come to fondly know as ASEAN, was formed in 1967.
3. Imperatively, the history of ASEAN has to be understood in the right context through a brief explanation on the formation of it, to serve as a reminder of the importance of regional cooperation. This very Assembly here has long held a history of close relations with ASEAN; a fact clearly illustrated with the incorporation of ‘ASEAN’ into AIPA’s name.
4. The rich diversity of cultures within this part of the world naturally dictates a plethora of different political, social, economic, cultural, religious and philosophies between the nations. Throw in the challenges of policy differences and interstate disputes involving territory, religious preferences and a sentiment of fear and suspicion for one another in that time, one would inevitably question how was it possible for ASEAN to be formed in the 1960s?
5. The epiphany that led to the formation of the organization can be attributed to the commonality of the challenges faced by the various nations within what was to be ASEAN and the realization that the collective strength of the region overcomes the individual weaknesses of each nation.
6. It is this simple idea that led to the 5 original member countries (Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, the Philippines and Thailand) the determination to pull their resources together to promote “economic

growth, social progress, cultural development and peace and stability in the region”.

7. Since inception, AIPA has actively aimed to contribute to the goals and objectives of ASEAN through inter-parliamentary cooperation. The theme of the 33<sup>rd</sup> AIPA General Assembly was a clear example of this, as this very Assembly sought to respond to the various pressing concerns that threatened the progress of the ASEAN region. Issues that range from the South China Sea dispute to the regional efforts against money laundering, AIPA has been at the forefront of keeping the efforts of achieving the objectives of ASEAN to task.
8. Additionally, the AIPA Fact-Finding Committee (AIFOCOM) was formed in 2001 to facilitate information and understanding among countries in their fight against illegal drugs and trafficking. To date, it has sought information and cooperation from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and from member countries through their country reports with a view to harmonization of illegal drug laws in the region.<sup>1</sup>
9. AIPA’s vision and firm belief on the role of the ASEAN Parliament has been uniformed and unwavering. Marzuki Alie summarized this sentiment perfectly in the Report on the Executive Committee Meeting of 2012 when he described the roles of ASEAN Parliamentarians as ‘intermediaries between people and the state administration’<sup>2</sup> with the pursuit of achieving the goals set out by ASEAN as its chief responsibility.
10. Thus, the utilization of Parliamentary diplomacy, both as a concept and in practice, must be explored with greater enthusiasm within the region.

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<sup>1</sup> (AIPA, Report of the Eighth Meeting of AIFOCOM).

<sup>2</sup> Marzuki Alie is the Former Speaker of the Indonesian People's Representative Council

11. Parliaments and parliamentarians along with its associates bring about a unique angle and approach towards the development of this region.
12. In its modus operandi that is beyond the limitations of traditional channels, parliamentary diplomacy shapes a more pragmatic and long-term effect through active dialogue, by nurturing a network of trust and understanding among member nations borne of parliamentary camaraderie.
13. For parliamentary diplomacy, the possibility of neutrality and independence from the executive branches of government, provides a platform of honesty towards conflict resolution within the ASEAN region with less of the animosity and constraints of local politics.
14. Should the priorities of ASEAN Parliamentarians be one that is independent of party discipline while promoting the interests of the region, parliamentary diplomacy would succeed as an innovative tool that could cut across cultural divides that stagnates any regional resolution process.
15. This unique concept should be given greater consideration in the effort to uphold the guiding principles and norms of the ASEAN Charter that highlights the people-centred sentiment of community building. Undoubtedly, a progressive ASEAN would place greater vigour towards regional democracy and the promotion of people-oriented organizations as a key purpose.
16. Whilst the individual achievements of each nation within this region are a testament to the strength, talent and excellence available within this blessed part of the world, the full potential of Southeast Asia remains

untapped, unfulfilled and unanswered. With that being said, the hour is upon us as a region to cultivate the strengths of individuality of each member nation into a collective regional powerhouse, that would thrust this region into greater horizons with a greater and stronger regional representation.

17. Together, as a collective region that strives for the pursuit of grand futures and visionary ideals, mountains of adversity will turn into molehills of inconvenience. At present, the invisible enemy of COVID-19 threatens to harm the prospect and development of each member state here. If there was ever a moment necessary for solidarity, cooperation, support and commonality, this is ASEAN's moment to showcase its commitment towards a region of greater tomorrows.

18. On behalf of the Parliament of Malaysia, we are ready to provide our undivided support of the remarkable efforts by our fellow AIPA members towards the realisation and collaboration of a greater ASEAN. I look forward to strengthening the relationships of our institutions. *Terima Kasih* and Thank you.