

THE PHILIPPINES' CHAIRMANSHIP OF ASEAN IN 2017*

by Hon. Enrique A. Manalo

Ambassador Claro Cristobal, colleagues, friends, ladies and gentlemen, good morning.

It is an honor to be invited to the Mangrove Forum. Today, I have been asked to talk about the Philippines' Chairmanship of ASEAN for this year.

Let me state at the onset that ASEAN is a regional organization that the Philippines can proudly claim to have co-founded. We have a stake in its success. ASEAN envisions a Community that encompasses all facets of life, as reflected by its political-security, economic and socio-cultural pillars.

ASEAN has come a long way since its founding on 8 August 1967, a time when the Cold War and different ideologies divided the region. Over the years, however, ASEAN has succeeded in espousing cooperation and promoting peace and security in the region, so much so, that the association has become a model regional organization.

ASEAN brings the attention of the world powers to the region, and thereby is the fulcrum on which the regional security architecture balances. Only ASEAN can perform this function with credibility, owing to decades of experience in cultivating peace and stability within the region using the *ASEAN Way* – the Association's vaunted non-confrontational approach in resolving differences.

It is a great honor for the Philippines to be the Chair of ASEAN this year, especially since this year also marks the 50th founding anniversary of the Association. This milestone event will be an occasion for ASEAN to reflect on its success and achievements during the last 50 years and to prepare itself for the new challenges ahead in the region.

For this afternoon, I will briefly give an overview of the ASEAN Community, and then proceed to my main topic, the priorities of the Philippines' Chairmanship of ASEAN.

Overview: The ASEAN Community

The ASEAN Community was formally launched on 31 December 2015, marking ASEAN's further consolidation since its creation in 1967.

"The realisation of the ASEAN Community has set a milestone in the integration process and will ensure lasting peace, security and resilience in an outward-looking region, with economies that are vibrant, competitive and highly integrated, and an inclusive community that is embedded with a strong sense of togetherness and common identity," ASEAN Leaders said in their Declaration on the Establishment of the ASEAN Community issued at their 27th Summit in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia on 22 November 2015.

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The ASEAN Community has three pillars, representing the Political-Security Community, Economic Community, and Socio-Cultural Community. For the Philippines, the three pillars are coordinated by the Department of Foreign Affairs for APSC, the Department of Trade and Industry for AEC, and the Department of Social Welfare and Development for ASCC.

As an ASEAN Political-Security Community, ASEAN forms a group of 10 sovereign Member States that have a common, shared stake in being internally resilient and promoting a rules-based, outward-looking region that enjoys lasting peace, security and stability. It follows the principles of the ASEAN Charter, uses consultation and consensus-building and adheres to the use of peaceful means in resolving disputes.

The ASEAN Economic Community is taking shape with the free movement of goods, services, capital and skilled labour, with a view to improving the lives of ASEAN citizens. It will be a single market and production base, a highly competitive economic region and equitable economic development and one fully integrated into the global economy.

These will boost both ASEAN's intra-regional economy as well as its attractiveness to external economic partners as an investment destination and a consumer base of 622 million people. ASEAN has been a region of continued economic growth and its engines continue to hum even when growth slows in other parts of the world.

ASEAN Leaders stressed that community-building must make a difference in the lives of citizens who are the beneficiaries of a people-oriented, people-centered ASEAN. This part of community-building will be the focus of ongoing initiatives such as programs to narrow the development gap within and among Member States, and to widen and deepen connectivity linkages in the region.

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It is important that the process of community-building continues in the coming years. Thus, ASEAN Leaders have committed to continued regional integration over the next decade, by adopting the Kuala Lumpur Declaration on ‘ASEAN 2025: Forging Ahead Together’ that sets targets to meet by 2025.

The Community's launch is the culmination of various initiatives of regional integration which have taken place over nearly five decades. It marks the completion by ASEAN Member States of the blueprints for the three Community pillars, after ASEAN Leaders in 2007 decided to move the goal of establishing the ASEAN Community to 2015 from the original target of 2020.

Consistent with the principles of the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 for a community that deepens cooperation with dialogue partners in the interest of developing friendly and mutually beneficial relations, ASEAN is at the forefront or “driver's seat” in a number of relations with dialogue or external partners, such as:

- ASEAN + 3 (China, Japan, ROK)
- East Asia Summit (with Australia, China, India, Japan, NZ, ROK, Russia and the USA)
- Plus One Dialogue Partners
- ASEAN Regional Forum (ASEAN + 17 States)

ASEAN meets with them on a regular basis, either during the Leaders' Summit or the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting.

The Philippines' Chairmanship of ASEAN in 2017

I will now proceed with the Philippines' Chairmanship of ASEAN in 2017.

The Philippines' Chairmanship of ASEAN officially began on 1 January 2017. Auspiciously, this coincides with the 50th anniversary of the founding of ASEAN. Taking off from the chairmanship of Lao PDR, the Philippines will steer and guide

ASEAN during a milestone year. In keeping with Articles 31 and 32 of the ASEAN Charter, the Philippines will endeavor to carry out the following:

- Actively promote and enhance the interests and well-being of ASEAN, including efforts to build an ASEAN Community through policy initiatives, coordination, consensus and cooperation
- Ensure the centrality of ASEAN
- Ensure an effective and timely response to urgent issues or crisis situations affecting ASEAN, including providing its good offices and such other arrangements to immediately address these concerns
- Represent ASEAN in strengthening and promoting closer relations with external partners
- Carry out such other tasks and functions as may be mandated

Our theme for the ASEAN Chairmanship is “Partnering for Change, Engaging the World”. The theme was first unveiled by President Rodrigo Roa Duterte during the symbolic turnover of ASEAN Chairmanship to the Philippines in Vientiane, Lao PDR on 8 September 2016 at the closing ceremony of the 28th and 29th ASEAN Summits and Related Summits.

Partnering for Change —The change that we are aiming for is a positive change in the lives of the peoples of ASEAN. As a regional organization and as a community, ASEAN at its disposal has an array of mechanisms and initiatives that significantly impacts on the lives of its citizens. Examples of these include strengthening the capacities of micro, small and medium enterprises, promoting and protecting the welfare of migrant workers, ensuring social protection for the vulnerable sector of society, securing the future for the succeeding generations by promoting the protection and sustainability of the environment.

Engaging the World — A core strength of ASEAN as a regional grouping is its ability and experience in being in the driver’s seat in expanded regional groupings. ASEAN’s creativity, or ingenuity, in dealing with the rest of the world to tackle non-traditional and transnational security threats while at the same maintaining its centrality and independence is an ingredient of its success. The Philippines envisions greater interaction by ASEAN with the international community, highlighting the importance of the association to both the region and the rest of the world in terms of advancing mutual benefits and interests.

In the words of President Duterte, the theme reflects “*our resolve to consolidate our community for our peoples, with a sense of togetherness and common identity; ready and able to take our rightful place in the global community of nations*”. As chair, the Philippines will ensure that it guides ASEAN towards a path of stability, security and growth.

Our theme for 2017 “*Partnering for Change, Engaging the World*” is reflective of our advocacy as a country to promote cooperation with and among our neighbors and ASEAN partner countries and invite them to become dynamic and vibrant partners.

President Duterte, in his acceptance speech at the ASEAN Summit in Laos, said that “*we will pursue initiative and enhance cooperation with global partners to ensure that ASEAN citizens live in peace, stability, security, and growth, while maintaining ASEAN centrality, unity, and solidarity for all times.*” It will be an occasion for us to set the tone for the next 50 years.

Thematic priorities

Serving as our beacons for moving forward our national interests and that of the region are the six thematic priorities that the Philippine chairmanship will pursue in 2017. These are products of a number of extensive and intense consultations and planning workshops with all relevant agencies under the three ASEAN pillars in the Philippines – in such fields as defense, security, trade and investment, science and technology, transportation and communication, health, women and children, youth, nutrition, and the environment.

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The three ASEAN Community pillars are reflected in the six thematic priorities. The thematic priorities of a people-oriented, people-centered ASEAN and ASEAN's resiliency are handled by our ASEAN Socio-Cultural Pillar; the thematic priorities of peace and stability in the region, maritime security and cooperation, and ASEAN: a model of regionalism, a global player is being overseen by our ASEAN Political-Security Pillar; and the thematic priority on an inclusive, innovation-led growth is under the ambit of our ASEAN Economic Community Pillar.

A people-oriented and people-centered ASEAN

The ASEAN Community puts its citizens' welfare at the center of its priorities. The community protects their rights and recognizes that their well-being is key to the region's progress. This is the core message of our first thematic priority. Under this, the Philippines aims to promote the following:

1. A community that upholds human rights, high quality of life, and equal access to opportunities.
2. A community that improves access to social services of vulnerable groups.
3. A community that provides basic necessities to its citizens, prioritizing healthcare and improved nutrition.
4. A community that promotes the importance of the professionalism of civil servants in ASEAN Member States in regional development and community building.

To realize an inclusive ASEAN Community, we must invest in our human capital by advancing universal access to education and health. We must step up in our efforts to uplift the conditions of the marginalized in our societies by providing genuine access to social services that will promote their human rights and transform them into productive and responsible citizens of our region.

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In support of the thematic and specific priorities, the Philippines is planning to organize activities and ensure the adoption of deliverables in line with the chairmanship theme.

- Consultations will be undertaken on the pursuit of declarations and statements that will reflect ASEAN's resolve to promote and protect the rights of vulnerable groups and improve their access to social services.
- Activities will be organized to support these efforts as well, such as thematic workshops and studies on human rights, the conduct of conferences on topics addressing social protection and gender-responsive issues.
- Promoting policy coherence and capacity building towards a healthy diet and proper nutrition for the citizens of ASEAN will be explored.
- Coordinating mechanisms in line with a holistic approach that will promote awareness and advocacy in the prevention of infection will be studied.
- The role of the civil service as catalyst for achieving Vision 2025 through the conduct of forums and launch of publications will be pursued.

Peace and stability in the region

The core message of our second thematic priority touches on upholding peaceful co-existence and enhancing regional partnership among the Member States of ASEAN. We wish to see the following during our chairmanship:

1. A community that strengthens cooperation in combating and preventing the use of dangerous and illicit drugs.
2. A community that aims to counter violent extremism in all its forms and manifestations.
3. A community that resolves conflicts and disputes through peaceful means and strengthens ties amongst its Member

States, building on ongoing efforts on moderation and support for the work of the ASEAN Institute for Peace and Reconciliation (IPR) and other ASEAN bodies.

An endearing characteristic of the peoples of ASEAN that helped turn the latter into a highly resilient and successful regional grouping is their non-confrontational approach, or the **ASEAN way**, with respect to resolving differences.

Preference for peaceful modes of settling disputes set the tone for ASEAN itself to adopt a similar approach in maintaining regional peace, stability and security. It is my contention that if Southeast Asia has been free from any major inter-state armed conflict for the past half-century, it is because of this cultural trait that has, in turn, informed the association to enshrine the ASEAN Way in the Bangkok Declaration of 1967.

ASEAN's organizational strength, specifically its chameleon-like ability to adjust its organizational make-up and processes in response to major geopolitical and economic developments in the region and around the world, is another ingredient of its success.

The Philippines recognizes the strategic relevance and importance of ASEAN-led mechanisms and their contributions to regional peace and security. We should continue to strengthen existing ASEAN-led mechanisms, including the East Asia Summit and the various ASEAN mechanisms and fora on defense, disaster management, maritime security, transnational crime, and drug matters.

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The Philippines stands resolute in our campaign against terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. We are developing a national strategy against terrorism and a national action plan on countering violent extremism. We cannot let our guards down.

The Philippines is ready to work with our brothers in ASEAN to address terrorism and violent extremism in a full and comprehensive manner – from intelligence gathering and sharing, to battling terrorism financing, to prevention and arrest, to interdiction and prosecution.

During the Philippines' chairmanship of ASEAN, the Philippines will be looking at possible instruments that will send a strong message on countering violent extremism and terrorism.

On the drug menace, the Philippines will look at ways to actively implement the provisions of the recently adopted ASEAN Work Plan on Securing Communities Against Illicit Drugs 2016-2025. This may involve socialization of the Work Plan among our local authorities and communities so they could support a Drug-Free ASEAN by 2025 and actively seeking the partnership of our Dialogue Partners in supporting specific projects of national drug boards along this line in 2017.

Maritime security and cooperation

The ASEAN Community adheres to the rule of law for the peaceful resolution of disputes and the preservation and protection of maritime resources.

On our third thematic priority, maritime security and cooperation, we wish to emphasize:

1. A community that recognizes international law as a basis of peaceful conflict resolution.
2. A community that intensifies maritime security and cooperation.

A clear-cut example of how the ASEAN Way has come to guide relations between and among the association's members and with non-ASEAN countries, especially in dealing with difficult subjects such as the South China Sea issue, is the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea or DOC signed by the ASEAN Member States and

China in 2002. Affirming the value and usefulness of the ASEAN Way, that DOC called for a peaceful and durable solution of differences and disputes among countries concerned. In 2017, we are hopeful of concluding a framework on the code of conduct. In the meantime, confidence-building measures have been agreed upon by ASEAN and China, including the MFA-to-MFA hotlines and the Code on Unplanned Encounters at Sea or CUES.

The Philippines is one with the rest of ASEAN in working to realize a rules-based, people-oriented and people-centered ASEAN Community, and strongly affirms the need for a rules-based approach in the peaceful resolution of disputes in accordance with recognized principles of international law, including the 1982 UNCLOS. It will continue its advocacy for the rule of law and the full respect for legal and diplomatic processes.

These will be achieved through workshops and seminars on peaceful resolution of disputes and on good practices in maritime security. The PH is looking at drafting declarations that will summarize the collective effort of ASEAN countries on maritime cooperation.

Inclusive, innovation-led growth

The ASEAN Community provides opportunities for business growth to improve regional capacity in responding to the demands of the global economy.

The fourth thematic priority represents the ASEAN economic community pillar and reflects our resolve to realize the following:

1. A community that heightens connectivity amongst Member States to improve economic synergy.
2. A community that is conducive for business and opportunities and investments; including micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) and multinational enterprises (MNEs).

A community that supports innovation leading to inclusive growth and development.

To further address the many social ills confronting our societies, inclusive economic growth must be ensured. We must strive to develop the capacity for growth of ASEAN's micro, small and medium enterprises so that it can help spur entrepreneurship and boost economic activities.

Progress rests on the back of stable, interconnected and integrated infrastructure. The Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity 2025 will complement and synergize our integration efforts and give further momentum for connectivity in sub-regional cooperation, such as the Brunei-Indonesia-Malaysia-Philippines East ASEAN Growth Area (BIMP-EAGA).

We could make this happen through projects that will physically link ASEAN countries together to enhance trade. The Philippines will also propose several action agenda that will develop ASEAN economies to become more innovative and that will integrate MSMEs to a more digital world, including efforts to reduce the cost of doing business and developing start-ups. The Philippines will also hold meetings and seminars to empower the youth and women in entrepreneurship.

A resilient ASEAN

The ASEAN Community cultivates a sustainable region that is prepared and responsive to disasters.

Our fifth thematic priority, a resilient ASEAN, envisions the realization of the following:

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1. A community that mitigates and manages the risk of possible disasters.
2. A community that is prepared and united in responding to disasters befalling member states.
3. A community that promotes the protection of the environment and recognizes the importance of biodiversity conservation.

At the 28th and 29th ASEAN Summits and Related Summits in Vientiane, Lao PDR on 6-8 September 2016, there was only one document that the ASEAN Leaders signed and this was the ASEAN Declaration on One ASEAN, One Response: ASEAN Responding to Disasters as One in the Region and Outside the Region. Given that the Southeast Asian region is no stranger to natural calamities – in the Philippines alone we average around 14 to 20 typhoons a year – the Declaration highlights the vision of ASEAN to build a safer and disaster-resilient region as a move forward approach while envisioning unity and solidarity among the ten ASEAN Member States in responding to disasters within or outside the region.

ASEAN Member States acknowledge the many perils brought about by man-made and natural disasters and, through the years, they have leaned on each other, with cooperation the way to go in ensuring that the effects are mitigated and, more importantly, ASEAN as a responsive organization move towards disaster reduction and management. The Philippines will build on past efforts and initiatives and move cooperation forward with the development of risk resiliency programs within ASEAN. We should also highlight ASEAN institutions such as the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance that was put in place to support ASEAN's resiliency when faced with disasters and the ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity which was established to care for ASEAN's natural resources. We will also release statements and declarations to ensure the protection of the environment.

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ASEAN: a model of regionalism, a global player

The ASEAN Community aims to showcase its various capacities as a global player in the international arena. Our sixth thematic priority highlights ASEAN as a model of regionalism and as a global player. Under this, we hope to strengthen ASEAN's resolve as:

1. A community that fosters inclusivity in diversity, and advocates equal recognition of all Member States.
2. A community that strengthens ASEAN's foundations rooted in both history and vision.
3. A community that addresses international issues through a unified stand.

The last time that the Philippines chaired ASEAN was in 2007. So many things have happened in the region and around the world since then. While conventional security challenges such as maritime disputes in the South China Sea remain, non-traditional security threats continue to emerge, including natural disasters associated with climate change; chronic food and energy shortfalls; forced displacement of large populations from their countries of origin due to political unrest; violent extremism and terrorism; pandemics; trafficking in persons; trade in illicit drugs; and piracy in the high seas.

Indeed, these are challenging times. But it should be recalled that ASEAN was born out of the aspiration of its founding fathers to address regional and global challenges to ensure the peace, security, stability, progress and prosperity of the region and its member states. At the brink of its 50th founding anniversary, ASEAN as an association and a community has encapsulated past and present successes that make it fully equipped not only to effectively respond to these challenges, but to prosper and come out stronger as a group.

ASEAN has built a foundation and reputation as a highly resilient and successful regional grouping. As a regional grouping, ASEAN laid the foundation for success through its wise and skillful application of three key ingredients, namely, its people, organizational adaptability, and creativity.

I have previously mentioned ASEAN's organizational strength and its ability to adjust its organizational make-up and processes in response to major geopolitical and economic developments in the region and around the world, as an ingredient of its success as a regional grouping. The Treaty of Amity and Cooperation or TAC, signed by all the members of ASEAN as High Contracting Parties, comes to mind as an example the association's flexibility and adaptability. Until 1976, ASEAN was characterized by a loose and highly decentralized structure, dominated by state-to-state cooperation and involving mostly foreign ministers to deal with regional security issues. The TAC changed all that by binding all its ASEAN signatories to peaceful co-existence and respect for the principle of sovereignty, territorial integrity, and non-interference in internal affairs.

Further, the ASEAN charter entered into force in 2008. The charter gave ASEAN, after more than 40 years of existence, a legal personality and profiled it as a rules-based organisation.

ASEAN has continued to address and confront new and emerging non-traditional and transnational security threats like terrorism and transnational crimes through the various sectoral bodies. Cognizant of the transboundary nature of these challenges, ASEAN also values cooperation with external partners in addressing these and, as such, it formed dialogue relations and strategic partnerships with non-ASEAN actors, including the world's major and some middle powers.

With that in mind, the Philippines aims to strengthen ASEAN institutions and centers across the region. As chairman, the Philippines will spearhead the timely issuance of statements on critical issues and deliver statements in UN bodies concerning pressing regional and international concerns. The Philippines will continue to undertake high-level conferences and seminars to highlight ASEAN's 50th year.

With that, I wish to thank you for your attention and I wish you the best for the rest of the day. 🌸

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