

ASEAN POLITICAL-SECURITY COMMUNITY

APSC OUTLOOK

Volume 1 (2019)

Number 2

ASEAN and Beyond



one vision
one identity
one community

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) was established on 8 August 1967. The Member States of the Association are Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Viet Nam. The ASEAN Secretariat is based in Jakarta, Indonesia.

For inquiries, contact:

The ASEAN Secretariat
Community Relations Division (CRD)
70A Jalan Sisingamangaraja
Jakarta 12110, Indonesia
Phone : (62 21) 724-3372, 726-2991
Fax : (62 21) 739-8234, 724-3504
E-mail : public@asean.org

**APSC Analysis and Monitoring Division
ASEAN Political-Security Department**

E-mail: APSCAMD@asean.org

Catalogue-in-Publication Data

ASEAN Political-Security Community Outlook - ASEAN and Beyond

Jakarta: ASEAN Secretariat, December 2019

320.0959

1. ASEAN – Political Community – Security Community
2. Disarmament – Peace and Reconciliation

ISBN 978-602-5798-55-9



Photo credits:

Page 3 : International Atomic Energy Agency
Page 10 : Ambassador Evan Ralph Garcia
Page 12 : Mala Selvaraju (ASEAN Secretariat's staff)
Page 16 : Government of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam

ASEAN: A Community of Opportunities for All

The text of this publication may be freely quoted or reprinted, provided proper acknowledgement is given and a copy containing the reprinted material is sent to the Community Relations Division (CRD) of the ASEAN Secretariat, Jakarta.

General information on ASEAN appears online at the ASEAN Website: www.asean.org

Editor: Raymund Jose G. Quilop
Copy Editing: Dayangku Siti Rosinah Pengiran Rusli

Copyright Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) 2019.
All rights reserved.

The map in this publication is only indicative and is not drawn to scale.



ASEAN and Beyond

The ASEAN Secretariat
Jakarta

Contents

Partnering Beyond Southeast Asia: The Case of ASEAN Regionalism	1
Towards Non-Proliferation and Disarmament: ASEAN's Modest Contributions	9
Promoting Peace and Reconciliation: The ASEAN Approach	15

Partnering Beyond Southeast Asia: The Case of ASEAN Regionalism*

Introduction

In early August 2019, ASEAN commemorated its 52nd founding anniversary. While the main event took place in Jakarta, specifically with the inauguration of the new ASEAN Secretariat Building, the embassies of the ASEAN Member States and ASEAN Committees in various third countries celebrated ASEAN's more than half a century of existence.

ASEAN was founded to promote economic growth, social progress, as well as stability in the Southeast Asian region. Amidst the geo-political superpower rivalry taking place in the 1960s, ASEAN was conceived to foster unity and cooperation among its members, in full recognition of the diversity of their political, economic and socio-cultural systems.

*ASEAN was conceived
to foster unity amidst
diversity.*

Beginning in the 1980s with the inclusion of Brunei Darussalam, ASEAN has expanded to include the other four countries in Southeast Asia in the late 1990s. ASEAN thus entered the 21st century as a 10-member association and to date remains to be a successful experiment in regionalism; with some describing it as a miracle for notwithstanding the diversity mentioned earlier as well as the existence of bilateral issues among its members, ASEAN has managed to remain united and has in fact evolved to become the fulcrum of regional processes through what is called in Southeast Asia as ASEAN-led mechanisms. Through these mechanisms, ASEAN's external partners are able to engage not only ASEAN but their fellow external partners of ASEAN.

A Vision Realised

The vision of ASEAN's founding fathers for the organisation to promote economic prosperity has today become a reality. With a combined GDP of USD 3 trillion in 2018, ASEAN – collectively – is the 5th largest economy in the world, accounting for 3.5% of the global economy in nominal

* Keynote Speech of H.E. Dato Lim Jock Hoi, Secretary-General of ASEAN delivered at a forum organised by the ASEAN Vienna Committee at the sidelines of 63rd Annual Regular Session of the General Conference of the IAEA held in Vienna, Austria on 17 September 2019.

terms, and as high as 6.5% in purchasing power parity (PPP) terms. For almost two decades, ASEAN has been growing at an average annual rate of 5.3%, consistently above the global average.

ASEAN is now a global powerhouse and a very attractive market.

ASEAN is now a global trade powerhouse, the 4th largest trader in the world, accounting for more than 7% of global trade. ASEAN's total trade reached USD 2.8 trillion last year, more than 90% of its GDP.

With population of almost 650 million people, the world's third largest after only China and India, ASEAN is a very attractive market. With such dynamism and immense potential, ASEAN has become the world's top investment destination, coming third after just the European Union (EU) and the US, attracting even more investment than major economies like China. In 2018, ASEAN received USD 154.7 billion of FDI flows, the highest in its history and account for almost 12% of global flows.

ASEAN's effort in economic integration has also paid off with intra-ASEAN accounting for the highest shares in trade and investment at 23.0% and 15.9%, respectively.

It must be stressed, however, that this positive performance should not be taken for granted. The region's growth outlook is now more subdued, given the current global uncertainties and ASEAN's close links to the global value chains. It is therefore important for ASEAN to keep its market open and forge ahead with its reform and economic integration agenda.

Partnering with the IAEA

Indeed, there is great economic promise for the ASEAN region. And fundamental to this economic potential is the need to ensure that there is the energy needed to fuel economic growth and development; nuclear energy is one of those options. Admittedly, while none of the ASEAN Member States have, to date, utilised nuclear technology for energy generation, nuclear energy remains a viable and is being considered by some ASEAN members as an energy source to underpin the increased energy demand for their respective growing economies.

But as responsible members of the global community and given the adherence to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons

(NPT), ASEAN and its Member States remain committed to the principles enshrined therein, specifically in ensuring that nuclear material and technology are used for peaceful purposes and the proliferation of nuclear weapons is prevented.



ASEAN therefore sees cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) as essential not only in fulfilling commitments under the non-proliferation regime but also in building the capacity relative to nuclear science and technology and applications, nuclear safety, security, and safeguards.

It was more than five years ago when ASEAN commenced exploring how to strengthen cooperation with the IAEA. That exploration of possibility has become a reality with the signing of the Practical Arrangements between ASEAN and the IAEA. Commendable is the role of ASEANTOM, the Network of Regulatory Bodies on Atomic Energy established in 2013 whose primary aim is to ensure that the use of nuclear energy in the ASEAN region remains safe, secure and peaceful, in negotiating the agreement as ASEAN's focal point.

ASEAN region as a nuclear weapons free zone is not solely about keeping nuclear weapons out.

While it was in recent years that the ASEANTOM was established, ASEAN has long been committed to the non-proliferation agenda as enshrined in the 1995 Southeast Asian Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone (SEANWFZ) Treaty. Making the ASEAN region as a nuclear weapons free zone is not only about keeping nuclear weapons out. An equally important aspect of that goal is ensuring that nuclear materials and attendant technology are used only for peaceful purposes and they are safe and secure. This is the other aspect of the SEANWFZ Treaty.

The signing of the Practical Arrangements on 16 September 2019 indeed signals the beginning of deeper collaborative partnership between ASEAN and the IAEA. By providing a framework of cooperation in nuclear science and technology and its applications, nuclear safety,

security, and safeguards, the expected result are tangible cooperative activities, exchange of experiences and best practices, and most importantly capacity building.

A few observations about this Practical Arrangement is in order. Foremost is what could be considered as *inclusiveness*, a key principle in ASEAN cooperation, which is reflected in the agreement's provision for a "non-exclusive" cooperation. This means having this agreement would not preclude either ASEAN or the IAEA from pursuing cooperation with other relevant partners even in the areas covered by the agreement.

Flexibility, another key principle in ASEAN cooperation, is likewise reflected in the provision that a separate agreement providing for specific legal and financial obligations would have to be entered into for specific activities.

Partnering with the European Union

Geography has not prevented ASEAN and the European Union from cooperating.

The success of ASEAN regionalism or what could aptly be described as the 1967 ASEAN experiment is anchored on two important elements: one, the commitment of the ASEAN Member States to stay united amidst diversity and two, the support of ASEAN's external partners, including the EU.

As geography would have it, Europe is a long distance from Southeast Asia, approximately almost 11,000 kilometers. But that has not prevented ASEAN and the EU from being partners.

In fact, while geography has created that length of a distance, history has brought the two regions together, with all Southeast Asian nations having had experience and interaction with European countries beginning in the 16th century. In the more contemporary period, Southeast Asian and European countries see each other as partners, which has been institutionalised in having the EU a Dialogue Partner of ASEAN. Given the comprehensive and deepened cooperation between the two organisations, the EU may soon be a strategic partner of ASEAN.

Indeed, ASEAN and the EU have deepened cooperation in areas such as but not limited to cybersecurity, border management, transnational

crime, countering terrorism, countering the rise of radicalisation and violent extremism, maritime security, and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, among others. As ASEAN's Dialogue Partner, the EU has consistently participated in the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and has shown interest in the ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting (ADMM)-Plus.

Economically, the two regions are closely tied together. The EU is ASEAN's second largest trading partner, with a total two-way trade of USD 285 billion in 2018. The EU has also consistently been the largest source of FDI with total FDI inflow to ASEAN of USD 22 billion in 2018. The two regions are solidifying discussions on a framework for a future region-to-region FTA, which could better realise the regions' economic potentials. ASEAN and the EU are also working on further enhancing air connectivity through a Comprehensive Air Transport Agreement.

Also acknowledged is EU's support to ASEAN through cooperation activities in various areas to narrow the development gap in the region, in enhancing ASEAN's quality of education, in building the capacity in trade facilitation, intellectual property, and civil aviation as well as statistics and integration monitoring, and in promoting sustainable development in our region.

ASEAN Regionalism's Current Challenges

As ASEAN moves forward towards its goal of building an ASEAN Community, challenges abound. Amidst the strategic competition between and among the bigger regional powers, ASEAN Member States continue to put premium in ASEAN unity to ensure that ASEAN remains to be the driving force in regional affairs. This is the context where ASEAN Leaders adopted this year the *ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific* which does not only reaffirm ASEAN's sacrosanct principles in promoting cooperation such as openness and inclusiveness, but identifies priority areas of cooperation to include maritime security, connectivity, sustainable cooperation, and economic cooperation.

ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific reaffirms ASEAN's sacrosanct principles.

Against the backdrop of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), which will bring about expansive implications across different aspects of people's lives, ASEAN is currently preparing itself to adapt to and take advantage of the opportunities brought about by the 4IR. Many

initiatives have been undertaken in this regard, and efforts have been intensified since 2018, which saw the signing of the *ASEAN Agreement on Electronic Commerce* as well as the endorsement of the *ASEAN Digital Integration Framework* and the *ASEAN Framework on Digital Governance*. In 2019, a number of 4IR related priority deliverables have been identified.

The ASEAN Economic Ministers Meeting have adopted the (1) ASEAN Digital Integration Framework Action Plan (DIFAP) 2019-2025; (2) the Guideline on Skilled Labour/Professional Services Development in Response to the 4IR; (3) ASEAN Declaration on Industrial Transformation to Industry 4.0; and (4) Policy Guideline on Digitalisation of ASEAN Micro Enterprises. Efforts towards the implementation of the *ASEAN Framework on Digital Data Governance* is also underway. ASEAN recognises that preparedness in terms of human capital and infrastructure, both hard and soft and including the necessary regulatory framework, is important to the region's ability to thrive in the 4IR.

ASEAN will uphold an open, inclusive, and rules-based multilateral system.

Of the more immediate concern is the growing protectionism and unilateral actions, which put pressure on multilateralism that ASEAN has greatly benefited from. To this end, ASEAN will take a more proactive approach to uphold an open, inclusive, and rules-

based multilateral trading system under the WTO, and call for all parties to work together to ensure its continued effectiveness and relevance and that the system be more inclusive. In parallel, concluding the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) negotiations remains a top priority for ASEAN. Once successfully concluded, the potential of the RCEP is immense, not only in terms of business and job opportunities, but also in providing an open, inclusive, transparent and rules-based trade and investment framework for the region.

Sustainability is Key

As encapsulated in the *Vision Statement on Partnership for Sustainability* issued by the ASEAN Leaders during their Summit in June 2019, it is imperative for partnerships both within ASEAN (among the ASEAN Member States) and with ASEAN's external partners to be advanced in order to "achieve sustainability in all dimensions of ASEAN's Community-building and in promoting regional peace and prosperity".

In accordance with the theme of Thailand's 2019 ASEAN Chairmanship, "Advancing Partnerships for Sustainability", several initiatives have been put forward to "promote sustainability of things" to include (1) addressing the maritime debris challenges, including through the convening of a Special Ministerial Meeting on Maritime Debris; (2) launching a human capital development initiative; and (3) developing an ASEAN Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated Fishing Task Force, to name just a few. The bottom line is that there is a need to make societies sustainable to make them liveable for the peoples of ASEAN.

Not only has the geo-political, strategic and economic landscape evolved, the physical environment of today has tremendously changed. Climate change has definitely dawned upon everyone so much so that the ability to mitigate its effects while at the same adapting to the changed environment is imperative if humanity were to survive. Making societies sustainable is definitely one critical step towards this end.

ASEAN is pursuing cross-pillar and cross-sectoral approach to issues.

Meanwhile, ASEAN is increasingly putting greater emphasis on cross-sectoral cooperation, knowing too well that issues of today are multi-faceted and multi-dimensional, cutting across ASEAN's three community pillars, thus requiring "whole of society" approaches, whether in creating opportunities or addressing challenges that come ASEAN's way.

A Concluding Note

While the ASEAN region and Europe are geographically distant, the fate of ASEAN peoples and those of Europe are closely intertwined so much so that they should continue to further deepen and strengthen partnership and collaboration. With the support of ASEAN partners and most importantly, with the commitment of the ASEAN Member States, ASEAN will effectively navigate its journey towards Community Building, no matter how challenging and arduous it may be.

Towards Non-Proliferation and Disarmament: ASEAN's Modest Contributions*

Introduction

The envisioned road towards disarmament for a secure and peaceful world is a long and arduous one, filled with challenges along the way. But ASEAN remains committed in working towards this end no matter how small its efforts may be in the eyes of some observers.

These efforts are towards a world where destructive weapons do not proliferate any further and those that exist are reduced to a level where the world is not endangered by their existence.

A Southeast Asia Free from Nuclear Weapons

ASEAN Leaders had the foresight through the signing of the Southeast Asian Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone (SEANWFZ) Treaty in 1995 to make the ASEAN region a nuclear weapons free zone and for the ASEAN Member States themselves not to venture into developing these weapons with its related materials and technologies. The Treaty covers the territories, continental shelves and exclusive economic zones (EEZs) of ASEAN Member States. This would be ASEAN's foremost contribution to the non-proliferation and disarmament regimes.

The ASEAN region is envisioned to be a nuclear weapons free zone.

A critical component of the Treaty is a Protocol, which is open for signature by the Nuclear Weapons States (NWS), with three of them (the US, Russia and China) being strategic partners of ASEAN.

But beyond being an effective tool towards non-proliferation, having nuclear weapons free zones, is also an important disarmament measure. By prohibiting the possession, testing, transporting and stationing of nuclear weapons, the SEANWFZ Treaty provides a disincentive to developing nuclear capability among the ASEAN Member States themselves.

* Remarks of H.E. Dato Lim Jock Hoi, Secretary-General of ASEAN at the Conference on Disarmament held in Geneva, Switzerland on 25 June 2019.



Through the years, to demonstrate ASEAN's commitment to make the region as a nuclear weapons free zone, the Commission for SEANWFZ (composed of the Foreign Ministers of the ASEAN Member

States) has constantly drawn up action plans for the Treaty's effective implementation. This Commission including its executive committee has been regularly convened, a testament to the high importance ASEAN attaches to its work.

A Critical and Yet a Missed Aspect

While to the casual observer, the accession to the Treaty's Protocol by the Nuclear Weapons States may be seen as the defining character of the agreement and is often used to measure the Treaty's effectiveness, there is an equally important aspect of the SEANWFZ agreement, an aspect that is often times glossed over.

These are the actions in ASEAN to promote the principles and objectives of the Treaty such as the establishment of "regional networks for early notification of nuclear accidents, developing a regional emergency preparedness and response plan and strengthening capacity building in the region on nuclear safety issues." This is one of the items contained in the Action Plan mentioned earlier.

To this end, established in 2013 is the ASEANTOM or the ASEAN Network of Regulatory Bodies on Atomic Energy, which serves as the focal point for ASEAN's collaboration with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

The Practical Arrangements between the IAEA and ASEAN includes cooperation in the areas of nuclear science and technology, and nuclear safety, security and safeguards. This set of practical arrangements would greatly contribute in promoting enhanced cooperation and collaboration between ASEAN and the IAEA in the said areas, including capacity building.

ASEAN has taken the pragmatic step of establishing ASEANTOM.

It must be stressed that nuclear safety is considered of utmost importance both regionally in ASEAN and in the national outlooks of ASEAN Member States. Given the rising demand for energy, nuclear energy is seen as a viable alternative to fossil fuels across the globe.

Admittedly, however, the issue of safety and safeguards in using nuclear energy, as well as security of radio-active sources and protecting them from falling into hands of illicit groups and individuals to include terrorists are key concerns. It is likewise critically important to ensure that the radiological materials available in the Member States of ASEAN, specifically those in the medical field, are protected from being used for illicit purposes.

ASEAN has therefore taken the pragmatic approach of establishing ASEANTOM for greater coordination among concerned agencies in ASEAN. It has been recognised in the region that to continuously rely on fossil fuels would have tremendous impact on the region's sustainable development. But it is equally realised that the use of nuclear technology, even for peaceful purposes, brings with it attendant challenges. There is therefore a need to strike a careful balance between these energy sources to drive economic growth and development.

A Major Agenda in ASEAN-Led Mechanisms

Non-proliferation and disarmament have figured prominently not only in ASEAN but also in the agenda of ASEAN-led mechanisms, in particular the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF).

While the issue of non-proliferation has been in the agenda of the ARF since its inception in 1994, a dedicated inter-sessional meeting (ISM) on Non-Proliferation and Disarmament was established and has consistently met since 2009. This ISM has focused on how to promote cooperation among regional states in regard to non-proliferation, disarmament and peaceful uses of nuclear energy, the three pillars where the global non-proliferation regime is anchored on.

Dual-use materials should not be used for weapons production.

Beyond these three areas of focus, this ISM has consistently brought within its ambit other issues that are equally relevant and important. These include the strengthening of export controls to ensure that dual use items are not utilised for the production of nuclear weapons,

prevention of nuclear terrorism within the framework of the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism (GICNT), the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty including the matter of future prospects for the Biological Weapons Convention and the Chemical Weapons Convention.



Through this ISM, various practical activities have likewise been conducted such as, to name just a few, seminars and workshops as well as capacity building programmes on export licensing, nuclear forensics, countering the illicit

trafficking of Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear (CBRN) materials, and implementation of the UN Security Council Resolution 1540, the resolution that obligates states to ensure that nuclear materials do not fall into the hands of illicit non-state actors.

A Cross-Cutting Issue

ASEAN sees non-proliferation and disarmament not solely as political and security issues but matters that cut across the three pillars of the ASEAN Community: political-security, economic and socio-cultural. While weapons proliferation and disarmament issues have political and security implications, there are related concerns that impact on ASEAN as an economic community. Such is the case of export controls. Efforts to secure borders and prevent the territories of ASEAN Member States from being used as trans-shipment points of nuclear and fissile materials for illicit purposes ought to be complemented with actions to ensure that trade activities are not unduly hampered.

ASEAN is therefore working closely with its external partners to enhance the capacity of customs agencies to enforce relevant laws and agreements. Meanwhile, internally in ASEAN, steps are being undertaken to enhance the capacity of ASEAN Member States to exchange related intelligence and information.

The use and diffusion of chemical, biological and radiological elements definitely impact on the lives of the ASEAN peoples. Sectoral bodies under the ASEAN's socio-cultural community pillar are working closely to deal with these issues. ASEAN as a Community needs to deal with these issues in a holistic manner with its three pillars working closely together.

A Concluding Call

ASEAN is cognisant of concerns and reservations as to the geographic scope covered by the Treaty, existing maritime and territorial disputes in the Treaty's zone, legally binding negative security assurances that they may have to provide as well as their procedural rights, among others.

ASEAN region as a nuclear weapons free zone is in the strategic interest of all.

Their accession to the Protocol has always been considered important by ASEAN so much so that this matter has remained a key aspect of the Action Plan for the implementation of the SEANWFZ. Likewise spelled out in the *ASEAN Political-Security Community Blueprint 2025*, the roadmap for political-security community building efforts, is to intensify on-going efforts between ASEAN and the Nuclear Weapons States relative to their accession to the Protocol at the earliest.

It is hoped that ASEAN partners, which have in their arsenal these weapons, three of them are ASEAN's strategic partners, recognise that it is equally in their strategic interest to have and make the ASEAN region a nuclear weapons free zone. ASEAN would always be ready to work and collaborate with its partners towards their eventual accession to the Protocol. In the meantime, a manifestation of their readiness as well as commitment to accede to the Protocol would bring the region closer to that goal.

Promoting Peace and Reconciliation: The ASEAN Approach*

Introduction

A dialogue about focused collaboration to support the ASEAN Institute for Peace and Reconciliation is both timely and useful for the broader agenda of peace and reconciliation in ASEAN. Peace and reconciliation are not only goals, which ASEAN hopes to achieve; advocacies that the organisation pursues, but could actually be considered as ASEAN's *raison d'être*, its reason for existence.

ASEAN in 1967 was founded primarily to promote peace in Southeast Asia. And reflecting on that objective laid out by ASEAN's founding fathers, it becomes clear that promoting peace is not only about the absence of inter-state conflict or preventing such from erupting, it is equally about reconciliation, especially given the diversity among the peoples that comprise each ASEAN Member State, a diversity that at one point or another has generated friction among ASEAN peoples.

*Promoting peace and
reconciliation is ASEAN's
raison d'être.*

It is therefore important for reconciliation among peoples to be promoted and pursued. Of course, what should not be overlooked is the equal importance of promoting reconciliation among states.

A Three-Layered Promotion of Peace

How ASEAN has fared in its vision of promoting peace could be dissected along three levels: first, within each ASEAN Member State; second, among the member states of ASEAN; and third, beyond Southeast Asia.

To a great extent, ASEAN in its journey for more than the past five decades has done pretty well in working towards the overall vision of having peace not only across the region but more importantly within

* Remarks of H.E. Dato Lim Jock Hoi, Secretary-General of ASEAN delivered at the Opening of the 7th ASEAN-UN Workshop Regional Dialogue on Political Security Cooperation: Focused Collaboration in Support of the ASEAN Institute for Peace and Reconciliation held in Ha Noi, Viet Nam on 3 December 2019.

each member state of ASEAN.

Statistics show that not a single member state of ASEAN is homogenous and it is this reality that has prompted governments of ASEAN Member States to continuously work towards bringing their peoples in the margins towards mainstream societies, to undertake programmes to address social issues that are considered as root causes of possible conflict, knowing too well that one of the key principles when ASEAN was founded: that regional resilience is anchored on national resilience, equally applies today.



ASEAN Community building efforts anchored on the three pillars of political-security community, economic community and socio-cultural community underpins ASEAN's quest for peace at the regional level. As encapsulated in the *ASEAN Vision 2025: Forging Ahead Together*, to wit: "peoples and members of ASEAN living in peace with one another and the world at large", the respective Blueprints 2025 of the three Community Pillars contain specific strategic measures and action lines to deepen the sense of community in ASEAN.

Community building is a process and momentum must be sustained.

Mid-way into their implementation, which commenced in 2016, there is good progress of implementation of these Community Blueprints by the various sectoral bodies in ASEAN including the ASEAN Member States, with key milestones achieved and others underway as 2019 draws to a close.

As Community building is a process, ASEAN continues to sustain momentum by further taking additional actions on those strategic measures and action lines already acted upon while efforts are underway to act on the remaining ones. And to ensure that ASEAN's community building efforts are on track, a Mid-term Review of each of the Community Blueprints will be undertaken in 2020 as Viet Nam chairs ASEAN.

The sense of community in ASEAN as a whole and among ASEAN Member States in particular is manifested by the readiness of members

to assist each other in times of disasters, whether human-induced or natural. ASEAN's efforts to deal with issues, particularly those that transcend the boundaries of neighbouring states, whether ASEAN or otherwise, may not necessarily hog the limelight. For some observers, these may even be falling short of what is expected of ASEAN.

But there is assurance that as always, ASEAN is working, quietly but consistently to deal with these issues, as has always been one of the hallmarks of ASEAN. Indeed, amidst the challenges to peace and security that exist in the ASEAN region, ASEAN continues to work hard to promote stability so that the peace dividend, which is needed for its community building efforts, is maintained.

Beyond Southeast Asia, ASEAN has contributed to building peace by promoting strategic trust not only between ASEAN and its external partners but also between and among the external partners themselves. By providing platforms where these external partners interact with each other through the various ASEAN-led or ASEAN-centred mechanisms, ASEAN is both able to contribute in building confidence and trust among its partners, with a strong emphasis that in working towards regional peace and stability, none should be excluded; instead all ought to be included.

ASEAN has contributed in building peace by promoting strategic trust.

The adoption by the ASEAN Leaders of the *ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP)* this year at the 34th ASEAN Summit in June is the latest testament to ASEAN's belief that inclusiveness is the key to promoting peace and cooperation in the wider Indo-Pacific region.

By emphasising the principle of inclusiveness through this AOIP, ASEAN has reshaped the discourse about the Indo-Pacific, which was then beginning to be perceived as a tool by some partners of ASEAN to counter another partner of ASEAN, into something that is inclusive of all stakeholders. The support to the AOIP, manifested by the Leaders of ASEAN's external partners during the most recent 35th ASEAN Summit and Related Summits in Thailand last November reaffirms their recognition of ASEAN's central role in the regional architecture.

Inclusiveness is key in promoting peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific.

In Partnership, Together with Stakeholders

ASEAN appreciates the contributions of its partners in building the capacity of ASEAN and its Member States. While ASEAN has been recognised as a successful experiment in regard to promoting peace within and beyond Southeast Asia, building a pool of experts and building a network of support would go a well way in further enabling ASEAN both to prevent conflict from arising as well as deal and manage it when it arises.

True enough, as is known in ASEAN and the rest of the world, peace is not only about the absence of conflict; it is rather a never ending process of working for and towards it, which is the essence of peace building where everyone is supposed to play a critical role, to include women.

This is something which ASEAN Leaders themselves affirmed in 2017 when they adopted the *Joint Statement on Promoting Women, Peace and Security in ASEAN*. The initiative to establish an “ASEAN Women for Peace Registry” is a step in the right direction to further enhance women’s involvement in peacebuilding. Women have always played a crucial role both in maintaining the peace or building it; many at times not accorded due recognition that is appropriate. It is therefore also encouraging that there is now a momentum for women to play a role in related areas such as peacekeeping operations.

*The development gap
must be narrowed;
the digital divide
must be blurred.*

Finally, if peace were to be sustained, there is a need to continuously work towards removing divisions among peoples from narrowing the development gap to bridging the digital divide. Indeed, the peace that is enjoyed today both at the national and regional levels will not be sustainable if such

divide or gap persists. It is for this reason that ASEAN continues to put premium on developing its human capital to include women, children and the youth. Even the ageing members of ASEAN societies are part of the human capital development agenda, hence ASEAN's focus on active ageing.

Indeed, human capital development is an essential factor in building a people-centred ASEAN Community that looks to the future and leaves no one behind as contained in the *ASEAN Leaders' Vision Statement on Partnership for Sustainability*; something that will continue to be envisioned as work is undertaken towards a *Cohesive and Responsive ASEAN*, the theme for 2020.



ASEAN: A Community of Opportunities for All

 ASEAN

 ASEAN

 @ASEAN

 www.asean.org