

PRESS RELEASE

At Davos ASEAN Chief Welcomes World's Focus on East Asia Davos, Switzerland, 2 February 2009

The recently concluded World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos, Switzerland, placed particular importance on regional economic integration in East Asia as a stabilising force and an engine of growth for the world economy.

Prime Minister Taro Aso of Japan promised to finance long term "economic corridors" infrastructure in ASEAN and India to promote economic recovery while Chinese Premier, Wen Jiabao, emphasized that regional economic integration "should be vigorously promoted".

The Chairman of ASEAN, Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva of Thailand, also called for a coordinated regional approach to resolve global financial problems. He used ASEAN as an example of regional strategy to minimise global impact of the current economic downturn.

Dr Surin Pitsuwan, the Secretary-General of ASEAN welcomed these calls for a stronger role for Asia in stabilising the world economy. "The general atmosphere at the WEF this year was rather subdued but the attention being paid to East Asian leaders' pronouncements has been significant, reflecting the international community's hope for our region to lead the recovery." He made this observation at the end of the 2009 WEF.

In the midst of global economic recession and potential social unrest if no effective solution is found, Dr Surin saw Asia as the only engine of growth left in the world. While multilateral trade negotiations are stalling, ASEAN is due to sign two important trade deals with India, Australia and New Zealand at its annual summit later this month in Thailand. "With ASEAN in the heart of Asia, there have been hopes expressed for the regional organisation to engage more actively in the world stage."

Dr Surin welcomed Japanese Prime Minister Taro Aso's pledge of an additional USD 17 billion to jump-start the Asian economies. Asia accounts for 40% of the world's population.

Earlier in Davos, Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao insisted on China's commitment to a policy of opening up and cooperation and to continue with trade and investment liberalisation. Premier Wen also called for a scaling up of "assistance to the least developed countries and regions in particular with a view to building up their capacity for independent development". As a close neighbour, ASEAN stands to benefit from this Chinese strategic vision.

The new Prime Minister of Thailand, Mr Abhisit Vejjajiva, in his maiden presence in Davos, called for a coordinated regional approach to the global financial problems. Prime Minister Abhisit suggested that while many of the global challenges are beyond the capacity of national governments to resolve, regional integration is the most effective means to deal with them. "The integration process is the way forward for ASEAN," Prime

Minister Abhisit reiterated as he prepared to chair the 14th ASEAN Summit in Hua Hin, Thailand, at the end of February.

Dr Surin affirmed that these commitments on the part of East Asia's two most important economies, China and Japan, and the two free trade agreements augur well not only for ASEAN but for the global economy as well. He said that economic integration will ultimately benefit the region and beyond.

"I sense a strong commitment of our regional leaders and the world welcomes it," Dr Surin concluded.