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**KEYNOTE SPEECH BY
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Excellencies,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen.

1. I am deeply honoured and privileged to be invited to speak at this Conference on Security Culture in Southeast Asia, Africa and Central Asia this evening. Let me thank the London School of Economics and in particular Sir Howard Davies for this opportunity.

2. I have decided to speak this evening on a subject which is very close to my heart. It is now almost a decade since I assumed the position of Malaysia's Foreign Minister and I must say that ASEAN remains to be the cornerstone of Malaysia's

foreign policy. Obviously, in the limited time I have, it would be difficult for me to cover the whole 40 year span of ASEAN history. What I intend to do is to touch on some of aspects of the evolution process we have undergone and look into the challenges as we chart our course in the future.

3. As this year also marks the 40th anniversary of ASEAN, I thought it would be able appropriate for me to speak on the theme “40 Years of ASEAN: Its Evolution and Its Challenges Today”.

4. At the end of the confrontation by Indonesia against Malaysia, the leaders of Indonesia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand agreed to the formation of a regional organization named ASEAN. Indeed it is a positive development following the failure of previous efforts at regionalism.

5. Let me begin by asserting that, at 40, ASEAN has now come of age. It has become a brand name, synonymous, with Southeast Asia. In the international arena, it is recognized as a

regional organization that is dedicated to the promotion of peace, stability, security and development in the region.

6. As one of the five founding members of ASEAN, Malaysia takes pride, following the signing of the Bangkok Declaration on 8th August 1967, to witness the evolution of ASEAN into a credible and respected organization. With that, the membership of ASEAN grew to the present 10, beginning with Brunei in 1984 and finally Myanmar in 1997.

7. In my view, the membership expansion is a testimony that ASEAN is truly an association representing the interest of its members in Southeast Asia. It is also considered a useful vehicle in promoting open and progressive regionalism and forging closer cooperation in various areas. The common goal and aspiration is to create a peaceful, stable, prosperous and progressive community as espoused in the Bangkok Declaration. The shared values have been instrumental in garnering the interest of the newer members to join ASEAN.

8. Up to today, it is heartening to see the differences between ASEAN member states in political, economic or territorial claims have not unduly affected the peace, security and stability within ASEAN.

9. The evolution of ASEAN is therefore clearly a function of its own need and circumstances. From the start, ASEAN has taken a cautious approach to develop itself gradually in the context of a loose regional framework trying to achieve consensus at all levels in its decision making process. It was never an ASEAN strategy to begin with a strong institutional structure. It was also dictated by the prevalent geo-political realities. Unlike some newly established regional organizations, the process of holding an annual ASEAN Summit, as an illustration, only began in 2001 i.e. 34 years after its inception. Otherwise, it kept on being referred to as an informal “Meeting of Heads of State and Government of ASEAN”.

10. The deliberate choice of a loose framework with emphasis on consensus-based decision making process would appear to outside observers that ASEAN is less efficient and sometimes

seem to undermine the effectiveness of ASEAN. However to ASEAN, such a mechanism was imperative as this provided room for its members to maneuver, especially during its infancy, in preventing the emergence of an intra ASEAN friction that would be divisive for the growth of the organisation.

11. We will get a better appreciation and understanding of ASEAN's origins if we look at the regional and global geopolitics at that time. Moreover, during this period, the world was very much divided along ideological lines and the tide of communism was perceived to be sweeping swiftly. Generally, there exist suspicions among countries in the region of each other as well as their motives. We were very concerned with ensuring peace, stability and prosperity to meet the hopes and aspirations of our people. A step by step approach was the best way to form the building blocks necessary in order to move forward. Indeed this provided an opportunity for leaders to hold candid discussions outside the formal settings and avoid a confrontational approach which could undermine the harmony and solidarity of ASEAN.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

12. Today, we can proudly say that ASEAN's success is becoming more and more visible. With a combined land area of 4.46 million square km, a combined GDP of US 1,072 billion and total trade amounting to USD1,404 billion plus a market size of some 560 million, ASEAN as an integrated region is practically at the heart of a dynamic Asia.

13. ASEAN's integration process has been greatly facilitated by the growing intensity of interactions and dialogue at all levels. More than 700 ASEAN meetings are held throughout the year. A wide range of issues have now been included in its Agenda. The "we feeling" is being developed to strengthen the ASEAN spirit amongst member states and to ensure that they give priority to ASEAN in the conduct of their external relations. Cooperation with non ASEAN states is also being intensified with enhanced interactions within the ASEAN+1, the ASEAN+3, the East Asia Summit, the ASEAN Regional Forum, the ASEAN PMC and also other regional and international mechanisms.

14. As a measure of ASEAN's confidence and achievements, several landmark instruments have also been concluded over the past 40 years to address both the security and economic needs of the region. These include the Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality Declaration, the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC), the Treaty on Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone (SEANWFZ), the Bali Concord I and II, the Hanoi Plan of Action, the Vientiane Action Plan, the Initiative for ASEAN Integration, the ASEAN Free Trade Agreement and the ASEAN Investment Area.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

15. A major transformation of ASEAN took place with the conclusion of the Bali Concord II in 2003 and the Declaration on the Establishment of the ASEAN Charter in Kuala Lumpur in 2005.

16. The Bali Concord II provides for the establishment of an ASEAN Community based on three pillars, namely, political and security, economic and socio-cultural cooperations by the year

2020 which was subsequently advanced to 2015. In other words we have drawn a clear roadmap for the development of a caring and sharing community with a common vision and identity to achieve an integrated ASEAN.

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

17. I believe with these pillars, if successfully implemented, it will give birth to a prosperous and dynamic ASEAN Community.

18. The ASEAN Political and Security pillar espouses that each member renounces the use of threat as a mode of resolving disputes. ASEAN's own experience has proved the importance of a peaceful and stable environment for economic and social development. This has enable peaceful coexistence and dialogue in the day to day interaction among member states.

19. The signing of the ASEAN Political Security Community of the ASEAN Convention on Counter-Terrorism (ACCT) in Cebu on

13 January 2007 reflects the commitment of ASEAN Member States to cooperate in addressing the challenges in countering international terrorism in this region. Another example was the signing of the ASEAN Declaration on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers during the same Summit in Cebu. This will allow for better protection and a more efficient system in tackling the movement of migrant workers.

20. At the AMM in Manila last August, it was decided that a committee to follow-up on the implementation of the Declaration be established.

21. It was also agreed that a Blueprint be drawn up to guide and consolidate the ASEAN integration process in the political and security aspect.

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22. The area that is considered less problematical in achieving integration is in the establishment of an ASEAN Economic

Community (AEC). Towards this end, a Blueprint is being crafted as a cross-sectoral document covering 12 economic committees. The main elements highlighted in the Blueprint are:

- a single market and production base;**
- a highly competitive economic region;**
- a region of equitable economic development; and**
- a region fully integrated into the global economy.**

23. The Blueprint which is targeted for signing at the 13th ASEAN Summit in November this year, will outline clear targets and timelines for the implementation of the various measure as well as with pre-agreed flexibilities. It is expected that this roadmap, if adhered to by a timely implementation, it will give birth to an ASEAN Economic Community by 2015. Being a dynamic organization, ASEAN will always adopt a pragmatic and realistic approach towards integration. Modifications will be made as we progress along in the implementation, taking into account the global market dynamics. This Blueprint will be a catalyst of growth and provide a multiplier effect to the already active intra-ASEAN trade movement that the group is currently enjoying.

24. In the final analysis, our intention to inculcate ASEANness will depend on the involvement of our peoples. The ASEAN government must be more sensitive and people oriented. We should encourage greater grassroots interaction and activities, and organize programmes that will promote their participation. The Hanoi Plan of Action which was adopted in 1998 and its successor, the Vientiane Action Plan (VAP) adopted in 2004 has laid down principles which will be instrumental in unifying as well as cross-linking strategies and goals of the three pillars.

25. This 2004-2010 Action Plan focused on the broader integration of the 10 member countries into one cohesive ASEAN Community. New strategies have to be formulated for narrowing the development gap to quicken the pace of integration. However, most of the ASEAN programmes implemented in the past three years tend to concentrate on confidence building and not on promoting greater regional integration process. Taking cognizance of this, the recent 40th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting (AMM) in Manila decided to also

develop a blueprint for the emergence of Socio-Cultural Community.

26. In order to enable ASEAN to monitor the progress of the VAP, a mid-term review will be undertaken, to study and examine in a quantitative manner, the progress and impact of the various programmes during the last three years. This would enable the planners to look at its trends, weaknesses and modify or revise the next course of action, if necessary.

27. Having touched on how the three pillars are being strategised as a tool for ASEAN integration, I would now like to touch on the subject of the ASEAN Charter that has attracted much interest within and outside ASEAN. The ASEAN Charter is intended to provide ASEAN with a legal personality without turning it into a supranational body. ASEAN would become a rules-based organization as distinct from its previously purely policy-oriented regime. It is hoped that the current weaknesses within ASEAN, namely:

- the lack of coordination and overlapping jurisdiction between ministerial/sectoral bodies,**

- proliferation of ASEAN bodies,
- compliance with ASEAN agreements and decisions,
- organisational structure at the ASEAN Secretariat,
- resource mobilization and,
- the strengthening of ASEAN's role as the driving force in its external relations,

would be better addressed with the coming into force of the ASEAN Charter.

28. Decision-making has a significant place, in particular, in the proposed Charter. Whilst consensus and consultations would remain as a general principle, a window is provided for ASEAN Leaders, in the event of failure to achieve consensus at the Ministerial level to choose the appropriate mode in arriving at the decision. This allows for some flexibility and is indeed perceived as a big departure. In the proposed Charter, we managed to take a leap forward by including an enabling provision for the establishment of an ASEAN Human Rights body.

29. I can definitely say the drafting of the ASEAN Charter by ASEAN's High Level Task Force (HLTF) is progressing better than expected. The core referral document other than studies, recommendations and views made by various ASEAN eminent personalities, external consultants, civil society, NGOs and other relevant stakeholders is the Report and Recommendations of the Eminent Persons Group (EPG) under the Chairmanship of Malaysia which was submitted and adopted by the leaders. I must admit achieving consensus on all the major issues involving ten member states was never an easy task. However, the HLTF has to complete its work hopefully in time for the signing during the Singapore ASEAN Summit, with the spirit of compromise and accommodation that exist, I believe it is possible to see it signed in Singapore.

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

30. It is hoped that ASEAN Community development and the ASEAN Charter will contribute significantly towards regional

peace and stability. Nevertheless, numerous political, security, economic and socio-cultural challenges still lie ahead of ASEAN.

31. In order for ASEAN to be credible and respected it has to move with the dictate of time. It has to be sensitive to the changes taking place at the global level in all aspects. ASEAN's policy of non-interference and absolute sovereignty need to be viewed in the context of current international political development. We have to make a paradigm shift, in action as well as mindset, to sustain our unity and cohesiveness. We have made many progresses and the 2002 Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea is a good example.

32. The accession of the TAC by the 14 non-ASEAN countries will ensure peace and stability in our region. We look forward to the EU and the UK to similarly do so in the future. An ASEAN SEANWFZ Plan of Action has now been adopted and as a follow up, an appropriate resolution would be tabled for adoption at the forthcoming 62nd Session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York. We are confident that the adherence to the principles contained in the relevant instruments would lead

to the reduction of tension and conflicts in the Southeast Asian region and the world at large.

33. Of course for regional resilience to be strong, we also need to maintain the necessary domestic climate in each of its member states. We must overcome the political and security hotspots in the Southern Philippines, Southern Thailand and Myanmar, and find a lasting resolution for ensuring peace and security in neighbouring ASEAN states. Whilst respecting and adhering to the principle of non-interference, this cannot be taken to mean that we could afford to totally ignore abuses of civil rights and liberties.

34. An important element to ASEAN solidarity is the way we have thus far manage the issue of overlapping claims covering land and maritime boundaries. The peaceful settlement of such disputes through political negotiations would definitely be the best route but it had never been easy as it cannot be left outstanding forever. The principle of “not giving and not taking an inch” can often lead to a long drawn impasse. It was against such a backdrop that Malaysia and Indonesia in 2002 decided to

resolve our disputes over Pulau Sipadan and Ligitan. Pulau Batu Puteh with Singapore is now before the International Court of Justice (ICJ). This still remains one of the preferred options available to us to achieve a peaceful resolution of boundary demarcation disputes within the region.

35. ASEAN too was badly affected by new challenges arising from transnational issues including piracy, international terrorism, drug trafficking, SARS, avian flu, natural disasters and more recently climate change.

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

36. The issue of climate change, environment and, closely associated with it, natural disasters in particular, are becoming more and more important for ASEAN as we witness the havoc and hardship caused on account of such disasters on ordinary ASEAN citizens. The disastrous effects of the 2004 Tsunami are yet to be forgotten and the affected ASEAN member countries have no choice but to invest heavily in establishing their

respective national early warning systems. We have also collectively address the issue of environment and climate change by reaching out to the international community including the private sector and the civil society in accordance with the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities.

37. Transboundary pollution, notably the haze, that annually affects Malaysia, Brunei, Indonesia and Singapore remains an issue of concern. ASEAN Member States are collectively united in tackling the issue by concluding the ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution in 2002 and by putting in place the ASEAN Regional Haze Action Plan. Each member state is now required to develop National Plans to prevent and mitigate land and forest fires, including the prohibition of open burning and the strict control of slash-and-burn practices during the dry period. Member States are also required to formulate and strictly enforce air quality laws, implement air quality monitoring and reporting regimes, undertake surveillance on local sources of emissions and establish a national task force to develop strategies and response to deal with fires and smoke haze.

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

38. We believe that the threat of international terrorism is under control since 9/11 and that authorities within ASEAN have continued to be cooperating within and outside the region. Joint Declarations in countering international terrorism with all Dialogue Partners are already in place. As a measure of the seriousness with which we continue to view the threat of terrorism, the ASEAN Convention on Counter Terrorism, as I mentioned earlier, was concluded in January 2007. Close collaboration in the exchange of intelligence amongst ASEAN member states has been a vital factor in success of our efforts in countering terrorism. Nevertheless, what remains is the need for us to be conscious and wary of the activities of any group that practices deviant teachings and hold extremist views of their faith and culture.

39. Due to globalisation and the fact that we are becoming more and more borderless, human trafficking has surfaced as a new problem that need to be tackled. Human trafficking in

Southeast Asia is not something new but remain a serious problem for us. Trafficking in our region is a very complex issue with a multifaceted dimension as many travel from a poorer country to a more affluent one to seek better employment opportunities. Due to the difficulties of enforcement of our long and porous borders, it is difficult for any one government to shoulder the responsibility of stopping the flow of people from one country to another including human trafficking. Close cooperation and intelligence sharing remain important to effectively combat the activities of traffickers.

40. The Straits of Malacca as we are aware is an important international trade routes for goods and services. Therefore, its safety and security is of paramount importance. As a littoral state, Malaysia is equally concerned on the need to safeguard the interest of all users of the Straits. But such rights need to be balanced with the sovereign rights of littoral states. The close collaboration and cooperation between Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore with the support of major user states have resulted in a further improvement of the safety and the security of the Straits.

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

41. Recently, consistent with what is happening in other parts of the world, the subject of energy security has become an important area of concern to ASEAN. We face the prospect of increasingly scarce and depleting oil and gas resources. Tension and conflicts may even arise if the search for such resources involves disputed maritime areas. Cooperative efforts are also absolutely necessary in the search for alternative energy and the need to promote research and development of energy efficient technologies, from the perspective of both the supply and demand side. This includes the regulation of renewable energy resources like hydro as well as an integrated approach towards energy resource management.

42. Is ASEAN moving towards the EU way as it sets itself at integration? My short answer is no, but over the long term it might happen. While we can draw several parallels with the European Union (EU), the evolution of ASEAN is quite different.

Like the EU, bridging the gap between the older and more developed ASEAN member states with the newer and less developed members continues to be a major challenge for ASEAN as a whole. Regrettably, not much had been achieved with the implementation of both the Hanoi Plan of Action and the Vientiane Action Plan due to lack of financial resources. It is therefore understandable to see the CLMV countries – Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam establishing or joining various sub regional groups to the extent of including non-ASEAN members as a way of securing additional resources. Nonetheless, this has not affected the unity of ASEAN.

43. How do we make ASEAN more people oriented and more meaningful to ordinary citizens? We see the need to create more awareness of ASEAN through early exposure and education of how ASEAN can and has benefited the people. Towards this end, more programmes would be undertaken so as to widen the scope and reach of ordinary citizens on ASEAN related matters. The declaration of August 8 as ASEAN Day was certainly a significant step in the right direction. Whereas, the

citizens of the European Union post World War II understood the need for a Union or a regional grouping.

44. ASEAN 40 years ago had a different outlook compared to countries within the EU. We had different values vis-à-vis political structures, beliefs, culturally as well as socio-economic disparities. We were essentially a collection of disparate countries drawn together for one common goal. We wanted a cohesive, peaceful, stable and prosperous partnership that was able to ensure the future of our children amidst diversity.

45. As a result, we have continued to treasure and value our individual conduct of external relations. At the moment, ASEAN is satisfied with the existing mechanisms in place and is not looking for new partnerships. However, we will continue to be outward looking in our approach and will deliberate on pertinent questions whenever an opportunity presents itself. Our main priority is to ensure that ASEAN continues to be the driving force in promoting collaborative efforts with its current Dialogue and Sectoral Dialogue Partners. This is a strategic decision considering the circumstances.

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

46. Much cynicism, if not outright criticism, have been leveled against ASEAN with respect to its capacity to shoulder such a responsibility. Indeed ASEAN's perceived "slow pace" ala "ASEAN Way" has even been a subject of irritation to some Dialogue Partners. This issue is well recognised by ASEAN and a major change is needed with clear commitments, hopefully via the proposed Charter, if ASEAN desires to maintain its position as the driving force in promoting the interest of ASEAN as well as its major Dialogue Partners.

47. What is pertinent here is that ASEAN is accepted as important to countries outside the region and by its dialogue partners. ASEAN's influence has indeed transcended the geographical footprint. ASEAN is now more comfortable and confident in itself to interact with others whilst preserving its own identity.

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

48. In conclusion, let me reiterate that ASEAN remains relevant and important for peace and security. The region would have been worse off without ASEAN. Its slow but steady evolution has allowed it to develop into a mature organization, able to respond to the ever changing realities of regional and global affairs including the inexorable advance of globalization, the rise of India and China and the dynamics of international diplomacy. It has a clear vision and a practical road map to achieve it. Its organizational structure is being significantly improved and with its own Charter, ASEAN is set to enter into a new and exciting era in the years ahead.

Thank you.