# THE PHILIPPINES AND INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION: TOWARDS BUILDING CARING SOCIETIES

By

Lourdes S. Tabamo
Director, ASEAN Office
Department of Foreign Affairs,
Manila, Philippines

## I. INTRODUCTION

In the Second ASEAN Informal Summit in December 1997 in Kuala Lumpur, which also marked the 30th Anniversary of ASEAN, the Heads of State/Government reaffirmed their commitment to the aims and purposes of the Association as set forth in the Bangkok Declaration of 8 August 1967, in particular to promote regional cooperation in Southeast Asia in the spirit of equality and partnership and thereby contribute towards peace, progress and prosperity in the region.

In this Summit Meeting, the leaders charted a vision for ASEAN on the basis of present realities and prospects in the decades leading to the year 2020. Thus was born the ASEAN Vision 2020 which envisages "ASEAN as a concert of South East Asian Nations, outward looking, living in peace, stability and prosperity, bounded together in partnership in dynamic development and in a community of caring societies."

### The Ha Noi Plan of Action and Vientiane Action Program

In order to implement this long-term vision, action plans will serve as guiding references. The Ha Noi Plan of Action (HPA) is the first of a series of action plans building up to a realization of the goals towards ASEAN Vision 2020. The HPA has a six-year timeframe covering the years 1999-2004. It ends in November this year at the ASEAN Summit Meeting in Vientiane, Laos. Its successor, the Vientiane Action Program. (VAP) will build on the accomplishments of the HPA and continue its goal and objectives for the next 5 years, from 2005 to 2010.

### The ASEAN Community by 2020

Setting its vision to the year 2020, ASEAN Heads of State/Government adopted the Bali Concord II in October 2003 which took the bold step to transform ASEAN from an association of states to a community of

nations. The Ha Noi Plan of Action and now the Vientiane Plan of Action would be the building blocks towards the ASEAN Community 2020.

The ASEAN Community would have three pillars: an ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), an ASEAN Security Community (ASC) and an ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC). All three pillars are mutually reinforcing in support of the ASEAN vision of peace, stability and shared prosperity in the region. The ASCC will stand as the social pillar of ASEAN cooperation, complementing the ASC and AEC.

The ASCC is a Philippine initiative proposed at the 2003 Summit Meeting in Bali. The proposal is derived from the premise that economic integration alone will not be sufficient to realize the vision of an ASEAN Community. The community must be built on a social agenda because poverty, social injustice, environmental degradation, infectious diseases, if not addressed, can undermine the full potential of the economy.

The proposed ASCC Plan of Action as drafted by the Philippines has four key elements:

- Building caring societies to address issues of poverty, equity and human development
- Managing the social impacts of economic integration by building a human resource base and systems of social protection
- Enhancing environmental sustainability
- Creating ASEAN awareness

## II. ASEAN AND DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION PARTNERSHIP

The efforts of member countries, individually and collectively, towards an ASEAN Vision 2020, since 1997, can be largely attributed to the support and cooperation with international development agencies among which are JICA, UNDP, WHO, ILO, ADB, ASEAN Foundation, and the dialogue partners (Australia, Canada, China, European Union, India, Japan, Republic of Korea, New Zealand, Russia, United States of America).

The dialogue partners are more economically developed countries interested in exploring and formally entering into cooperative

relationship with ASEAN. The partnership with developed agencies and dialogue partners is guided by the following principles of conduct:

a) Cooperation with ASEAN as a group should not be at the expense of existing bilateral arrangements.
b) Cooperation should serve to complement ASEAN's capabilities and not supplant them
c) Cooperation should be for projects conceived by ASEAN which are of a regional character and for the benefit of all ASEAN countries.
d) Cooperation should be unconditional, that is, similar terms and conditions should apply to all ASEAN countries, unless otherwise agreed upon by the parties conceived.

Cooperation Projects

Recent years have seen the support of various agencies to the Philippines for its social development projects towards ASEAN countries. A Seminar on Accessible Information and Communication Technology for Persons with Disabilities was completed in 2002 through UNDP. Its objective was to facilitate access to ICT by People with Disability (PWD).

In October of last year, the Workshop on Community Strategies for Prevention of Domestic Violence was conducted by the Philippine Department of Social Welfare and Development in cooperation with New Zealand, one of the Dialogue Partners. It was attended by over 30 delegates from the ASEAN countries who spent ten (10) days in meetings, workshops and study visits learning about best practices, sharing experiences and agreeing on an action plan to be implemented in their respective countries.

Health issues were at the forefront of ASEAN's concerns last year and early this year due to the outbreak of SARS and avian flu virus. China did not waste time in organizing with ASEAN, several meetings to address and control the spread of the diseases. The Philippines also hosted two ASEAN meetings related to SARS: first an Aviation Forum for the containment of SARS which set the procedures for screening incoming and outgoing travelers in airports and at seas, and second, a Special Labor Officials Meeting on SARS to address the impact of SARS on the labor workforce.

The United States has contributed US$1 Billion for the Global Fund to Fight Aids, Tuberculosis and Malaria which is presently benefitting ASEAN countries. Aside from this, it provided support to the ASEAN Work Program on HIV/AIDS in the amount of US$1.7 Million.

Later this year, through the ASEAN Foundation and with assistance from Japan, the University of the Philippines' College of Community Development and Social Welfare will conduct an ASEAN Training Course for Social Workers aimed at standardizing practices and enhancing skills in the conduct of social services.

Ongoing since year 2000 is ASEAN's centerpiece project, the Initiative for ASEAN Integration or IAI which aims to bridge the development gap between the six "older" developed ASEAN members (Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand) and the four "newer", less developed members (Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Viet Nam). Total of over seventy projects have been organized for them with funding from development agencies on human resource development, ICT, regional economic integration and infrastructure. In the field of HRD, the Philippines Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) will conduct a training course in Ha Noi and Manila for CLMV participants to enhance their skills on Technical Vocational Education and Training.

International development cooperation would also figure prominently in the implementation of the Plan of Action for the ASEAN Social Cultural Community, wherein the first two key elements are on building caring societies and managing the social impact of economic integration.

## III. JAPAN'S ACTIVE ROLE IN DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

Japan has been a consistent supporter of ASEAN projects. It will soon implement an ASEAN-Japan Plan of Action as a result of the ASEAN-Japan Commemorative Summit in Tokyo in December 2003. In that Summit Meeting, Prime Minister Koizumi and the ten ASEAN Heads of State/Government agreed on a Tokyo Declaration for the Dynamics and Enduring ASEAN-Japan Partnership in the New Millennium, which spells out cooperation in the political/security, economic and social/cultural areas. The Plan of Action will have short and long-term phases (more than three years) and will be implemented at the regional level between ASEAN-Japan.

Projects under this Plan of Action will in no way jeopardize ongoing or proposed projects under the Japan-ASEAN Exchange Project (JAEP) and the Japan-ASEAN General Exchange Fund (JAGEF) and the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA).

The Philippines attaches great importance to its relations with Japan, whether on bilateral or multilateral fronts. Philippine President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo in her policy speech at the 106th anniversary of the Department of Foreign Affairs in July 2004, stated eight realities in the conduct of foreign relations, and the first one is quoted as follows:

*"The first reality that China, Japan and the US have a determining influence in the security situation and economic evolution of East Asia."*

Given their meaningful historical and cultural ties, there is no doubt that Japan and the Philippines and ASEAN-Japan will continue to nurture their close cordial relations and partnership in many areas of cooperation in the years to come.