

Speech
Minister for Foreign Affairs, Julie Bishop MP
50th anniversary of ASEAN
August 3, 2017
Bangkok

Thank you Ambassador Nongnuth for your kind words and thank you for the introduction.

Honoured guests, ladies and gentlemen, it's a great pleasure to be back in Bangkok, my second visit as Foreign Minister, although I have been here as a tourist on many occasions over many decades.

I began my day with an early morning run through Lumpini Park and I joined hundreds it seems of local people embracing brisk exercise not just the physical and mental but also the spiritual and it reminded me again how the Thai people are able to bring such balance into their lives.

I then paid my respects at the Grand Palace, expressing the condolences of the Prime Minister, the government and the people of Australia on the passing of your beloved monarch, His Majesty King Ramos IX.

I have just completed a very productive and comprehensive meeting with Minister Don and now it is indeed a great pleasure to be here at the at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on this significant anniversary.

Fifty-one years ago, here in Bangkok, Thailand played a leading role in helping to resolve what was then a significant regional conflict, *Konfrontasi*.

The Indonesian Foreign Minister and Malaysian Deputy Prime Minister met with Thai Foreign Minister Thanat Khoman. They came up with a way to manage the regional tensions that gave rise to that conflict.

That idea was for an association of Southeast Asian nations, a regional community of countries that shared geography and history, and a desire to see a more unified – and therefore influential – Southeast Asia.

As Foreign Minister Thanat put it at that time:

“The nations out here in Southeast Asia are small.

“If (they) can learn and find ways and means to band together and cooperate with one another, they may eventually be able to shape and implement a positive and concerted policy without being squeezed or crushed by the weight and pressure of larger countries”.¹

Bringing together five countries, its key goals were ambitious:

- To accelerate economic growth, social progress and cultural development
- To promote regional peace and stability
- To promote Southeast Asian studies
- To promote collaboration, mutual assistance and trade.

So, fifty years ago here in Bangkok, a new phase in the history of Southeast Asia began, with the birth of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

¹ ‘Recalling Thanat as a diplomatic doyen’, Bangkok Post 20 July, Kavi Chongkittavorn.

ASEAN's creation in Bangkok testifies to Thailand's leadership role and its influence over security and development issues in South East Asia. When the Bangkok Declaration was signed at Saranrom Palace, the former headquarters of Thailand's Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 8 August, 1967 – Australia, saw the huge potential of ASEAN.

Australia's then Foreign Minister Sir Paul Hasluck, welcomed the formation of ASEAN the very next day, August 9, noting Australia enjoyed close and friendly relations with all of its members, and gave our support for its objectives.

Seven years later, Australia was ASEAN's the first dialogue partner. Our formal and informal links have grown and deepened ever since.

The ASEAN-Australia-New Zealand Free Trade Agreement – which entered into force in January 2010 – remains ASEAN's most comprehensive free trade agreement.

Australia and ASEAN recognised our strong and long-standing ties by declaring ours a strategic partnership in 2014 and by agreeing to hold biennial leaders' Summits, the first of which was held last year.

Fifty years on, Australia's support for the objectives of the 1967 ASEAN Declaration remains and our partnership with ASEAN has become a decisive element of our foreign policy.

Economic growth, social progress and cultural development in this part of the world have been truly transformational.

I note that Thailand was instrumental in the inclusion of Cambodia, Myanmar and Laos PDR into ASEAN in the late 1990s and advocated for the expansion of ASEAN more generally.

Now comprising ten nations, ASEAN makes up the third-largest population in the world, with a combined GDP of more than \$2.5 trillion.²

ASEAN economies comprise the 3rd largest economy in the Indo-Pacific, behind only India and China, and indeed, the 5th largest in the world.

ASEAN's digital economy is projected to grow by 500 per cent and be worth more than \$200 billion by 2025, on the back of nearly three quarters of a billion mobile connections.

This region's transformation is remarkable. Take this one statistic: extreme poverty in East Asia and the Pacific reduced from 58 per cent in 1990 to 4 per cent in 2015.

Australia's strong ties with ASEAN are based on a clear-eyed assessment of our shared interests and values.

Australia and ASEAN are both clear beneficiaries of the international rules-based order that has underpinned our growth and prosperity.

That order, and the open economic architecture that ASEAN and its partners have developed, has allowed Australian and ASEAN economic engagement to flourish.

² All statistics in this section are taken from ASEAN Matters for America, a May 2017 report by the East-West Centre, the US-ASEAN Institute and the Yusof Ishak Institute.

ASEAN is our third-largest trading partner.

The economies of ASEAN and Australia complement each other and have brought new levels of prosperity to our peoples.

We benefit from ASEAN's economic vibrancy and we support ASEAN integration, which makes the economies of Southeast Asia more open and easier to navigate for Australian business.

As part of Australia's \$730 million development program to the countries of ASEAN, Australia supports ASEAN economic integration through the flagship ASEAN-Australia Development Cooperation Program II (\$57 million over 5 years).

This program is the latest iteration of economic cooperation with ASEAN that started in the 1970s, shortly after Australia became ASEAN's first Dialogue Partner.

At a recent review with our ASEAN Ambassador, ASEAN described this program as "changing the landscape" and "leading the way partners work with ASEAN".

It is supporting ASEAN's connectivity agenda and narrowing the development gap between the ASEAN economies.

We cooperate in counter-terrorism, cyber security, maritime cooperation, immigration and border control, anti-human trafficking, law enforcement, education and disaster management.

The \$50 million Australia-Asia Program to Combat Trafficking in Persons demonstrates Australia's commitment to helping ASEAN address shared challenges.

This program connected Indonesian law enforcement to counterparts in Cambodia, Myanmar, and Thailand, which assisted with the successful prosecution of traffickers charged with enslaving more than 1,500 fishers in Indonesia's Maluku province in 2015.

However, perhaps the most important factor binding Australia and ASEAN are our extensive personal ties, forged through education, our diasporas and our communities.

Almost one million Australian residents, in a population of 24 million, claim ASEAN ancestry.

Our forebears would be pleased by the progress we have made under the framework they established, and at the depth of the ties between Southeast Asia and Australia.

At the same time, our region faces challenges.

We are witnessing a historic shift of power to and within the Indo-Pacific region.

Rising tensions in the South China Sea are a challenge to regional stability.

The pursuit of national interests is testing the norms and rules which have served our region for so long, and which are the basis of our security and prosperity.

North Korea continues to defy the United Nations Security Council with its illegal missile and nuclear weapons programs.

There is a compelling need to defend the rules-based order in the region. We need resilient and clear processes to manage conflict and the maintenance of the norms that apply equally to all states, large and small.

ASEAN established the East Asia Summit as the pre-eminent leader-level forum for the discussion of strategic issues affecting the region.

Australia strongly supports the East Asia Summit.

Australia is mindful of the profound nature of the shifts through which we are living. This is why I have commissioned a Foreign Policy White Paper, to help Australia establish a strategic framework for the years ahead.

The issues we will address will include

- economic, industrial and social disruption driven by unprecedented technological change and changing demographics
- weak global growth
- the scourge of local and international extremism, inspired by violent extremism
- climate change
- and substantial development issues, including a major infrastructure backlog and lagging progress on gender outcomes.

That said, our region faces these challenges from a position of strength that must give rise to optimism.

ASEAN and its partners have achieved much in 50 years. Our shared history gives me confidence that we can rise to meet the challenges of the future and take advantage of the opportunities.

Prime Minister Turnbull will deepen our engagement next year by hosting the ASEAN-Australia Special Summit of leaders, and we look forward to welcoming all leaders of ASEAN for this important event in Sydney in March.

The ASEAN Special Summit is an unprecedented opportunity to further strengthen Australia's strategic partnership with ASEAN, delivering tangible economic, political and security benefits.

Closer integration around the region is not the perhaps radical and untested proposal that it was back in 1967.

Today the benefits are clear. Thailand's ambition for regional integration through its support for the establishment of the ASEAN Free Trade Area and a program for comprehensive tariff reduction saw the creation of a common market for Southeast Asia.

Australia remains a strong supporter of the ASEAN Economic Community.

Since 1967 we have worked hard to build cross-regional understanding and collaboration, particularly through education.

Nearly 100,000 students from ASEAN countries studied in Australia last year in 2016.

We are immensely proud that so many ASEAN alumni have gone on to substantial careers over many decades. For example, Thailand's Minister of Digital Economy and Society, Dr Pichet Durongkaveroj, studied at the University of New South Wales and was awarded the 2017 Australian Alumni of the Year.³

Since becoming Foreign Minister, I've put a particular focus on education by establishing the New Colombo Plan, a reversal of the original Colombo Plan - a government program that provides Australian undergraduates with support to live, study and undertake internships in one of forty nations in our region.

I was pleased Deputy Prime Minister and former Foreign Minister, General Tanasak was able to join me for the launch of the New Colombo Plan in Thailand in May 2015.

In only four years nearly 8000 of our 18,000 New Colombo Plan students have undertaken programs in ASEAN countries.

They have reached every ASEAN nation. Thailand has proved particularly popular – by the end of this year, more than 900 New Colombo Plan students will have come here in search of new skills ideas, perspectives and inspiration.

In 2017 over 3000, in fact, Australian undergraduates are being supported to undertake study and work-based learning across ASEAN nations.

I'm particularly excited to announce today that in 2018, this number will nearly double. Next year, the New Colombo Plan will support nearly 6,000 Australian

³ Dr Pichet was an alumnus of the University of New South Wales, and was awarded the 2017 Australian Alumni of the Year.

undergraduates to study and become interns in the public and private sectors of ASEAN countries.

Another exciting area of collaboration between ASEAN and Australia, and a key focus for Thailand, is in innovation.

Linked by the internet, there is extraordinary potential for far-reaching changes in the way people live work and communicate.

The private sector is a major driver of that change, and I've been particularly keen, in Government, to bring the spirit of innovation to Australia's almost four billion dollar overseas development program.

I established the innovationXchange within the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade as an incubator for new thinking, technologies and approaches on overseas development assistance.

Three years on, the innovationXchange is driving new approaches in many areas.

It is supporting for example faster, cheaper and easier movement of goods and people across the Greater Mekong Subregion.

A one-stop shop approach to border, customs and immigration has led to a 50 per cent fall in passenger crossing times between Vietnam and Laos at that border.

It is exciting that this approach is about to be adopted between Thailand and Laos, with a similar one-stop shop opening on that border of these two countries.

Similarly, in Vietnam, our aid programme is helping to developing innovative approaches to climate change adaptation, to improve access to safe water, and to make prawn production more sustainable, all through ideas generated in our innovation exchange.

Ladies and gentlemen, fifty years on, the central and essential role of ASEAN is recognised and respected by the great powers of the world.

In a period of opportunity and challenge, we will need to strengthen that role and standing of ASEAN's so as to advance peace, freedom and prosperity in the region and beyond.

Much depends on the ability of likeminded nations working with ASEAN in supporting and defending the international rules-based order.

When ASEAN speaks with one voice its power and influence should never be underestimated.

I look forward to Thailand's chairmanship of ASEAN in 2019, and working with all its members as we commence ASEAN's next fifty years.

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