

1999 JOINT COMMUNIQUE OF THE 32ND ASEAN MINISTERIAL MEETING

Issued in Singapore on 24 July 1999

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1. We, the Foreign Ministers of the ten ASEAN countries, met in Singapore from 23–24 July 1999 and renewed our commitment to work together to meet the challenges of a region undergoing significant political and economic changes.
2. We warmly welcomed Cambodia's participation for the first time in the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting (AMM), following the special ceremony in Hanoi on 30 April 1999. This is a milestone in ASEAN's evolution and a fulfilment of the vision of ASEAN's founding fathers. All Southeast Asians are now part of a single community. We reaffirmed our commitment to assist Cambodia's integration into ASEAN while preparing for the next phase of ASEAN's development.
3. In the face of new challenges as well as opportunities, we the ASEAN Ten, are confident of overcoming our current difficulties because we are all united in our aim of strengthening ASEAN. ASEAN's fundamental role in managing diversity and differences in Southeast Asia is as important today as when ASEAN was formed in 1967. We have now entered a period of consolidation and rebuilding which would undoubtedly reinforce our foundations and set the stage for the emergence of a stronger ASEAN. With these challenges in mind, we unanimously reaffirmed the relevance and value of ASEAN to all our countries and renewed our determination to strengthen ASEAN.
4. The 6th ASEAN Summit held in Hanoi in December 1998 was a key turning point in the process of ASEAN's recovery and consolidation. The Hanoi Declaration (HD) and the Hanoi Plan of Action (HPA) have taken ASEAN closer towards realising the ASEAN Vision 2020 adopted by our leaders in 1997. In Hanoi, the ASEAN leaders decided to strengthen regional cooperation and ASEAN unity and reaffirmed their commitment to keep ASEAN open to trade and investment. We reiterated ASEAN's determination to fully implement the leaders' decisions on accelerating the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) and the ASEAN Investment Area (AIA). We would promote to the international community the set of Bold Measures adopted by the ASEAN leaders at the Hanoi Summit in December 1998. We highlighted the significance of the decision of the leaders of ASEAN and China, Japan and ROK to regularise the ASEAN+3 Summits. It underscored their confidence in ASEAN as a dynamic and resilient organisation.

ASEAN FOREIGN MINISTERS' RETREAT

5. We held for the first time a Retreat of the ASEAN Foreign Ministers. The Retreat provided an opportunity for all ten ASEAN Foreign Ministers to hold frank and wide-ranging discussions on the future of ASEAN, the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and ASEAN's dialogue relationships. The Retreat is part of a continuous process of serious re-examination of the longer-term issues facing ASEAN. We are committed to continually shaping an ASEAN that is attuned to the challenges of the times. ASEAN will continue to play a key role in the region.

6. We discussed the far-reaching effects of the financial crisis. We believe that ASEAN had taken a series of significant steps that would set us on the path to economic recovery. The economic outlook for the region had improved. Although there were still uncertainties, there were early signs of economic recovery. We acknowledged that more had to be done to sustain the recovery process and renewed our commitment to continue undertaking the necessary policy adjustment and structural reforms, and to expedite efforts in the reform of the international financial architecture.
7. In discussing the future direction of ASEAN, we focused on the challenges confronting ASEAN which could undermine ASEAN's image. We stressed the need to remain dynamic and adapt to changes in the external environment. We reaffirmed the fundamental principles of ASEAN and the importance of working together to strengthen ASEAN in order to face up to the challenges ahead. In the long term, the realisation of ASEAN Ten will strengthen regional resilience.
8. We discussed the issues facing ASEAN and its Dialogue Partners. Over the years, changes had taken place in our dialogue relationships. However, we recognised the unique role of the Post-Ministerial Conferences (PMC) and Dialogue Partnerships in managing the broad cooperative relationships. We renewed our commitment to reinvigorate and intensify our dialogue relationships.
9. We reviewed the development of the ARF and discussed its future direction. For a regional political and security forum that groups very diverse countries and major powers, the ARF has made significant progress during the past five years. We noted with satisfaction that the ARF, through the active contributions of all ARF countries, has become the key forum for political and security dialogue and cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region. We are committed to strengthening ASEAN's role as the primary driving force of the ARF process. We noted that the ASEAN officials are preparing a paper on the concept and principles of Preventive Diplomacy for discussion by the ARF Intersessional Support Group on Confidence-Building Measures (ISG on CBMs) during the next intersessional year. We stressed the importance of enhancing the ARF's relevance and effectiveness in addressing the challenges faced by the region amidst the changing political and security environment. We also stressed the importance of moving the ARF process forward at a pace comfortable to all participants and on the basis of consensus.

JOINT ASEAN ROADSHOWS

10. We welcomed the idea of Joint ASEAN Roadshows proposed by Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong of Singapore to market ASEAN as a joint investment area to our major investors. This represents a concrete and concerted effort to advance our common interests and underscores our resolve to work together to restore ASEAN's economic dynamism. We commended the proposal for further action by the 31st ASEAN Economic Ministers (AEM) Meeting.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISIONS OF THE 6TH ASEAN SUMMIT

11. We agreed to hasten the implementation of the set of specific directives in the Hanoi Plan of Action to guide ASEAN activities over the next six years. This would speed up regional integration, mitigate the social impact of the global financial turmoil, deal with environmental issues and other transnational problems, and intensify international awareness of ASEAN. Significant advances had already been made by ASEAN Ministerial fora,

Committees, the ASEAN Secretariat, and other ASEAN bodies. We noted that a review of progress would be made at the 7th ASEAN Summit in the year 2001.

12. We had a useful discussion on the preparations for the 3rd Informal ASEAN Summit to be held in Manila in November 1999 and endorsed the Special Joint Ministerial Meeting before the Summit involving the ASEAN Foreign, Economic and Finance Ministers.

ECONOMIC COOPERATION

13. Following the Framework Agreement on the AIA signed by the ASEAN Economic Ministers in the Philippines in October 1998, the first AIA Council Meeting was held in Phuket in March 1999. The AIA would link the ASEAN economies more strongly together by extending national treatment to ASEAN investments in the manufacturing sector. We would actively support the joint promotion of investments in ASEAN as envisioned in the AIA.
14. In response to the rapid changes in the global financial environment, and the risk of contagion, the ASEAN Finance Ministries and Central Banks have strengthened their cooperation and consultations. The ASEAN Surveillance Process (ASP) was established to encourage peer reviews and share experiences on policy challenges facing our respective economies, in order to enhance macroeconomic and financial stability in the region. Development of work programmes to implement the finance-related activities of the Hanoi Plan of Action is currently underway.
15. Steady progress has been made in formulating the implementing Protocols for the ASEAN Framework Agreement on the Facilitation of Goods in Transit. This would enable efficient transportation of goods in the region, support the implementation of the AFTA and further integrate the region's economies.
16. We welcomed the ASEAN initiatives towards the establishment of an ASEAN Food Security Information System and collaborative research to develop new and improved production, post-harvest and processing technologies. We also noted the continuing efforts to enhance the marketability of ASEAN food, agriculture and forest products and commodities through harmonisation, adoption and implementation of quality standards and regulations.
17. We welcomed the inauguration of the ASEAN Centre for Energy in January 1999 and the adoption of the ASEAN Plan of Action for Energy Co-operation 1999–2004 by the ASEAN Ministers of Energy in July 1999 which would move forward the early realisation of the Trans-ASEAN energy network.
18. We hoped that efforts be further intensified to promote the development of the Mekong Basin, and that the implementation of projects and programmes in this framework be expedited accordingly. To this end, it is important to convene as soon as possible, the ASEAN-Mekong Basin Development Co-operation (AMBDC) Ministerial Meeting.
19. We would intensify efforts to develop the human potential, the natural resources and the infrastructure linkages of the Greater Mekong Sub-Region, including the development of less developed inter-state areas along the West-East Corridor (WEC), the Brunei Darussalam-Indonesia-Malaysia-Philippines East ASEAN Growth Area (BIMP-EAGA), the Indonesia-Malaysia-Singapore Growth Triangle (IMS-GT), and the Indonesia-Malaysia-Thailand Growth Triangle (IMT-GT). Co-operation initiatives at the sub-regional levels would further enhance growth opportunities and expedite the region's economic recovery progress.

POLITICAL AND SECURITY CO-OPERATION

20. We welcomed the progress made by the High Contracting Parties in ratifying the 2nd Protocol to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC). We reiterated our call for extra-regional states, particularly the major powers, to accede to the TAC to reinforce its continuing relevance as the basis for a framework governing inter-state relations in the region and allow ASEAN to maintain peace and stability in the region. This would be further reinforced once the 2nd Protocol comes into force.
21. The ASEAN Foreign Ministers convened, for the first time, the Commission of the Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone Treaty (SEANWFZ). This is the first concrete step towards the implementation of the Treaty. The Commission directed its Executive Committee to prepare the draft rules of procedure and to initiate all necessary actions to ensure compliance with the Treaty, including consultations with the Nuclear Weapon States and International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and other related bodies.
22. We noted the consultations which had taken place between the ASEAN SOM Working Group on the Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOPFAN) and SEANWFZ and the Nuclear Weapon States and urged the Nuclear Weapon States to accede to the Protocol to the SEANWFZ Treaty as another means of enhancing the regional security environment.
23. Positive progress had been made in the various ARF activities at both Track I and Track II levels, including the constructive contribution of defence and military officials. We assessed that the Intersessional Support Group on Confidence Building Measures (ISG on CBMs), the Intersessional Meeting on Disaster Relief, Intersessional Meeting on Peacekeeping Operations, and other activities under their auspices had contributed substantially to the furthering of the ARF process, through the promotion of mutual understanding and a mindset of cooperation. While recognising that the implementation of CBMs continues to be the focus of ARF, we noted the importance of advancing the ARF process on the basis of principles agreed, and in this context, support the recommendation of the ISG on CBMs to discuss the concept and principles of Preventive Diplomacy (PD) and to further explore the areas of overlap between CBMs and PD in the next intersessional year. We also encouraged increased interface between Track I and Track II and continued active participation by defence and military officials in ARF activities.

ASEAN FUNCTIONAL COOPERATION

24. We discussed ASEAN functional cooperation and its part in preparing ASEAN to meet the challenges of the future. We noted the progress made over the past year as recorded in the ASEAN Standing Committee (ASC) Annual Report and commended the efforts made by the functional committees to work out strategies for coping with the impact of the regional crisis in their respective areas.
25. Economic growth is sustainable only if the environment is cared for. The atmosphere and the marine environment can be protected only through regional action. The ASEAN Regional Centre for Biodiversity Conservation has started operations and a network of National Biodiversity Reference Units among all ASEAN member-countries has been set up to strengthen regional co-operation in biodiversity conservation. We welcomed the initiative to develop ASEAN Criteria and Indicators for Sustainable Forest Management in the region. We also appreciated the active participation of ASEAN Member Countries in meeting the objectives

and recommendations for population and sustainable development contained in the Bali Declaration.

26. We recalled the ravages wrought by the land and forest fires in parts of Southeast Asia on the health and livelihood of people and on the growth of the economies of the area in the past two years. In this connection, we fully supported the work of the Haze Technical Task Force of the ASEAN Senior Officials on the Environment (ASOEN) in monitoring, combating and preventing land and forest fires and mitigating their effects. We appreciated the support extended by the Asian Development Bank, the United Nations Environmental Programme, and the governments of Australia, Canada, and the United States. We urged the international community to continue its support.
27. Recalling our earlier decision to co-operate in ensuring the conservation and sustainability of water resources, we commended the ASOEN for taking concrete steps to pursue this initiative. We welcomed the proposed establishment of an ASEAN Network of Water Resource Agencies (ANWRA), which is expected to contribute to the realisation of ASEAN regional water conservation programme embodied in the Hanoi Plan of Action (HPA).
28. Science & Technology cooperation had been enhanced with the development of a dynamic and responsive set of strategies to encourage intra-ASEAN cooperation and collaboration with dialogue partners and the private sector. The ASEAN Committee on Science and Technology (COST) had undertaken a project entitled ASEAN Science and Technology Network (ASTNET) to facilitate information exchange between ASEAN and international science & technology organisations and to serve as an information resource and link to the business sector.
29. We stressed the urgent need to strengthen the regional capacity to combat transnational crime. The ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Transnational Crime held in Yangon last month had initiated a regional plan of action to combat such crimes as illicit drug trafficking, money laundering, terrorism, piracy, arms smuggling and trafficking in persons and agreed in principle to establish the ASEAN Centre for Combating Transnational Crime (ACTC). We reaffirmed ASEAN's commitment to the Joint Declaration for a Drug-Free ASEAN, signed at the 31st AMM in Manila, and called for the support of the international community for the implementation of ASEAN drug control programmes.
30. The ASEAN University Network (AUN) has progressed in its work in promoting student and faculty exchanges, ASEAN studies and collaborative research. In connection with ASEAN's educational goals, we welcomed the implementation of the Singapore Scholarship launched during the 6th ASEAN Summit.
31. We reaffirmed ASEAN's policy of ensuring that the poor, the disadvantaged, and other vulnerable sectors of society, including women and children, are not harmed or neglected in the effort to promote economic growth. We stressed the crucial role of women in economic recovery programmes. It is important to focus on the social impact of the crisis and to expand social programmes in times of difficulty. We welcomed the adoption of the regional plans of action on health and nutrition, tuberculosis control and disease surveillance to assist ASEAN in addressing priorities in the areas of nutrition promotion, new, emerging and re-emerging diseases, environmental health, food and drugs safety and disability.

32. We welcomed the Action Plan and Work Programme of the ASEAN Task Force on Social Safety Nets, which aim to strengthen the capacity of ASEAN countries for developing and implementing social services for the poor and the disadvantaged. We recognised the importance of developing strategies aimed at coordinating, developing and implementing regional activities concerning Social Safety Nets. We supported the sharing of knowledge, experience, expertise and best practices in designing immediate and long-term social safety nets, as called for in the Action Plan. We acknowledged that alternative, creative and innovative ways and strategies have to be found in order to achieve these objectives and welcomed support and assistance from countries and multilateral institutions. To meet the short-term and long-term needs in these areas, particularly in Human Resource Development, we agreed to consider the establishment of an ASEAN Human Resource Development Fund, so as to facilitate the process of regional integration within ASEAN.
33. We welcomed the progress made in the work of the ASEAN Foundation during the past year. We noted its efforts to prepare a plan of action and a work programme focussing on the priority areas of the HPA, that are in the Foundation's mandate to promote: ASEAN awareness, people-to-people interaction, human resources development and poverty alleviation. A workshop to formulate the Medium to Long-Term Action Plan of the Foundation was held in July this year. We urged the Board of Trustees to expedite the implementation of projects on human resources development. We also noted with appreciation the contributions by Japan and China to the Foundation and urge our Dialogue Partners and the private sector to support the Foundation.

EXTERNAL RELATIONS

34. We reaffirmed the importance of an outward-looking ASEAN, which can play a pivotal role in international fora. We appreciated the continuing support extended by the international community, particularly ASEAN's Dialogue Partners, to ASEAN's activities. We hoped that our Dialogue Partners, the international financial institutions, United Nations agencies, foundations and non-governmental organisations would collaborate with ASEAN in carrying out the co-operative measures in the HPA. We are encouraged by their participation in the ASEAN Development Cooperation Forum held in the ASEAN Secretariat in Jakarta in May 1999.
35. We reaffirmed adherence to the principle of non-discrimination in the pursuit of development cooperation in ASEAN. ASEAN's relationships with all its Dialogue Partners, as well as its cooperation with other countries and regional and international organisations are based on equality, non-interference, non-discrimination, mutual respect and mutual benefit. To ensure that ASEAN consolidates its relationships with the current Dialogue Partners, we agreed to consider new ASEAN Dialogue relationships only after July 2000.

REVIEW OF THE ROLE AND FUNCTIONS OF THE ASEAN SECRETARIAT

36. We commended the work of the Special Directors-General Working Group on the Review of the Role and Functions of the ASEAN Secretariat. With the new challenges facing ASEAN over the last few years, new demands had been placed on the ASEAN Secretariat. The rationalisation of the Secretariat's organisational structure would allow the Secretariat to be a more effective instrument in helping ASEAN prepare for the future. The completion of the Review was in line with the call in the HPA for a more responsive Secretariat.

REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL ISSUES

37. In reviewing the regional and international political situation, we reiterated our conviction that a stable, strategic relationship among the major powers, particularly China, Japan, Russia and the United States was a vital contributing factor to the peace, security, stability and prosperity of the Asia-Pacific region, especially Southeast Asia. A positive framework of relations among the major powers and their efforts in enhancing their mutual understanding and cooperation in their relations at bilateral and global levels are all the more vital, in order to ensure the continuation of the economic recovery in the region.
38. We expressed our concern over the tension that arose in the Taiwan Straits after 9 July 1999, which could seriously affect regional peace and stability and prospects for economic recovery. We hoped for a quick and peaceful return to normalcy. We reaffirmed our commitment to our "One China Policy".
39. In reviewing the situation in the South China Sea, we recognised that several issues remained a source of concern, including the overlapping and conflicting claims among the countries involved that remain unresolved. We emphasised the importance of resolving these issues in the interest of peace and stability in the region. We reiterated the need for the disputes to be settled peacefully, in accordance with the recognised principles of international law, including the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, and to continue to exercise self-restraint in the conduct of activities in the South China Sea. We recalled the ASEAN Foreign Ministers' agreement in 1996 to the idea of a regional Code of Conduct which would lay the foundation for long-term stability in the area and foster understanding among claimant countries. At the 6th ASEAN Summit, the ASEAN Leaders agreed to promote efforts to establish a regional Code of Conduct in the South China Sea among the parties directly concerned. Pursuant to these agreements, we noted that as a follow-up to the ASEAN SOM recommendation in May 1999, the Philippines has submitted a draft Regional Code of Conduct for the immediate consideration of the ASEAN SOM Working Group on ZOPFAN and SEANWFZ at its next meeting. We recognised the positive contribution of the ongoing bilateral and multilateral consultations among the parties concerned at the intergovernmental level, the extensive consultations at the ASEAN-China Dialogue and the regular exchange of views in the ARF, and the ongoing Informal Workshops on Managing Potential Conflicts in the South China Sea and encouraged their continuance.
40. We are also concerned with developments in the Korean Peninsula and agreed that the parties involved should not adopt postures which could undermine peace and security. We reaffirmed the importance of maintaining the 1953 Armistice Agreement and the Agreed Framework and hoped that all the parties would continue dialogue with a view to establishing a permanent peace regime. We expressed support for the Four-Party Talks, the inter-Korean Dialogue, the US-DPRK negotiations and the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO) in promoting peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula and as peaceful means to advance global nuclear non-proliferation. In this regard, we noted the Republic of Korea's efforts to contribute to the stability of the Peninsula, including through the Sunshine Policy.
41. We noted with deep concern developments in Kosovo, including the humanitarian crisis, and its implications. We reaffirmed our support for the UN Charter and respect for the basic principles of international law. In this connection, we welcomed the comprehensive political settlement of the Kosovo crisis as endorsed by the

United Nations Security Council Resolution S/RES/1244(1999) of 10 June 1999, and urged all parties involved to work closely with the UN in implementing the settlement.

42. We hope for a new momentum in the Middle East Peace Process and welcome the sentiments expressed by the leaders of Syria, Israel and the Palestinians to move on to a comprehensive peace in the region. We welcomed recent encouraging statements by the new Prime Minister of Israel to withdraw from Southern Lebanon within the year and to implement the Wye River Agreement in full, thus paving the way for the further return of territory to Palestine National Authority (PNA). We urged the parties concerned to implement all agreements signed and all pledges and commitments made following the Oslo Peace Accords and Madrid Conference, in particular the principle of land for peace, in due compliance with relevant United Nations Resolutions. We also called for an early resumption of negotiations between Israel, Syria, Lebanon and PNA in order to achieve a comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East. We called on Israel to take steps for the immediate and full cessation of the construction of the settlement at Jabel Abu Ghaneim and similar activities in the West Bank.
43. We welcomed the agreement reached by India and Pakistan to end hostilities along the Line of Control and urge both sides to resolve the dispute through dialogue.
44. We reaffirmed our support for the goals and principles of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). We stressed the importance of the NAM as a unifying forum not only for discussions but also cooperation among developing countries, so that they may exert a more active influence on the direction and management of world affairs. We recognised the NAM's strength as a significant leverage in negotiations vis-a-vis the developed countries on crucial political and economic issues. We emphasised the need to continue the active and collective promotion of agreed positions of the NAM members in the UN and in the international arena.
45. We exchanged views on the need to reform the UN Security Council, particularly in the aspect of representation among the developing countries. We agreed that the reform and expansion of the Security Council should be considered as a package. Any reform, however, must take into account the principle of sovereign equality of states and equitable geographical distribution. There is also the need for transparency, accountability and democratisation in the working methods and procedures of the Security Council, particularly in its decision-making process.
46. We stressed the importance for all states that have not signed or ratified the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) to do so. We urged all states to refrain from undertaking weaponisation or deploying missiles to deliver nuclear weapons, and to prevent any transfer of nuclear weapon-related materials, technology and equipment. To this end, we called for the immediate commencement and early conclusion of negotiations in the Conference on Disarmament on a treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons purposes as an essential measure of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation of nuclear weapons. We also called on the nuclear weapon states to make further efforts towards achieving the ultimate objective of eliminating nuclear weapons.
47. We noted the progress that has been made on the implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and called on all states that have not ratified or acceded to the CWC to do so. Progress has also been made in the work on the protocol dealing with compliance and verification of the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC). To this end, we commended the work of the Ad Hoc Group of State Parties to the BWC.

48. We supported the ongoing negotiations to draft an international convention against organised transnational crime, as well as its supplementary protocols on addressing trafficking in women and children, and illegal trafficking in firearms. We urged the international community to focus its attention on the problem of transnational crime, and called on the UN to play the lead role in coordinating the efforts of Member States to deal with this problem.
49. We noted the entry into force of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction. We agreed to support initiatives to enhance international co-operation on demining, including training, and in the removal of unexploded ordinance as well as the rehabilitation of mine victims.
50. We recalled the decision of the 26th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting held on 23–24 July 1993 in Singapore to consider the establishment of an appropriate regional mechanism on human rights and noted the establishment of the informal non-governmental Working Group for an ASEAN Human Rights Mechanism. The Working Group and ASEAN officials have met regularly since the 29th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting in Jakarta, most recently on 22 July 1999 in Singapore. We recognised the importance of continuing these dialogues.

INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC ISSUES

51. We welcomed the improved outlook for world output growth and noted that significant challenges remain. We called upon the major countries to address the downside risks to the world output growth and to implement appropriate macroeconomic and structural measures. We emphasised the importance of open and competitive markets to sustain growth and stability and urged further market access for ASEAN exports. We welcomed China's commitment and effort to reform the financial sector and state-owned enterprise for sustainable development, and its continued pledge not to devalue its currency. We noted the signs of imminent recovery in Japan and welcomed Japan's continued efforts in putting in place measures to stimulate domestic demand-led growth. We noted with appreciation Japan's US\$30 billion assistance to Asia through the Miyazawa initiative. We hoped the United States would direct policies at ensuring sustainable non-inflationary growth. We welcomed the launch of the Euro and looked forward to the increased role of the Euro in facilitating greater stability in international financial markets and urged Europe to implement policies to support domestic demand.
52. In this regard, we reiterated our support for the ASEAN consensus forged by the ASEAN Finance Ministers on the reform of the international financial architecture. We called for expeditious implementation of the concrete measures that have already achieved a high degree of consensus.

WORLD TRADE ORGANISATION (WTO)

53. We looked forward to the 3rd WTO Ministerial Conference to be held in Seattle, USA from 30 November-3 December 1999. This meeting would provide an important opportunity to shape the future work programme of the WTO. We urged our officials to contribute positively towards the preparations underway in Geneva by submitting specific work proposals regarding the WTO's future work programme, with a view to the early finalisation of a substantive and balanced agenda for the Ministerial Conference.
54. We emphasised the importance of the membership of Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam in the WTO and reiterated our full support for their early admission. We urged the WTO to expedite the accession process.

ASIA PACIFIC ECONOMIC COOPERATION (APEC)

55. We are heartened by the signs of recovery in a number of APEC Members' economies but agreed that much still needs to be done to put in place measures that would facilitate a sustainable recovery. In this respect, we welcomed the significant capacity-building initiatives announced at the APEC Leaders Meeting in Kuala Lumpur last year.
56. We noted the continuous efforts to liberalise trade and investment and APEC's key role in strengthening the multilateral trading system. APEC has an important opportunity to make significant contributions to the WTO this year in the run-up to the 3rd WTO Ministerial Conference in Seattle. We pledged our support to New Zealand during its Chairmanship of APEC and expressed confidence that important outcomes would be achieved under its leadership.

ASIA-EUROPE MEETING (ASEM)

57. We were pleased by the strong registration of continued commitment and support towards the ASEM process at the 2nd ASEM Foreign Ministers Meeting of 29 March 1999. We reaffirmed our determination to keep the ASEM process open and evolutionary. We acknowledged that changes in the global and regional landscapes of Asia and Europe had made it more important for both regions to strengthen existing cooperation, which would constitute the basis for a stable Asia-Europe new comprehensive partnership.