

2008 JOINT COMMUNIQUE OF THE 41ST ASEAN MINISTERIAL MEETING

Issued in Singapore on 21 July 2008

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"ONE ASEAN AT THE HEART OF DYNAMIC ASIA"

INTRODUCTION

1. We, the Foreign Ministers of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), met at the 41st ASEAN Ministerial Meeting (AMM) from 20-21 July 2008 in Singapore. His Excellency George Yeo, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Singapore and Chairman of the 41st ASEAN Standing Committee (ASC), chaired the Meeting. We had wide-ranging and productive discussions under the theme of "One ASEAN at the Heart of Dynamic Asia", during which we reaffirmed our common desire and collective commitment to the establishment of an ASEAN Community of peace, stability, prosperity and social progress.
2. His Excellency Lee Hsien Loong, Prime Minister of Singapore, addressed the Opening Ceremony of the 41st AMM. Noting that the celebration of ASEAN's 40th anniversary brought ASEAN closer to the people, Prime Minister Lee underlined that fostering our people's understanding of ASEAN's relevance to their well-being would nurture their sense of belonging to an ASEAN community. This in turn would be critical to our integration efforts.
3. Reviewing the past year under Singapore's Chairmanship of ASEAN, Prime Minister Lee raised two events which he believed would continue to define ASEAN in the years ahead. First, ASEAN's response to Cyclone Nargis demonstrated ASEAN's unity, and showed that ASEAN member countries recognized the responsibilities and obligations of membership. While not perfect, the ASEAN-led tripartite process bridged the gap of trust between the Myanmar authorities and the international community to facilitate the flow of emergency aid to the disaster victims. Only the international community had the capacity to address the effects of Cyclone Nargis, and ASEAN welcomed Myanmar's willingness to continue with the tripartite cooperation.
4. Prime Minister Lee also highlighted that the signing of the Charter would help realize the vision of a vibrant ASEAN Community by improving ASEAN's record of implementation through a rules-based framework. He stressed that the timely ratification and implementation of the Charter would be a signal of ASEAN's resolve.
5. Prime Minister Lee underscored that ASEAN could not take its relevance as the preferred platform for regional interactions for granted. While ASEAN members may be pre-occupied with pressing domestic issues, it was vital that we continue to move forward on ASEAN cooperation and integration, even if the pace may sometimes vary. A thriving ASEAN would be courted by the major powers as an economic power and valued as a partner for cooperation to deal with larger regional and global issues.
6. Prime Minister Lee also launched the ASEAN Studies Centre in the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies in Singapore. The Centre would work closely with the ASEAN Secretariat to undertake

policy research on ASEAN that would help the organization grow new capabilities, strengthen its institutions, and enhance cooperation among its members.

BUILDING AN ASEAN COMMUNITY

7. We are pleased with the progress in the implementation of the Leaders' decisions of the 13th ASEAN Summit in Singapore, and agreed to further intensify our integration efforts in all three pillars of the ASEAN Community to establish a people-oriented, caring and sharing ASEAN Community by 2015. We reaffirmed our resolve to pursue more region-wide cooperation programs and activities geared towards accelerating the ASEAN Community-building process. We also reiterated the importance of maintaining ASEAN's central role in regional processes.

THE ASEAN CHARTER

8. We stressed our full commitment to the realization of the vision set out in the ASEAN Charter that was signed by our Leaders on the occasion of the 40th Anniversary of ASEAN last November. With our Statement on the ASEAN Charter issued on 21 July 2008, we reaffirmed the commitment by all Member States to ratify the ASEAN Charter by the 14th ASEAN Summit in Bangkok, and pledged to undertake all measures necessary to ensure expeditious implementation of the Charter.
9. We endorsed the Terms of Reference of the Committee of Permanent Representatives to ASEAN. We agreed that each ASEAN Member State would appoint their Permanent Representative to ASEAN at the level of Ambassador in Jakarta with effect from 1 January 2009.
10. We reaffirmed our commitment to the promotion and protection of human rights. We set up the High Level Panel on an ASEAN human rights body, and endorsed its Terms of Reference. We look forward to the High Level Panel's submission of its first draft of the Terms of Reference of an ASEAN human rights body at the 14th ASEAN Summit in December 2008 for our guidance and direction. We noted the reports of the 7th Workshop on ASEAN Regional Human Rights Mechanism in Singapore on 12-13 June 2008 and the Workshop on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights in Bali on 15-17 May 2008. We further noted the work carried out by the non-governmental Working Group for an ASEAN Human Rights Mechanism, including the meeting between the open-ended SOM Troika and the Working Group on the sidelines of the 41st AMM with the objective of facilitating the implementation of the activities under the promotion of human rights component of the VAP.
11. We are committed to make ASEAN a more rules-based organization. We established the High Level Legal Experts' Group on Follow Up to the ASEAN Charter and endorsed its Terms of Reference. We look forward to the first draft of recommendations on the legal personality of ASEAN, dispute settlement mechanisms and other legal issues by December 2008.
12. In view of the increase in ASEAN's activities with the coming into force of the ASEAN Charter, we noted the importance of strengthening the ASEAN Secretariat and agreed to provide it with adequate resources. We endorsed the recommendations of our Financial Experts Group. We requested for the Secretary-General to strengthen the Secretariat's internal systems, in particular its Staff Regulations and Financial Rules in order to put in place a more robust system of accountability and financial management. In addition, as one of the measures to strengthen the Secretariat, we agreed that the appointment of two additional Deputy Secretaries-General should

be finalized by November 2008. We also tasked our officials to explore the idea of an ASEAN laissez-passer for ASEAN Secretariat staff as a valid travel document among ASEAN Member States.

NARROWING THE DEVELOPMENT GAP AND INITIATIVE FOR ASEAN INTEGRATION

13. We agreed to intensify our cooperation to Narrow the Development Gap (NDG) with a view to supporting ASEAN's integration efforts, which is of paramount importance to ASEAN community-building. This would also help to ensure the equitable economic development of the region and facilitate the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which would in turn contribute to the well-being of the people of ASEAN. In this regard, we emphasized the key role of the Initiative for ASEAN Integration (IAI) in ASEAN's overall NDG efforts and look forward to the final draft of the 2nd IAI Work Plan for 2009-2015 by December 2008. We also noted with appreciation the support and contributions of ASEAN Member States and external partners to the implementation of the IAI.
14. We support programs to uplift existing pockets of under-development in all parts of ASEAN, specifically in sub-regional areas including BIMP-EAGA and IMT-GT and Mekong sub-regional frameworks.

VIENTIANE ACTION PROGRAMME

15. We welcomed the progress achieved in the implementation of the Vientiane Action Program (VAP). We tasked our officials to prepare a comprehensive review of the implementation of the Vientiane Action Program to be undertaken in 2008.
16. Noting the adoption of the ASEAN Economic Community Blueprint at the 13th ASEAN Summit in Singapore last year, and the ongoing work to draft the Blueprints for the ASEAN Political-Security Community and ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community as well as the 2nd IAI Work Plan, we agreed to recommend to the ASEAN Leaders that these documents be issued as part of a declaration at the 14th ASEAN Summit.

ASEAN POLITICAL-SECURITY COMMUNITY

17. We are pleased with the positive developments in the establishment of the ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC). We took note of the progress made in the drafting of the APSC Blueprint, and further noted that the Blueprint should be practical, substantive, action and results-oriented, and have a timetable. We look forward to its completion by the 14th ASEAN Summit in Bangkok, Thailand.

TREATY OF AMITY AND COOPERATION IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

18. We warmly welcome the impending accession by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC) as a strong signal of the DPRK's commitment to the peace and security of the region. We noted that the continuing interest in the TAC underscores its important role as a key code of conduct governing inter-state relations in Southeast Asia. We also called upon other countries, particularly our Dialogue Partners and other interested parties, to consider acceding to the TAC. In this regard, we will continue to work to facilitate the accession of the EU to the TAC in the near future.

TREATY ON THE SOUTHEAST ASIA NUCLEAR WEAPON-FREE ZONE

19. At the Meeting of the Commission on Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone (SEANWFZ) in Singapore on 21 July 2008, we welcomed the progress made in the implementation of the Plan of Action adopted by the SEANWFZ Commission in 2007, and reaffirmed the importance of persevering in our efforts to strengthen cooperation to implement the Treaty. We instructed our officials to continue to engage the Nuclear Weapons States, to secure their accession to the SEANWFZ Protocol as soon as possible. We elected Thailand as the incoming Chair of the Commission.

SOUTH CHINA SEA

20. We reaffirmed the continuing importance of the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea of 2002 (DOC) as a milestone document between ASEAN and China, embodying our collective commitment to ensure the peaceful resolution of disputes in the area. We believe that the Declaration has been effective in building mutual trust and confidence among the claimants in the area and in maintaining peace and stability in the region. We underscored the need to intensify efforts to move forward the implementation of the Declaration, including the early finalization of the Guidelines on the Implementation of the DOC. We look forward to the eventual conclusion of a Regional Code of Conduct in the South China Sea.
21. We encouraged the continued exercise of self-restraint by all the parties concerned and the promotion of confidence-building measures in this area and welcomed their commitment to resolving disputes in the South China Sea by peaceful means in conformity with the spirit of the DOC and recognized principles of international law including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

ASEAN REGIONAL FORUM

22. We reaffirmed the role of ASEAN as the primary driving force of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) process and the ARF as the primary forum in enhancing political and security dialogue and cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region. We agreed that the ARF should undertake concrete cooperation to address the increasingly complex and multi-faceted security challenges confronting the region, through cooperation in areas such as counter-terrorism and transnational crime, non-proliferation and disarmament, maritime security, disaster relief, and combating communicable diseases. We also looked forward to the discussions at the upcoming 15th ARF on 24 July 2008, in particular, to have a comprehensive review of the ARF process and consider its future direction.

ASEAN MARITIME FORUM

23. We noted the Concept Paper for the Establishment of the ASEAN Maritime Forum, which could provide a platform for comprehensive deliberations and dialogues among relevant ASEAN bodies on maritime issues. We noted the offer by the Government of Indonesia to host the First Meeting of the ASEAN Maritime Forum in 2009.

TRANSNATIONAL CRIMES

24. We reaffirmed our commitment to enhance further cooperation and to promote the entry into force of the ASEAN Convention on Counter Terrorism as soon as possible. We also recognized the process of developing an ASEAN Comprehensive Plan of Action on Counter-Terrorism by the

SOMTC. We also recognized the increasing trend of the offences of trafficking in persons in our region. In this regard, we noted the AMMTC's endeavor to explore the possibility of developing an ASEAN Convention on Trafficking in Persons. We noted ASEAN's efforts to enhance cooperation on the issue of extradition and noted with appreciation the convening of the Workshop held in Singapore on 22-23 May 2008.

ASEAN ECONOMIC COMMUNITY

25. We underscored ASEAN's commitment to establish a single market and production base characterized by a competitive economic region, with equitable economic development and one that is fully integrated into the global economy.
26. We welcomed the ongoing implementation of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) Blueprint, which was adopted by the Leaders at the 13th ASEAN Summit in Singapore in November 2007, and the imminent launch of the AEC Scorecard, a monitoring mechanism intended to help ensure compliance with the provisions of the AEC Blueprint. We noted the significant progress made in the areas of trade in goods, services and investment. We viewed these developments with satisfaction, as proof of ASEAN's commitment to maintain and strengthen its credibility and effectiveness, by transforming itself into a rules-based organization.
27. We welcomed the progress in negotiations by the Transport Sectoral on the implementing Multilateral Agreements (MAs) for the Roadmap for the Integration of Air Travel Sector (RIATS). We welcomed the Joint Ministerial Statement of the 13th ASEAN Transport Ministers' Meeting in Singapore in November 2007, and looked forward to the signing of the ASEAN Multilateral Agreement on the Full Liberalization of Air Freight Services and the Multilateral Agreement on Air Services by the ASEAN Transport Ministers.

ASEAN SOCIO-CULTURAL COMMUNITY

28. We underscored the importance of the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) to address the region's aspiration to further improve the well-being of its peoples through investing in human resource development, enhancing food security and safety, protecting the environment, protecting people from natural disasters and infectious diseases, and pursuing cooperative activities that are people-oriented. The ASCC shall lay the foundation for greater understanding and good neighborliness, and build a shared sense of identity and responsibility in ASEAN. We were pleased with the progress made in the drafting of the ASCC Blueprint and looked forward to the adoption of an action-oriented and substantive document by the 14th ASEAN Summit in Bangkok, Thailand.
29. We expressed our satisfaction at the fast-growing people-to-people linkages, especially among our youths, as we continue to build deeper understanding, friendship and mutual respect among our countries. We commended the efforts and initiatives of the ASEAN Member States in promoting greater ASEAN awareness and strengthening existing cultural links through projects like the "ASEAN Quest" video game, the "Trail of Civilization" and the "Best of ASEAN Performing Arts", which aim to regularly showcase ASEAN's best arts and cultural performances to regional and international audiences. We looked forward to the celebration of ASEAN Day on 8 August by all ASEAN Member States.

30. We further stressed the need to integrate education priorities into ASEAN's development agenda, and hone the skills and talents of our peoples to boost the region's overall competitiveness, in order to reap the fruits of globalization.
31. We expressed our satisfaction with the progress made in the implementation of the Guidelines for the Provision of Emergency Assistance by ASEAN Missions in Third Countries to Nationals of ASEAN Member States in Crisis Situations, following our July 2006 Statement on this issue.

ENERGY, ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE CHANGE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

32. We stressed the need to address the issues of energy security, sustainable agriculture and environmental protection in a comprehensive manner. We expressed our appreciation for the efforts undertaken by the relevant ASEAN Sectoral Bodies to follow up on the outcomes of the Leaders' discussions at the 13th ASEAN Summit and related meetings on the theme of "Energy, Environment, Climate Change and Sustainable Development". We encouraged the relevant ASEAN Sectoral Bodies to develop concrete programs and activities to implement measures and enhance international and regional cooperation to combat transboundary environmental pollution, including haze pollution, through, among other things, capacity building, enhancing public awareness, strengthening law enforcement, promoting environmentally sustainable practices, as well as combating illegal logging and its associated illegal trade.

DISASTER MANAGEMENT

33. We are pleased to note that the ASEAN Humanitarian Task Force had effectively delivered humanitarian assistance to the victims and survivors of Cyclone Nargis. This first ASEAN-led mechanism involving ASEAN Member States individually and collectively, as well as the United Nations and the international community, had brought positive results. The post-cyclone emergency relief operations have underlined the urgency for ASEAN to further strengthen cooperation in mitigating large-scale disaster situations. As we strengthen our collective efforts in disaster management, we should maintain credibility by ensuring more open access and accountability. We acknowledged ASEAN Member States' contributions and sharing of experiences from the post-tsunami relief and recovery efforts in extending humanitarian assistance to Myanmar. We also expressed appreciation to the ASEAN Humanitarian Task Force and the Tripartite Core Group for their dedication and hard work in discharging their tasks. We welcomed the release of the Post-Nargis Joint Assessment (PONJA) report. We agreed that the ASEAN-led mechanism should continue for another year until 2009 to support the humanitarian effort in Myanmar.
34. Recognizing Southeast Asia as one of the most natural disaster prone regions, we reaffirmed our commitment to intensify our cooperation as well as with other countries and international organizations in the areas of disaster relief and management. In this regard, we called for the full ratification of the ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response (AADMER), which provides for effective regional mechanisms to mitigate the impact of disasters in the region. We also looked forward to the operationalization of the ASEAN Standby Arrangements and Standard Operating Procedures and commended the efforts of the interim ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on Disaster Management (AHA Centre) in Jakarta. We called upon the relevant Sectoral Bodies and the ASEAN Secretariat to work towards the establishment of a fully functional AHA Centre.

CULTURE AND INFORMATION

35. We also expressed satisfaction at the significant number of projects and activities that were implemented in the culture and information sectors to promote the rich and vast cultures of ASEAN, and looked forward to the new ASEAN Anthem, which will be chosen through an ASEAN-wide competition organized by Thailand with the support of the ASEAN Committee on Culture and Information (COCI).

LABOUR

36. We look forward to the convening of the ASEAN Committee on the Implementation of the ASEAN Declaration on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers before the 14th ASEAN Summit in Bangkok in December 2008, pursuant to the Declaration which our Leaders signed on 13 January 2007 in Cebu, and our Statement of 30 July 2007 on the Establishment of the ASEAN Committee on the Implementation of the ASEAN Declaration on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers. We expressed support for the Philippines' hosting of the 2nd Meeting of the Global Forum on Migration and Development in October 2008 with the theme "Protecting and Empowering Migrants for Development".

EXTERNAL RELATIONS

37. We agreed to continue strengthening ASEAN's relations with our external partners. We underscored the importance of further deepening and broadening our cooperation in various fields with our Dialogue Partners as a critical part of ASEAN's efforts to build a closely integrated community. In particular, we looked forward to the appointment of ambassadors to ASEAN from Dialogue Partners.
38. We agreed that our cooperation with Dialogue Partners should focus on key areas such as energy and food security, terrorism and transnational crimes, poverty reduction, sustainable forest management and climate change, communicable diseases and disaster relief and response.
39. We reiterated our commitment to push ahead with the FTA negotiations with Australia and New Zealand, the EU and India. We also welcomed the progress made in the ongoing negotiations on the investment agreements with China and the Republic of Korea, and looked forward to the early entry into force of the ASEAN-Japan Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement. Besides economic benefits, the FTAs between ASEAN and its Dialogue Partners are also strategic linkages that will bind our regions even closer together.
40. We agreed that we should conclude as soon as possible the MOU on the Second Phase of the ASEAN-Australia Development Cooperation Program (AADCP II). We took note that the AADCP II would focus on strengthening the ASEAN Secretariat's institutional capacity to effectively implement its mandate as well as supporting regional mechanisms and capacity for implementation of ASEAN Economic Community Blueprint activities.
41. We looked forward to the finalization of the MOU on the establishment of the ASEAN-China Centre to further deepen our cooperation in all areas.
42. We looked forward to the launch of the ASEAN-Korea Centre to further enhance our cooperation in the areas of trade, investment, tourism and cultural exchange by end 2008. We supported the

proposal to convene an ASEAN-ROK Commemorative Summit in 2009 to celebrate the 20th anniversary of relations between ASEAN and the Republic of Korea.

43. We also looked forward to adopting the Roadmap on the Implementation of the ASEAN-Russia Comprehensive Program of Action, at this year's ASEAN Post Ministerial Session with Russia. We expressed confidence that this Roadmap will help to promote mutual understanding, increase people-to-people interaction and facilitate cooperation projects between ASEAN and Russia.
44. We noted the launch of the ASEAN Development Vision to Advance National Cooperation and Economic Integration (ADVANCE) program initiated by the US in February 2008. The ADVANCE program sets to implement the goals of the ASEAN-US Cooperation Plan, the ASEAN-US Enhanced Partnership, the ASEAN-US Trade and Investment Framework Arrangement (TIFA) and the Vientiane Action Program (VAP). We also welcomed the appointment of the first US Ambassador for ASEAN Affairs.
45. We expressed our appreciation to India for its contribution of US\$1 million to operationalize the ASEAN-India Science and Technology Fund, which demonstrated India's firm commitment to further its cooperation with ASEAN. We expressed our readiness to work closely with India to expeditiously establish the initiative on ASEAN-India Green Fund. We looked forward to the implementation of more collaborative projects between ASEAN and India in this area.
46. We recalled the adoption of the 2nd Joint Statement on East Asia Cooperation and the ASEAN Plus Three Cooperation Work Plan (2007 - 2017) at the 11th ASEAN Plus Three Summit in Singapore. In this regard, we welcomed the completion of the Terms of Reference for the ASEAN Plus Three Cooperation Fund and looked forward to the establishment of the Fund. We expressed confidence that the priority areas set out in the Cooperation Work Plan can be implemented without delay.
47. Recalling our Leaders' substantive discussions at the 3rd East Asia Summit in Singapore, we reaffirmed the value of continued cooperation within the EAS. As the EAS develops, we stressed the importance of ensuring follow-up actions in areas as mandated by the Leaders. We looked forward to the upcoming EAS Foreign Ministers' Informal Consultations on 22 July 2008 as an opportunity to discuss regional and international issues, and consider the future direction of the EAS.
48. We welcomed the enhancement of the ASEAN-UN Partnership which has been marked by events such as the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding in September 2007 and the ASEAN-led humanitarian assistance for the victims of Cyclone Nargis. We recommended the convening of the 3rd ASEAN-UN Summit back-to-back with the 14th ASEAN Summit in Bangkok in December 2008.
49. We agreed to pursue cooperation with other regional organizations that could complement ASEAN's objectives. In this regard, we welcomed the invitation from Brazil, the pro tempore president of MERCOSUR, to attend the inaugural ASEAN-MERCOSUR Ministerial Meeting in Brasilia on 24 November 2008. We looked forward to the meeting that would deepen the engagement between both sides. We also looked forward to the convening of a full-fledged ASEAN-Gulf Cooperation Council Ministerial Meeting in Thailand in 2009 to take ASEAN-GCC relations in the areas of inter alia, trade and investment, tourism, and energy security to a higher plane.

DEVELOPMENTS IN MYANMAR

50. We took note of the briefing by Myanmar on the recent developments in the process of national reconciliation and its peaceful transition to democracy, as envisaged in the roadmap to democracy; in particular, the adoption of the State Constitution of 2008 by referendum. We urged Myanmar to take bolder steps towards a peaceful transition to democracy in the near future, and working towards the holding of free and fair General Elections in 2010. While recognizing the steps undertaken by the Government of Myanmar to conduct meetings with all concerned parties, including the NLD leadership, we reiterated our calls for the release of all political detainees, including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, to pave the way for meaningful dialogue involving all parties concerned.
51. We recognized the fact that Myanmar has tried to address many and complex challenges. We reaffirmed our commitment to remain constructively engaged with Myanmar as part of building the ASEAN Community. We encouraged Myanmar to continue to work closely with the Good Offices of the UN Secretary-General and his Special Advisor Ibrahim Gambari in ensuring an inclusive process towards national reconciliation. In this regard, we welcomed Myanmar's agreement to the upcoming visits of Mr. Tomas Ojea Quintana, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar in August 2008, and Professor Ibrahim Gambari in August 2008, and reiterated our call for Myanmar to extend its full support for their missions.

REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL ISSUES

FOOD AND ENERGY SECURITY

52. We discussed how the mounting challenge posed by rising oil and food prices poses a serious challenge to our peoples' welfare as well as our countries' continued economic development. On the issue of food security, we affirmed that access to adequate and reliable supply of staples, and stable prices were fundamental to the region's economic and social well-being. To address rising food prices, we stressed the importance of regional and international efforts to ensure the efficient functioning of market forces, as well as to come up with longer term agricultural solutions. We encouraged all countries to do away with price-distorting export subsidies and other protectionist policies and to provide market access to competitive food exports.
53. We are concerned that the recent volatility and rise of oil prices has adversely affected our economies. We reiterated the need for regional and international efforts to ensure the efficient functioning of market forces and to enhance the region's energy security in a sustainable manner through greater cooperation measures such as improving energy efficiency and conservation.

FINANCIAL COOPERATION

54. We exchanged views on the global financial situation, especially in the wake of last year's sub-prime mortgage crisis. While the risk of sudden rapid deterioration in the near term has somewhat abated, we stressed the importance of ensuring sound fiscal and monetary policies.

CROSS-STRAIT RELATIONS

55. We welcomed the positive development in relations across the Taiwan Strait. We expressed our hope that cross-Strait relations would continue to improve.

KOREAN PENINSULA

56. We reaffirmed that the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula is essential in maintaining peace and security in the region, and expressed our full support for the Six-Party Talks to continue its deliberations in resolving the North Korean nuclear issue. We noted the political will of relevant parties to implement their respective commitments and welcomed the convening of the meeting of the Foreign Ministers of the Six-Party Talks at the sidelines of the 15th ARF.

IRAQ

57. We remained concerned over the continued violence in Iraq despite recent indications that the security situation has improved. We strongly urged all parties to resolve their political differences peacefully and work towards durable peace and security in the country. We were encouraged by the resilience of the Iraqi people and reaffirmed our support for the national reconciliation process aimed at constructing a unified and stable Iraq. To this end, we voiced strong support for the efforts of the Iraqi Government to conduct provincial polls in October 2008 as part of its nation building efforts.

MIDDLE EAST

58. We were encouraged by the diplomatic efforts to move all tracks of the peace process forward in the quest for a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East. We urged the Israeli and Palestinian sides to continue efforts towards reaching an agreement consistent with the Roadmap and UN Security Council resolutions. We welcomed the Israel-Hamas ceasefire of 19 June 2008 and the efforts at brokering the deal. We encouraged the Palestinians to forge unity amongst themselves in pursuit of an independent, democratic and viable Palestinian state living side-by-side with Israel in peace and security.
59. We further welcomed the election of the new president of Lebanon and hope that all parties would be able to resolve their differences to ensure a stable and secure Lebanon.
60. We urge the continuation of renewed Israel-Syria indirect talks to contribute towards achieving lasting peace and stability in the Middle East.
61. We welcomed the convening of the Ministerial Meeting of the New Asian African Strategic Partnership on Capacity-building for Palestine in Jakarta on 14 July 2008 organized jointly by the Government of Indonesia and the Government of South Africa. We welcomed the outcome of the Meeting which shows our commitment to assist the Palestinian people.

ASIA-MIDDLE EAST DIALOGUE (AMED)

62. We welcomed the successful second meeting of the Asia-Middle East Dialogue (AMED II) in Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt from 5-6 April 2008. We commend Egypt's chairmanship of AMED II, which has sustained the momentum and interest of Asia and the Middle East in strengthening ties and deepening engagement to foster greater mutual understanding and cooperation. We also welcomed Thailand's offer to host the next AMED meeting, and Singapore's proposal to host an AMED Media Roundtable in 2009.

WORLD TRADE ORGANISATION

63. We note that there is a WTO Ministerial Meeting taking place in Geneva on 21 July 2008. It is important that the meeting be able to push forward the negotiations for the Doha Development Agenda for the benefit of all WTO members. We also expressed our support for the early accession of the Lao PDR into the WTO.

42ND ASEAN MINISTERIAL MEETING

64. We elected Thailand as the Chair of the 42nd ASC and Viet Nam as the Vice-Chair. We looked forward to the 42nd AMM/PMC/16th ARF to be held in July 2009 in Thailand.