

AUSTRALIA AND ASEAN: FACING THE NEW INTERNATIONAL ORDER

Statement by Senator Gareth Evans, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, at the ASEAN Post Ministerial Conference, 6 + 7 Open Session, Manila, 24 July 1992.

We are meeting here in Manila at a time of enormous global historical change which, while for the most part very positive in its impact, has worked to create a more fluid and less certain international climate than has been the case for a long time.

Some of the most positive developments have been here in the Philippines, where we have seen the complete consolidation of the democratic process, culminating recently in the first absolutely normal transfer of Presidential power for 27 years. We are indeed grateful to the members of the Philippines Government for their warm welcome and generous hospitality, particularly given their preoccupation with establishing the new administration. I would also like to express my own - and my delegation's - sincere gratitude to His Excellency Raul Manglapus, Chairman of this Post Ministerial Conference, for his many positive contributions to our discussions in this forum over the years, and to wish him well in his return to private life. I look forward to working with his very worthy successor, His Excellency Roberto Romulo.

The 25th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting which our ASEAN colleagues have just concluded has itself marked some important changes, not least the admission of Laos and Vietnam as observers, the attendance of their Foreign Ministers at the AMM Opening Session, and the accession this week of the two countries to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in South East Asia (Bali Treaty): these are important milestones in the move, which we all applaud, to integrate those countries into the wider South East Asian region.

Since the pace of international change started to really accelerate in the last three years, the extraordinary has so much become the commonplace that we sometimes need to stop and pinch ourselves to fully appreciate the scale of the

transformation. Since we last met just a year ago, we have witnessed nothing less than the total collapse of the bipolar global structure that has characterised international affairs since 1945. Communism has disappeared as a ruling force in all but four countries - although three of them are here in Asia - and nearly twenty new states have emerged on the Eurasian landmass.

But the so-called new world order of the post-Cold War world is far more complex, diverse and unpredictable than the East-West polarity it has replaced. In a phase of world history that has seen a superpower vanish in a matter of weeks, nothing can be regarded as invulnerable to the forces at work - both external and internal - in the current international environment. While the Asia Pacific area has adjusted to the end of the Cold War much more effectively than many other parts of the world, and developments have generally been positive, problems and possible sources of tension nevertheless remain.

The economic success of a number of Asia-Pacific countries, for example, is bringing with it a greater general sense of confidence and status, which in time may require some adjustments in regional attitudes and arrangements if envy and competition are to be managed. At the same time, the increased wealth and technological sophistication of some regional nations is leading to increasing weapons procurement: while there is nothing which can yet be called an arms race in the region, the situation will bear watching in the medium term.

The role of Japan and China as major regional powers will necessarily come into sharper focus as Russia and the United States become less all-pervasive presences in the region than they were during the Cold War years - although I should say that we both accept and welcome United States assurances that it intends to remain very much engaged on this side of the Pacific.

While there is growing regional acceptance of Japan playing a political role commensurate with its economic power, there remains considerable resistance to it assuming an enhanced security role, even in the very narrowly defined context of UN-sponsored peace-keeping operations. It is important that Japan continue to pay close attention to these sensitivities, as we believe it has in the passage of the PKO legislation.

The development of China's response to the new international environment has been complicated by the approaching leadership transition. While that country

has been playing a very cooperative role within the Security Council, especially on Cambodia, we have seen signs that it could adopt increasingly hardline positions on a number of international issues, not least on some long-standing territorial claims. May I say, however, in this respect, that Australia did appreciate the comments about China's attitude to regional security made by the Foreign Minister of China His Excellency Qian Qichen at the AMM Opening Session. His assurance that China would not seek to "fill up the vacuum" in the region, and his proposal for a multi-level and multi-channel security dialogue mechanism at both bilateral and regional levels, were very welcome.

Residual territorial disputes do continue to trouble parts of the region, most obviously in the South China Sea where tensions over competing claims to the Spratly Islands have heightened recently and are a major concern. The very useful series of workshops sponsored by Indonesia do, however, give cause for continuing hope that peaceful cooperation in the South China Sea - including perhaps through resource-sharing arrangements of the kind entered into between Indonesia and Australia in the Timor Sea - will be achievable. In this respect, Australia also welcomes ASEAN's desire to resolve this problem which was so clearly signalled in the Declaration on the South China Sea signed earlier this week: we certainly welcome the cooperative approach urged in that Declaration.

There are, in addition, a number of transnational issues - particularly so-called "police" issues - which are likely to cause low-level but irritating problems for some time. Amongst these is the scourge of piracy which continues to plague the region, both in territorial waters and on the high seas. Attacks on vessels have increased alarmingly in the last year. And drug trafficking continues to drain regional economies and inflict untold suffering.

The political, economic and social advancement of the region as a whole also suffers when the political will of a people is suppressed. Nowhere was that suppression more acute, or the scale of human suffering greater, than in Cambodia. The greatest achievement for peace in the year since we met last was the conclusion in October 1991 of the Paris peace settlement, bringing to an end - or so we all hoped - this long, tragic struggle and the enormous suffering it had inflicted on the people of Cambodia. But peace continues to be a fragile commodity. The Australian Government shares the concern of all around this table at the recent resistance of the Khmer Rouge to implementing the crucial second stage of the ceasefire arrangements.

We were all prepared at the recent Tokyo Conference to accept and respond to those complaints of the Khmer Rouge which did have some reasonable foundation - including the slow implementation of the civil administration element of UNTAC. But we are not prepared to accede to complaints or demands which are manifestly outside both the letter and spirit of the Paris Settlement. We accordingly welcome action by the United Nations Security Council to put the Khmer Rouge clearly on notice that they stand totally isolated in obstructing the implementation of the Settlement, and indeed any action by the Security Council which shows the determination of the world community to resolve absolutely and once and for all this source of regional instability.

The Burmese people are still without a democratically elected government over two years after they overwhelmingly voted for political change. While there have been some slight recent signs of willingness to relax pressure and resume dialogue, it is clear that Burma's rulers are not contemplating the early installation of a democratic government, with the result that their economy and human rights records are likely to continue to languish among the world's worst. Given ASEAN's particularly influential role in this respect, I would hope that the kind of energy that it demonstrated for so long in seeking to resolve the Cambodia problem could also be channelled to Burma. And I look forward to our discussions on the various ways in which we can all help, in our various ways, to accelerate the pace of democratic reform in Burma.

Events in Thailand earlier this year have also been a source of considerable concern both inside and outside the country. Subsequent developments, however, have shown that the popular will to oppose peacefully an unpopular government will eventually be heard: the people of Thailand demonstrated unequivocally in May the strength and conviction of their desire to establish firmly a democratic tradition in that country.

Again, we were all saddened and shocked by the tragic violence which erupted in Dili last November. But equally we have welcomed the significant steps taken to respond to that violence by the Indonesian Government in a way which acknowledged the force of both international and internal concern. Countries in our region do move toward more open political systems at their own pace and in their own way, but the trend is clear - and welcome.

In the most volatile single area of the region, the Korean Peninsula, the North

Korean nuclear program and its possible weapons application continues to loom as a spectre despite some encouraging progress in relations between North and South and in North Korea's acceptance of international nuclear safeguards.

Despite all these worries and sources of potential concern that remain in the region, the prognosis is generally one for optimism. South East Asia is better placed than most other areas to make impressive strides into the next century. ASEAN's economies are booming, and its political cohesion is as strong as it has ever been.

The decisions of the ASEAN Heads of Government at the Summit in Singapore in January epitomised ASEAN's progress, strengthening the economic cooperation of its members and, in a particularly welcome development, reaffirming the central role of ASEAN - and this ASEAN PMC - in the discussion of regional security issues.

For Australia, the fundamental question is how best we can contribute to sustaining and enhancing this generally positive regional environment. Our approach has two distinct, but interrelated, dimensions: greater involvement in the region's economic future, and continuation of joint efforts with our neighbours to help build greater regional peace and security.

Australia's commitment to the region is already starkly illustrated by the extent of our integration with the East Asian economies, which now account for some 60 percent of our exports and 40 percent of our imports. The need to link our economy even more closely with the region's growth has been one of the guiding principles of Australia's vigorous program of economic reform under the Hawke and Keating Governments over the past nine years. Australians now know that they cannot rely on high primary produce prices to maintain living standards.

To regain our competitive edge, we have lowered to around two percent the high inflation rates of the 1980s which long distorted investment decisions. We have also very significantly reduced the size of the featherbed of tariff protection which had imposed major costs on our export trade and operated over many years to weaken the competitive strength of our manufacturing sector. Considerable progress has been made on microeconomic reform, in particular in our transport and communications infrastructure. The emphasis of industrial

relations has been shifted toward enterprise bargaining, with productivity taking centre stage. New disciplines have been imposed on the public sector. Taxation has been reformed and foreign investment into Australia has been liberalised.

All of this means that we look out on the world at large, and our region in particular, in a more positive and forthcoming way than has been the case in the past. In this respect, may I say that we welcome the ASEAN Summit's decision to establish the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) as a positive development, certainly to the extent that it is predicated on complementing efforts in the Uruguay Round and in APEC to bring about trade liberalisation both globally and regionally. We believe there is every chance that AFTA will be a positive, trade-creating rather than trade-diverting, force in the region, and welcome it in that spirit. We will be following AFTA's development with great interest.

The further development of APEC will also encourage and support regional prosperity. We are looking forward to the fourth APEC Ministerial Meeting in Bangkok in September to carry forward the process of APEC's consolidation. In saying this, however, I am very conscious that this consolidation and further development will only be possible with a continuation of ASEAN's vital role in, and support for, APEC.

A particular challenge we will all face over the next year will be to reflect on the outcome of the Uruguay Round and its implications for regional economies. Given the nature of the GATT, it is inevitable that any agreement which is universally acceptable will leave plenty of opportunities for regions and sub-regions to improve on the outcome in a GATT-friendly way. We believe that it will be important to address these opportunities vigorously in APEC and we are pleased to see the array of practical and more visionary measures which are being contemplated.

Prime Minister Keating, in his February "One Nation" statement, clearly recognised the imperative of intensified contacts with Asia. He underscored the fact that the pace of structural change in Asia means that Australia cannot afford to stand still. Mr Keating's suggestion that regional Heads of Government meet periodically in an APEC context to discuss economic and trade issues; Australia's strong support for both ASEAN and APEC as regional groupings; and our efforts to work for a successful outcome to the Uruguay Round, especially in the agricultural sector so important to us all here - are all, I hope,

together with the greater depth and breadth we are building into our bilateral relationships, evidence of Australia's desire to contribute to the region's economic growth and development.

We in Australia also believe we have something to contribute to the emerging dialogue on regional security and strategic issues, both on specific issues like chemical weapons - where we have been very encouraged by the extremely positive response to our Chemical Weapons Regional Initiative - and on regional security issues generally.

It may also be that our experience in developing the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone will be a helpful contribution to the continuing discussion on a SEANWFZ, which we continue to believe would be a very helpful addition to the world's defences against nuclear proliferation.

We have for some time been encouraging the perception of this ASEAN PMC as the major regional forum for security dialogue, and we have warmly welcomed, as I have already indicated, the decision of the ASEAN leaders to formally place security on the ASEAN Summit and PMC agendas.

I have read with great interest the many references to regional security in the opening speeches to the AMM on 21 July. The need to be forward-looking on this issue was particularly well captured by Singapore's Foreign Minister His Excellency Wong Kan Seng when he said that security arrangements needed to be reviewed and re-assessed to preserve optimal conditions of stability and growth. He said, and we strongly agree, that we can build on the "more positive structure of regional relationships in South East Asia" as well as the discussion of security matters at the PMC to elaborate new security arrangements for the Asia Pacific.

We have also welcomed and participated in the series of seminars, sponsored by the think-tanks and involving both officials and experts, that have already been held in Manila, Bangkok and Bali. We have been encouraged by the recent holding by ASEAN of its first Senior Officials Meeting devoted entirely to regional security issues. We welcome the support that has recently been given by Japanese Prime Minister Miyazawa to ongoing regional dialogue both at general and sub-regional levels. And we specifically welcome the proposal made by Malaysian Defence Minister Najib to convene a meeting of senior

government officials to discuss all these issues in Kuala Lumpur next June.

The task ahead will be to put some more flesh on the proposals that have been made in regional security discussions to date, both in terms of advancing the general conceptual debate - on the meaning and relevance these days of concepts like deterrence, balance of power, common security and collective security - and in developing particular confidence-enhancing cooperative strategies. I will be making in a later session some very modest suggestions in this regard relating to a possible exchange of maritime information to assist in combating piracy, the possible development of strategic planning discussions, and possible consultation about the development of a regional arms register.

I accept that while it is important to debate larger conceptual themes and issues from time to time, real progress in regional security is only likely to be achieved in practice by gradual, incremental measures in which the confidence of each relevant country is won and consolidated step by step along the way. The task is not so much to define threats, and to mobilise resources against them either unilaterally or cooperatively, but rather to build the kind of relationships of mutual respect, cooperation and interdependence in our wider region which will ensure that such threats will never materialise.

Overall, Australia sees developments in the region as being positive, highlighted in particular by the trends towards strong economies and stronger economic cooperation, greater democracy and transparency within government, and a generally benign external security environment. Australia has an important stake in the continued prosperity and security of the region, and thus in cooperating in the dialogue that underpins it. The challenge for all of us in the future will be to consolidate the political, economic and social gains made so far and to remove the remaining restraints on political and economic progress in the region.

ASEAN's strength and cohesion will be a vital factor in this effort, and I therefore look forward very much to participating in our discussions both here and during the coming year of change and challenge in our region.

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