

Excellencies,

Members of the Diplomatic Corps,

My colleagues in government,

Friends,

Ladies and gentlemen:

On behalf of the Department of Foreign Affairs, I welcome our distinguished guests to this morning's celebration and extend my warmest greetings to you all.

We gather today for a very special event, which is to celebrate the 44th Founding Anniversary of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations or ASEAN, the organization that continues to maintain the preservation of peace and stability in the Southeast Asian Region.

On this day, the ASEAN flag will fly not only here in the Philippines or in your respective countries in Southeast Asia, but also in the countries where Member States have diplomatic and consular missions, in the countries of our Dialogue Partners, and in ASEAN Member States' permanent missions in the various United Nations headquarters in the world.

By this time next year, the second phase of the program to fly the ASEAN flag in more countries

will be completed. We look forward to an even stronger ASEAN, with its flag flying proudly in more countries.

With the raising of the ASEAN flag, we expect the world to look at ASEAN with greater anticipation of its full consolidation into one lively Community, which will be a major force in regional and international affairs.

We have set our goals. We are determined to reach them. Indeed, we have already set in motion our concerted efforts toward the attainment of an ASEAN Community by 2015 -- 600 million people working together toward one vision, one identity, one caring and sharing community.

While we are 10 independent nations, we have that strong sense of a shared past, and an even stronger sense of a shared future. This unity is very special. There is a robust spirit of mutual concern which drives us to help each other develop and cooperate with each other to achieve the maximum good for all the peoples of ASEAN. A developed and peaceful ASEAN Region also translates into more prosperity and stability for the rest of the world.

That is how we see ASEAN's value in the international community.

And so, looking forward to that day, I would like to greet each and everyone with, "MABUHAY ANG ASEAN! MABUHAY TAYONG LAHAT!"

Thank you.