

Your Excellency, former President Fidel V. Ramos,

Excellencies,

Members of the Diplomatic Corps,

My colleagues in government,

Friends, ladies and gentlemen:

Exactly 45 years ago, the Philippines joined hands with our neighbors Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand in establishing ASEAN. Since then, the group of five States has expanded to ten to include Brunei, Viet Nam, Laos, Myanmar and Cambodia.

In four decades after its founding, ASEAN has made remarkable progress as a regional body. It has emerged as a driving force in promoting dialogue and cooperation in regional stability and security, economic prosperity and socio-cultural amity.

Despite the myriad challenges that have confronted the group through the years, ASEAN has maintained its central role in advancing its Members' interests, particularly in achieving its cherished ideals of peace, freedom, and social justice.

Under the three pillars of political-security community, economic community and socio-cultural community, ASEAN continues to strengthen its foundation and effectively collaborates with its

Dialogue Partners and other major organizations. It has steadily progressed with various regional programmes and initiatives in achieving the goal of an ASEAN Community by 2015, backed by a legally binding Charter that guides its activities and external relations.

The establishment of the ASEAN Community in 2015 will be a significant milestone in the journey of ASEAN. Its success will have far-ranging implications to the region as it will redound to the benefit of the nearly 600 million peoples of Southeast Asia, contribute to the continued economic development and peace and stability of the Asia-Pacific, and firmly anchor ASEAN's place in the regional security architecture.

With our collective investments in building an economically-integrated, politically-cohesive and people-centered ASEAN Community, we honor the vision of ASEAN's founding fathers for ASEAN unity and strength.

Today, more ASEAN flags are being hoisted in more countries all over the world--a tool for, and a sign of, greater awareness about the region. The image of the ASEAN flag waving next to the national flag of the ASEAN-member countries symbolizes the spirit of community and synergy of ideas that will bind and animate ASEAN in the next 45 years and beyond.

To commemorate 45 years of ASEAN's foundation, the Philippines is launching today the commemorative 50-peso bills with an overprint of the ASEAN logo. Ten million bills of this kind will be circulated. We hope that this project, in collaboration with Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas, will promote greater awareness of ASEAN in the Philippines. We thank the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas as partner in this joint undertaking. I will shortly present this currency as souvenir to the ASEAN Ambassadors or Embassy representatives who are here today.

I also wish to convey our heartfelt appreciation to the National Commission for Culture and the Arts and the Intramuros Administration for spearheading the installation of a bust of Philippine National Hero Dr. Jose P. Rizal at the National Heroes Section of the ASEAN Garden in Intramuros. Due to the inclement weather this week, we will find a suitable date for the unveiling of the bust.

In closing, I would like to thank everyone for taking an active part in this special occasion commemorating the unity, camaraderie, and shared destiny of ASEAN Member States.

## Remarks 45th Anniversary of the Founding of ASEAN

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MABUHAY ANG ASEAN! LONG LIVE ASEAN!