

Foreword

ASEAN has come a long way in the 41 years since the signing of the Bangkok Declaration in 1967 where the five founding member states of ASEAN (Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand) signed a political document announcing the aspiration of the five senior Ministers of the five Southeast Asian governments to work together under ASEAN. In the last 41 years, ASEAN has grown from a family of five to ten, and the ten countries are now cooperating and integrating on more areas than ever before. The ASEAN Charter has given us new impetus for further integration and growth, and will carry us forward for generations to come.

The ASEAN Charter is a precious gift to the peoples of Southeast Asia. The Charter would not have been possible without the endorsement of the ASEAN Leaders and work of the drafters of the ASEAN Charter — the High Level Task Force on the Drafting of the ASEAN Charter, the drafters of the Terms of Reference of the ASEAN Human Rights Body, and the other supplementary agreements. The Eminent Persons Group on the ASEAN Charter also gave us valuable recommendations. The High Level Task Force on the Drafting of the ASEAN Charter has contributed to the body of knowledge that will go down in the history of the region, for opening up new possibilities for ASEAN.

The Charter spells out our vision for the future, our commitment to become a people-oriented and regional grouping that is united by a common desire to live in a region of lasting peace, security and economic growth, shared prosperity and social progress. The ASEAN Community will be underpinned by the values of good governance and rule of law as well as the respect for and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms of our peoples. The ASEAN Charter has also created a new legal and institutional framework with a legal personality and improved decision-making mechanisms to carry out our work.

I have already witnessed some of the implications that the ASEAN Charter have on my work in the first year as the Secretary-General of ASEAN. The “little green book” is indispensable in my dealings with people, who range from the Leaders of the world’s greatest superpowers, heads of multilateral institutions, businesses, banks, religious leaders, academia, students, the media, Parliamentarians and civil society. These people come from the ASEAN region as well as from countries with whom ASEAN has yet to establish formal relations. The ASEAN Charter has allowed me to explain issues more clearly to our friends and partners, who support and share the same aspirations, and would like to contribute to our region’s future. It has helped ASEAN articulate our values, purposes, visions and foundations on which we are built and our desire to build a regional identity.

The ASEAN Charter has paved the way for ASEAN’s stakeholders to build coalitions to help the region grow to embrace the future. It has laid the ground work for the partnerships we will forge with all our stakeholders, from

different countries and industry sectors, between government and inter-governmental organisations, businesses, academia, civil society, and others, to create a vibrant and integrated Southeast Asia. It is now up to the stakeholders of ASEAN to take up the challenge of regional integration to respond creatively to globalisation and the opportunity to improve our lives. Although many challenges lie ahead, the ASEAN Charter gives us hope, purpose, and importantly, a framework of action for all the peoples of ASEAN.

This book provides insights into the making of the Charter and background of the deliberations on the range of issues that are so pertinent for the region's future. It will help us develop a perspective of the intent of some of the provisions in the Charter.

As ASEAN celebrates the Charter's full ratification by all ASEAN member states and the entry into force this December, I am most grateful to the contributors of this volume who have helped to shed light into the inspiration and guiding principles of the drafting of the ASEAN Charter. This, in turn, will help future generations of the people of ASEAN to appreciate not only the text of the Charter, but also the spirit of our basic document. The more we understand and appreciate what went into the drafting of the Charter, the more we will respect and live our life under its guidance. Our collective endeavours to build the ASEAN Community will certainly benefit from the collective memories and insights contained in this book. And that is nothing less than an intellectual legacy for our posterity.

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