

PREFACE

In this book, Professor Koh Kheng Lian, judiciously and perceptively, invites us to witness the maturing of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) as a regional socio-economic and cultural integration organization. Here Professor Koh gathers the constituent decisions that incrementally define the ASEAN consensus and provide insights into the emergence how peoples across many languages and traditions find a common path toward sustainable development.

ASEAN has advanced its programs for sustaining natural resources, biodiversity, public health, and nature conservation in important ways. These efforts have been in tandem with growing collaboration in many other sectors, such as finance, transport, and commerce. What makes the environmental agenda so important is the region's enormous richness in biodiversity, as well as its habitats for many migratory species whose range encompasses the ASEAN area as a key link in pathways that extend from as far away as the Arctic or Australia and Antarctic. ASEAN constituencies know intimately that their nations have accepted the obligation under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea to protect and preserve the marine environment; all ASEAN nations share a direct association with the oceans. In like vein, the ASEAN States have important, common but differentiated duties to stabilize the climate of the Earth. The typhoons and floods at one extreme, and the welcome rainfall for freshwater resources at another extreme, evidence the region's dependence on climatic conditions.

No one nation can provide for environmental stewardship in Southeast Asia. Only the sort of transnational cooperation can ensure a sound environment for all the peoples of the region. By harmonizing programs, standards, and sharing in capacity building, the region is building the foundation for effective cooperation and performance. This work is not accomplished suddenly. There can be no true capacity-building transnationally without confidence building. This happens gradually, through successive programs and plans of action, and reassessment and reappraisals. Much international development assistance focuses on external economic indicators and seeks a short-term burst in productivity; such patterns of development repeatedly deteriorate, are subject to corrupt manipulation or lack the personnel to sustain them over time.

ASEAN has pursued a more effective model, working on harmonization and integration through pragmatic and effective common endeavors. Much of what works in ASEAN is grounded on a confidence-building model. To be sure, the European Union, from the earliest work of European Communities and the Council of Europe, has also demonstrated that regional confidence building is key to socio-economic well-being. The EU has been focused inwardly, on its own political integration, and like other regions has not seen how ASEAN has been cultivating its own distinctive kind of regional harmonization and integration.

Professor Koh facilitates the study of ASEAN in important ways. Without this compendium, comparative regional studies would be difficult. She has been a close watcher as well as a leader in building ASEAN's environmental conservation cooperation, and brings her unique insights to the editing of this work.

All those who strive to build environmental cooperation across nations are indebted to Professor Koh for her scholarly work over one decade in the study and analysis of ASEAN's environmental programs. Her leadership in the Asia-Pacific Centre for Environmental Law at the Faculty of Law of the National University of Singapore has been a beacon to government officials in Asia, to scholars around the world, and to institutions such as the Asian Development Bank, that build the framework for sustainable development. Her role as a Vice-Chair for South and East Asia for the Commission on Environmental Law of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) has enabled her to bring ASEAN's leadership to the attention of other regions.

ASEAN's environmental laws and programs are building, almost in an organic and evolutionary way. To discern this growth requires detailed attention to what some dismiss as a bureaucratic meeting or a routine administrative act. The genius of this work is in linking these small — sometimes imperceptible — environmental legal measures to reveal their maturation over time and their morphing into new patterns. This book can only remind us how indebted we all are to Professor Koh Kheng-Lian for her dedicated scholarship as one of Asia's pioneers in environmental law.

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