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Climate change: is Southeast Asia up to the challenge?: closing address

Report

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Closing Address

H.E. Dr. Surin Pitsuwan

Secretary General of ASEAN



First of all I wish to express my sincere appreciation to Tan Sri Munir Majid for putting together this workshop and lining up an impressive array of speakers to deliberate on the important issue of climate change which is now grabbing world attention at all levels. The rather provocative title he has chosen, “Is Southeast Asia up to the Challenge”, certainly makes us reflect on what we have done, and whether we are doing enough to face the looming threat of climate change which is affecting our survival, livelihoods and development. For a person who claims that this is a “night time job”, because of his many other engagements during the day, Tan Sri is certainly showing us that our capacity to act is limitless if we put our mind to it. I would also like to acknowledge the efforts of Mr. Rajaretnam who has connected the intellectual resources of the LSE with the ASEAN Secretariat.

Having been briefed on the deliberations that have taken so far, I am impressed with the line-up of very senior and high profile speakers and the diversity of topics, which any discourse on climate change has to address. Mr. Gita Wirjawan, Chairman of the Investment Coordinating Board of Indonesia has brought home the debate on climate change to the private sector and businesses, and how it may benefit the private sector as a “win-win” proposition, and for the businesses to seize this opportunity towards a resilient green economy. He highlighted the enormous wealth of natural resources, citing several examples in Indonesia, and argued convincingly that judicious management of natural wealth is good both for business growth and diversification and the environment.

Dr. Jorn Brommelhorster highlighted the key findings of the ADB-UK study on the economics of climate change. The predictions are clear; Southeast Asia will be the worst effected among all the other regions of the world. The worst case scenario points to a 4.8 degree Centigrade rise in temperature, rise of sea levels of up to 70cm, and loss of rice yields up to 75% by the year 2100, among others. In ASEAN, such predictions are a reality even now. The unrelenting spate of disasters recently is ample testimony to that. We look forward to working with ADB in further refining and doing shorter term sectoral analysis that will enable ASEAN to make better informed policy choices.

Dr. Tim Forysth has combined his academic knowledge with field experiences in Southeast Asia to present a very compelling case for climate change mitigation actions in the land and forestry sector, and has balanced it with caution of the many challenges and pitfalls in addressing forestry and climate

change. His exposé will be very useful for the policy makers who now have to negotiate the future framework on climate change through the Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD) Mechanism.

Prof. Fredolin Tangang's numerical analysis on the fires and trans-boundary haze pollution is instructive. While acknowledging that humans are the cause of fires, the El Nino phenomena clearly exacerbates the impact of trans-boundary smoke haze pollution. He has highlighted that expansion of agriculture, land use change, resettlement etc. has combined to make a strong correlation between the El Nino and the spread of smoke haze. His message is clear, governments and all stakeholders need to do more, leveraging with climate change actions.

Dr. Dewi has highlighted what Indonesia has committed to do on climate change, considering that the country is reported to be third largest emitter of greenhouse gas emissions in the world. The President of Indonesia has committed his country to a voluntary emission reduction of 26% from the business-as-usual scenario by the year 2020 – certainly a wake-up call to the developed countries to commit to early and deeper cuts at Copenhagen under the Kyoto Protocol. Their emission reduction is substantiated by various options in different sectors, implemented through national resources and assisted by technology and finance from outside.

Mr. Abdon Nabadan has highlighted how the NGOs and civil society are contributing to combatting climate change, not only in terms of advocacy, but more importantly working with the poor and marginalised to bring the benefits of climate change reduction to them. If climate change actions are to succeed, the people have to be involved, and they need to see clear additional benefits to their daily lives; not just to the global cause, the business or the affluent communities.

Mr. Rafael Senga of WWF International has highlighted the vulnerabilities of ASEAN megacities to climate change. Coming from Manila which suffered the worst floods in decades recently, his presentation is very compelling, emphasising the need to act quickly before more and more cities become victims to such devastating effects.

I have highlighted the above discussions to show how important climate change is and why diverse stakeholders have a role to play in addressing it.

The ASEAN Secretariat has presented the ASEAN policy framework on climate change situated within the context of sustainable development through the Road Map for an ASEAN Community 2009-2015. The ASEAN Leaders have also been very proactive in articulating their concerns and positions in issuing various timely declarations/statement on climate change, committing to act responsibly to contribute to the global efforts on climate change.

However, our task is to translate all these policies and strategies into actions. As highlighted by the various speakers, leadership in implementation comes not only from the governments, but also the private sector, academics and researchers, technocrats, the NGOs and

community based organisations and from the people themselves. On my part, I have promoting actions on climate change using my good offices to ensure better coordination among various sectors and ASEAN community pillars, connecting all stakeholders with the ASEAN machinery, and ensuring sufficient resources for implementation. Just last week, we announced the Cool ASEAN, Green Capitals Initiative, a city-led, people-engaged effort to green city infrastructure, amenities and services to make ASEAN capitals and mayor cities in the forefront of addressing climate change.

I understand the deliberations over the course of the last two days have shown how important it is for the researchers and academics to unravel many of the intricacies of climate change, and to provide the necessary information for policy making and implementation. There is clearly a dearth of research and studies focusing on the unique circumstances of ASEAN, and developing countries in particular. I understand this Workshop has articulated these needs and priorities. ASEAN can provide the platform for further research in that direction and connect with the policy makes both at the national level and the regional level.

I would like to see this workshop as the start of a sustained engagement of the intellectual community with ASEAN. Thank you all for initiating this process of engagement. ■