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VIEW FROM
THE 19th
FLOOR
Reflections
of the first
APEC
Executive Director

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Introduction

In 1993, I served as the first Executive Director of the Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation (APEC) Secretariat. From my office on the nineteenth floor at Alexandra Point, I looked out over the thriving port of Singapore. Day and night, the harbour was busy with ships loading and unloading goods from all over the world. The view from my window was a constant reminder of the role that trade and commerce play in the dynamic economies of the Asia-Pacific region. The nineteenth floor was also my vantage point on APEC.

This monograph is the result of my year in Singapore. It is meant to be partly narrative history, partly a case study, and partly my own thoughts regarding where APEC should be headed. The idea for this monograph come out of a talk I gave at a June 1994 Workshop on APEC organized by the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, and owes much to the suggestions and encouragement of the Institute's Director, Professor Chan Heng Chee. The views expressed are my own and do not reflect the views of the United States Government nor any non-governmental organization.

I received no instructions from the United States Government during my tenure as Executive Director and was solely answerable to the APEC Senior Officials as a group. I had an arms-length relationship with the

United States Government from the beginning, which I concluded meant that the Executive Director was to be treated as if he had been seconded to an international organization. This relationship gave me considerable freedom of action.

Of course, instructed or not, my perspective was coloured by my background and culture. As the Germans say, “You can’t jump over your own shadow.” That said, I tried to be objective in running the Secretariat and to keep the interests of all the member economies in mind. I have also tried to be as honest as I can be in describing my experience as the first APEC Executive Director.

In my many return trips to Singapore since then, I have been pleased to see that the guiding principles we had put in place seem to be working well. My successor, Ambassador Rusli Noor, has adjusted and improved the operation of the Secretariat. Some of the support staff have left, but job-hopping is a way of life in Singapore and that was to be expected. Additional professional staff have come on board and the morale and enthusiasm remain high. The Secretariat will change as it evolves and the tone of the organization will change depending on the Executive Director. But however it evolves, I will remember that year with affection and pride.

In addition to Professor Chan, I would like to express my appreciation to Professor Tommy Koh, Dr Lee Tsao Yuan and Dr Sharon Siddique for teaching me about ASEAN in general, and Singapore in particular. Scott Thomson, Ainslie Smith, and Terri Lannigan were of invaluable help with the manuscript and, as always, my wife Ingrid gave me love, support and good advice throughout the whole experience.