
Sixteenth ASEAN-Australia Forum Canberra, 3–4 May 1994

JOINT PRESS RELEASE

The 16th ASEAN-Australia Forum was hosted by Australia in Canberra on 3–4 May 1994.

In his opening statement, Australia's Minister for Foreign Affairs, Senator the Hon Gareth Evans, QC, said that the ever increasing complexity and scope of discussion at the Forum reflected the growth and development of the relationship and provided a good guide to the nature of ASEAN-Australia relations in future years.

Senator Evans said that in 1994 we were well into what he had described in 1989 as a new stage in Australia-Southeast Asian relations — that of "comprehensive engagement". Senator Evans said that in twenty years' time, ASEAN and Australia would be significantly closer and would form something of a cohesive unit within a broader Asia-Pacific framework. In a changing regional environment, there was a need to look to the future of ASEAN-Australia relations and develop the structures and linkages to sustain our political and economic relationship into the next century.

The Forum agreed that the ASEAN-Australia relationship was now entering a new phase of partnership, with ever strengthening relations and a growing recognition of the two sides' common interest in working together for economic progress and peace and stability within the Asia-Pacific framework. The Forum looked forward to broader and deeper engagement between Australia and ASEAN and continued close cooperation in dealing with future challenges.

On international and regional economic issues, the Forum addressed possibly significant developments in the international and regional trading environment in the post-Uruguay Round period. The Forum noted the trend towards increased regionalism and the complex policy agenda for the new World Trade Organisation. The Forum agreed on the need to continue to work for a strong and open multi-lateral trading system. Both sides expressed confidence that the strong partnership fostered during the course of the Uruguay Round negotiations provided a solid foundation for continued close cooperation in the years ahead.

Both sides reaffirmed their strong support for APEC, noting that the vision set out by leaders at their historic meeting in Seattle in November last year would give APEC an important role in expanding economic cooperation between members and fostering trade and investment flows in the Asia-Pacific region. The Forum emphasised the importance of the leaders' summit to be hosted by Indonesia in November 1994 for the future of APEC.

The Forum noted the progress in the implementation of the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA). ASEAN noted that AFTA is outward-looking, and that with the enhanced cost competitiveness of manufacturing in ASEAN with the larger and more integrated ASEAN market, Australian investors can enjoy

economies of scale in production. This will in turn stimulate the growth of industry in the region for direct investment.

The Forum discussed the possibility of linkages between the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) and Australia and New Zealand through the Australia-New Zealand Closer Economic Relations Trade Agreement (ANZCERTA). It considered that this merited further discussion.

The Forum noted the phenomenal increase in ASEAN-Australia two-way trade over the last decade and the need to further boost two-way investment.

The two sides noted that ASEAN-Australia trade had grown at an average rate over the last decade of 17 percent per annum, driven by growing complementarities resulting from economic reform and restructuring. In 1992/93, the value of two-way trade reached A\$13.4 billion.

The Forum agreed to continue to work to remove barriers to enable further expansion of trade and investment between Australia and ASEAN.

The Forum noted the growing potential for increased economic cooperation through the development of Growth Areas which offers opportunities for investment from Australia.

A special focus for the Forum was the new Phase III of the ASEAN-Australia Economic Cooperation Program (AAECP) to which Australia will contribute A\$32 million over four years, divided between six projects worth A\$18 million and a Linkages Stream worth A\$14 million. The new Linkages Stream of the AAECP, with its emphasis on promoting joint ventures between government and academic institutions and private enterprises from Australia and the countries of ASEAN, was highlighted. It symbolised in a very real way the evolution of the relationship into an economic partnership.

The Forum also agreed to further explore joint technical cooperation programs between ASEAN and Australia, especially for the former Indochina countries. An inter-agency meeting to develop cooperation arrangements is planned to be held before the next Forum.

The Forum discussed the regional security outlook in the Asia-Pacific. The Forum noted that the new level of fluidity created many opportunities, but that this was also a cause of uncertainty, including proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery. The Forum agreed that developments in the Korean Peninsula were of particular concern because of their potential to seriously affect the security of countries in the Asia-Pacific. ASEAN and Australia agreed to maintain dialogue on the progress of political and economic reform in Myanmar/Burma. The two sides noted that the first meeting in July 1994 of the new ASEAN Regional Forum would be a significant step forward in the development of an Asia-Pacific wide security dialogue.

The Forum convened working groups on trade and investment, telecommunications, education and training, industry and technology, environment, and culture and information. It expressed its satisfaction that the working groups had made real progress on these major issues.

The Forum agreed to develop a directory of professional organisations and skills recognition processes, and to conduct three regional workshops in priority areas of vocational education and training, including in the areas of hotel management and commercial cookery, agriculture and production engineering. The workshops will develop industry curricula and standards and will share examples of best practice.

The Forum agreed on the establishment of an Industry and Technology Working Group as a means of identifying opportunities for industry collaboration, initially concentrating on transportation, communication/information technology and micro-electronics, and bio-technology.

The Forum agreed on an exchange scheme between ASEAN and Australia for information officers, as well as cooperation in heritage protection and preservation.

SOURCE: Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Singapore.