

**CENTER FOR STRATEGIC AND
INTERNATIONAL STUDIES**

SOUTHEAST ASIA INITIATIVE

**REMARKS BY SURIN PITSUWAN,
ASEAN SECRETARY GENERAL**

MODERATOR:

**DEREK MITCHELL,
SENIOR FELLOW, CSIS**

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DEREK MITCHELL: Thank you very much for your cooperation on this. We are indeed on a tight schedule, and unfortunately, we're having very un-ASEAN-like weather outside – (laughter) – which I think is creating some difficulties for folks getting around. I'm also checking for people who are wearing pink today, given the king's birthday. We're taking names on this. (Laughter.)

I want to welcome you all. My name is Derek Mitchell. I'm a senior fellow at the international security program at CSIS, but also to be the director of our new Southeast Asia initiative at CSIS to the great, good offices of our Thai friends who are able this year to finally have some more official and consistent examination of Southeast Asia issues. And this is something that I have felt very deeply since I started at CSIS six years ago. There was a major gap in the work that we did. I did it sort of ad hoc. But now, we have a real initiative for the coming year that we hope to sustain over many, many years to focus on a critical region.

I think it's axiomatic in Washington that we say that the United States is distracted from East Asia. Well, if that's true, think about Southeast Asia, which is getting really not nearly the attention it deserves for the interest that we have there, the senior most levels of our government, but also more broadly in the Washington community. So we're very excited about this. I see a lot of good friends, old friends around this room that I hope to work with – not that old, Stanley – but – (laughter) – good friends around the room who I really look forward to working with as partners as we get these things off the ground, and in using your experience and your judgment and your knowledge as we move forward.

Again, we're on a tight schedule. My job here basically is to introduce our introducers, our first speakers, and then turn to Surin. First, I will ask my boss, the president and CEO of CSIS, John Hamre, to say a few words of introduction.

Please, John.

JOHN HAMRE: Derek, can't stand up. You all see him hobbling around on crutches. (Laughter.) But I thought I would have better eye contact with all of you, basically just to say thank you. Welcome. I'm delighted that you're here. We are experiencing winter in Washington. I mean, we collapse at the smallest amount of snow. I mean, just the hint of snow and we collapse. So unfortunately our numbers are slightly diminished today, but not our interest. This is a very important initiative for us and it wouldn't have been possible without the vision of Ambassador Krit, and I would like to say thank you at this stage. I mean, he has taken the platform of the embassy and taken it to a new dimension to help Washington fill in a void and a void that's much overdue to be filled in.

As Derek said, we through the good offices and support of Ambassador Krit and the Royal Thai government, we are launching a program on Southeast Asia. You know, those old maps in the United States where there was a vast blank space east of the Appalachians was, you know, incognito territory. You know, nobody knows what's out there. And I hate to say it, but in the intellectual landscape of Washington that's really the situation with Southeast Asia. It's unknown territory for us as an intellectual space. There might be people who have traveled there, vacationed there, this sort of thing. But Washington has, in the policy landscape, with the exception of Al La Porta over here, who's been pioneering in this for so many years, it's just not a strong consciousness here in the Washington policy landscape on this very important region – becoming more important.

So I would like to thank Ambassador Krit and his very, very capable embassy staff for helping us launch this. So I'm delighted you're here. We are going to rush through this because you have to catch a flight, and it was an unusual opportunity for us to have the secretary general. So let me just say thank you to all of you. We're delighted that you could come. We – I will get out of the way, and may I turn the floor over – I don't know if Derek is going to introduce the ambassador or I'm going to just turn it over. You go ahead. You can go ahead. But I would just, again, like to say thank you. Let me get out of the way.

MR. MITCHELL: Okay. Thank you very much, John.

The ambassador, Ambassador Krit, arrived very recently in Washington. He's already made quite an impression. He's displayed enormous vision in promoting not just Thai interests, but Southeast Asia interests here in Washington. He has a distinguished career from years in serving the Thai government. He has a law degree by training, but he's been in the foreign ministry, the interior ministry for many, many years. So we are really, really grateful to have him here in Washington and to work closely with him in the coming years.

With that, we allow him to make some opening remarks before we get into Dr. Surin's. (Applause.)

AMB. KRIT KANCHANAKUNCHON: Dr. John Hamre, Dr. Surin Pitsuwan, Derek Mitchell, His Excellency the ambassador of Indonesia, and ladies and gentlemen, it is indeed a privilege to be here participating in the launch of the Southeast Asia research program at the CSIS. I would like to thank, in particular President John Hamre for kindly hosting this event. I'm honored and grateful to the ASEAN Secretary General Designate Dr. Surin Pitsuwan for kindly sparing the time, traveling all the way from Bangkok to be here with us as keynote speaker and share his vision and wisdom on the future direction of ASEAN and Southeast Asia and its implications for the United States engagement in the region.

Now, just a few thoughts. Southeast Asia has been broadly recognized as a region of vital strategic importance, given its geo-strategic location, geopolitical significance

and potential or real economic strength. These factors have in the past proven sufficient at least at certain historical periods or for the purpose of certain specific exigencies, some of which, not altogether welcome or benign. Some of these have been sufficient for countries of the region to assume a degree of relevance, getting recognition, or role in a fast affecting regional stability, or that beyond.

However, in recent times, becoming more visible are the efforts on the part of these countries to make good on the strategy of getting greater leverage through greater integration. ASEAN is now going about strengthening its own house, a process which will necessarily be gradual, given the need to keep all and sundry on board through confidence-building and through consensus. This process of broadening and deepening integration should also be seen as a design to build up ASEAN's own capacity to take care of problems within its own ranks or within its very own hatch. This trend has become more and more perceptible or more pronounced in the recent soul-searching exercise which culminated, as you know, on the recently signed ASEAN Charter with its groundbreaking, though some may say modest, provisions on democracy, rule of law, and human rights.

Unfortunately, if one may say by way of generalization, within United States itself, these efforts of building up integration in that region, political, economic and otherwise on the part of ASEAN have either on the one end of the spectrum past by unnoticed, or at the other end, given rise to wildly inflated exploitations that ASEAN, for instance, could or even should expel any erring member from its own ranks.

There is perhaps some amount of truth in the assertion that the importance of Southeast Asia region in the eyes of U.S. policymakers have steadily receded in the past decade or so. Also, that researches and studies conducted by prominent think-tanks in Washington, D.C., and by leading universities in the United States have been dominated by conflicts and hotspots of the day, leaving Southeast Asia very much out of Washington's intellectual framework.

Despite the vastly changed political landscape in Asia, we have indeed witnessed a decreased role and engagement of the United States in Southeast Asia. Therefore, ASEAN must not become a missed opportunity for the United States. Paying greater attention to ASEAN and Southeast Asia is not being asked of the United States as a gesture of goodwill, but it must come from the realization and a cold calculation on the part of the United States of its own interest in Asia and Southeast Asia.

In an effort to reinvigorate Southeast Asia within Washington, D.C.'s, intellectual framework, the Thai Embassy strongly believes that CSIS is a leading institution with many prominent scholars and experts keen on conducting policy research and studies in Southeast Asia and Thailand and on expanding cooperation with countries of this region. The launch of the Southeast Asia research project today reflects our full confidence that a CSIS will play a crucial role in generating better understanding about Thailand and Southeast Asia as well as bringing back the entire region into Washington's radar screen.

The setup of the Southeast Asia research project is a collaborative effort between the Royal Thai Embassy and CSIS. I look forward to closely working with the CSIS, fully believing that Southeast Asia research project here will flourish and will become sustainable in the long run. Once again, I would like to thank with appreciation Dr. Hamre and all his able staff at the CSIS for all the cooperation and cordial relationship and also to express my profound thanks and appreciation to Dr. Surin Pitsuwan.

I yield the floor to you, sir. (Applause.)

SEC. GEN. SURIN PITSUWAN: Thank you very much, Ambassador Krit. Dr. Hamre, Dr. Mitchell, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, it is indeed an honor to be with you this afternoon of this launching of the Southeast Asia research project. It is indeed a sign of the times when small countries in Southeast Asia have to help research institutes like CSIS to be interested in Southeast Asia. (Laughter.)

I remember it used to be the Asia Foundation – where is Nancy Yuan – promoting studies among ourselves, creating institutions in all ASEAN capitals called ASEAN ISIS. But it is great to know that Thailand is helping the U.S. in learning something about Southeast Asia. But here, in this room, I can see you're all veterans of Southeast Asia, veteran of ASEAN. I appreciate seeing you all today. But I think the subject is very, very relevant, very, very important to all of us.

ASEAN was born 40 years ago out of a rather nebulous atmosphere of Southeast Asia trying to get ourselves out of the impact and effect of colonialism. There was an ideological conflict going on even between two former colonies, Malaysia and Indonesia, two major Muslim countries, Konfrontasi; Malaysia and the Philippines was over Sabah; and Singapore had just decided to separate from Malaysia; the ideological conflict between the Mekong River countries now and the mainland Southeast Asia Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore. It was created out of an atmosphere of tension, of conflict, of confrontation.

Forty years on, and along the way, people predict that we're going to succumb to our own differences, our own diversity, a lot of criticism, a lot of doubts and a lot of skepticism about how ASEAN would survive. Well, we have survived for 40 years. And along the way, we have been able to attract other powers from the region and outside the region, all the way from Southeast Asia to this part of the world, the U.S., Canada, Russia, the EU, Japan, China, Australia, all have become our dialogue partners. So, to me, ASEAN is not only ten countries, it's ten plus all the dialogue partners, all the superpowers, major powers, permanent members of the UN Security Council are in the ASEAN process.

We were able to spawn other groups, other architectures of cooperation in East Asia. I believe APEC was also created because of the dynamism of Southeast Asia, of East Asia, together the idea came along with the Australian initiative. And then ASEM, Asia-Europe Meeting, 15 countries of Europe at that time 1996, and 13 countries of East Asia, ASEAN Plus Three, and then after the economic crisis, we got together and we

called it between the ten countries of Southeast Asia of ASEAN and the three East Asian countries – China, Japan and South Korea – we got together, we call ourselves the ASEAN Plus Three.

But along the way, we realized that we probably spread ourselves too thin. We really need to contract back, we need to solidify, consolidate ourselves. That's why after 40 years, the leaders decided to have this thing called the ASEAN Charter. It was signed on the 20th of last month at the 13th summit in Singapore, and it's going to be our blueprint for the future, and in that document, it is going to make us a legal entity. It's going to be a rule-based organization. It is going to call upon every member to comply with every document, every agreement that we agree to commit ourselves to.

Prof. Tommy Koh of Singapore, the chairman of the drafting committee of this charter calculated that for the last 40 years, only about 30 percent of agreements of ASEAN have been complied with – 30 percent. What happened to the 60? Well, that's what they think the Charter is going to help bring the members to comply with, to commit to and to implement whatever we agree upon. We are hoping that we can create what we call the ASEAN community by the year 2015, seven years from now, and that is very, very ambitious. And in that ASEAN community, it will comprise of three pillars. First is security community, second is economic community, the third is socio-cultural community.

Now, the security community has its own vehicle; it's called the ASEAN Regional Forum. It can go as fast as it could because of the diversity among us while there have been a lot of cooperation, a lot of exchange, a lot of discussions and conferences, trying to build confidence among the 21 members of the ASEAN Regional Forum.

The economic community again has its own vehicle. We have already signed a blueprint called Blueprint for ASEAN Economic Community. It's very complicated. It's very complex because again of the differences among us. The poorest of the ASEAN countries has \$209 per capita income; the richest among us has something like \$35,000 a year. That gap has to be managed, that gap has to be handled, otherwise, it will become our structural defect in the system and the whole structure could crumble, if we are not careful.

So it is going to be complicated to create one market, one investment field so that skilled labor can cross borders, can choose employment in one country or another within the ten. That's going to be quite a challenge to create, one unified market 567 million – very easy to remember, 5-6-7 – in ten countries in seven years. It could go as fast as it could. But I think what ASEAN need is an identity, an ASEAN identity.

The third pillar is going to be socio-cultural community. That's where the civil society will have space. That's where the academic institutions like yourself has to play a part of the dialogue partner like the U.S. can have a space. The NGOs, the media, the environment people, the health people, all in this space called socio-cultural community.

I think this is extremely important and this is extremely exciting, because for the past 40 years, ASEAN has been pretty much of an elite organization driven by diplomats like myself, like Ambassador Krit, leaders, but not much connected with or relevant to or at least the perception of relevancy of ASEAN with all our people has not been that much, partly because member government have not brought the ASEAN local, ASEAN policy, ASEAN agreements down to the people.

We implement projects. We have been given assistance to by the European Union, by the United States, by Japan, but the people have never been told that this is an ASEAN project, this is an ASEAN decision, this is an ASEAN policy. So without creating that sense of identity, sense of belonging, sense of ownership among our people, it's going to be very, very difficult to sustain a community that we want to produce, that we want to establish among us ten countries.

So people ask what would be the difference between a politician coming in to the secretariat as opposed to my predecessors who have been civil servants? I told them I would do what politicians do best, and that is, communicate with the people, energize the people, bring them in, give them the space, let them feel the ownership of the process, let them contribute into the process, and let them benefit from the process. Only then, they will ask their own governments, their own government agencies, how come my country is not moving fast enough? How come another member of ASEAN is growing 9 percent a year, mine is only 6.3? So far they have not been accountable and responsible to their own people, the governments of ASEAN.

I hope by – generate the interest by empowering, by energizing them, they will be asking for that accountability, that participation, that openness themselves, on their own putting pressure on each government. I hope that will be the case. And the secretariat from now on will be what I would call a networked secretariat, meaning reaching out to people like you, reaching out to NGOs, reaching out to economic institutions, reaching out to professional groups, reaching out to various institutions in the international community so that ASEAN can be used as a stage, a forum where each who has concern and goodwill and the willingness to help to contribute can come through ASEAN to help build Southeast Asia in – according to Southeast Asia's own wish, that is, creating what we call community of caring societies. And I hope that would mean open, that would mean participatory, that would mean accountable, that would mean compassionate, that would mean – well, if all those are included, it would mean democratic and respect for human rights.

Among us, we have tremendous wealth, but it's not equally distributed. Foreign reserves combined of the ten countries USD450 billion. I've been telling governments, sometimes seriously, sometimes jokingly that if we want others to help the ASEAN countries to help our people, to bridge that gap between \$209 and \$35,000 a year, we'd better do something with our own health accumulated in the past 40 years. Can we do something with the \$450 billion? Can we take 3 percent, 4 percent to give it to the Asian Development Bank? Manage it for us so that the private sector looking for capital to do infrastructure construction in the Mekong River countries can have some favorable rate

from this fund, from this pool, from this reserve that is being given to the Asian Development Bank to manage. I don't know if that is possible, but some creativity has to be found in order to show to the world that we have the wealth, we are willing to invest and we want your help at the same time.

I have a vision of creating – help create, persuade governments, persuade dialogue partners to come in and help create a middle class ASEAN. By the year 2027, two decades from now, the population of ASEAN will not be 567. We are growing by 1.5 percent a year, some countries are growing more than others, faster than others. But by the year 2027, we will have something like 750 million. Can we make one-third of that 750 middle class, quote, unquote, “ASEAN.”

Recently, Credit – (unintelligible) – came up with their own survey, their own study. Very interesting. Five families in five countries of ASEAN. And they called them middle class, and they found out that not necessarily – an Indonesian family would have the same middle class bracket of income as a Thai, as a Singaporean – which is beyond middle class now – as Vietnamese, as Thai, as Malaysian. But each is middle class in its own context. If we can make one-third of ASEAN population in year 2027 middle class, it is going to be a very, very powerful base for further development, for transformation, for democratization, for accountability, for participation, serving as a very effective transmission belt of wealth distribution that we have accumulated in the past few decades.

My appeal is dialogue partners have room to contribute. Have a role to play. If Southeast Asia ten countries, 567 or 750 in 20 years, with themselves, among themselves could manage, be progressive, be open, be accommodating. At least, there's one region less for many of us to worry about, one headache less, and it could serve as a model for development of other regions. That is the appeal of ASEAN now. That is the attraction of ASEAN now. That is that possibility and we have proven record that we could do it, we could achieve. We want to transform different pace from one country to another, but we are moving in the right direction.

It is an invitation for all dialogue partners, including the U.S. to take a look and see if in the past we have served as a utility vehicle to get organized in that region, to help solve some of the problems in the region whether it's Cambodia, East Timor. I told CSIS audience yesterday in the case of East Timor, we did not go in as ASEAN because ASEAN was reluctant to go in because it was happening in one of the member country, but we went in as neighbors. Thailand went in, Philippines went in, Malaysia went in, Singapore went in to help, responding to the appeal of President Habibie who said, come, come in large number. We want to see your faces here. And if you can take the commandship of the international force for East Timor at that time, please do. Keep it within yourself, within ourselves, within ASEAN. In other words, try to avoid Australia at all cost. He didn't say that. (Laughter.)

But ASEAN went in. ASEAN could bring about stability, law and order according to the wish and the call of Indonesia, the largest country in the region, in the

grouping. We did the same thing in Cambodia. I know you'll ask me about Myanmar, I'll leave that to you. Ask and then I'll answer. But we have contributed to the stability, to the prosperity, to the security of the region, and I'm telling you that more can be achieved.

Thank you very much for being helpful. AID is helping. Japan is helping. Jethro (ph), my host, actually I come here with Jethro, sitting at the back here. The organizer at conference – at CSIS yesterday, and I'm flying off to Chicago, talking about the same thing: East Asian integration. Various NGOs, including Sasagawa Peace Foundation, many NGOs from Germany on political, on participation, you know, the Democratic Institute, the Republican Institute, all have contributed. EU is contributing.

Well, I think the fact that people come and willing to help demonstrate the fact that there is hope in Southeast Asia. People mean well and they want to help themselves, but they want also to do it their own way in their own pace, oftentimes frustrate a lot of people, including this country. Why don't you go faster than you've been going? Well, we have been able to stay together, hang together, and being able to achieve a level of prosperity and stability for the region, more to be accomplished, and how much we can accomplished in the next 40 years will depend not only on us, but on many of you in the outside world with goodwill, extending your help, contributing your ingenuity, your resources and work together, at least one region of the world will not be as violent, as dangerous, as some other places.

And let me drop you with just one statement that you might want to ponder. The road to reconciliation with the Muslim world from the West may run through Southeast Asia because of the moderate nature of the Muslim community there, because of progressive nature, because of the accommodating nature, open nature of the community of the ummah there. Malaysia has become an example of modern Muslim society to the surprise – to the surprise and probably with some reservation from the heartland, from the Middle East that how could you do it? Indonesia is now a democratic country and trying to put its act together, moderate, progressive, open, willing to engage, not as absolute, not as dogmatic, not as conservative, rigid, maybe.

The road to reconciliation to in most dangerous divide in the world today, the road to reconciliation between the West and the Muslim world may run through Southeast Asia. ASEAN can be the framework for that trial, that test, that experiment. Therefore, ASEAN remains relevant, remains viable, remains ready to engage and to resolve some of these very, very threatening problems and issues hovering over us, above us.

I'll leave it at that. Let you come up with your reactions so that we can have some exchange for the remaining 20 minutes. Thank you very much. (Applause.)

MR. MITCHELL: Thank you very, very much, sir, for quite a wonderful and quite a passionate talk, I should say. Really compelling to listen to the vision that you have as you enter as secretary general of ASEAN in the coming year. I'm sure there are

many questions. Let's get to them. (Unintelligible) – first, and then Stanley – (inaudible).

Q: Dr. Surin, you – (inaudible). (Laughter.) (Inaudible) – what do you suggest should happen in terms of solving the situation there, particularly what would you like to see the U.S. do? The U.S. Congress in particular is looking at sanctions. Would there be an alternative in looking at various incentives like – (inaudible) – Vietnamese or – (inaudible) – to resolve that situation?

SEC. GEN. PITSUWAN: Sanction has rarely worked, if it has worked in the past. Sanction tend to strengthen the hands of the power that be, because of the limited resources that there is the power that be would certainly get their hands on, rather than letting them go to the people. So sanction has not worked. ASEAN itself has been asked to stand by. That was the statement, and I can only paraphrase the chair of the ASEAN Summit prime minister of Singapore, who said we have to respect the wish at the UN now shall take the lead dealing with Myanmar directly, but ASEAN as a group is ready, standing by to extend help whenever that help is needed.

I think it is up to the ASEAN diplomats, not my level, at the leadership level to try to interpret that statement by the prime minister of Singapore, standing by ready to extend help. I can couple that with my experiences in East Asia that most of the problems in East Asia have been resolved by regional local neighborhood mechanisms, whether it's East Timor, whether it's Aceh. The early phase of Aceh was the initiative from the region. The Cambodian issue – I'm talking about the second one when the two co-prime ministers split apart. The East Timor issue, we went in and helped, but of course, with the help of other major superpowers because we didn't have the resources, transport, technology, intelligence; the U.S. helped.

So in the end we relied on the traditional structure of cooperation of relation of security relationship, but on the ground it had to be something neighborly, neighborhood, something regional, something in the local area. I think the success of the Korean issue, I consider that also regional and local. I think the U.S. has been there for so long, you have become local. You have become part of the region. So I think we have to engage neighbors, big neighbors so that we can stand ready to extend help, according to the wish of Myanmar, according to the statement of the chairman, Singapore, that is, we standby ready to extend help whenever that help is needed.

The question is are we going to standby folding our hands or are we going to explore and follow and monitor the UN process that is going on and at one point, there will be some need for – I think people have been talking about and I agree – economic help, humanitarian help, so that the pain of adjustment, so that the pain of reconciliation, or the doubts about the benefits of reconciliation at least could be cushioned by some support from humanitarian assistance, from economic assistance when that help is called for, verbally, clearly, otherwise, it will be interpreted as interfering. We have to respect that, but there are ways to explore the possibility of how we can help, how we can engage.

I think again – I think too big of a mechanism would be probably too cumbersome, but regional neighborhood, neighborly group or working group or a vehicle working quietly in cooperation, in consultation with each other and, of course, with the willingness of Burma/Myanmar themselves. I think that would be a way out in the long run. It's going to take time, it's going to take a lot of patience, it's going to take a lot of ingenuity, but that's the only way to go.

MR. MITCHELL: Okay. I should have said wait for the microphone and introduce yourself and your affiliation, if you could.

Please, Stanley.

Q: Boeing. (Laughter.)

MR. MITCHELL: (Inaudible) – more than Boeing.

Q: Congratulations on your new position and welcome back to Washington, however briefly.

SEC. GEN. PITSUWAN: Thank you, sir.

Q: I want to be – you'll be pleased to hear it's not a follow-up question on Myanmar. As important as that is, I think the thrust of your presentation is ASEAN is important. So I want to give you an opportunity to talk a little bit more about the ASEAN Charter. While not a front page New York Times-type issue here, some of the specialists have been somewhat disappointed in the charter, America especially – (inaudible) – saying that it appears a lot weaker than the draft – (inaudible) – all the wise men were working on and that while it says it's rule-based, it's really still consensus document and not much has changed.

I wonder if you could take any one of a number of issues from the past to say what might be different, whether it's the Asia financial crisis, the Thai experience, or East Timor, or the SARS epidemic, or anything else, but say what will be done differently now as a result of the ASEAN Charter. It might give us a better understanding of what's changed.

SEC. GEN. PITSUWAN: I think take the issue of that Prof. Koh, Tommy Koh raised, that is, only 30 percent of previous agreements, commitments within ASEAN, among ASEAN have been complied with – complied to. While there's now a mechanism with monitoring that the secretary general shall monitor compliance. Now, how to go about monitoring that? Is it name and shame, or is it just reporting that some countries are lacking behind, but here are the reasons and here are ways to improve level of compliance? So there will be pressure, there will be peer pressure within the group. At least there will be a mechanism legitimate to do the compliance monitoring. I think that's a progress.

Human rights body, still we don't know what it is going to be like, but it is an agreement – there is an agreement to establish the human rights body. And that's a progress. I believe that any commitment at all, committed to sign on to by the members will serve as a basis for further progress. I had an argument with Carolina Hernandez, who has been pro-ASEAN all her life from the Philippines. She's very, very disappointed. In fact, she's heartbroken that it had not gone far enough. But I told her at least we have a beginning, at least we have something as a legal basis for us to grow on from here onward, and we'll hold on to it.

How much we can do with it, it depends on the ingenuity, it depends on the creativity, it depends on the energy of those who want to run, who want to lead ASEAN from now onward. But at least there is something, a platform to stand on. Again, it is what it can be. It is a product of the lowest common denominator. If you want more than that, you won't have it. Now, we have something. Let's work on it, let's put flesh into it, put spirit into it, and go on and try to accomplish more.

I think we have to push the envelopes, all of us and see how much we can do and how much we can bring them along and how much – it's interesting that the new member is now – are more eager to sign, more eager to ratify than the old members who have other problems. The Philippines said, because it has not gone far enough, we may have trouble with our Senate. The Indonesian said it's not as good as we were expecting, therefore, we may have trouble running it through their parliament. But the new members are as eager; they can do it tomorrow. And I have been lobbying, I've been appealing to them that if you can do it first, please do; create a momentum and let others follow.

So at least there is that sense of urgency among the new members that we want this organization, and I think the old members will use it in the dynamics of this push and pull, it's not far enough, therefore we are reluctant to sign, and I think the old member can go and say, give us a reason why our Senate should sign on to this document. Make some move, make some small step so that our parliament in Jakarta can feel comfortable that they can ratify this document. So there is room for give and take, for negotiation, for some kind of dynamic relationship between the old and the new. In that sense, I think it's a progress.

Ten years ago, I was the one who introduce the idea of flexible engagement, as you know. Now, I think they went much, much further than I'd proposed. Now, issues, controversy – issue of controversial nature can be on the agenda. The – I think what was apparent in Singapore was Singapore wanted Mr. Gambari to come in and brief the Asia Plus Six, ASEAN Plus Six Forum called EAS, but it was – it was shelved because some members felt that EAS is not a place to talk about security, to talk about politics. But it was on the agenda. It was apparent to everyone that we will talk about this kind of issue that used to be off the agenda. Now, we can pick up all those issues and put it on the agenda. Anybody who has any problem with it come and argue about it, to the point

where it has to be removed from the agenda, but at least they talk about it. And ASEAN is still there.

So there is a progress there, a step forward. Yes? Sorry.

MR. MITCHELL: Okay. A final question, sir.

SEC. GEN. PITSUWAN: We'll probably have it altogether, then I make one remark and then I have to go – (laughs) – otherwise, I'll miss the plane.

MR. MITCHELL: Okay.

Q: (Inaudible). My name is – (inaudible). I'm the executive director of the U.S. – (inaudible). So my question will be regarding the Myanmar or Burma. You just reply to the state representative – (inaudible) – about the –

SEC. GEN. PITSUWAN: ASEAN –

Q: ASEAN, where they are ready to assist Burma if – (inaudible) – the Burmese government ask for the assistance. Also, you also mention about creating ASEAN as a community of caring – (inaudible) – but looks like you only will listen to the governments, existing government, not the wishes of the people in Burma. Now, people of Burma are telling to the world that they need assistance from the international community. They are very willing to – (inaudible) – brutal military conduct, but instead you only grant the wishes of the military conduct and you will not interfere anything, and you will not take any action, then if you're going to do – continue to deal with ASEAN where continue to be the community of care, community of governments who care each other and cares the wishes of the people of Burma.

So how can you create the ASEAN community as a community of care for the people in that region by this way?

SEC. GEN. PITSUWAN: Well, I think – yeah, briefly, I think the – I think it is a rather consensus that it will not be a status quo. It will not go back to where it was. It will have to move forward, and I think the world and I guess ASEAN itself is expecting that thing's going to move forward, and hoping that there will be some kind of reconciliation, some kind of space. The lady has already said that she's willing to talk to the government. That's a good sign, and as I said, we hope that the UN process is going to lead to more space, more voice of every party in the process so that it will not be just one voice, and if we stand ready to extend our help, I think we have to explore the possibilities of what kind of help, in what form, at what point, under what conditions.

I mean, we have to find out for ourselves and again, it's a matter of dynamic give and take, what is possible, what is useful, what is appropriate. I don't think you can just barge in – (laughs) – saying that the – you know, this is the way the people want. That's not how things are being done, certainly not in ASEAN. So I guess we have to find some

ways, you know, on the table, on the side, listening, discussing, asking for advice, asking for support, listening all sides, until such time when the space is more open, then there'll be more voice. But right now, we have to make do with what we have.

Yes?

MR. MITCHELL: Do you have time for another question, or –

SEC. GEN. PITSUWAN: One more, yeah. Then I have to rush.

MR. MITCHELL: One more question? We'll take two. We'll take one from Drew and then I have one as well, just very quickly. (Laughter.) I'll take the – assert the prerogative of the chair.

Q: Thank you very much. I'm – (inaudible) – with the – (inaudible) – center. You mentioned – (inaudible) – but first of all, thank you for a very inspiring speech. It felt a little bit like Iowa for a moment there, and I think you'll find people will be willing to stand with you soon. (Laughter.)

SEC. GEN. PITSUWAN: I'm not running. (Laughter.)

Q: You mentioned several of the ASEAN dialogue partners in a very favorable light and the role that they play in the region, but you made no mention of India or China. Could you give your –

SEC. GEN. PITSUWAN: Oh, yes.

Q: – your vision of what role they will play in the region?

SEC. GEN. PITSUWAN: Oh, yes.

MR. MITCHELL: Can I ask – can I ask one additional country that's not in there is the United States – (laughter) – and given, we're here, I wonder if you can – we talked about the U.S. as not engaged adequately in the region of late – at least that's the general impression. I wonder if you can give us some advice as how we can be doing better? What the U.S. role should be?

SEC. GEN. PITSUWAN: Okay. I think India, China are very, very important factors in our own evaluation of ourselves. I think the phrase is the oxygen has been taken away from Southeast Asia as far as the foreign American investment is concerned. It's gone to China, it's gone to India. So we'd better look at our own house, our own organization what went wrong? Well, we have to create a bigger market for potential investors, come in and you have 567 million, truly with high purchasing power. The world is very much excited about the middle class – rising middle class of China, rising middle class of India. I say we can create the same middle class. It takes some effort, takes some vision, it takes some leadership, and some commitment and some help.

Therefore, it is growing very fast like a train leaving the station with momentum. ASEAN is feeling that it is being left behind. In that sense, it has created a sense of urgency among us. And we have caught on to the velocity, to the momentum. We have become the – we have become part of the supply chains of both China and India, and we are negotiating more and more deeper and wider free trade arrangement between the two, With China, we have finished; with India, we are working on and hope to finish – hope to finish by March. Again, that's very, very, very, very ambitious.

With the U.S. – the U.S. is still the only power in the region that could provide a sense of security and a sense of stability, but it needs to – it needs to be present more and need to be consistent. I think the missing opportunity – the missed opportunities whether at the level of the president, at the secretary of state have been quite serious in the eyes, in the minds, in the perception of the people in the region. Anybody can argue with that, but we are there, even though we are not apparently present. We are there, ready to help. We are there when the tsunami came, only power that can deliver the services and the rescue. That's true. But tsunami doesn't happen every day, and people want to see, you know, the European Union want to see, the U.S. want to see the Chinese are there at the same time, because that's we feel comfortable about us being the stage for everyone, every power.

The fulcrum of the power plays in the region. U.S. has been absent and absent rather conspicuously. Therefore, I think – yesterday, I heard some wise words about the U.S. being a bit impatient about the way things are being handled, being managed in Southeast Asia, in ASEAN. It is too slow. It is step by step. It is not clear. You want it black and white. That's not the way we do things in Southeast Asia, in ASEAN. We let things go, we let things roll, and in the end, we arrive at something, ha-ha, this is the ASEAN way.

For a long, long time, the U.S. has been there and understanding that process, but in the recent years, I think you have other commitments, you have other pressing issues somewhere else. So the stage of ASEAN has been rather empty as far as the U.S. is concerned. But I would hope that, you know, you will continue to reengage now that we are reorganizing ourselves and I think a good sign coming from President Bush that – when the charter is ratified, the U.S. is considering naming, appointing ambassador on ASEAN affairs. That's certainly is going to high-profile ASEAN, vis-à-vis the U.S. one more time.

And then your help at the secretariat is very much appreciated, and we like to see more engagement. We like to see more present on the ground, at various meetings so that we can feel that, you know, ASEAN is being taken seriously as other partners are taking ASEAN seriously, whether it's Japan, whether it's China, whether it's European Union, whether it's the Australians. I think it would be helpful for us to achieve what we are trying to achieve, our vision of one Southeast Asia, open, progressive and able to take care of itself with participation, with contribution, with cooperation for dialogue, from dialogue partners, like the U.S.

MR. MITCHELL: Thank you very much. We will be serious about it at CSIS for the coming many years, and we look forward to your leadership in ASEAN. We look forward to the partnership. We look forward to be party for your socio-cultural community and along with many others here in the audience. And we need to let you go. But thank you very much. Thank you to the Thai Embassy as well.

SEC. GEN. PITSUWAN: Thank you. Thank you very much. (Applause.)

(END)