



Chairman's Statement

The Sixth Meeting of The ASEAN Regional Forum Singapore, 26 July 1999 (Excerpts)

The Sixth Meeting of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) was held in Singapore on 26 July 1999.

The Ministers welcomed Mongolia as a new participant, and welcomed the admission of Cambodia as a member of ASEAN, thereby realizing the vision of ASEAN-10.

Overview of the ARF Process

The Ministers expressed satisfaction that the ARF has continued to serve as the key forum for political and security dialogue and co-operation in the region. They agreed to move the process forward so that the ARF would continue to remain relevant and able to respond to the challenges posed by the changing political and security environment of the region. The Ministers noted the useful exchange of views at the lunch gathering of senior defense officials, and further noted the constructive contributions that defense and military officials have made to the ARF process and encouraged their continued participation in all relevant ARF activities.

The Ministers emphasized the importance of confidence building to the success of the ARF and encouraged the further development of confidence building measures (CBMs). They endorsed the recommendations of the ARF Senior Officials Meeting and the ARF Inter-sessional Support Group on Confidence Building Measures (ISG on CBMs) to discuss the concept and principles of Preventive Diplomacy and noted the common understandings reached on the four tabled proposals relating to the overlap between CBMs and Preventive Diplomacy. The Ministers expressed their continued support for the leading role of ASEAN in the ARF process and noted with appreciation that ASEAN would be preparing the draft paper on the concept and principles of Preventive Diplomacy for discussion among ARF members.

Highlights of Issues Discussed

The Ministers had substantive discussions on major regional and international issues that had an impact on the regional security environment.

The Ministers discussed the security implications of the regional economic and financial crisis. They noted that the situation had stabilized as compared to last year and that the region was now beginning to recover. Nevertheless, continued restructuring and policy reform would be necessary to sustain the recovery.

The Ministers agreed that stable relations among the major powers was an integral element underpinning regional stability. In this regard, the Ministers welcomed the regular exchanges of visits, including at the leadership level, which have contributed to stable relations among the major powers.

The Ministers recognized the Treaty of Amity and Co-operation in Southeast Asia (TAC) as a key regional instrument for strengthening security. They noted that non-Southeast Asian countries, in particular the major powers, were now in the process of considering acceding to the TAC after the Second Protocol amending the TAC enters into force. The Ministers expressed support for the continuing consultations between the State Parties of the SEANWFZ (Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon Free Zone) Treaty and the Nuclear Weapon States regarding the latter's accession to the Protocol of the Treaty.

The Ministers welcomed the commitment of all the countries concerned to the peaceful settlement of disputes in the South China Sea in accordance with the recognized principles of international law and the UNCLOS. They stressed the importance of freedom of navigation in this area. The Ministers noted that some ARF countries were concerned that there could be increased tensions. They welcomed the continued exercise of self-restraint by all sides and the positive contributions made by the bilateral consultations between the countries concerned. They further welcomed the dialogue in the ASEAN-China Senior Officials Consultations, the regular exchange of views in the ARF, and the continuing work of the Informal Workshop on Managing Potential Conflicts in the South China Sea, which have enhanced confidence building. They noted that ASEAN was working on a regional Code of Conduct in the South China Sea.

The Ministers noted that developments in the Korean Peninsula remain of concern and agreed that parties involved should not adopt policies which could undermine peace and stability. They emphasized the importance of observing the 1953 Armistice Agreement. The Ministers expressed concern over the August 1998 payload launch and other missile-related activities which could heighten tensions and have serious consequences for stability in the Korean Peninsula and the region.

The Ministers emphasized the importance of systematic and progressive efforts taken by nuclear weapon states on nuclear disarmament and called on them to make further efforts towards achieving the ultimate objective of eliminating nuclear weapons. The Ministers called on all states to exercise restraint in the development, testing and export of ballistic missiles and other delivery means of weapons of mass destruction. The Ministers noted support for encouraging states that had tested nuclear weapons last year to exercise restraint, including by adhering to the comprehensive test ban treaty.

The Ministers noted with appreciation the entry into force of the Ottawa Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and their Destruction. The Ministers agreed to support

initiatives to enhance international co-operation on demining, the removal of unexploded ordnance and rehabilitation of victims, and commended efforts by some ARF countries to provide training and assistance on mine clearance.

The Ministers discussed trans-boundary problems that could have a significant impact on regional security. They recognized that the illegal accumulation of small arms and light weapons posed a threat to peace and security in many regions and urged the international community to focus its attention to this problem. The Ministers noted with concern the problem of piracy in the region and recognized that there is a need for cooperative approaches to deal with this problem. They also noted the problem of illegal migration.

Track I and II Activities for the Current and Next Inter-sessional Years

The Ministers noted with satisfaction the successful implementation of numerous Track I and II activities for the current inter-sessional year (July 1998-July 1999). The Ministers noted the following major Track I activities:

a. Co-Chairmen's Summary Report of the two meetings of the Inter-sessional Support Group on Confidence Building Measures in Honolulu on 4-6 November 1998 and Bangkok on 3-5 March 1999.

b. Co-Chairmen's Report of the Inter-sessional Meeting on Disaster Relief in Moscow on 11-13 April 1999.

c. ARF Experts Group Meeting on Disaster Relief on 29 January 1999 in Bangkok.

The Ministers commended the work of the ISG on CBMs and the ISM on Disaster Relief in furthering the ARF process. They endorsed the recommendations as contained in the above-mentioned reports. The Ministers welcomed the offers by Vietnam and Russia to co-chair the ISM on Disaster Relief and by Singapore and Japan to co-chair the ISG on CBMs for the next inter-sessional year. The Ministers also welcomed the production of the Annual Security Outlook (ASO) by individual participants on a voluntary basis at the Track I level for compilation without any editing by the ARF Chairman and noted that maritime co-operation would be included in the agenda of future ISG on CBMs.

The Ministers also took note of the following Track II activities:

a. ARF Workshop on Disaster Management in Bangkok on 25-28 January 1998.

b. CSCAP Seminar on Preventive Diplomacy in Bangkok on 28 Feb-2 March 1999.

c. Conference on "Towards Comprehensive Security and Cooperation in the Asia Pacific" in Vladivostok on 25-27 April 1999.

Future Direction of the ARF Process

The Ministers confirmed that the ARF is a framework for political and security dialogue and cooperation in the region and that its discussions and activities should be focused on issues which would have significant impact on regional security. The Ministers agreed that ASEAN would remain the driving force of the ARF process and that the ARF would maintain its evolutionary approach as the process progresses from confidence building to preventive diplomacy and, as an eventual goal, the elaboration of approaches to conflict resolution. The ARF process will continue to move at a pace comfortable to all ARF participants on the basis of consensus. The Ministers recognized the importance of CBMs in enhancing confidence and trust among ARF members and agreed that the ARF should further develop and deepen cooperation on CBMs among ARF members. They recognized that various efforts at confidence building would have an important role in facilitating the ARF process.

The Ministers also requested the ISG on CBMs to further explore the overlap between CBMs and Preventive Diplomacy for the next inter-sessional year, focusing inter alia, on the development of the concept and principles of preventive diplomacy. In this regard, the Ministers welcomed the offer by ASEAN to prepare a paper on the concept and principles of Preventive Diplomacy for consideration by the ARF SOM at its next meeting.

The full text of the ARF Chairman's Statement is available as PacNet 31A on-line (www.csis.org/pacfor/) or upon request from Pacific Forum or from the ASEAN Website (<http://www.aseansec.org/>)