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SPEECH

By H.E. Mr. Nguyen Van An,

President of the National Assembly of Vietnam, President of AIPO

At the Opening Ceremony of the 23rd AIPO General Assembly

(September 9, 2002, Ba Dinh Hall)

*Your Excellency Mr. Tran Duc Luong, President of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam,
Honourable Presidents and Heads of AIPO Member Delegations, and Heads of Special
Observer and Observer Delegations,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

On behalf of the National Assembly and people of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, I would like to extend my warm welcome to AIPO Member Parliaments and Observers to the 23rd General Assembly of the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Organization. I also warmly welcome members of the diplomatic corps, invited guests and all correspondents present here today.

In accordance with AIPO's rotation rule, the National Assembly of Vietnam has assumed the role of AIPO President since September 2001. Following one year of assuming the Presidency, we take great pleasure in hosting and chairing the 23rd General Assembly, which coincides with the 35th and 25th anniversaries of the establishment of ASEAN and

AIPO respectively. The Vietnamese people always recall these days as the sacred moment as on 2nd September 57 years ago, at Ba Dinh Square, right outside the Conference Hall, President Ho Chi Minh announced the Declaration of Independence, giving birth to the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, now Socialist Republic of Vietnam.

For nearly half a century, this Hall has been the venue for plenary sessions of the National Assembly of Vietnam where deputies express the will and aspirations of the Vietnamese people for building a new and strong State of Vietnam. In this Hall one month ago, 498 deputies of the Vietnam National Assembly, who were elected during the 19th May 2002 election, convened the first session to decide upon vital issues aimed at taking the country to a new phase of development. Today, at this venue we once again have the great honour to host an important event, the opening ceremony of the 23rd AIPO General Assembly with the participation of delegations of all AIPO Member Parliaments, Special Observers and Observers. On behalf of the National Assembly and people of Vietnam, I wish to extend to all of you our warmest welcome and our greetings of solidarity and friendship.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The 23rd General Assembly of the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Organization takes place at a time when ASEAN is striving for a brighter future built on the foundations of achievements recorded in the past 35 years of existence and development. With only five original members, the Association has grown to embrace all ten nations in the region with much greater magnitude and influence. Despite vicissitudes, the goals and principles set out in the Bangkok Declaration and the Treaty on Amity and Co-operation have always served as solid foundations for ASEAN to grow. Today, as a dynamic regional grouping with an identity of "unity in diversity" and a well-known ASEAN Way, ASEAN has become a factor to promote peace, stability and co-operation in the region and the world.

Formed amidst the process of regional integration a quarter of a century ago, the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Organization always remains a driving force for strengthening co-operation among ASEAN Parliaments. Through AIPO meetings, close links have been developed among ASEAN parliamentarians, and between them with parliamentarians of observer countries. These links have helped us transcend lingual, cultural and ideological differences to exchange views on matters of mutual concerns in an open and in-depth manner, thus deepening mutual trust and understanding. At the national level, parliamentarians play an active role in assisting and overseeing Governments' implementation of ASEAN commitments and developing legal frameworks for national integration. We have worked closely with Governments in the policy formulation to promote regional integration while preserving national identities.

At the regional and international levels, inter-parliamentary co-operation within the AIPO framework and between the organisation and its dialogue partners contributes to

accelerating ASEAN integration and expanding the grouping's co-operation with other regions. AIPO's legislative measures and resolutions dealing with regional and international socio-political matters have helped bring about a comprehensive vision and optimal ways and means for realizing ASEAN's goals.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Since the 22nd AIPO General Assembly and particularly following the September 11th event in the United States, our region and the world at large have witnessed rapid and complex changes, which have had both direct and indirect impacts on the political and economic situation of each nation and the whole region. However, peace and stability remain a major trend, reflecting the aspiration and the pressing demand of all nations in the region and across the globe. As such, ASEAN's enhanced co-operation and promoted development become ever more imperative. As the world economy rebounds, our region has seen encouraging growth in the early months of this year. ASEAN's unity, which is rested upon the Association's fundamental principles, has been firmly maintained. All-sided co-operation among member countries has been strengthened. New mechanisms and areas of intra-ASEAN co-operation and its co-operation with the outside have been established.

With the determination to realize Vision 2020, ASEAN is doubling efforts to implement the Hanoi Plan of Action, Initiative for ASEAN Integration and Declaration on Narrowing the Development Gap. An ASEAN-10 with its inherent image and position has offered each member country and the Association as a whole many across-the-board opportunities. However, ASEAN has to confront numerous difficulties and challenges, including the negative effects of globalization, the danger of lagging behind in science and technology, especially information technology, and the widening development gap among ASEAN members and between ASEAN and other regions. Intra-ASEAN co-operation is also facing new challenges caused by impacts of the September 11 event. In addition, ASEAN must deal with a series of pressing social matters which require close co-operation among countries in the region.

For its part, AIPO has been actively implementing the resolutions of the 22nd General Assembly in the past year to assist ASEAN Governments in addressing the region's priority issues. We successfully organized the First Meeting of the AIPO Fact-finding Committee on Combating the Drug Menace. An AIPO delegation, headed by its President, paid a visit to Japan and exchanged views with the Japanese Parliament with the aim of strengthening co-operation with dialogue partners. We also organized the Ad-hoc Committee Meeting on Organizational Matters to deliberate upon essential issues relating to finance, mechanisms to monitor the implementation of AIPO resolutions and awards presented to persons with outstanding contributions to the development of AIPO.

The 23rd AIPO General Assembly also welcomes the results of the 7th ASEAN Summit and the 35th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting. Documents released at these events reflected major issues of the region, as well as ASEAN's resolve to build a brighter future. It is certain that this determination will also be echoed at our meeting in the next few days, and the outcomes of this General Assembly will serve as practical contributions to ASEAN's joint efforts to consolidating unity, strengthening policy co-ordination, maximizing internal strengths, accelerating regional integration and expanding co-operation with outside partners.

With the conviction in the region's future development and the worthy contributions of the 23rd AIPO General Assembly to the common cause of the Association, I declare open the 23rd General Assembly.

Thank you for your attention.

