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KEYNOTE SPEECH

By **HE. Mr. Tran Duc Luong, President of the SR. Vietnam**

At the Opening Ceremony of the 23rd General Assembly of

ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Organization (AIPO)

(September 9th, 2002, Hanoi)

*Your Excellency Mr. Nguyen Van An, President of the Vietnamese National Assembly,
President of the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Organization,*

Honourable Leaders of Delegations,

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the out set, allow me, on behalf of the State and the people of Vietnam, and in my own name, to extend my warmest welcome to all distinguished delegates to the 23rd General Assembly of ASEAN Inter-parliamentary Organization (AIPO) in the capital city of Hanoi.

I would like to sincerely thank you for honouring me with the opportunity to address this solemn opening ceremony.

Following Vietnam's accession to the Association of the Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam also became an official member of ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Organization (AIPO), and since September 2001, the Vietnamese National Assembly has assumed the Presidency of the AIPO General Assembly. This is both the great honour and responsibility of our National

Assembly and people. I hope that with your close co-operation, the 23rd AIPO General Assembly will come to a successful conclusion, making further contribution to the maintenance of peace and stability, promotion of regional integration, expansion of the multi-faceted co-operation within ASEAN and between ASEAN and dialogue partners towards enhancing the Association's position in the world.

I also wish to extend my congratulations to distinguished delegates on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the establishment of AIPO. Over the last quarter of a century of its existence and development, AIPO has asserted its important and dynamic role, and made valuable contributions to the deepening of mutual understanding and trust, actively assisted ASEAN Member Governments in expanding co-operation in many fields, settling urgent issues in the political, security, economic, financial and social areas, and improving the people's life. By expanding its relations with Parliaments of other countries, AIPO has an important role to play in building the image and prestige of ASEAN in the world. These are proud achievements of not only AIPO but also of all ASEAN member countries. Honourable, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The 23rd AIPO General Assembly takes place at a time when the region and the world are undergoing many new developments and complexities. This demands ASEAN countries to make greater efforts to move the Association forward in conformity with its purposes and principles and to create favourable regional and international environment for each member country and the entire Association to firmly advance into the first decades of the new Millennium.

Peace and stability are always the burning desire of all nations and essential conditions for development. That is also applicable to the case of South East Asia, a region once enormously suffering from wars and conflicts. Over the past years, all of our countries have made tireless efforts for regional peace and stability through establishing and developing the friendship and good neighbourliness within ASEAN and between ASEAN members and the rest of the world on the basis of respect for independence, sovereignty, non-interference into internal affairs, mutually beneficial co-operation and settlement of differences and disputes through peaceful negotiations. However, there remain destabilizing factors in the region. In addition, security problems, namely terrorism, drugs, women and children trafficking, piracy, etc., tend to rise, threatening regional security and stability and negatively affecting socio-economic development and people's life.

In response to those challenges, we should reinforce our unity and co-operation within ASEAN and between ASEAN and the rest of the world on the basis of mutual understanding, trust and respect. This is the optimal means to safeguard regional peace and stability conducive for prosperous development.

As legislatures, Member Parliaments and the entire AIPO have an extremely important voice and position in these common efforts. I am pleased to note that this is one of the

major themes in the agenda of this General Assembly. I fully believe that the General Assembly will come up with new initiatives to build lasting peace and stability in South East Asia.

We are living in a changing world not only politically but also economically. Given the 1997-1998 regional financial - economic crisis, the recent developments in the wake of the September 11th event in the U.S. and fierce competition in the economic, trade and investment areas in the region and the world, ASEAN should further intensify regional integration and increase its competitiveness. To that end, ASEAN has introduced the Initiative for ASEAN Integration and implemented projects the ASEAN Highway Network project, studied the feasibility of the Singapore-Konming Rail-link, ASEAN Power Grids, Trans-ASEAN Gas Pipeline Network, and concurrently decided to set an earlier date for the ASEAN Free Trade Area and ASEAN Investment Area. Closer co-operation within development triangles and quadrangles is another essential step towards the above-mentioned direction.

Besides efforts by ASEAN Member Governments, we hope that AIPO will make active contribution to boosting regional integration, especially economic integration, and creating additional strength to the Association.

Given different circumstances, there remains a wide development gap among ASEAN countries, especially between old and new members, hindering the Association development and co-operation. Therefore, narrowing the development gap is both a pressing demand and a long-term goal that ASEAN considers a high priority. To that end, ASEAN has been taking great efforts in implementing many important measures, for example, the comprehensive Roadmap for ASEAN Integration, known as "R.I.A" with three main pillars, namely bridging the development gap, intensifying economic co-operation and deepening economic integration. A 6 -year Work Plan has also been formulated to assist the new members in four areas of priority namely development of infrastructure, human resource, information and communication technology, and promotion of regional economic integration. In the spirit of mutual support, ASEAN-6 countries have voluntarily granted preferential treatments to products made in Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Vietnam that are exported to their markets under the ASEAN Integration System of Preferences (AISP). ASEAN old members also have implemented technical assistance programmes on the bilateral basis to support the new members to integrate into the region. We highly appreciate those invaluable co-operation and assistance and hope that parliamentarians of ASEAN countries will contribute to the reinforcement of this trend.

Taking the view that people are the final goal of development and factors to ensure the success of development programmes, our Association has attached great importance to the human development through various measures such as hunger eradication and poverty reduction, education development, diseases prevention, especially HIV/AIDS and other

infectious diseases, empowerment to women, improved spiritual and material life for the people in the region. In this connection, some encouraging achievements have been recorded. The material and cultural life of our people has been significantly improved; human resources remarkably upgraded; position of women incessantly enhanced. However, much remains to be done in dealing with hunger and poverty, diseases, trafficking of women and children, and violence against women. This requires regional countries to further complete their legal systems; develop and implement development policies; and devote more resources to these endeavours. Human development will help ASEAN counter challenges, meeting the goal set out in the Hanoi Plan of Action and Vision 2020 to build "ASEAN as a concert of Southeast Asian nations, outward looking, living in peace, stability and prosperity, bonded together in partnership in dynamic development and in a community of caring societies". We hope that AIPO will accord adequate attention to the fulfilment of this noble task.

Your Excellency Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen,

ASEAN has just come to the 35th year of its existence. Great strides of ASEAN over the past decades towards a better future would not have been made without the precious contribution of distinguished delegates and AIPO as a whole.

Representing the will, aspirations, and interests of ASEAN peoples, you are in a good position to encourage the people to support and join ASEAN Governments' efforts in striving for an ASEAN of unity in diversity, and dynamic and equitable development.

In the capacity of lawmakers, Your Honourable are playing a vital role in building a legal framework for regional co-operation and integration as well as the integration process of member countries.

Responsible for overseeing the implementation of development policies, you are also well-positioned to promote the fulfilment of commitments made by ASEAN Governments to the regional integration process.

I am convinced that the General Assembly this time will deliberate and put forth practical measures to join ASEAN Governments in translating our priority programmes into reality. In that spirit, I wish the 23rd General Assembly of ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Organization a great success, providing an added strength for ASEAN to firmly advance in this new millennium.

Thank you Mr. President and all delegates.