

**Opening Remarks for
the 6th Meeting of the
ASEAN Regional Forum Experts and Eminent Persons
2 February 2012, Bangkok**

**Excellencies, Co-Chairs,
Distinguished Experts and Eminent Persons,**

It is an honour for me to preside over the opening ceremony of the 6th Meeting of the ASEAN Regional Forum Experts and Eminent Persons here in Bangkok, Thailand.

The ARF would not be where it is today were it not for the supporting role and creative thinking provided by the ARF Experts and Eminent Persons.

Nowhere is this more true than in the area of preventive diplomacy or PD. The adoption of the PD Work Plan last July by ARF Ministers was the culmination of many important steps, some of them provided by the contributions from the ARF EEPs.

This year, Thailand is honoured to co-chair the Sixth Meeting of the ARF EEPs with the United States. We are pleased to have Dr. Ralph Cossa and Dr. Panitan Wattanayagorn co-chairing this event.

This year, for the first time, we will try to build directly on our discussions last year in Dili, focussing on developments in preventive diplomacy and the future direction of the ARF including the evolving regional architecture.

As agreed to at the EEPs' last meeting, this approach will help ensure some continuity in the EEPs' work as well as greater links between the EEPs work and that of the ARF Track One.

Indeed, at the last meeting of the ARF Intersessional Support Group (ISG) on CBMs and PD in Phnom Penh which I attended, there was a call for the EEPs to continue to provide more substantive inputs to the ARF's ongoing work on PD and on the ARF's future direction.

This enhanced linkage between the EEPs and the ARF Track One is something that Thailand supports.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

With the adoption of the ARF Work Plan last July, there is heightened expectation that the ARF will increasingly recognize the importance of Preventive Diplomacy as an important tool in tackling new threats and challenges to promote peace and security in our region.

Perhaps, we are moving closer to Phase Two of the ARF which involves implementation of preventive diplomacy.

But challenges remain. How can we actually move from having a PD Work Plan to actually implementing PD measures that are acceptable to all? Are there voluntary PD measures that can be used in specific circumstances without having wider regional implications? These are some questions to which the EEPs might be able to provide some answers.

Another important and related issue is the future evolution of the ARF and in particular the evolving regional architecture.

With the successful conclusion of the first ever expanded East Asia Summit (EAS) in Bali last year which essentially endorsed the ASEAN-centered regional architecture, the relationship between the EAS and other regional fora including the ARF will be another important issue of debate.

How can the various regional fora i.e. the EAS, ARF and ADMM Plus interact constructively with one another to provide the region with the best possible tools to deal with regional security challenges?

Indeed, our EEPs were tasked by the ARF ISG on CBMs and PD to examine the role of the ARF in the context of new developments in the regional architecture with the expanded East Asia Summit (EAS) and the ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting Plus (ADMM Plus) and discuss the relationship of these three mechanisms.

Lastly, it is important that we use this opportunity to also discuss plans for the ARF Electoral Capacity Building Programme for Timor Leste which was one of the proposals made last year at our meeting.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I hope that all of us will help brainstorm on how we can contribute ideas that will help take forward the ARF EEPs agendas and help shape the future direction of the ARF.

I look forward to a fruitful discussion from all participants and to having good recommendations for the ARF to consider.

Thank you.
