

During its first year, the Centre will provide a home for CIDA's development cooperation program with ASEAN and with the regional institutions. I am sure that this will result in a much more effective management of the programs, and more frequent and effective communication between ASEAN and Canadian officials involved.

The decentralization of CIDA's program, however, is only the first step in the Centre's evolution. I expect it will evolve with a much broader mandate. To define the next steps, I intend to create an Advisory Council made up of experienced people who have a profound knowledge of areas where ASEAN and Canada can develop closer linkages. Both Canadians and ASEAN representatives would be appointed. Together, they would establish priorities for the Centre.

The detailed planning for the Centre's operation will thus take place where it should: here in ASEAN. The day-to-day management of the Centre will be entrusted to an executive director. I expect the Executive Director, along with the Advisory Council, to be appointed by October. His or her first task will be to undertake consultations within the region and in Canada to chart out priority activities for the Centre.

Let me leave you with some ideas as to what the Centre might do. I see the Centre's role in the future as building bridges between groups in Canada and ASEAN with common interests in a variety of fields, as a complement to our official relations.

Education and training will form a large part of the Centre's future work. I have had many conversations with ASEAN Ministers and with Canadian business persons working in the region. There is a clear consensus that if there were more direct exchanges and visits between the people of Canada and ASEAN countries, including our companies, universities and colleges, both our peoples would benefit through enhanced skills, deeper knowledge and understanding, and, of course, close friendships.