

ASEAN

ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) composed of Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand, was founded in 1967 to promote peace, stability and development in Southeast Asia.

Economic cooperation served as the first practical objective of the Association. However, events in Indochina hastened the realization on the part of the individual ASEAN countries that jointly they could accomplish more on the world stage than if they acted individually. Political cooperation, therefore, has become one of the cornerstones of the Association. Indeed, because of their strategic location, their considerable natural resources and their growing political cohesion, the member states of ASEAN have become a vital factor in the political evolution of the region and, by extension, the Pacific as well.

In 1971 representatives of the five ASEAN governments signed the Kuala Lumpur Declaration, calling for a Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOPFAN) in a Southeast Asia free from outside interference. This idea has become increasingly important following the communist victories in Indochina in 1975 and the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia in 1979 and is now a major ASEAN principle.

ASEAN has been in the forefront of the search for a political solution to the Cambodian problem. It has sponsored UNGA resolutions on the matter. It has been unwavering in its call for the withdrawal of Vietnamese troops from Cambodia. It was instrumental in the convening of the 1981 International Conference on the problem. In all of these efforts it has succeeded in gaining the support not only of many Western countries but also, to a considerable extent, of the members of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM).

On other issues the members of ASEAN have been active as a group in international forums such as the UN conference on Law of the Sea, the Group of 77, North-South and various commodity groupings, the latter because the ASEAN countries are major producers of rubber, hardwoods, tin, sugar and coffee.