

The aim of the Treaty of Amity and Co-operation in Southeast Asia was to promote perpetual peace, everlasting unity and co-operation among the peoples which would contribute to their strength, solidarity and closer relationship. It was signed by the member states of ASEAN but remained open for accession by other states in Southeast Asia. The signatories promised to enlarge co-operation in many fields with a view to furthering economic development, peace and stability in Southeast Asia. The Treaty provides for the peaceful settlement of disputes through consultation between the disputants and other treaty signatories.

Organizational Character

The organization structure set out in the original Bangkok Declaration included: an annual meeting of foreign ministers, held in rotation in the various capitals; a standing committee chaired by the foreign minister of the country that was next to host the foreign ministers meeting and having as members the ambassadors of the other member states; a number of ad hoc and permanent committees of specialists and officials; and a national secretariat within each member's foreign ministry.²³

Despite the establishment at the Bali meeting of a central secretariat, ASEAN continues to be highly decentralized. The central secretariat is situated in Jakarta, but does not play a very major role in ASEAN policy development or implementation. The ministerial meetings of foreign ministers and the standing committee continue to be the primary governing bodies and these consultative organs have been joined by additional meetings of ASEAN ministers (including economic, labour, social welfare, education and information). The wide range of standing and ad hoc committees have been grouped under these ministerial meetings.²⁴

The annual foreign ministers' meeting has continued to be the most high profile regular ASEAN meeting. Since 1979, these meetings have been followed by meetings (on both an individual and joint basis) with ASEAN's dialogue partners (the US, Japan, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the EEC and just recently, Korea) which have provided avenues for discussion about political and security issues and a concrete reaffirmation of the association's international acceptance and credibility. The ASEAN structure is complex and its decentralized style reflects a perceived need for decisions on key issues to be taken by national representatives on a high level through extensive consultation.²⁵

²³ Ibid., pg. 5.

²⁴ Ibid., pg. 19.

²⁵ Ibid., pg. 19.