

ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS: A PROFILE

Historical Background

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), comprising Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand, was formed in Bangkok in 1967. Brunei became the sixth member in January 1984. The original objectives of ASEAN as stated in the Bangkok Declaration were: (1) to accelerate economic growth, social progress and cultural development in the region, and (2) to promote regional peace and stability. A major ASEAN accomplishment, over the years, has been to moderate the antagonisms between the countries of the region. They have set aside the legacy of bitterness and hostility which had been manifest in regional disputes such as Indonesia's "Confrontation" with Malaysia, and the Philippines claim to the Malaysian state of Sabah.

In 1971, the Foreign Ministers of the five founding members of ASEAN signed the Kuala Lumpur Declaration calling for a Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOPFAN), with the aim of keeping the region free from big power rivalries. The idea has re-emerged as an important objective of ASEAN in the wake of the communist successes in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia in 1975. In February 1976, the first Summit meeting of the ASEAN Heads of Government was convened in Bali where they signed a Treaty of Amity and Cooperation which established mechanisms to resolve outstanding bilateral disputes. The importance of political consultations and economic cooperation was emphasized by the signing of the Declaration of ASEAN Concord, which established a framework for sustained consultations at various political and economic levels.

The second ASEAN Summit in Kuala Lumpur in 1977, reaffirmed the directions established at Bali. The Kuala Lumpur Summit also affirmed the importance of "Dialogues" being opened with Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Japan and the EC.

The third ASEAN Summit was held in Manila in December, 1987. The Manila Declaration gave new impetus to regional economic cooperation and approved amendments to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation to facilitate greater contacts and cooperation between ASEAN and other countries, particularly within the Asia-Pacific region.

Political Cooperation

It is in the area of political cooperation that ASEAN has had its most remarkable success. Regular meetings of Foreign Ministers, Economic Ministers and other senior political and government officials have been