

further compounded by the complicated geography of the region.

There were several attempts to overcome these difficulties by the formation of various regional organizations in the early 1960s. These attempts provided important learning experiences and eventually, despite political and economic tensions, a determined political will prevailed to overcome differences and begin the search for common interests and goals. Thus, the Bangkok Declaration was signed in 1967 and the founding members — Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines — proclaimed their three objectives to be the acceleration of economic growth; social and cultural development; and the promotion of regional peace and stability.

Today, the nations of Southeast Asia have market-oriented economies, and are open, dynamic and increasingly prosperous societies in a region vital to Western interests. Their unity has provided the region with political stability and a growing centre of economic power. Since the early 1970s, Canada has supported ASEAN politically and economically. Canada recognizes the important role ASEAN plays in the peace and stability of Southeast Asia, and ASEAN's role as a model of regional co-operation.

Realizing the Objectives

Political co-operation has been the most remarkable success of ASEAN, which has promoted regional peace and security through a variety of mechanisms. Sensitive to the super-power rivalry in Southeast Asia and the war in Indochina, ASEAN called for a Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOPFAN) in the Kuala Lumpur Declaration in 1971. In 1976 in Bali, at the first summit meeting of ASEAN Heads of Government, the Treaty of Amity and Co-operation and the Declaration of ASEAN

Accord were signed. The treaty set up ways to settle disputes between ASEAN members, while the accord was a blueprint for political, economic and cultural co-operation.

The fall of South Vietnam and rise of Communist governments in Laos and Cambodia in 1975 gave added impetus to the objectives contained in the original declaration and ZOPFAN's goals. The emergence of the brutal Khmer Rouge regime in Cambodia and subsequent invasion by Soviet-backed Vietnamese forces brought ASEAN's own security into sharp focus. Suddenly, an ASEAN member, Thailand, was threatened by Vietnam at its Cambodian border. It was this event that led ASEAN to close ranks and become the effective regional political unit it is today.

Politically, ASEAN has developed a unified response to a number of regional concerns. For 10 years, it has focused its attention on the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia and has repeatedly called for withdrawal of troops from Thailand's neighbour. The association has also criticized the Soviet naval build-up in the Pacific and Indian oceans, and the Soviet establishment of a major naval and air base in Vietnam. ASEAN has spoken against Chinese expansionism, French policy in New Caledonia and nuclear testing at Mururua, and the presence of nuclear weapons in the Pacific. ASEAN amended the ZOPFAN in 1984 and agreed that Southeast Asia should be a Nuclear Weapons Free Zone. ASEAN also developed a co-ordinated position on the Law of the Sea.

Although the association was initially envisaged as an economic grouping, ASEAN political co-operation has been easier to achieve than economic co-operation. While individual ASEAN members sustained high average overall growth rates in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) between 1970 and 1980 (averaging 7 per