

Speech by the Secretary General of ASEAN, Surin Pitsuwan at the Inaugural Best of ASEAN Performing Arts

Jakarta, 6 May 2008

Selamat Malam to all

Assalammu'alaikum Warahmatullah Wabarakatuh

Excellency, Minister of Culture and Tourism of the Republic of Indonesia, Jero Wacik and *Ibu*,
Excellencies, the Ambassadors of ASEAN
Excellencies, the Ambassadors of the world
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour of ASEAN, of the ASEAN Secretariat, to be able to co-host this very important cultural event in Jakarta with the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the Republic of Indonesia. As the Minister of Culture and Tourism told us, the idea was conceived in the new Capital of Myanmar in January.

It was conceived because when I was flying to Jakarta to be inaugurated as the new Secretary-General of ASEAN, people asked me, "Where are you going?" I said, "Jakarta". A lot of them said, "But you are the new Secretary General of ASEAN, why are you going to Jakarta?" I said, "Because the secretariat is there". They said, "Oh, we did not know that".

Jakarta has hosted the ASEAN Secretariat since 1976. The idea and the kindness came from Pak Soeharto himself, the great statesman of ASEAN. But I have a feeling that people in Jakarta who have been so kind in hosting us for the last 30+ years are not quite aware of the fact that we are here. So, this series of cultural performances have been inaugurated in order to make sure that Jakarta knows that we are here and it is, in a small way, for the people of ASEAN to say thank you Jakarta for hosting the ASEAN Secretariat here for a long time.

As we are sitting here in this very beautiful building tonight, enjoying the performances from Indonesia, The Mosaic Archipelago, our hearts and our minds must also go to our fellow ASEAN people in Myanmar who are suffering from the natural climate change called the cyclone last week. Up to now, 15,000 have lost their lives, many thousands more are missing. Life in the delta of the Irrawaddy River is now very difficult indeed.

We have called for solidarity; we have mobilized the resources; we appealed to the generosity of all ASEAN governments, the civil societies, the international organisations to respond generosity to the appeal of our Myanmar colleague for help and for support.

I hope you enjoy this cultural performance tonight. We shall not forget the suffering of our friends and our fellow ASEAN people. But tonight is the beginning of the series. I have good news for you, Excellency, the Minister of Culture and Tourism - your colleague, the

Minister of Information, Communications and the Arts of the Republic of Singapore has already asked Singapore to be the second country representing ASEAN on this stage. We hope that we can stage the Singaporean performances during the week of the birthday of ASEAN. ASEAN's birthday is the 8th of August. We do hope that Singapore performances can be staged during that week; and that there would be others from Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Thailand, and Viet Nam - from all the members of the ASEAN countries who shall march on this stage or any other stage in this great city of Jakarta, so that people of Jakarta will have an opportunity to appreciate the diversity of culture that we have among 567 million people that we have here in the ten countries of ASEAN.

So, thank you very much for your positive responses to our invitation.

We do hope you will enjoy it and we do hope that you follow the series in many months in the future. After we finish with the ASEAN series, why not have the Dialogue Partners of ASEAN join in, so that Jakarta would become the cultural centre of ASEAN that ASEAN has inspired to be - one diversified, unified but prosperous and very welcoming region for all of you from outside the region.

Thank you very much and enjoy the show.