



**44th Meeting of the ASEAN
Committee on Culture and Information**

KEYNOTE SPEECH

by

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and**

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Our Colleagues in the ASEAN Committee on Culture and Information, Guests from the Diplomatic Community, Ladies and Gentlemen, Good Morning to all.

On behalf of the Philippine Government and President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, it is my great pleasure and honor to greet all of you today at the opening ceremonies of the 44th ASEAN-COCI Meeting in this beautiful city of Tagaytay City. This hotel where you are having the ASEAN-COCI Meeting is located on top of the ridge of Tagaytay which provides a spectacular view of Taal Volcano, the world's smallest volcano. As your programme guidebook says, Tagaytay's cool climate has made the city ideal for sports, picnics, conferences, spiritual retreats, honeymoons and country homes. I hope that you will have an enjoyable stay here while you work.

The 44th ASEAN-COCI Meeting this week comes at a definitive moment in ASEAN. Recent developments in the Region and globally, as well as landmark decisions of our leaders such as the ratification and entry into force of the ASEAN Charter, the acceleration of the establishment of the ASEAN Community by 2015 and the approval of the blueprints for realizing the three pillars of the ASEAN Community pose new challenges and opportunities for the Culture and Information sector of ASEAN and also the member states.

As we meet today, it is apropos to recall the goals of ASEAN which could be summarized as follows: to create a zone of peace, freedom and neutrality where people live in harmony, peace and prosperity.

With the ratification and entry into force of the ASEAN Charter, the vision of ASEAN remains. We note, however, that the Charter underscores certain purposes and principles that would lead to the empowerment of the peoples of ASEAN and the strengthening of the ASEAN Community. Among those are the development of human resources through closer cooperation in education and life-long learning, the creation of a single market and production base which is stable, prosperous, highly competitive and economically integrated with effective facilitation for trade and investment. These are aimed to alleviate poverty and narrow the development gap within ASEAN through mutual cooperation and assistance.

This, to me, is the great challenge to culture and information as we enter a new phase in the development and integration of ASEAN.

In the early years of ASEAN, our focus was to create awareness on ASEAN as an association and the member states with a view to getting to know each other well. Cooperation in culture and information evolved over time. During our “getting to know you” stage, cultural cooperation took basically the form of exchange of cultural performances, festivals and people to people exchanges while cooperation in information consisted mostly of seminars in mass media, exchange of journalists and media persons, and, TV, radio and film presentations and festivals.

In 1992, the thrust shifted to greater enhancement of awareness and knowledge of ASEAN as a region bound together by a shared past. Cooperation focused on activities that projected ASEAN wholly. One example of such cooperation was the joint theatrical production of the region’s popular epic “Rama.”

I think we can all agree that the time has come for us to reexamine the present roles and thrusts of culture and information so that our sector will be key participants in the much-desired building of the ASEAN Community and the faster promotion of the ASEAN Charter.

The approved ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community blueprint for action has clearly identified culture and information as key in the building of ASEAN identity. In the ASSC blueprint, strategies have been spelled out to create a sense of community, preserve and promote ASEAN cultural heritage, engage the community to participate in these efforts and narrow the development gap. In this regard, we could maximize cultural forms, traditional communication tools and channels and new information technology to cultural messages but messages of development.

For the Sub-Committee on Information, I would like to reiterate again, as I did at the SCI Meeting last January 2009 in Clark, Pampanga, Philippines, the need to reformulate the ASEAN National and Regional Communication Plans.

Our goals in building the ASEAN Community are enshrined in the ASEAN Charter. Our work in the culture and information sector has been spelled out for us in the ASSC blueprint for action. We look forward to the time when our member states and peoples in ASEAN will truly be one.

Thank you very much and MABUHAY!