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**INAUGURAL MEETING OF TRACK II NETWORK OF ASEAN  
DEFENCE AND SECURITY THINK TANKS  
23 - 24 AUGUST 2007  
VANDA 6, LEVEL 6, MARINA MANDARIN HOTEL**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to thank you very much for accepting our invitation to this meeting of ASEAN Defence and Security Think Tanks.

The idea that research centres can contribute to the making of government policy is not new. Many of our Ministries have dedicated research centres analysing policy options. Indeed, some universities have set up research centres to do policy analysis. Other institutions like our Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies (which is the fore-runner of RSIS and remains a key component of RSIS) was established explicitly to undertake the analysis of security issues. In Jakarta the Centre of Strategic and International Studies was established to develop and advocate policies for the then New Order of General Soeharto in the early 1970's. Since then each of us in ASEAN developed a series of policy institutions. In Singapore we established the Institute of Policy Studies and the East Asia Institute to provide policy makers with policy relevant knowledge.

Until the 1980's we worked in isolation from each other. We knew of each other, but there was no institutional link-up of our institutions. It was only in the mid-1980's that the lead institutions of each ASEAN country gathered in Bali and established a network known as the ASEAN Institutes of Strategic and International Studies, or ASEAN-ISIS. That network has grown with the

expansion of ASEAN and today includes policy institutions from Brunei, Cambodia, Vietnam and Laos. As a network, ASEAN-ISIS has met regularly to review regional trends and developments that could impact on defence and security of the region and its nation-states and sent its assessments and recommendations to the ASEAN Senior Officials for their consideration. Over the years a fairly well defined relationship has developed between ASEAN-ISIS and the ASEAN Senior Officials. They form a Track II network of think tanks to the Track I network of officials. It is a relationship in which the Senior Officials would call on ASEAN ISIS to study a policy issue and submit its recommendations. Most recently, ASEAN ISIS was invited to submit its views on the ASEAN Charter we are about to adopt.

In the early 1990's ASEAN-ISIS expanded its network and reached out to the Pacific Forum in Hawaii, the Japan Institute of International Affairs and the Seoul Forum to form an Asia Pacific wide network of policy institutions to address issues of the wider post-Cold War Asia Pacific region. Today this network known as the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific (CSCAP) has a membership of policy institutions in some 28 countries, including Australian New Zealand, Mongolia, North Korea, India and Papua New Guinea, with ASEAN-ISIS as a core group co-chairing the network. CSCAP has over the years worked to make itself relevant to the ASEAN Regional Forum. It has issued a number of policy memorandums directed at the ARF Senior Officials. CSCAP is the Track II network to the ARF Track I.

We have therefore in ASEAN-ISIS and CSCAP two examples of how a network of policy institutions can interact with policy makers and support the formulation of regional policies. This networking of policy institutions has occurred not only in the field of security and international relations, but also in the field of economic cooperation, where a network of economic research institutes formed the Pacific

Economic Cooperation Council that works to support the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation Council. More recently a Network of East Asia Think Tanks, or NEAT, was formed to provide policy inputs to the ASEAN Plus Three group. That NEAT group has just finished its annual meeting in Singapore earlier this week, just before our meeting today.

Both ASEAN-ISIS and CSCAP however perceive themselves as the Track II to the Track I Foreign Affairs officials of ASEAN and the ARF. Participants at their meetings are policy analysts, academics, retired Foreign Affairs officials or serving Ministry of Foreign Affairs officers in their private and personal capacity. Military and Defence officials have not been invited to participate in ASEAN-ISIS or CSCAP events.

This has to change with the emergence of defence cooperation as a policy issue in ASEAN. The 9<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Summit convening in Bali in 2003 announced its decision to establish an ASEAN Security Community by 2010. This declaration signals a new phase in the nature of ASEAN security cooperation, to bring “ASEAN’s political and security cooperation to a higher plane to ensure that countries in the region live in peace with one another.” The Vientiane Plan of Action adopted at the ASEAN Summit in 2004 advanced the ASEAN agenda for security cooperation by proposing a number of areas of cooperation, among them conflict prevention, conflict resolution and post-conflict peace-building. For conflict prevention, the Vientiane Plan of Action proposed convening an annual ASEAN Defence Ministers’ Meeting, enhancing Confidence Building Measures through conducting more military exchanges between defence officials, increasing bilateral military exchanges and production of an ASEAN Annual Security Outlook. Malaysia convened the first ASEAN Defence Ministers’ Meeting last year and Singapore will be convening the second later this year.

The Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies, RSIS, is taking the initiative to convene this meeting of defence think tanks to explore the prospects of establishing a Track II Network of Defence and Security Think Tanks to the emerging Track I network of ASEAN Defence Senior Officials and their Ministers. We at the IDSS believe that such an initiative is timely and necessary to bring policy analysts specialising in defence issues, academics researching security cooperation and defence officials together to discuss these issues of ASEAN security cooperation that the ASEAN Summit have raised and other issues. We believe that the informal and unofficial Track II platform offers a more conducive environment for a free discussion of defence and security cooperation in ASEAN than the more formal structure of an official meeting. Ideas and proposals that may be deemed too sensitive to be formally tabled at an official Track I meeting can be informally raised and debated at a Track II meeting. Moreover, our Defence Officials may not have the time within their tight schedules to discuss the details of, for example, producing an ASEAN Annual Security Outlook. How should such an Outlook be structured? What will be its contents? Hopefully, we on Track II can discuss these details and send to the Senior Officials our recommendations. Perhaps our institutes could even attempt a first draft for the consideration of the senior officials.

Such a Track II network of ASEAN Defence and Security Think Tanks will not compete with the other Track II networks established by ASEAN-ISIS or CSCAP, but will contribute to increasing the density of bridges between institutions and personal links and bonds to build the confidence and trust that will define ASEAN as a Security community. An increasingly dense network of our institutes and persons will increase the sense of “we-ness” as a Security Community.

This then is the challenge confronting us at this meeting: whether we can build the bridges between our institutes that will enhance this sense of “we-ness” for an ASEAN Security Community.

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