

7th ASEAN Ministers Meeting on Rural Development and Poverty Eradication (7th AMRDPE)

Address by His Royal Highness Prince Haji Al-Muhtadee Billah ibni His Majesty Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah Mu'izzaddin Waddaulah, The Crown Prince and Senior Minister at the Prime Minister's Office on the occasion of the opening of the 7th ASEAN Ministers Meeting on Rural Development and Poverty Eradication (7th AMRDPE) ' A Coordinate Strategy of Intervention: Towards Zero Poverty' at the Empire Hotel & Country Club on 2nd November 2011.

Assalamu'alaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuh

Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim

Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to begin by extending a warm personal welcome to the distinguished ministers, heads and members of all the delegations attending the 7th ASEAN Ministers Meeting on Rural Development and Poverty Eradication.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Poverty eradication is an issue that touches and challenges the hearts and minds of people all over the world. Despite positive progress in recent years, the World Bank reported that 1.4 billion people are still living in extreme poverty surviving only on the equivalent of one dollar and twenty five cents a day.

According to the latest UNDP facts and figures on poverty throughout the world: 170 million children suffer from malnutrition; over 100 million never attend school; 230 million have no access to secondary education; and almost 250 million work to fend for themselves and their families.

Closer to home, there is still much work remaining to overcome poverty. Based on the latest ASEAN statistics, a significant percentage of the population in member states, still live below the \$2 Purchasing Power Parity Poverty Line.

Poverty is indeed a threat to human security and dignity. It hinders the development of an economy, reduces the stability of society and adversely affects the peace and security of a country.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

As the first goal of the Millennium Development Goals, we have all pledged to eradicate poverty setting a target of cutting extreme poverty by half by 2015.

The UN General Assembly proclaimed the years 2008 to 2017, as the Second United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty reiterating that poverty eradication is the greatest global challenge that must be won.

In ASEAN, we have consistently emphasised the eradication of hunger and poverty as a major goal. Our leaders have reaffirmed on numerous occasions their commitment to reduce poverty by improving the standard of living and quality of life of our people.

The theme of this meeting, 'A Coordinated Strategy of Intervention: Towards Zero Poverty' is therefore well chosen and most relevant. Efforts to successfully and sustainably eradicate poverty must indeed cover a wide spectrum of activities.

We need to be well coordinated to bring together measures, such as, the facilitation of economic growth and development, and the provision of social services and safety nets in order to be effective. Our aim should not only be to provide immediate relief and assistance to the poor when the need arises, but also to make them in the long term more resilient, resourceful and self-supporting which will contribute to breaking the vicious circle of poverty.

The work of our governments alone cannot succeed without the cooperation and support of all sectors of society. In particular, business communities must be encouraged to exercise their corporate social responsibilities. And we should do our best to obtain the support and assistance of our Dialogue Partners and other regional and international organisations, as I am sure that they have much to offer.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am also pleased to note that with the establishment of this Ministerial Meeting back in 1997, the foundation for a coordinated approach on rural development and poverty eradication was first established. The work to bring together the two action lines – rural development and poverty eradication has progressed.

Poverty is largely widespread in rural areas, and therefore, promoting rural development goes a long way in addressing many of the multi-faceted challenges of overcoming poverty.

In this regard, I note with appreciation to work undertaken within the ASEAN Framework Action Plan on Rural Development and Poverty Eradication. The Framework Plan remains valid as the

key strategic plan for ASEAN to address poverty in the region. I therefore welcome the renewal of this Framework Action Plan covering the new period 2011 to 2015.

I am confident that our efforts to improve coordination and collaboration to eradicate poverty whilst narrowing the development gap within ASEAN will contribute significantly to realizing the goal of an ASEAN Community that enjoys peace, stability and prosperity throughout the region.

The challenges to succeed in our work are however numerous and complex. One of the challenges that arose recently is the flooding brought about by climate change and weather extremities, that has devastated large areas in a number of member states. The environmental elements of this challenge illustrates the need for ASEAN to have close multi-sectoral coordination in rural development.

A more positive example of why we need to work together is the recent proposal to promote volunteerism amongst our youth. If this is done properly, the involvement of our young professionals in rural development will almost certainly bring about positive developments.

In short, ASEAN can only prosper through a well-coordinated strategy to develop rural areas and overcome poverty.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Poverty eradication is at the forefront of Brunei Darussalam's national agenda.

His Majesty has set 'zero poverty' as a high priority national goal. In this regard, a Special Inter-Ministerial Committee on Poverty was established with its first task being the conduct of a comprehensive study on poverty in Brunei Darussalam which was completed early this year.

The report from the study recommended an integrated poverty eradication strategy which would streamline all social safety net and poverty eradication programmes so that they would yield better results. It also recommended that all programmes and initiatives should address the root causes of poverty, in particular, shortcomings in employment, income, infrastructure, enterprise, education and health.

Our existing social safety net programmes in Brunei Darussalam come in two categories that seek to complement each other, namely: social welfare and socio-economic development programmes.

The social welfare programmes are designed to provide more immediate welfare benefits in cash and in-kind for the needy. Our socio-economic development programmes look to more long-term objectives and include assistance in education, medical and health care, as well as housing.

We believe that a good balance must co-exist between the immediate need to alleviate poverty and our longer term efforts to assist the poor in permanently breaking free of the debilitating cycle of poverty.

One initiative worthy of specific mention is the new Supplemental Contributory Pension Scheme to strengthen the existing Employees' Trust Fund. It is hoped that, this additional scheme will help to prevent individuals from falling into poverty upon retirement.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am sure that you will be discussing many of your successful endeavours during the meeting and this exchange of best practices represents an important part of our work together.

Let me conclude by wishing you the very best in all your deliberations and I hope that our guests will enjoy their stay in our country in the true spirit of the ASEAN Community.

With the kalimah Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim, I now declare the 7th ASEAN Ministers Meeting on Rural Development and Poverty Eradication, officially open.

Wabillahit Taufiq Walhidayah, Wassalamu'alaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuh.