

Inaugural Speech

by

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“The Continuing Challenges to Peace”

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Singapore Management University,**

**Professor Arnoud De Meyer, President of Singapore Management
University,**

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Centre,**

Members of the Diplomatic Corps,

Distinguished Faculty members and students of SMU,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

**As we begin to look back on 2015, we realize that the
challenges to peace have not diminished. Old challenges like
nuclear proliferation and interstate conflict die hard, and newer
challenges like terrorism, climate change and mass migration
threaten the status quo.**

The turbulence of 2015 is a stark reminder that new and old challenges to peace and a once-in-a-generation power shift potentially threaten to derail Asia's return to development and economic prosperity. It is a reminder of the perpetual cycle of opportunities and challenges in international affairs.

As we move into 2016, the turbulence and ripple effects caused by a return to great-power geopolitics; the assertive rise of new powers accompanied by the reflexive resistance of powers in relative decline; the uncertainties of increased political and economic multipolarity; global problems seemingly beyond the reach of global consensus; the spread of violent extremism; and the on-going perennial challenges of poverty, health and natural disasters, all seem to be combining into a toxic brew that threaten to reach boiling point in 2016.

The situation requires our continued attention, diligent search for solutions, and the dedicated application of both knowledge and wisdom.

I commend therefore the Singapore Management University for its initiative in organizing the Annual Ikeda Peace and Harmony Lecture series to focus attention on the key issues of our times.

Let us begin close to home.

In Asia, growing prosperity risks being undermined by competition. Competition over resources, influence, security and control over the rules of the game.

The challenge for all of us seeking avenues to peace in Asia, is to cast a solid foundation for stability and prosperity, in a time where disorder and conflict threaten to break out. How do we foster an environment where comfort and trust breed collective responses to collective problems?

How can we build a regional architecture which can accommodate the rise of new powers, but also leaves smaller countries enough space and self-determination to be in control of their own affairs?

How can we create an environment which can absorb challenges to peace instead of exacerbating them?

For Asia, one answer lies in ASEAN. I know this is the usual fallback position, and ASEAN has been around for so long, it seems redundant and even passé to keep referring to it. But in the coming era of turbulence, a proactive and creative ASEAN will be even more central to preserving peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific.

ASEAN has become the most widely accepted vehicle for regional governance as it encompasses the traditional Asian values and oriental customs of our collective ancestors: pragmatism, informal discussion and win-win compromise.

These values and customary way of doing things must be embedded into the emerging regional architecture of Asia.

ASEAN centrality must be synergised with sub-regional and multilateral institutions that can serve as the building blocks for peace.

The challenges that we have faced in Asia and beyond in 2015 are still a long way from being solved in 2016. But utilisation of the traditional Asian values and oriental customs enshrined at the core of ASEAN DNA, along with grassroots involvement, must be the connector for the building blocks in order to create a more viable and sustainable regional architecture to overcome challenges to peace and prosperity.

The ASEAN region has not been immune to the global trends that have affected other regions.

The influence of non-state actors, particularly terrorists, on the international system has never been so profound.

On August 17 this year, Bangkok became victim to its worst terrorist attack in recent history. The bombers targeted worshippers at an iconic shrine popular with locals and tourists. Twenty people were killed and more than 130 innocent bystanders injured. It was a reminder of the reach of global terrorism in the 21st Century. Nationals from Singapore, China, Malaysia, Indonesia, Hong Kong and Thailand were victims of the attack. Nationals from Turkey and Thailand along with members of an ethnic Moslem minority from central Asia were involved in the attack.

Instability in the Middle East and North Africa has been intensified by the rise of the Islamic State.

This year during Ramadan, ISIS claimed responsibility for a series of attacks across the Arab world; a gunman opened fire at a popular tourist resort in Tunisia killing 40, a suicide bomber killed 27 and injured 227 in a mosque in Kuwait, and in Kobani, Syria, 220 were killed as IS fighters detonated 3 car bombs in crowded civilian areas.

The Islamic State which control parts of Iraq and Syria, claims jurisdiction over an area larger than Italy and with over 8 million people. The UN estimates that 22,000 foreign fighters from 100 countries, including ASEAN countries, have joined ISIS, in addition to the 40,000 from Syria and Iraq.

Terrorist groups threaten our citizens, our freedoms and way of life at home, and the very future of the international system abroad.

In recent years, terrorist groups have devised a brand of extremism, hatred and fear, packaged under the cloak of a legitimate religion and broadcast their diabolical activities to the world through the internet and the world social media.

For some young men and women, many of whom feel ostracized in their homes or communities, many of whose prospects are unsure, or whose personal values match the extremism, joining the extremist groups becomes an attractive proposition.

How do we counter this threat?

Our governments, police and intelligence forces must continue to be vigilant in their counterterrorism efforts to make sure domestic terrorists can't hurt our citizens.

It is in the best interests of all countries in the world to work together against the global threat of terrorism. The Member States of the United Nations agreed on a Global Strategy to counter terrorism in 2006 with an action plan that includes measures to

address the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism, measures to build state capacity to fight terrorism, and measures to ensure human rights.

But like so many UN resolutions and plans of action, including the eighteen universal instruments against international terrorism that have been adopted, this Global Strategy of 2006 is not being adhered to, and indeed few have even heard about it. Civil society organizations everywhere must call attention to this agreement, monitor compliance and press for full implementation. More of us need to become involved in order that more can be achieved for more people.

Many terrorists come from the poorest and most war torn countries in the world. We cannot stop our efforts to provide aid and assistance in these places which need it most. As His Holiness the Dalai Lama has said, “Peace is the manifestation of human compassion.”

As we cannot have development without security, we obviously cannot have security and peace without development. As the honorable Daisaku Ikeda, the founder of Soga Gakkai International once said, “It is impossible to build one’s own happiness on the unhappiness of others.”

We must continue to have exchanges of experiences on reconciliation, sharing of different ideas, understanding of different beliefs.

We must also support the initiatives to hold interfaith dialogues in all corners of the globe in order to foster understanding of different values and cultures so as to bring about a culture of tolerance and a habit of living peacefully together even when different.

Indeed, it is this collective society of harmony even when segments are different that we must aspire to. Recognition of

differences and the need of each other to co-exist is the orientation all of us must help promote.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The death and destruction caused by terrorist acts capture the headlines. But there is in addition a less dramatic, less easily seen threat to the global community. In fact, some of the world's biggest killers are those which are entirely preventable, and which have been with us for a long time. These are the diseases and viruses that have more-or-less been eliminated as causes of death in developed countries, but remain prevalent in developing countries in Asia, Africa and South America -- malaria, diphtheria, hepatitis, measles, and mumps.

It is estimated that malaria kills 580,000 people each year in Africa, Asia and the Pacific. Diarrhoea alone killed 1.25 million people in 2013.

Around the world, 2.6 billion people lack basic sanitation, 1.1 billion have no access to safe water of whom 400 million are children. This year, 1.4 million children will die from lack of sanitation and safe drinking water.

This reflects great economic disparities around the world, 12% of the world's population uses 85% of its water. Of the 1.8 billion people who have access to a clean water source within a one kilometre radius from their homes, the average person consumes 20 litres of water a day. In the UK, the average person uses 50 litres of water a day to flush toilets.

Poor sanitation, lack of clean water and diseases are the consequence of poverty. As we all know, over 2.2 billion live below the poverty line on less than 2USD a day. 80% of humanity live on less than 10USD a day.

According to the UN, every 3.6 seconds one person dies of starvation. According to UNICEF, some 300 million children go to

bed hungry every day. Over 22,000 children die each day due to poverty -- 15 every minute. In the words of UNICEF, these children "die quietly in some of the poorest villages on earth, far removed from the scrutiny and the conscience of the world. Being weak and meek in life makes these dying multitudes even more invisible in death."

The invisible but preventable deaths, the quiet suffering of large portions of humanity, must weigh on our collective conscience. If the attention of governments continue to be diverted by other matters, international NGOs and civil society must step in to do more. There can be no real peace, no harmony in the international community until the injustice of these invisible deaths are effectively addressed.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

There has been another long-standing threat to peace for the global community. In the second half of the 20th Century, the world

lived in the shadow of a nuclear Armageddon. In April this year, there was a piece of good news. The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action on Iran's nuclear programme was agreed upon in Vienna. The agreement seeks to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons, and commits Iran to destroying 98 percent of its stockpile of enriched uranium.

This is a hopeful development in preventing nuclear armaments proliferation. It is something that should be welcomed by all peace-loving peoples.

The deal is not built on trust, but on verification, and we must wait to see how all the commitments are adhered to before it can be lauded a success. At the very least, however, the agreement halted a potentially disastrous nuclear weapons arms race in the volatile Middle East region.

The comprehensive nature of the Iran nuclear agreement, took into account the overall security and economic interests of a

potential nuclear-weapons country, and involved the active participation in the negotiations of all the major powers.

In contrast, the North Korean nuclear programme seems no closer to being resolved. North Korea continues to seek concessions from China, its neighbours and Western countries while continuing its nuclear programme and intensifying its bellicose rhetoric. Compromise with North Korea's leaders seems unlikely, but so too did negotiations with Iranian leaders. As I observed at a recent conference in Seoul, South Korea recently, the Iran deal can hopefully serve as a model for disarmament negotiations with other nuclear weapons states, particularly North Korea.

Even beyond rogue states possessing nuclear capabilities, the number of nuclear weapons in existence has increased tremendously, and continues to be a cause for concern.

According to the civil society watchdog group Nuclear Threat Initiative, over 2 dozen nations have the materials needed for

nuclear weapons, and there is nearly 2,000 metric tons of it, enough to make thousands of bombs. These dangerous materials are stored in hundreds of different sites around the world, both military and civilian locations, where security is sometimes minimal.

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has revealed that more than 100 incidents of thefts are reported each year involving nuclear and radioactive materials.

Collectively, we must reaffirm our efforts to prevent the spread of nuclear material and strive for a future free of nuclear weapons. At the state level, we have to renew the tools used to prevent proliferation. The International Atomic Energy Agency – IAEA -- must be strengthened and its mandate enlarged.

We must be vigilant against rogue states and terrorist groups, and prevent them from acquiring nuclear materials. We must undertake counter proliferation measures.

And we must continually remind the nine current nuclear weapons states that peace and security can exist without depending on nuclear capabilities. There must be concrete achievements at the Fourth Nuclear Security Summit scheduled to be held in the United States next year, especially concerning measures for securing nuclear and radioactive materials.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The year has been bookended by two severe migration crises.

Now in Europe and the Middle East, millions of Syrians are still searching for new homes as their country has been devastated by an intensifying civil war which has morphed into an international flashpoint. According to the United Nations, the Syria crisis has become the worst migration crisis since the end of the Second World War. According to the UNHCR, over 4 million Syrian refugees have been created since 2011.

From January to March this year, ASEAN faced severe criticism during the Rohingya crisis. Tens of thousands of ‘boat people’ originating from the Bay of Bengal – mostly from Rakhine State in Myanmar, some from elsewhere – boarded rickety, old boats in the hope of a better life in Thailand, Malaysia or Indonesia.

The lack of a regional framework for handling such a crisis was plainly evident.

Negotiations were chaotic, press conferences embarrassing and the whole ordeal was damaging to ASEAN, not to mention victims seeking to escape poverty and persecution. Eventually, Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia were able to provide respite to the crisis. But a solution at the source of the problem will be almost impossible to achieve through existing regional governance mechanisms. There are indications that the outflow will once again begin.

The Rohingya refugee outflow is but one part of a global phenomenon. According to United Nations figures, there are now more displaced people and refugees than at any other time in recorded history -- some 60 million in all. Over 10 million of them are estimated to be on a migratory march. This reflects situations of failed states, unending war, intractable conflicts, and economic deprivation. We must work to prevent this global crisis from unduly affecting our region.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The human tragedies of displaced people, refugees and migrants and the challenges they pose to governments have been compounded by the increasing occurrence of natural disasters.

In October of this year, Japan was struck by tropical storm Etau, which resulted in severe flooding across Honshu island. It caused great financial damage for the country, and great personal damage for the families of those who lost their lives, and the

hundreds of thousands who were affected by the cyclone. But for many of us in Asia, most memorable was the efficiency and pace of the response and clean up after the disaster. Japan is a country which is fortunate to have the capacity and expertise to organise a coordinated, organised response to a disaster of this scale. The government was able to deploy thousands of personnel and dozens of helicopters from their Self-Defence, metropolitan police and fire department forces to lead the rescue of citizens in distress.

Other countries in Asia are not as fortunate to have the resources and technical capacities for this kind of response. In July this year a severe monsoon season led to floods across the west of Myanmar. The impact was devastating. 103 people died and over million were directly affected by the floods. And in April an earthquake with a magnitude of 8.1 on the Richter scale struck close to Kathmandu, and triggered an avalanche on Mt. Everest in Nepal. Over 9,000 were killed as a result of the main quake and aftershocks, which are still continuing to this day.

In Nepal and Myanmar, and countless other disasters in recent memory, the international response to these disasters is always heartening. Countries from every corner of the earth are eager to provide financial aid, technical assistance or emergency food and water supplies. Public donation drives wanting to help out neighbours in distress are always well received; after the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, everyday donors and NGOs from around the world were able to raise over 5 billion dollars to assist in the recovery efforts.

While there is often a tremendously heartwarming response from governments and citizens when countries in crisis require need, generous international assistance must be put into well coordinated, tangible assistance for the people affected which is where disaster responses too often fall short. This again was evident in the aftermath of the Nepal and Myanmar disasters.

It is not the resources or will which are lacking, it is the disaster response capacities which need to be strengthened. It is

ensuring that money and emergency supplies makes it out of government or NGO accounts and reaches the people that need it most.

It is ensuring that where there is a generous financial response from donors worldwide, the recipients are transparent with the donations, and that the pledges are met with concrete action. It is about making sure that the operations of volunteer military or emergency units are coordinated at a central command centre to ensure that they are reaching the most important areas and that their contributions do not overlap or interfere with each other.

It is about ensuring the best mitigation measures are in place, such as building quality standards, evacuation procedures or early warning systems.

In ASEAN we have seen some our fair share of disasters. From the 2004 tsunami, to Cyclone Nargis in Myanmar in 2008 and

Typhoon Yolanda in the Philippines in 2013, to recent aeroplane accidents in the region.

As climate change will bring more frequent and intense natural disasters, the demand for Southeast Asia to be able to undertake coordinated, streamlined responses to disasters affecting the region will only intensify.

The importance of this is reflected in the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Blueprint, one of the three pillars of the ASEAN Community due to come in force at the beginning of next year.

It stresses the importance of seeing through the implementation of the "ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response" and the ongoing operations of the "ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on disaster management." These plans aim to develop the disaster response and organisational capacities across ASEAN member states, and support the ongoing operations of the "ASEAN-

Emergency Rapid Assessment Team" and disaster mitigation activities. The final goal is for full coordination and inter-operability across the region in disaster response.

The "One ASEAN One Response" is aimed at strengthening ASEAN's solidarity and capacity to respond collectively to natural disasters. It is an ambitious project. But it is one that ASEAN should not step back from. Natural disasters do not discriminate. They strike without warning or notice. We don't know when or where they will strike. So it is incumbent upon the governments and citizens of ASEAN to ensure that our collective responses to any natural disaster, no matter the cause, time or location, is coordinated and comprehensive. In doing so, it can set an example for the rest of the region.

The haze phenomenon, however, indicates that we are a long way from setting such an example. Singaporeans are, understandably, particularly sensitive to haze. It is more than an inconvenience. I don't have to remind Singaporeans of this. Foreign

Minister Vivian Balakrishnan said the other day, and I quote, “This is a deliberate, man-made tragedy, vandalism against society, against the environment ...”

The haze also impacts business and health. The World Health Organisation estimates that around one eighth of total global deaths, are a result of air pollution, and this health impact can cost a country 2 to 4% of its GDP. This past two months, haze has affected Indonesia, Malaysia, southern part of Thailand and as far as the Philippines.

Haze is symptomatic of many of the challenges facing ASEAN. Similar to Rohingya migrants, border disputes or establishing an effective human rights watchdog, it seems like the establishment of a rules-based community with a framework to adequately resolve cross-border crises in ASEAN is still a long way off. These kinds of simple collective action problems still seem so hard to resolve.

At a time when we need ASEAN to be stronger and more relevant than ever before, there are a number of challenges.

ASEAN has made great strides in building up its institutions and community, but implementation of agreements reached is still at a minimum. Why ASEAN cannot put in place an automatic trigger mechanism where disaster relief efforts can be mobilized immediately whenever disaster occurs? We should consider whether an ASEAN + 3 Emergency Relief Fund can be established to strengthen the relief operations.

A recent survey found that as little as 30% of the commitments made among the ASEAN member states are ever implemented. No central mechanism exists to enforce compliance. Nor is there a properly functioning dispute settlement mechanism across economic or political spheres. The ASEAN Secretariat remains largely under-utilized -- this of course has its pros and cons. Nevertheless, the rate of compliance will have to be improved, otherwise the many ASEAN meetings and resolutions will increasingly be irrelevant.

The collective interests of ASEAN are rarely put ahead of the interests of individual member states. Policymakers seek independence over interdependence. This limits ASEAN's ability to encourage cooperation -- even in areas that should not be controversial, such as disaster relief and other issues of human security. This is because there is a continuing tension between a rules-based community which is implicit in the efforts to achieve the ASEAN Economic Community, and "ASEAN Way" which emphasizes non-intervention in domestic affairs of members, leaving each country to put national priorities before ASEAN.

Southeast Asia has come a long way in opening up borders, reducing tariffs, creating opportunities and enabling stability. But it is still made up of ten disparate sovereign states, each with their own brand of governments, interests and domestic challenges.

But despite these shortcomings, I feel the case for ASEAN has never been more persuasive, not just for its member countries but also for the Asia-Pacific as a whole.

The frustration over our weakness due to diversities should be seen as our strength, which has bound us together for 48 years, and will be strengthened over further in the future.

These challenges are significant, but they are manageable and not insurmountable. The ASEAN Community, set to come into force by at the start of next year, is a step in the right direction.

The centrepiece of this effort is the ASEAN Economic Community.

The AEC is the vehicle to drive our economic growth through further integration, development of a single market and trade liberalisation.

But the prospect for economic cooperation within ASEAN alone is simply not enough to ensure peace and stability.

Thus, ASEAN Community project must also give importance to its two additional complementary pillars: the Socio-Cultural and Political-Security Communities. The AEC captures the most

attention because it is all about the money in our pockets, but such economic prosperity cannot be sustained without a strong political-security framework, and a robust socio-cultural underpinning.

Without a mechanism to provide the capacity with which to build people-to-people links, meet, talk and share cultural experiences, then the economic integration and development will not be sustainable. We therefore need to give much more attention and focus to this Socio-Cultural Community pillar.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Upon the founding of ASEAN in 1967 at Laemtan, just east of Bangkok, Dr. Thanat Khoman the former Thai foreign minister and one of the founding fathers of the Association declared: "What millions of men and women in our part of the world want is to erase the old and obsolete concept of domination and subjection of the past, and to replace it with a new spirit of give and take, of equality and partnership."

This was spoken in the context of the height of the Cold War. The countries of Asia were in danger of falling like dominoes to Communism. The spectre of mutually assured destruction hung over our heads. The fear that small countries could be subjugated by the superpowers was real.

The goals outlined by Dr. Thanat are still needed to overcome the continuing challenges to peace. We are again in a regional environment which threatens to return to tensions of old; Dr. Thanat's words are just as prophetic today as they were 48 years ago.

As China and the United States continue to squabble and threaten the peace and stability of the region, there are fears that smaller nations will get caught in the crossfires.

This years' East Asia Summit will be held in Kuala Lumpur in two weeks' time, returning again to Malaysia for the first time since the inaugural meeting in 2005. Southeast Asia will again host the

leaders of China, the United States, India, Russia, Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand in what has become the most broad and comprehensive regional forum, to try to narrow their differences, build trust and comfort and work towards a peaceful 2016. ASEAN's East Asia Summit is the cornerstone of the regional order.

The ASEAN Way, has been the centrepiece to ASEAN's existence for the past 48 years and the appeal of the East Asia Summit. It stresses the respect for independence and sovereignty, the need for non-interference in neighbours' affairs, renunciation of the use of force, and most importantly effective cooperation and diplomatic solutions to disputes.

ASEAN has extended its own multilateral practices to gather in other states, welcoming them to enter into dialogue and to find consensus, once they agree to the set rules.

These rules and norms have been accepted across the region because they complement the Asian values and oriental customs of our ancestors. They stress the importance of valuing relationships and maintaining regular contacts and engaging in informal and heart-to-heart discussions through quiet diplomacy.

Oriental tradition is not one of ‘winner-takes-all,’ or blunt confrontations but rather to move towards win-win accommodation and consensus-based collective decisions for the greater common good. It values prudence over recklessness, moderation over extremism, reason over folly, leading not to perpetual war, but towards peaceful co-existence.

I therefore believe that ASEAN continues to be ideal foundation upon which to build a regional order. It is stable and non-threatening. It is well institutionalised and trustworthy. It does not have any enemies or old grudges, and it is independent. It has been, and continues to be a regional stabilizer and a regional bridge for countries within and outside the region.

And for 48 years, it has proved its durability.

The principle of non-interference has remained at its core since 1967. It has forced us to compromise, improve our understanding, to take a moderate, prudent path rather than to quickly point the blame. It has given us time to overcome misunderstandings or long-held grudges. Most importantly, it has given us the space to learn the importance of starting to build trust.

But we must not rest on our laurels. If we want to remain at the centre of the region's organisations we have to be pre-emptive. We have to remain united internally and independent externally.

But most importantly ASEAN centrality must be synergised with other sub-regional and multilateral proposals that can serve as the building blocks for peace.

ASEAN should be at the forefront of forging new institutions that can further deepen and broaden regional integration. Proposals from great and small powers alike should be welcomed, but woven

into the existing architecture. They should be complementary, not competitive. And we have to engage grassroots and government levels, civil society and business, to encourage them to create new mechanisms to foster peace and stability.

What are some of the emerging building blocks of the new regional architecture?

Chinese initiatives to spur growth and prosperity in the region, such as through the Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st Century Maritime Silk Road plans and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) are a signal of a newly engaged and neighbourly Beijing. On one hand, they should be welcomed as necessary influxes of funds and expertise into a region so desperately lacking infrastructural development. A China which is active and engaged is good for the region, and we should encourage and accommodate these overtures.

China sees the Belt and Road Initiative as a new form of regional cooperation, a new alternative model to development and symbol of its contribution to international society and global governance for the 21st Century.

ASEAN should encourage China to make use of existing regional mechanisms as far as possible. For example, many parts of the Belt and Road initiative weaves ASEAN, , particularly countries in the Mekong River region with sub-regional institutions in South Asia, Central Asia, the Middle East and connected ultimately to Europe. AIIB will complement the Asian Development Bank, the World Bank, and Japan's infrastructure financing initiatives in upgrading infrastructure in Asia.

To ensure that competing visions for regional order don't start to undermine the peace and stability of the region, China and the other major powers active in the region should be encouraged to deepen and strengthen the existing mechanisms of the regional architecture.

However, we should not just be encouraging the great powers to contribute to the ASEAN centric regional architecture. We ourselves must be proactive in injecting the ASEAN-centric regional architecture with deeper integration and governance.

Chief among this is the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, the RCEP, built upon the ASEAN Free Trade Agreements with India, China, Japan, South Korea and Australia and New Zealand.

The ten countries of ASEAN want to be in control of our own destinies. We cannot be vulnerable to the whims of the great powers. We have to take a proactive, driving role in enabling a regional architecture that is open and peaceful. It is essential that a united, proactive ASEAN remains at the centre of the regional architecture. Pressing towards completing the RCEP is the first step on that path.

The Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) was signed in October to both jubilation and concern. In ASEAN, Singapore is a signatory,

one of the original 4 along with Brunei, as are Malaysia and Vietnam. For Singapore, the TPP offers a chance to further advance its position as not only a regional, but a global trading hub.

The TPP and the RCEP in the Asia-Pacific, are reactions to the complete breakdown of the Doha Development Round of the World Trade Organization in 2008. The narrative we often see of the talks on RCEP and TPP is that these regional trade negotiations are part of the competition between China and the United States. The TPP is billed as the economic arm of the American pivot. The RCEP as the Chinese-led version of its own economic Marshall Plan. Both, it is often said, are about entrenching trade and legal standards across the region beneficial to the great powers' interests.

But it is often forgotten that the plans for these trade agreements initially did not originate in Washington or Beijing. The TPP started with the Pacific 4, ASEAN members Brunei and Singapore along with New Zealand and Chile.

More importantly, the RCEP was an ASEAN proposal launched at the 2011 ASEAN Summit. The RCEP has ASEAN DNA at its core, and we must keep it that way.

Completing negotiations on the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, which involves all 10 ASEAN countries plus China, Japan, South Korea, India, Australia and New Zealand must now be prioritised. China, and the 6 ASEAN countries not party to the TPP, will not want to be left behind in this new era of multilateral free trade blocs. The RCEP is aimed at expanding free trade across Asia, but also standardising some of the various existing free trade agreements across the region.

It is imperative, therefore, that completion of the RCEP be prioritised, and collectively ASEAN should take the lead in trying to press for realization of RCEP.

The TPP and RCEP are not that different, and particularly for ASEAN, their goals are complementary. RCEP can be ASEAN's economic building block for the region's peace and prosperity.

Last year at the APEC Summit in Beijing, China proposed a revival of the multilateral Free Trade Agreement of the Asia Pacific (FTAAP) to encompass all APEC member economies. This was first proposed within APEC in 2006, as a way to link up the various bi- and mini-lateral and the competing RCEP and TPP trade negotiations. It would include the 21 economies on the Pacific Rim, including bringing the two superpowers under the same trade arrangements. It is an ambitious proposal and would take time to complete, but it is a worthy endeavour.

China's proposal to revive the FTAAP is evidence that it does have a will to constructively engage with its neighbours. It shows the importance China places on economic growth and integration in the Asia-Pacific. And it shows that China is willing to utilize many

of the existing mechanisms of the regional order in its foreign policy, such as reviving a dormant APEC proposal.

But it is also evident that China will be impatient with slow progress on important regional issues. Slow progress on RCEP is indicative of this. So if ASEAN is to remain the foundation of a peaceful future, and if we are to protect the norms and rules of the regional architecture, we must show leadership and provide deliverable solutions which retain core ASEAN values at their heart, not just with the RCEP vis-à-vis the TPP and the FTAAP, but also on border and maritime issues, human rights problems and the continuing challenges to peace. ASEAN must be creative in reducing tension in the South China Sea. An economic cooperation dialogue such as joint fishery management and joint development areas for oil and gas among claimant states can complement negotiations on the Code of Conduct and divert to areas which are less confrontational.

If we don't, other alternatives to regional order, which may not be as stable or prosperous, might start to emerge.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As we grapple with the emerging regional security, political and economic architecture for the 21st Century, we must find mechanisms to help weave together the various emerging building blocks.

Societies in Asia still value traditional wisdom, the role of respected elders and quiet dialogue among family members. Asia is also a triangular society where one contact can lead to and is often necessary for making contact with another party. We therefore have traditionally valued and are receptive to intermediaries, neutral coordinators, third parties, which seek to reduce tensions, foster dialogue, facilitate agreements, and prevent potential conflict situations from getting out of control through quiet diplomacy. It is here where grassroots support and civil society engagement has the

potential to play this essential role as neutral third parties to build trust, engage participants and create a private space for negotiation and reconciliation to take place.

In this context, the Asian Peace and Reconciliation Council (APRC), of which I am currently Chairman, was founded in September 2012 on the premise that all differences are reconcilable through peaceful processes and the traditional Asian Way.

The APRC is a track-one-and-a-half, which brings together former Heads of State and Government and former Ministers from various regions of the world who are interested in and concerned with peace, stability and progress in Asia.

The Founding Members of APRC aim to use their experiences to contribute to fostering a peaceful environment in Asia, to facilitate peace dialogue that would be conducive to its peace and prosperity. We have been working through quiet diplomacy on issues such as the South China Sea and the Rohingya refugees.

The APRC is a complementary institution which seeks to build on the traditional Asian values I have spoken about: respect for the wisdom of elders, consensual decision-making, and quiet diplomacy. This can help lessen tensions in potential conflict areas which threaten the stability of the region, as well as encourage resolution of humanitarian issues.

With an emerging regional architecture of several building blocks, I believe non-governmental organisations like APRC and SGI (Soka Gakkai International) have the ability to generate attention on particular issues, propose solutions, change mind-sets and muster resources.

Ladies and Gentlemen, it therefore gives me great pleasure to be here today at the Singapore Management University. I am honored to have been asked to deliver the inaugural Annual Ikeda Peace and Harmony Lecture. I am delighted to see that more institutes and distinguished thinkers in Asia are joining together to try to create a region which can absorb the continuing

challenges to peace. Grassroots and civil society and academic institutions have a pivotal role to play in creating a viable and sustainable regional architecture for peace and prosperity.

Not only can we learn lessons from each other, but we can work together to promote peace and prosperity in the region. As seen in the Asian and the ASEAN way, I suggest that we must emphasize the cardinal tenets which the APRC has taken as its guiding principles that are shared by our oriental ancestors – non-interference, silent or quiet diplomacy, and the consent and comfort level of all concerned parties.

We, as Asians, are enriched with our thousands of years old oriental wisdoms upon which we can learn to base our diplomacy and initiatives to move forward. But the structures that we create must be people-centric in their perception and implementation. When people-centric and based on our own oriental wisdoms, peace and cooperation will not be beyond our achievement.

Singapore has been at the forefront of conceptualizing “Asian Values” and bringing them to the world’s attention. Singapore’s leaders and citizens must continue to lead the way in the efforts to embed Asian values and the ASEAN Way into the emerging regional structures and arrangements.

ASEAN centrality and ASEAN connectivity must be synergised with sub-regional and multilateral institutions, including the new initiatives from major powers, that can serve as the building blocks for peace. The ASEAN Way, along with grassroots involvement, must be the connector for the building blocks in order to create a more viable and sustainable regional architecture for peace and prosperity.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are entering dangerous and uncertain times when events seem to be beyond the control of any single power or coalition of powers. Perennial problems of poverty, disease, inequality of

opportunity, have been left to fester and in many ways have morphed into violent extremism, religious and even civilizational confrontations. The march towards global development and prosperity is severely threatened. For the first time in recorded history, more young people see a future for themselves as being less bright than those of their parents.

We must do all we can to keep hope alive. In the shadow of despair, we must help to carve out the contours of hope. Peace and harmony need a foundation of hope.

A book has been brought to my attention. It is entitled “The Gift of Age”. In it there is a poem by Dr. Kirpal Singh called “Why should I give up?” I would like to paraphrase it here:

“Why should I give up

Though I am old and grey

My eyes and arms work okay ...

Why should I give up ...

There are ways to move deeper

Into the regions beyond grief

Why should I give up

The city is my home

Here I shall work and play ...

Challenging the norms of old ...

No, I shall never give up

Until He, the one and only, calls

And even then, with my last breath

I will still say

Why, why should I give up? ”

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

In an uncertain world, in the midst of many challenges old and new, we have a mission and a duty. Those are to ensure that the elderly would not have lived in vain, that women get the same opportunities in life, and that the young will inherit a better world. Yes, in the pursuit of these goals, we cannot and must not give up.

Thank you very much for your attention.
