

ADDRESS BY H.E. DR MAKARIM WIBISONO
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'COMBATING MALNUTRITION:
AN ALL STAKEHOLDERS BREAKTHROUGH CONFERENCE'
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Excellencies, Ladies and gentlemen,

The relationship between the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the European Union is mainly a story of trade. The figures in this regard are quite eloquent: In 2011 the EU imported for more than 93 billion Euros of goods from the ASEAN community. On its turn, the European Union represents ASEAN's largest export markets. As ASEAN members are currently experiencing strong economic growth, one can only expect this relationship to grow even stronger.

However, the story does not end with trade. The two communities share something else; namely, an unwavering dedication to ameliorate the livelihoods and living conditions of the most fragile amongst us. To this end both entities have equipped themselves with ad hoc agencies, such as the ASEAN Foundation, that have made firm commitments to the UN Millennium Goals and translated them into encouraging tangible results. These 8 universally accepted goals aim to give every man and woman on the planet a chance to a decent and healthy existence. It is not an accident that the first of these MDGs reads "the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger."

Unfortunately, as your conference already so comprehensively explained, hunger still continues to kill; indiscriminately, infamously and intolerably. From the 870 million people who suffer from hunger and malnutrition, almost all are in developing countries and 2/3 are in Asia and Oceania. The ASEAN community is thus at the center of this fight against malnutrition and needs to maintain a special focus on the more than 200 million children whose lives are negatively affected if they do not receive the necessary nutrients within their first 1000 days.

In this context, it is interesting to underline the efforts and concrete results the Republic of Indonesia has made in achieving the first MDG. Since 1990, Indonesia has succeeded to substantially reduce the number of people and especially infants suffering from hunger and malnutrition. More specifically, in 1989, for example, more than 30% of the infants were underweight, by 2010 that number had been brought back to 17,9 %. Similarly, the prevalence of infants with undernutrition was reduced from 23,8 % in 1989 to 13% in 2010. Moreover, the Indonesian government has strengthened the local governments in their MDG attainment efforts and has put into place incentives for local governments rewarding those performing well in achieving the MDGs. Yet silent undernutrition persists both in East Indonesia and in urban areas.

In spite of these promising trends there is room for improvement. Only 3 of the eleven ASEAN countries are on track with regards to their MDG hunger goals. It is therefore of paramount importance that our community furthers its investments in other demonstrated successful approaches and models.

Mrs. Erna Witoelar, the former UN Special Ambassador on MDGs in Asia Pacific, recently explained that in order to achieve MDGs targets all stakeholders must be involved from grassroots to highest officials as well as the private sector. Mrs. Witoelar underlined that the cooperation with the corporations is essential to create PPP/ CSR initiatives that can improve and accelerate the effort to meet up the MDGs's targets. This call was echoed on October 2012 by Minister Prof Dr. Armida S. Alisjahbana, Minister of Planning and Development of Indonesia who stressed the urgency of having a public-private partnership (PPP) approach and on that basis to encourage harmonization with various companies.

This reflects what H.E. Hidayat, Minister of Industry of the Republic of Indonesia, stated to PA International's conference last year. Allow me to reprise his exact words for reasons of clarity:

“The European Union and ASEAN may wish to further develop this particular model that is based on facilitation by governments from the North and the South and by industrial cooperation and partnering between companies from the North and the South. This would be a new way and possibly a much more effective and lasting way to combat malnutrition in Indonesia, throughout Asia and indeed in all parts of the world.”

Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, with such eminent experts concurring so adamantly on the course to go, the lessons from this conference gain a uniquely valuable resonance. Indeed the large volume of EU-ASEAN Trade demonstrates a huge CSR potential. Indeed the technological cooperation and industrial partnership of the EU-ASEAN framework can help address the gaps in the food value aid chain. Indeed the European Commission can provide guidance on how such CSR can be initiated by an EU-ASEAN generated PPP.

The ASEAN Foundation with its recognized social track record is ready to provide the necessary assistance for such cooperation. Fusing governmental and industrial resources and expertise with each other, we can bridge our different interests to finally put a halt to unnecessary death of more than 2 million children a year.

As you may very well know, Asia is the home of many nature-induced disasters. From tsunamis to earthquakes, the perils of our natural environment dangerously abound. At the same time our planet abounds of food, plentiful for everyone. Hunger is thus not an inescapable fatality but merely the shameful result of the unequal distribution of resources. However, we can fight malnutrition efficiently, successfully. Today's conference has confirmed the private sector's willingness and ability to step into the fight and deliver the precious knowledge-based and technological tools to galvanize our ranks. Optimizing the inclusion of the private sector in the chain will produce new means, new approaches and new products to put an end to what UNICEF has called the 'silent crisis'. We at the ASEAN Foundation are looking forward to cooperate with the European Union in adopting such a new holistic approach towards nutrition problems in the world. We are ready to help implement suitable models that this conference will no doubt produce.

Thank you very much.

Dr Makarim Wibisono
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