



ASEAN INTER-PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY

THE 11th MEETING OF THE AIPA FACT-FINDING COMMITTEE (AIFOCOM)

TO COMBAT THE DRUG MENACE

12th – 16th May 2014, Landmark Mekong Riverside Hotel

Vientiane, Lao People's Democratic Republic

THEME: "Enhancing Parliamentary Cooperation for a Drug Free ASEAN Community"

**OPENING REMARKS BY MR P O RAM,
SECRETARY- GENERAL, AIPA, AT THE OPENING
CEREMONY OF THE 11th MEETING OF AIFOCOM IN
VIENTIANE, 13 MAY 2014, AT 9.00 AM**

Your Excellency Mme Pany Yathoutou, the National Assembly of Lao PDR and President of 35th General Assembly,

Your Excellencies, Honorable Members of Parliaments,

Distinguished Guests, Fellow Secretaries General and Officials of Member Parliaments,

Ladies & Gentlemen,

This is the 11th meeting of the AIPA Fact-Finding Committee (AIFOCOM) over as many years. Within that space of time, many decisions were made and converted to Resolutions by the General Assembly.

AIFOCOM was established at the 22nd General Assembly held in September 2001 in Bangkok, Thailand, following the Resolution on ASEAN Program on Drug Abuse, Illicit Trafficking and Rehabilitation at Manila, Philippines, in 1999. Its first task was to work out the Terms of Reference for AIFOCOM and establish a channel of communication with the drug fighting agencies in the ASEAN and Special Observer countries on drug eradication.

The Terms of Reference drafted at the first meeting of AIFOCOM on 31 January 2002 in Hanoi and approved by the General Assembly in September of the same year also in Hanoi explicitly stated that:

“AIFOCOM shall undertake visits and conduct dialogues with Drug Fighting agencies of member countries and Special Observer countries to promote mutual understanding and the exchange of information.”

The Terms of Reference further set out the functions of AIFOCOM. In September 2000 in Singapore, the General Assembly under the Resolution on Combating the Drug Menace resolved to:

- Call upon ASEAN member countries to review their existing legislation on criminal offences relating to the various aspects of illicit trafficking and to ensure that such illicit activities are dealt with as serious offences; and
- Encourage and support the exchange of best practices and experiences among member countries, and also to provide training to member countries in the area of drug rehabilitation and aftercare of drug abusers.

Subsequently, the 25th General Assembly held in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, in 2004:

- affirmed that the AIPO Member Countries should formulate and harmonize legislation providing for a scheme of extradition

between them in order to ensure that each Member Country is not a safe haven for any fugitive involved in drug trafficking; and

- recognized that each AIPO Member country should form a Working Group on Handling Drug Abuse and illicit Drug Trafficking, composed of Parliamentarians, Government Officials and relevant Non-Governmental Organization Representatives in the Region, which will be responsible for producing annual indicators of success and progress toward the realization of a Drug-Free ASEAN by the year 2015 and to report to the next meeting of AIFOCOM.

It also resolved to:

- Call upon all AIPO Member Countries to enhance cooperation in the field of law enforcement through bilateral or multilateral treaties, and to establish through Mutual Legal Assistance consistently severe penalties for drug offenders wherever they are detained in ASEAN Member Countries;
- Call upon the ASEAN Senior Officials on Drug Matters (ASOD) to continue to take an active role in facilitating cooperation by inviting AIFOCOM Representatives to attend ASOD meetings as observers and to establish joint efforts among the parliaments, governments and relevant non-governmental organizations in the region to fight the drug scourge.

The intention behind the formation of AIFOCOM shows the concerns of the Member Parliaments to eradicate the illegal production, trafficking and consumption of drugs. This well-meant aspiration should be vigorously and rigorously pursued. The only question is how to fit AIFOCOM into the equation with similar bodies concerned with the same issues.

Since 2010, ASOD has not extended any invitation for AIPA to attend its meetings and has limited communication with the Secretariat, probably a result of oversight or a lack of significant contribution from AIPA in the form of very technical and sensitive inputs. We are likewise not in the loop with ASEAN Governments on illegal drug management for the same reasons.

Discussions at AIFOCOM meetings are usually concerned with the contents of country reports of the respective Member Parliaments presented at the meetings, setting out precisely each country's drug situation, information most probably already available in the public domain.

Last year, reports made at the AIFOCOM Meeting in Brunei revealed that the drug menace in all respects has not diminished in terms of the production of drugs (both natural and synthetic) or in the illegal trafficking or consumption of drugs.

To recap, the recommendations of the first ASOD held in Singapore in 1976 were in four major areas: enforcement and legislation; treatment and rehabilitation; prevention and information; and training and research.

The recommendations have influenced the creation of and provided the goals for AIFOCOM. They set out in totality the ways and means to eradicate the Drug Menace.

It may be more productive, in the long run, for AIFOCOM to focus its limited resources and energies on those areas where its contribution would have the most direct and greatest impact, such as legislation, where it is well-placed to do the job and more likely to be accepted as a valued contributor by all member states.

AIPA Secretariat, Your Excellency, would like to ask whether our quest to combat and eradicate the Drug Menace is on course and whether we need to re-evaluate our position and provide a different

strategy to be meaningful in our intent to eradicate the drug menace. We hope these thoughts would be uppermost in our minds at this and future meetings.

Your Excellency, I thank you for giving AIPA Secretariat an opportunity to speak at this forum.

Thank you.