

*The following article first appeared on the ASEAN Secretariat website (<http://www.asean.org/26155.htm>) on 11 April 2011:*

*“Preserving ASEAN’s Central Role in an Expanded EAS”*

ASEAN is determined to maintain its central role in the newly expanded East Asia Summit (EAS), says Dr Surin Pitsuwan, Secretary-General of ASEAN.

The ASEAN Leaders, at their 17th Summit in Ha Noi in October last year, agreed to invite Russia and the US to join the EAS effective 2011. The EAS will have 18 participating countries once Russia and the US join the forum later this year. Currently, the EAS comprises the ten ASEAN Member States, Australia, China, India, Japan, the Republic of Korea and New Zealand.

The ASEAN Foreign Ministers, at their Special Informal Meeting on EAS held in Bangkok, discussed the implications of this expanded EAS and the evolving nature of its agenda. The Ministers agreed that the agenda should not be limited to the existing five priority areas of cooperation (finance, education, disaster management, avian influenza, energy), but also include connectivity, Comprehensive Economic Partnership in East Asia (CEPEA), and other pressing areas of interests.

“The Foreign Ministers are determined to preserve the central role of ASEAN in an expanded EAS and they will continue to consult with all the six original non-ASEAN participating countries of the EAS and the two new countries of the EAS as they prepare for the 6th EAS later this year,” Dr Surin added.

“All the eight non-ASEAN participating countries of the EAS have re-affirmed the role of ASEAN as the driver of this process,” the Secretary-General also said. “Mindful of this expectation, the Ministers saw the need to have a more forward looking agenda that would serve the interest of ASEAN in an expanded EAS.”