

What to Expect at the 17th ASEAN Summit: A Briefing by ASEAN Secretary-General

ASEAN Secretary-General Surin Pitsuwan briefed the policy, business and academic communities, civil society organisations, media and other stakeholders in the ASEAN region and in three Dialogue Partners of ASEAN on issues before the 17th ASEAN Summit, the 5th East Asia Summit and related ASEAN Plus summits scheduled for 28-30 October 2010 in Hanoi.

The briefing – conducted through the World Bank's Global Learning Development Network (GDLN) in Asia-Pacific – connected the Secretary-General in Hanoi with participants in the host country Vietnam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand, and in three Dialogue Partners, Australia, India and Japan.

The 17th ASEAN Summit will focus on accelerating regional integration processes towards 2015, the date set for realising the ASEAN Community, and the work of regional cooperation mechanisms in confidence building.

ASEAN Leaders are expected to approve the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity, which Dr Surin highlighted as an important strategy for regional integration in physical infrastructure, institutional and people-to-people connections. This occasioned several comments and questions from participants attending the briefing on implications for employment and labour mobility, member country responsibilities in facilitating and regulating migrant worker flows, and connectivity with countries in the immediate vicinity of ASEAN.

Dr Surin highlighted two key characteristics of ASEAN: 1) open regionalism which signified ASEAN's inclusive way of relating to the international community, and 2) incrementalism which indicated the "work-in-progress" nature of community-building in ASEAN.

The 17th ASEAN Summit, which Dr Surin described as a "free-flow forum", would also discuss issues that ASEAN Leaders feel are important for regional cooperation and ASEAN's standing. The situation in Myanmar and the forthcoming elections scheduled for 7 November would most likely be a topic of discussions, as would each member's performance tracked by the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) Scorecard. The latter, observed Dr Surin, was a form of positive peer pressure that would help ensure that the 2015 deadline is on track. As for Myanmar, ASEAN had made known its views and concern and its willingness to assist the transition towards national reconciliation in that country.

Another topic on the agenda is the planned participation of Russia and the United States in the ASEAN-led East Asia Summit (EAS). ASEAN Leaders will review their Foreign Ministers' recommendation to formally welcome the two countries to join the EAS in 2011. Currently, EAS is made up of the ten ASEAN member states and six Dialogue Partners, Australia, China, India, Japan, Republic of Korea and New Zealand. The Russian foreign minister and the US Secretary of State will attend this year's EAS as guests of the chair.

The usual sideline meetings will also take place, including the ASEAN Plus One Summits with China, Japan, South Korea and India. ASEAN will also have a Summit meeting with the Russian President.

Vietnam will hand over ASEAN chairmanship to Indonesia at this Summit.