Statement by
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on behalf of the Association of South East Asian Nations

Agenda Item 24: Operational activities for development of the Second Committee
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(Please check against delivery)

Mr. Chairman,

I have the honour of delivering this statement on behalf of the ten member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), namely Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Viet Nam.

ASEAN associates itself with the statement made by the distinguished representative of Fiji on behalf of the Group 77 and China.

Mr. Chairman,

ASEAN would like to take this opportunity to reiterate the primary importance of the development pillar in the work of the United Nations. We believe that strengthening and intensifying development co-operation is in the interest of all countries and instrumental to consolidating and enhancing the other pillars of work of the United Nations, which are the maintenance of peace and security and the protection and promotion of human rights.

As developing countries that have gone through different stages of development, ASEAN members have benefited greatly and highly appreciate the assistance provided
by the UN through its operational activities for development. In this connection, as the Secretary-General and the President of the General Assembly reaffirmed during the ASEAN-United Nations Ministerial Meeting on 26 September 2013 the commitment of the UN to work closely with ASEAN towards their common goals as set out in the Joint Declaration on Comprehensive Partnership between ASEAN and the United Nations, ASEAN invites the UN development system to engage closely with ASEAN with a view to implementing the Comprehensive Partnership, including the attainment of the MDGs and support for ASEAN community building.

ASEAN holds the role of the UN development system in high regard and acknowledges the comparative advantages of the different UN funds, programs and specialised agencies. ASEAN believes also that operational activities carried out must ensure and promote national and regional ownership and be in line with the programme countries’ own development policies and priorities.

ASEAN commends efforts by the leadership and staff of the UN development system to promote UN development co-operation in many respects and particularly welcomes the adoption and implementation of resolution 67/226 on the Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review (QCPR) which provides very important guidance for operational activities for development in the coming years. We welcome the Secretary General’s report to ECOSOC which highlights implementation of the new QCPR at the early stages.

At the same time, ASEAN is concerned about the decline in funding for UN operational activities for development, as well as the overall decline in ODA in two consecutive years. This poses challenges to the operation of the UN development system, especially at the country level where programming activities take place. In this regard, we call on donor countries to honour their commitment to provide financing for UN operational activities, in particular to narrow the growing imbalance between core and non-core resources to ensure that UN operational activities for development could remain neutral, voluntary, universal and multilateral in nature. Against this backdrop, ASEAN would like to commend the positive trend in which contributions from developing countries is growing, totaling $562 million in 2011 and have increased by some 16% in nominal terms since 2006, of which about half was in the form of core contributions. In this connection, we look forward to the development of the concept of critical mass by UN funds and programs by the end of this year with a view to a decision by 2014 as stipulated by Resolution 67/226.

Secondly, as articulated in the QCPR resolution, the contribution of the UN development system is important in many fields, including addressing poverty eradication, capacity building, South-South cooperation, gender equality and women’s empowerment and sustainable development. We encourage the UN development system to continue assistance in these areas and to focus particularly in capacity building where, according to the Secretary General’s report on QCPR to ECOSOC, there is disparity in the perception of UN efforts dedicated to this field between the UN and national
governments. Development of national capacities in program countries will contribute to the crucial long term ability to address various development challenges presented to LDCs, LLDCs as well as middle income countries.

Thirdly, ASEAN strongly supports efforts to reform the UN development system with a view to enhancing greater coherence, effectiveness and efficiency at all levels and improving the UN’s mandate of operational activities for development. We recognize actions taken by the different UN funds and programs and entities to promote and implement this, such as the alignment of strategic planning cycles of key funds, programs, specialized agencies and other entities with the QCPR cycle and annual QCPR reporting to their respective governing bodies; and modest success in establishing some basic common services at the country level. However, simplification and harmonization of business practices remains challenging, and requires vigorous commitment from headquarters level. In this connection, we look forward to the Secretary-General to present plans for the establishment of common support services at the country, regional and headquarters levels, based on unified regulations and rules, policies and procedures in all functional areas of business operations with a view of implementation by 2016.

It is also important to emphasize that strong government ownership is critical to this process. In this regard, Delivering as One (DAO) is an example of such efforts. Based on implementation of the initiative in pilot and self-starter countries and evaluation reports, achievements have been recorded in a number of countries in enhancing coherence, relevance and efficiency of the UN development system in these countries, because in order to be relevant, efficient and effective and given the limited resources, UN development cooperation activities in DAO have to be more coherent in purpose, more coordinated and focused in action and more harmonized in management. It is recommended that the UN development system promote success stories and address the outstanding challenges, including the issue of declining funding and firm commitment by agencies’ headquarters. On the other hand, the principle of “no one size fits all” approach should be reiterated and the implementation of Delivering as One and/or other modalities, if necessary, has to be suitable and accommodate the specific characteristics and requirements of each particular country.

Mr. Chairman,

The growing role of South-South and triangular cooperation adds to the diversity of modalities in which countries work together to promote development. Many countries of the South have taken advantage of the common economic, social and regional characteristics to forge and boost partnerships and cooperation in various fields, in particular knowledge and expertise sharing at relatively low cost. The nature of South-South cooperation, based on mutual trust, equality and especially non-conditionality provides arguably more policy space for developing countries to implement priority areas for development. However, it is not to be considered as substitute but rather a complement to North-South co-operation. Despite the emergence of a number of developing countries that provide development assistance, total contributions from
developing countries for operational activities for development, for instance, only account for less than 2% of the overall funding. In this connection, ASEAN encourages member states to promote triangular cooperation, a modality in which two developing countries implement cooperation activities with the financial support of a donor country and/or a UN agency.

To this end, ASEAN welcomes the establishment of the UN Office for South-South cooperation and calls on the UN, with its central and neutral role in promoting development, to make greater effort to mobilise support for South-South cooperation and we encourage development partners to scale up financial assistance, knowledge sharing, technology transfer and peer-learning, strengthening of policy and institutional frameworks.

I thank you for your attention, Mr. Chairman.