

and communications; promotion of tourism, South East Asian studies, cultural, scientific, educational and administrative exchanges. The decision to set up an ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) was taken at the Fourth Summit meeting, in Singapore in 1992, with the aim of reducing trade tariffs in the region and attracting investment. AFTA became operational for its first six signatories, namely Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand, in 2003. The four other members are set to join in 2012. The ASEAN Charter of 2007 established a schedule for the elimination of non-tariff barriers and other restrictions on trade.

Heads of government who met in Bangkok in Dec. 1995 established a South-East Asia Nuclear-Free Zone, which was extended to cover offshore economic exclusion zones. Individual signatories were to decide whether to allow port visits or transportation of nuclear weapons by foreign powers through territorial waters. The first formal meeting of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) to discuss security issues in the region took place in July 1994 and was attended by the then six members (Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand). Also in attendance were ASEAN's dialogue partners (Australia, Canada, the EU, Japan, South Korea, New Zealand and the USA), consultative partners (China and Russia) and observers (Laos, Papua New Guinea and Vietnam). In 2008 the participants in the ARF were the ten ASEAN members, Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, China, East Timor, the EU, India, Japan, South Korea, North Korea, Mongolia, New Zealand, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Russia, Sri Lanka and the USA.

ASEAN is committed to resolving the dispute over sovereignty of the Spratly Islands, a group of more than 100 small islands and reefs in the South China Sea. Some or all of the largely uninhabited islands have been claimed by Brunei, China, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan and Vietnam. The disputed areas have oil and gas resources.

Organization. The highest authority is the meeting of Heads of Government, which takes place twice annually. The highest policy-making body is the annual Meeting of Foreign Ministers, commonly known as AMM, the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting, which convenes in each of the member countries on a rotational basis in alphabetical order. The AEM (ASEAN Economic Meeting) meets each year to direct ASEAN economic co-operation. The AEM and AMM report jointly to the heads of government at summit meetings. Each capital has its own national secretariat. The central secretariat in Jakarta is headed by the Secretary-General, a post that revolves among the member states in alphabetical order every five years.

Official language: English.

Headquarters: POB 2072, Jakarta 12110, Indonesia.

Website: <http://www.aseansec.org>

Secretary-General: Surin Pitsuwan (Thailand).

ASEAN-Mekong Basin Development Co-operation (Mekong Group)

The ministers and representatives of Brunei, Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam met in Kuala Lumpur on 17 June 1996 and agreed the following basic objectives for the Group: to co-operate in the economic and social development of the Mekong Basin area and strengthen the link between it and ASEAN member countries, through a process of dialogue and common project identification.

Priorities include: development of infrastructure capacities in the fields of transport, telecommunications, irrigation and energy; development of trade and investment-generating activities; development of the agricultural sector to enhance production for domestic consumption and export; sustainable

development of forestry resources and development of mineral resources; development of the industrial sector, especially small to medium enterprises; development of tourism; human resource development and support for training; co-operation in the fields of science and technology.

Further Reading

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Van Hoa, Tran, (ed.) *Economic Developments and Prospects in the ASEAN*. 1997

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Colombo Plan

History. Founded in 1950 to promote the development of newly independent Asian member countries, the Colombo Plan has grown from a group of seven Commonwealth nations into an organization of 25 countries. Originally the Plan was conceived for a period of six years. This was renewed from time to time until the Consultative Committee gave the Plan an indefinite life span in 1980.

Members. Afghanistan, Australia, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Fiji Islands, India, Indonesia, Islamic Republic of Iran, Japan, South Korea, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Maldives, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, New Zealand, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand, USA and Vietnam.

Aims. The aims of the Colombo Plan are: (1) to provide a forum for discussion, at local level, of development needs; (2) to facilitate development assistance by encouraging members to participate as donors and recipients of technical co-operation; and (3) to execute programmes to advance development within member countries. The Plan currently has the following programmes: Programme for Public Administration (PPA); South-South Technical Co-operation Data Bank Programme (SSTC/DB); Drug Advisory Programme (DAP); Programme for Private Sector Development (PPSD); Colombo Plan Staff College for Technician Education (CPSC).

Structure. The Consultative Committee is the principal policy-making body of the Colombo Plan. Consisting of all member countries, it meets every two years to review the economic and social progress of members, exchange views on technical co-operation programmes and generally review the activities of the Plan. The Colombo Plan Council represents each member government and meets several times a year to identify development issues, recommend measures to be taken and ensure implementation.

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Secretary-General: Patricia Yoon-Moi Chia (Malaysia).

Publications. *Consultative Committee Meeting—Proceedings and Conclusions* (biennial); *Report of the Colombo Plan Council* (annual); *The Colombo Plan Brochure* (annual); *The Colombo Plan Focus* (quarterly newsletter); *South-South Technical Co-operation in Selected Member Countries*.