OPENING REMARKS
MR PERNOSAMY OTHARAM, SECRETARY GENERAL OF AIPA

OPENING OF THE REGIONAL MEETING ON PROMOTING WOMEN’S LEADERSHIP AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN ASEAN
7 OCTOBER 2014, FOUR SEASONS HOTEL, JAKARTA

Honorable Mr. Jacob Thoppil, Director of Development of the Southeast Asia and Indonesia, from the Embassy of Canada.

Honorable Ms. Roberta Clarke, Regional Director of UN Women Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific.

Honorable Parliamentarians from AIPA Member Parliaments, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, a very good morning to all of you.

SelamatDatang.

AIPA is desirous of connecting with other international and regional organizations, governments and parliaments. The purpose is purely to facilitate the achievement of the goals of ASEAN through Parliamentarians of ASEAN Member States. AIPA has in the recent past reorganised itself and, through its Secretariat, is reaching out to various organisations, one of which is the UN Women Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific.

With funding support from the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development, Canada, we are here today to discuss on the topic contained in the concept paper which is “Regional Meeting on Promoting Women’s Leadership and Political Participation in ASEAN”.

One of the Standing Committees of AIPA is the Committee on Women Parliamentarians of AIPA (WAIPA). WAIPA, at the last General Assembly in Lao PDR, made several Resolutions. The first Resolution was on strengthening efforts in the prevention of all forms of discrimination and violence against women and children in ASEAN; the second was on strengthening Women Parliamentarians’ Roles in ASEAN Community Building; and the third was on Women Leadership in Southeast Asia. All the Resolutions were adopted by the General Assembly.
This regional meeting gives an opportunity for stakeholder organisation to join in the discourse about increasing the share of women’s representation and the quality of their participation in public policy making, especially in the areas of health and education. This regional meeting is also relevant in providing a comparative study on the causes of the lack of interest in women representation in Parliament in ASEAN vis-a-vis other regions in the world. Other regions of the world may have their own causes for lack of women participation in politics which could be deeply rooted in social norms, cultural attitudes, perception of gender roles, codes of conduct, and discriminatory laws. Women participation in public and in politics in ASEAN may likewise have its own causes.

The problem may well lie within the gender itself, meaning that women may be more interested in career development than in constituency work. Unlike in the distant past, women here have equal opportunities in education and employment and they are therefore more aware of their rights. Yet, there is a lack of will on their part to be involved in public life. Women representation in each of the 10 Parliaments is less than 30%. More women are staying single or marrying late and tend to have smaller families and hence a better opportunity to be involved in public affairs. On the other hand, there could be other causes, besides the small number of women who participate in national elections. Much work remains to be done to get more of them to come forward to serve. Hence the appeal is to you, Parliamentarians, to encourage women of ASEAN to be involved in public policy making process.

Whatever the causes, this forum will, I hope, help provide the answers sought by the objectives in the concept paper of this regional meeting.

I wish to once again thank the sponsor, the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development, Canada, and the joint organisers for giving this first opportunity to AIPA to have this inaugural Regional Meeting. I wish you all a successful meeting.

Thank you.

Mr. Periowsamy Otharam
Secretary-General of ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly (AIPA)

7 October 2014