

## UC Distinguished Lecture Series on “The Future of ASEAN”

Written by Administrator

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On March 01, 2016, Techo Sen School of Government and International Relations (TSS) and ASEAN Study Center (ASC) were jointly organized another UC Distinguished Lecture Series featuring **H.E. Ambassador Bilahari Kausikan** of Singapore. The TSS and ASC hosted the lecture in the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor conference room. This

event was presided over by

**H.**

**E. Dr. Kao Kim Hourn,**

Founder, Chairman of the Board Trustees and President of The University of Cambodia.

In his welcome remarks, Dr. Kao Kim Hourn explained that the purpose of UC's Distinguished Lecture Series is to invite political leaders, diplomats, top civil servants, policy advisors, industry leaders, and accomplished researchers to share their expertise and advice with UC students, faculty and staff. These efforts are consistent with the University's mission to educate and develop graduates to well-grounded in both theory and practice. Additionally, he informed the audience that earlier in the day, he and Ambassador Bilahari met to discuss matter of mutual interest between Cambodia and Singapore. He was pleased to report that the long standing fraternal relations between the two ASEAN countries remains close, cordial and strong, and added that both he and Ambassador Bilahari look forward to enhancing ties between the two ASEAN nations.

He then introduced Ambassador Bilahari; one of Singapore's outstanding diplomats having served as Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs before retiring in 2013 after 31 years of distinguished public service for which he received the Singapore Government's Public Administration Gold and Meritorious Service Medal. At present, he is Ambassador at Large and Policy Advisor to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Ambassador Bilahari recalled that a major factor leading to the formation of ASEAN in 1967 was the common interest of the non-communist states (Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand), all of whom faced threats from externally supported communist insurgencies, in preserving maximum autonomy in the midst of major power competition. Whatever their other

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differences, and they were indeed great, ASEAN leaders then realized that if they did not hang together, they would hang separately.

ASEAN is thus mechanism for managing external pressures and preserving autonomy of its members by ensuring at least a modicum of cohesion, order and civility in state relations in a region where none of this should be taken for granted. Security must remain ASEAN's fundamental and enduring purpose. ASEAN's declared goals of establishing a "Community" across the three pillars of political and security cooperation, economic integration, and social-cultural cooperation are in a sense as important as mean towards this fundamental principle, as they are ends in themselves.



ASEAN is an extremely diverse region. This, according to Ambassador Bilahari, is a major challenge for the present generation of leaders. Diversity makes regional cooperation both necessary and very difficult to achieve. In Ambassador Bilahari's view, ASEAN can only work by consensus and largely informally. He said, "Any other mode of decision-making risks rupture with unpredictable consequences...The downside of working by consensus---the unavoidable price we must pay for having any sort of regional mechanism---is an unfortunate tendency to privilege form over substance which all too often morphs into self-delusion and wishful thinking".

In conclusion, Ambassador Bilahari explained that the future of ASEAN must not be taken for granted. It is still a work in progress. But there should be no doubt that as the regional mechanism for economic cooperation and regional security, ASEAN is moving forward. There have been no wars between its members. The regional grouping has so far leveraged its relationship with the major powers to its advantage, while avoiding becoming embroiled in their conflicts. These are not insignificant achievements.