

**Remarks by Hon. Deepak Obhrai, M.P. and Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and for International Human Rights, at the Canadian International Council Conference: *Power Shifts & Vibrant Economies: Canada Awakens to the Opportunities and Risks in Southeast Asia***

**November 25, 2014**

Good morning,

Thank you David for the kind introduction.

As it states in your program, I'm here to discuss Canada's stake in Southeast Asia.

Canada's relationship with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations is one of our key foreign policy priorities. Canada has been a Dialogue Partner of ASEAN for 37 years. And this relationship has grown to become a comprehensive partnership..

Canada's commitment to this region is clear and we look forward to this relationship reaching its full potential.

Already, Canada is well placed in the Asia-Pacific.

Since 2010, Prime Minister Harper has visited Thailand, the Philippines and Malaysia. Since 2011, Ministers Fast and Baird have been to all 10 ASEAN member states; and Minister Baird to all four ASEAN Regional Forums / Post Ministerial Conferences. Minister Fast has also attended three successive ASEAN-Canada Economic Ministers meetings.

In recent years, Canada has also welcomed to its shores the ASEAN Secretary General, various foreign ministers from ASEAN member states like Singapore, Vietnam and Indonesia, and most recently the ASEAN Economic Ministers "Roadshow," demonstrating Canada's commitment to increasing trade with this region of the world.

And today, Canada's diplomatic network in Southeast Asia is stronger than in any other region, and growing.

In August, Minister Baird announced a new dedicated ambassador to ASEAN based in Jakarta and new resident diplomatic missions in Laos and Cambodia, meaning that Canada now has a presence in all 10 ASEAN member countries. It is clear that in this hyper-connected world, a prosperous Asia as a whole means a more prosperous world. What happens in Asia, including Southeast Asia, is now instantly felt across the globe.

That means we not only have a stake in the region's prosperity, but also in its peace and security, and in its governance.

Given Canada's open economy and trade dependence—among the highest in the G-7 with some 60 percent of GDP and one in five jobs tied to exports—this is no small matter to Canadians.

We have learned that countries who capitalize on global opportunities do so through sound policies, political leadership, international strategies and informed populations.

Canada's traditional trading patterns have naturally involved the United States and Europe. However, we now know that we must diversify our economic relationships.

That is why most ASEAN countries are considered priority markets under the Global Markets Action Plan.

Canada has world-class companies that are keen to deepen partnerships in the region, and innovative and rapidly growing firms that are ready to get started.

In turn, as Asian firms are expanding their global reach, our doors are open to Asian direct investment in Canada in these and other sectors.

Our growing trade in China, across ASEAN, and with other major Asian markets is a testament to this synergy.

We know that the process of modernization and development has been uneven in the region. Some nations are being left behind. And progress in some cases remains fragile.

Canada is stepping up its development support in several countries to address these outstanding challenges. We are building on development assistance to Asia over six decades, with current contributions totalling \$1 billion every year.

The connections between Canada and Asia are not only due to our closeness geographically, historically, demographically and economically.

The need for our strengthened engagement is also due to the direct impact instability in places like Iraq and Syria can have on the stability of places like Indonesia and Singapore.

For example, when ISIS began to roll across Iraq, oil prices surged and Asian stock prices fell. So just as transforming Asian nations have evolving economic needs, I believe they have evolving diplomatic needs too.

Growing economies and stature on the world stage should bring with it growing responsibilities beyond domestic and regional borders.

Canada is an outward-facing, open trading nation. We have a long-standing interest and sensitivity to global issues.

I believe there are three strategic areas in which Canada can make a meaningful contribution to stability in Asia: governance, energy security, and security cooperation.

After the seemingly inevitable march of democracy in the later decades of the last century, it often feels like progress has stalled over the past decade.

Fortunately, some of the great democracy success stories of the last generation are found in Asia. For example, I am optimistic about a fresh era in Indonesia following its historic elections over the summer.

But there are clearly also continuing challenges in the region like Vietnam's restrictions on bloggers and Thailand's military coup.

Of course, democratic development takes time, involving entire societies, the old and the young, the rich and the poor, governments and civil society.

Societies that fail to develop democratic checks and balances, transparency and accountability, and freedom of expression, contribute to instability and risks of conflict.

Successful and enduring societies of the 21st century are not built on strongmen and secrecy. They are rooted in democratic norms and standards, independent institutions, the rule of law and accountable, representative governments.

Canada is committed to working together with Southeast Asian nations to ensure that this region continues to move forward as a region of democracies.

Another area worth discussing is energy security.

The IEA [International Energy Agency] projects that most energy demand growth will take place in Asia.

In a time of global concern about risks in energy supply, the world is looking to Canada as a stable, reliable, resource-rich partner.

Canada has the third-largest proven oil reserves. We are already the fifth-largest crude oil producer and the fifth-largest natural gas producer. We are the second-largest uranium producer and exporter, and a major producer of renewable and clean energy sources.

Not to mention our stable economy, society and democracy.

Secure energy supplies are key to sustained and predictable economic growth in this region, at a time when current sources are predominantly in the volatile Middle East, North Africa and Russia.

This coincides with increased energy self-sufficiency in the United States, Canada's primary destination for current oil and gas exports.

So there is a natural and mutually beneficial potential to significantly deepening the Canada-Asia energy partnership.

Asia needs more energy—reliable energy. Canada is a natural supplier.

Energy has the potential to transform Canada-Asia relations. It is up to all parties to make that happen. It is in our collective interests to do so.

Third, and not entirely unrelated to energy security, is the need for security cooperation.

The world's prosperity now depends on stability in Asia at least as much as it does on a peaceful and responsibly governed Europe or North America.

The world's most active shipping lanes are in Asia. Two-thirds of the world's container traffic comes from there. It is difficult to overstate the importance of Asian seas to global prosperity.

Canada is deeply concerned by the rise in tensions surrounding maritime boundary disputes.

We continue to call on nations in the region to refrain from provocative actions, to commit to peaceful solutions, and to strengthen the institutions and norms that can underpin regional stability.

Canada is prepared to do its part to help strengthen peace, security and stability in Asia. And we are well positioned to do so as a founding member of regional institutions, such as APEC and the ASEAN Regional Forum.

Canada can add real value to the region, not just with regards to maritime security, but in areas like cyber security, military medicine, and counterterrorism capacity building.

In particular, ASEAN is a vitally important institution in the region, and we welcome its work with China toward establishing a code of conduct for the South China Sea. We urge all countries in the region to embrace such a code.

This past August, Minister Baird announced \$14 million in additional funding to enhance security cooperation in ASEAN, which will help tackle non-traditional security threats such as trafficking and radicalization. This was on top of the \$30 million announced in 2013.

Canada also believes that the East Asia Summit has the potential to evolve into an organization that can play a more consequential role in addressing the complex challenges—economic, socio-cultural, security—that Asia and Canada face together.

We have already signalled our willingness to join the East Asia Summit as soon as it is ready to expand its membership. And we are encouraged by the strong support that Canada's candidacy has received from across the region.

In conclusion, increased democratic development, energy security, and security cooperation can be pillars of stability in this region.

A secure, stable world is something we should all care about as a value in itself, but seeking it isn't just about liberal internationalism or being an altruistic global citizen.

Prosperity is inextricable from stability and security.

Canada's common interest in Asia's peace, prosperity and role in global affairs is clear.

And I believe that Canada and the Southeast Asian nations can and will benefit from deepening their bilateral relations further.

Thank you.