



# PRESS RELEASE

15<sup>th</sup> ASEAN SUMMIT  
CHA-AM HUA HIN  
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## **ASEAN Leaders Inaugurates Much Anticipated Regional Human Rights Body**

On 23 October 2009, speaking as the Chairman of ASEAN at the Inaugural Ceremony of the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR), Thai Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva hailed the establishment of AICHR as another important milestone in ASEAN's dynamic regionalism.

In effect, AICHR has placed human rights at the centre of ASEAN's agenda, as the regional grouping is aiming to build a Community of Peoples. "Ultimately, it is about the commitment of Member States to enhancing the quality of the life of ASEAN peoples, empowering and engaging them in ASEAN's community building process, all of which form the fundamental basis of a genuine community for peoples," noted Mr. Abhisit who serves as the current Chairman of ASEAN.

Noting comments that AICHR's mandate and functions do not yet go far enough, the Thai Prime Minister emphasised that AICHR is an important first step in an evolutionary process towards strengthening the human rights architecture in the region. "The responsibility now rests on all of us to work together to move AICHR forward – to make it credible and effective in the promotion and protection of human rights," Mr. Abhisit stressed, calling on all sectors, governments, civil society and other stakeholders to join hands to ensure AICHR's success.

For the first year of AICHR's operation, ASEAN Member States have committed USD 200,000 as the start-up fund, and hope more would be forthcoming, both from within and outside ASEAN.

Looking ahead, the Thai Prime Minister called on ASEAN Members to continue their individual and collective efforts in support of AICHR, including by strengthening national institutions and developing regional norms and institutions.

He also announced the completion of the work on the Terms of Reference of the ASEAN Commission on the Rights of Women and Children, which would lead to the establishment of this Commission by 2010.

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23 October 2009