



Strengthening the Role of Southeast Asian Parliaments in Security Policy Review

Proceedings of the parliamentary workshop held in Manila,
Philippines on 10-11 March 2007

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INTRODUCTION

Background information

The workshop is part of a process relating to the parliamentary dimension of security sector governance in Southeast Asia which was launched at the international parliamentary workshop in Siem Reap, Cambodia, from 7 to 10 February 2006. At that workshop, during which the main focus was on security sector governance, it was established that the plurality and diversity of Asia provides opportunities as well as challenges in considering the issue of parliamentary accountability and security sector governance (SSG). It was also established that parliamentarians need to continue to pursue a regional debate on security sector governance. This was the rationale of the 2nd international workshop on ‘Strengthening the Role of Southeast Asian Parliaments in Security Policy Review’ in Manila in March 2007, co-organised by the Institute for Strategic and Development Studies (Manila); the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Office for Regional Co-operation in Southeast Asia (Singapore); and the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF Geneva).

Objective: Exchanging views on security sector governance

The purpose of the workshop was to provide a setting for an exchange of views on Security Sector Governance (SSG), to discuss the role of parliaments in security policy review and encourage their participation in Security Sector Reform (SSR), to consider how to improve legislation through the exchange of views and experiences, as well as to consider how to equip parliamentarians with new ideas to use in their work and identify ways in which they can contribute to social justice and peace worldwide. The workshop also aimed to contribute to confidence-building measures and to a broad ownership of security sector reform (SSR) which, according to some, is the best approach to shift the framework of national security policy formulation towards a more participatory and more democratic atmosphere. The following points were then considered:

The importance for ASEAN parliaments to play a role in national security policy

The parliament is the representative of the people and key to accountability and, as such, its involvement in formulating good security policy cannot be underestimated. Moreover, SSR is not just about the provision of security as defined by the people but also about democratic accountability. In this view, oversight is a key element and it is the parliament that plays this role, though often not satisfactorily. There is a need to develop the capability of parliamentarians and equip them with new ideas to do with how they carry out their work and inform them about ways in which they can contribute to social justice and peace worldwide, because their non performance has an effect on public safety and the

¹ To this report contributed the Institute for Strategic and Development Studies (ISDS) in Manila Philippines; the Friedrich Ebert Foundation in Jakarta, Indonesia; and the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF) in Geneva, Switzerland.

survival of democracy. The role of parliament in formulating national security policy is of particular relevance to Southeast Asia where, considering the political developments, it is fair to say that although parliament is a key institution, it does not yet work in a satisfactory manner. In this context, it is necessary to evaluate the role of parliament in policy formulation and address the problem of transparency on national security agenda formulation. It is only when the process is inclusive that a comprehensive, responsive, and transparent national security agenda can be achieved.

Structure of the Summary of the Workshop Proceedings

This report first focuses on understanding the processes and outcomes of national security policy review. The focus then shifts to the role of ASEAN parliaments in security policy, and is then followed by the presentation of three Southeast Asian case studies (Indonesia, Philippines and Thailand) which are compared with Romania which represents a case study on a European transition state. The proceedings conclude with a discussion of the ASEAN security community as well as discussions about the way ahead for parliaments and security sector governance in Southeast Asia.

UNDERSTANDING NATIONAL SECURITY POLICY REVIEW

The concept of National Security Policy (NSP)

National Security Policy is needed so that the government can address threats in a comprehensive manner; the effectiveness of the security sector can be improved by optimizing every security sector; the implementation of policies can be guided; domestic consensus can be built; and, regional and international confidence can be enhanced.

The objectives of NSP are to: consolidate current policies; to provide a new approach to security, i.e. from traditional to human security; introduce democratic governance to the security sector; and, to formulate and coordinate response to new internal and external security changes.

The concept of National Security Policy (NSP) refers to an integrated document that functions as a framework laying out how a country provides security to the state and its people. National security policy is both a document (or a network of documents) and a process. There is no universal model of national security policy as, in practice, it is impossible to create one that would fit the particularities of different countries. What countries do in general is to take a snapshot of their threats and response(s) to them. Sometimes, changes happen all of a sudden, such as was the case with the events of 9/11. The event caused security threats to be reassessed and achievements made prior to the events had to be thoroughly discussed and changed.

The role of parliament in formulating NSP

The role of parliament in security policy review can not be underestimated despite the fact that parliamentarians are not necessarily experts on this matter. Nevertheless, they are

responsible for public transparency and therefore ought to always be included in the process.

At the initiation phase, the parliament can play several roles. It can play a proactive role, mandating the government to draft an NSP; a reactive role in which it invites the government to a question and answer session; a comprehensive role in which it debates the substance of NSP at the committee level without changing it. At the formulation stage, the parliament needs to involve civil society. Parliament also needs to link issues such as equipment and arms procurement and the deployment of troops abroad with NSP.

Southeast Asian countries usually have totalitarian or semi totalitarian backgrounds. In these countries, governments used to have a very strong role and it is for this reason that parliamentarians cannot carry out their checks and balances functions as in established democracies. Members of Parliament usually conduct public hearings but are seldom able to scrutinize the governments' budget. Due to lack of interest, many members of parliament have a lack of capability in defence matters. Moreover, the attitude of some military generals can be another problem for democratic oversight. Weakness in oversight functions of the parliament has a direct impact on the use of public money.

NSP as a point of departure for SSR

Since it is important to understand the relation between National Security Policy and SSR, the differences between SSR-based policy review and non-SSR defence policy review need to be clarified. Although NSP can be discussed without reference to SSR (as is the case in South Africa), NSP can become the point of departure for SSR. In essence, SSR-based policy review is unique because it is a comprehensive, integrated review with its goal being to increase democratic accountability. When applied to SSR, NSP should be transparent. Planning and implementation should go together. A country cannot have a good NSP if it is badly implemented. Thus, capacity to implement security policies must also be addressed. NSP is needed because it gives direction to security related policies. NSP is made for the long term process and problems in defence procurement can only be solved through long term planning which provides an indication on the direction to take in the future.

APEC, ASEAN and Best Practices

It was noted that APEC has progressively moved from frameworks to implementing programs while ASEAN has made the ASEAN Security Community one of its goals. There are also efforts to deal with terrorism at the regional level. Different views on best practices in this area are being discussed and explored. However, there is still disjoint between local and national/regional security efforts. Security policy, to a large extent, still fails involve the grassroots. How should security policy address this gap? According to one of the participants, all security policies or documents must reach the local level if they are to be enforced.

THE ROLE OF ASEAN PARLIAMENTS IN SECURITY POLICY

Evolution of SSG and security policy

Security sector reform (SSR) and security sector governance (SSG), it was noted, is a new paradigm that was developed as a result of several major changes in the global security agenda. It has experienced significant changes over the last 15 years. Indeed, up to the 1990s the Cold War was considered to be the main threat to most countries. At that time the threats that most countries faced had three characteristics, namely military, visible and external. Security policy has therefore gone through changes. At the time when the Cold War drew to a close, the changes in the global security agenda meant that in terms of security, the predominant risks were war, globalization, a significant reduction in the number of inter-state wars and the emergence of non-traditional security threats. In response to this new context, the concept of SSR widened, from a traditional state-based one i.e. emphasizing only national security and traditional security actors, to an individual-based concept, concerned with collective security and human security comprehensive, common, and cooperative. This paradigm shift has heightened the need for democratic control of the security sector and the importance of the role of parliaments—as the embodiment of people’s sovereignty—in exercising this control.

Lack of knowledge about the role of ASEAN parliaments in SSG

The problem, however, is that scholars know very little about parliaments and even less about their role in SSG or the achievements of Southeast Asian parliaments (i.e., specifically those in the Philippines, Indonesia, and Thailand) in these particular areas of concern. Southeast Asian parliaments, which are neglected objects of research, tend to be “rubber-stamp” bodies with very little influence in policy-making. Researchers have a tendency to underestimate their roles in the political arena because many of those studying these institutions come from outside the Southeast Asian region and, as such, they are predisposed to using a “Western” perspective in examining and assessing the roles of Southeast Asian parliaments. Additionally, the rise of new agents (e.g., international financial institutions like the International Monetary Fund) which perform similar functions as legislatures or actually take over parliamentary duties through their influence on the policy process in these countries have led to the so-called “parliamentary decline” thesis. From this viewpoint, these new agents have effectively undermined the influence of parliaments in policy-making.

The contribution of parliaments to SSG in Southeast Asia

A closer look at the functions of ASEAN – and in particular Southeast Asian - parliaments through three stages of development (liberalization, democratization and consolidation) then followed. Indeed, the contributions of Southeast Asian parliaments to security sector governance can be assessed by looking at these three phases of parliamentary growth.

During the transition-to-democracy processes which some countries in the ASEAN region are currently undergoing, the involvement of parliaments in the consolidation phase tends to be strong initially. This is because the need to complete the process of institutional reform and to settle conflicts between the old and new forces leads to an upsurge in legislation. However, once the initial phase has passed and parliaments get into the normal routine of things, it becomes more difficult for them to go ahead with the task of fine-

tuning legislations. Thus, there is a natural inclination for the level of activism on the part of parliaments to decline over time because much of the work (i.e., in terms of new legislation) that they wanted to accomplish in the first place has already been achieved. Hence, the strong impetus to improve legislation at the start of the consolidation phase eventually declines.

The 3rd wave of democratization reached the shores of Southeast Asia in the mid 1980s. Old 'strong' governments were taken over by new governments, and new rules were enacted. In the new era, the role of both parliament and civil society organizations has grown in significance with both of them having to overcome the executive dominance of the past. However, the capability of parliament to represent the interests of the people is still questionable. 'Money politics' still matters in Southeast Asia. In addition, the tendency to make ever more laws has also decreased among parliamentarians in comparison to the beginning of the democratization era –for instance during the Habibie presidency in Indonesia. Although, it is possible to interpret this as the decreasing productivity of parliamentarians, this phenomenon can also be caused by the amount of legislation that is already in place as well as the fact at present there is no need for any more, apart from some fine tuning.

Legislative structures in the Southeast Asian region

At present, eight Southeast Asian countries have elected parliaments, but at the regional level there is no ASEAN parliament to speak of that possesses similar competences and scope as the European Parliament. The Southeast Asian region is characterized by historical, political, economic, and socio-cultural diversity and similarity which may go some way in explaining the kind of security policies countries in the region have. The varied history of nation-building as well as the different levels of economic development and democratization in the region defines the security concerns of Southeast Asian countries. One thing in common among these countries is that national security policy tends to take precedence over other policy concerns and, to a certain extent, security concerns even dictate the direction of other state policies. National security concerns have been used to justify state actions that have proven to be inimical to the public interest such as the granting of bigger budgetary allocations to the defence sector or the implementation of actions against minorities.

Southeast Asian parliaments are confronted with various challenges when dealing with the oversight of the security sector:

- ASEAN is an executive heavy organization: In the regional context, parliaments still have little room to play. ASEAN is an executive heavy organization that contributes more to executive agreements than to treaties that have to be ratified by the parliament. To overcome this weakness, ASEAN parliamentarians need to share their experiences. Cooperation between parliaments and civil society also needs to be improved and ultimately greater cooperation between these two entities will lead to more effective oversight.
- Lack of contacts between expert community and lawmakers: A criticism which is often put to academicians is that academics frequently fail to establish enough contact with law makers. According to one of the parliamentarians, academics should assist in

providing details that help the legislation process, but information should be provided in a precise and clear manner so that parliamentarians can get a good grasp of the core issues in a short period of time.

- Weak oversight in practice: In the ASEAN region, even if parliaments have powerful instruments on paper, in practice, it appears that they are unable to effectively manage military and security affairs. Even the legislative committees that are tasked to deal specifically with security concerns are unable to perform their oversight functions *vis-à-vis* the military and the police because security is regarded as an ‘executive privilege’ and because of the secrecy.
- National security impacts on other government policies: The concept of national security, on which most security policies in the region are based, focuses on the survival of the state. Most ASEAN states continue to be preoccupied with the business of state-building and the consolidation of the nation-state. Within this context, national security has come to define most of the policies in the region and has given ASEAN countries a means by which to rationalize actions undertaken to ensure the survival of the young states in Southeast Asia. Furthermore, the security sector in ASEAN countries enjoys a big share of national budgets at the expense of basic social services. The recent incidents of terrorism in the region as well as in other parts of the globe have further strengthened the emphasis given by governments to national security.

FORMULATING A NATIONAL SECURITY POLICY: THE CASE OF THE PHILIPPINES, THAILAND, INDONESIA AND ROMANIA

The presentations presented below offer an overview of national security policy in four selected states, namely the Philippines, Thailand, Indonesia and also Romania. Romania was added to the list in order to offer a comparison between European and Southeast Asian states that have undergone transition-to-democracy processes since the end of the Cold War.

NSP formulation in the Philippines:

The discourse of security policy review must take place within the framework of democratic systems of governance. The review can serve as a part of the process of checks and balances, and the accountability of public servants, including leaders and legislators must be emphasized. Consequently, a balance between the interests of the state and human security must be established. Security policy review must also be assessed within the specific context of different levels of urgency, from crisis situations to “politics as usual” scenarios. Ultimately, the review process should be viewed as an integral part of good governance and the democratization process. The major challenges facing the process of security policy review can be listed as:

- i) The institutionalization of the review process must happen within the pressures of political expediency.
- ii) The competence of leaders and staff members must be in a straight-forward and clear, in cooperation with analysts and academics. Bureaucrats are usually not receptive to assessments, especially negative ones, presented by academics.

- iii) A consensus or, perhaps, a compromise must be reached between the comprehensive view of security and the compartmentalization as driven by operational imperatives.
- i) Fair access to information based on facts must be ensured. The media plays a critical role in this aspect, especially in getting their facts “straight.”

The aforementioned challenges can be overcome through the creation of a security sector constituency that consists of actors that are consciously aware of the dangers of complacency. There should be a comprehensive dissemination of ideas within the context of a proper balance between secrecy and transparency as a function of public trust (e.g., social capital, civic culture, etc.).

Concerning the role of parliament, the process of the evolution of security policy in the Philippines has been dominated by the executive and the military. While Congress can review the policy through the budget process or through legislation, it is still the President and her advisers who define the country’s security policy. Also, while Congress does have internal mechanisms, particularly the committee system, through which to conduct oversight of the security sector, few of these committees actually have direct oversight functions in relation to the military and the police. In addition, the areas of concern of these committees often overlap and there is lack of coordination among them. Another problem concerns the limited exercise of oversight function *vis-à-vis* the executive, given that most committee chairpersons are aligned with the ruling party and so the President or party leaders can often dictate the direction of committee inquiries. Overall, therefore, while oversight of the security sector in the Philippines may be powerful in form, it is weak in practice.

NSP formulation in Thailand

In Thailand, NSP formulation is not comprehensive and focused on the definition of threats and the management of the relationship with the military, and dependent upon situational specifics instead of strategic priorities. Before the ousting of the Thaksin administration, there had been good development towards democratization and national security policy formulation was done competently, where institutions are present to oversee security sector reforms, especially the balance of power in the police forces. However, former Prime Minister Thaksin did not want the national security body to assess the situation in southern Thailand, and instead indiscriminately handed security concerns to the police sector. In Thailand, instead of consulting the National Security Body, Thaksin preferred to consult a subcommittee which, unfortunately, lacked sufficient experience in solving the Southern issue. The policemen who were sent to the southern province without adequate knowledge on the issue and dealt with the circumstances as if they were facing criminals. This led to extra judicial killings occurring in the southern province.

There is a great need for Thailand to formulate a national security policy that will be effectively implemented to reform various parts of the security sector. This formulation process must identify potential threats that may occur over the next ten years so that appropriate responses can be planned. In order to do this, it is vital that there be someone in a parliamentary capacity who is strong enough to turn policy into action. The specific

context of the Thai parliament was noted, where the present administration has virtual control over parliament.

NSP formulation in Indonesia

Indonesia has not, to date, had a comprehensive National Security Policy. Based on legal aspects, defence policy is the responsibility of the Department of Defence. To declare a state of emergency the President would need the approval of the parliament, but just who from the parliament (commission for defence, international affairs and media or chairperson or the whole parliament) is not yet clearly defined. Misuse of power is another weakness and reason why an integrated National Security Policy is difficult to achieve in Southeast Asia.

- Defence policy formulation: The Indonesian Constitution clearly states that the President, as the Commander-in-Chief with the highest political authority, has the right to declare war and peace and, consequently, has the authority to formulate the National Grand Strategy. From a legal-institutional perspective, defence policies fall within the authority of the Department of Defence, the civilian political entity within the defence sector that has the authority in policy making and management.
- Issues of defence oversight by parliament: Defence oversight is done, politically, by the parliament (DPR) and the public. Parliamentary oversight includes the drafting of laws and amendments, approval of personnel appointments, approval of force mobilization, declaration of emergency status, declaration of war, negotiation with other states and, most importantly, formulating the defence budget. Although budget control by the DPR includes access to all pertinent documents, the right to examine and change the budget, program monitoring during implementation, and the ultimate approval of requested amendments, existing regulations have not been clear on the level of access and the procedure to resolve conflicts arising from access issues nor on the regulation of the DPR's role in the policy-formulation process, including oversight functions in contentious areas such as military equipment acquisition. On the other hand, clear regulation on parliamentary oversight is found in the issue of the authority to approve or disapprove the defence budget, and in the issue of Presidential authority to mobilize the military. But further clarification is needed regarding the precise definition of "DPR approval". Finally, parliamentary oversight of the defence sector must include parliament's function to communicate with the public.

NSP formulation in Romania

The Romanian experience is not aligned with a single model of strategic security policy review. In this specific country setting, security policy is closely linked to defence policy, and the different political cycles in motion point to a wide variety of models. The assessment of security policy must be done within the context of a very dynamic world, which necessitates a "snapshot" approach to analysis that can lead to plans for appropriate responses and to projection of future challenges. But the cross-sectional approach to analysis would then require a reassessment of security policy from time to time, such as in the case of Romania where the law stipulates that a review must be carried out every two to four years depending on the situation. The choice between regular and occasional assessments must be partly based upon unforeseen yet significant events, such as

September 11, 2001 or 9/11 that may require substantial modifications to current programs.

In the post-Cold War scenario in Romania, national security priorities are less visible and more internally focused and, in general, have been effectively shifted from ministries of defence to ministries of the interior. In the case of Romania, the National Security Strategy document is “sustained” by the President and presented to the Parliament. The “White Book” puts strategy into practice, addressing many aspects of the security sector including military strategies even with the presence of NATO. National defence strategies are still deemed necessary in the presence of a collective regional strategy as the coherence of responses among the various parts of the security sector must be ensured.

Parliamentarians play a role in overseeing of the implementation of recommendations after a comprehensive national security policy review has been adopted. Within parliament, a committee must deal with planning and assessing security policies. The level of confidentiality should be guided by the virtue of the mandate given to parliamentarians upon their election into office. A major portion of security policies are necessarily secretive; but there must be a delicate balance between this need and the necessity to share what the public needs to know in a transparent manner. In this specific situation, parliamentarians can serve an oversight function to determine the balance needed to prevent potential abuses.

ASEAN SECURITY COMMUNITY: WHAT ROLE FOR PARLIAMENTS?

Parliaments have an important role in regional issues, particularly those that confront ASEAN. While this regional organization has remained a gathering of executives, it must be stressed that everybody in the region is affected by the decisions that it makes.

The ASEAN community and security sector governance

The concept of an ASEAN community is a tremendous challenge given that particularistic interests continue to prevail among its members. The preoccupation with each others’ local concerns constitutes the greatest hindrance in achieving a cohesive and united ASEAN community. However, the gathering of ASEAN parliamentarians on specific issues such as security policy review is pivotal in breaking the barriers across countries. The newly formed ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting is a platform where harmonization of defence and security policies could be made. Hopefully, such an initiative may be extended to include other actors, for example, the interior ministers within the region.

Whether the ASEAN Security Community (ASC) will relax the prevailing principle of non-interference in the affairs of member states was also discussed. Given the prevalence of internal conflict within ASEAN countries, intervention within domestic issues might be the proper course to take. The response given was that it is a very sensitive issue given that internal conflicts often overspill to the boundaries of other member states. This makes it

imperative for parliamentarians to be involved in the project of building an ASEAN Security Community.

The pivotal role that parliaments play in security sector governance

Parliaments are to be considered as an important – if not the only - source of democratic legitimacy and could therefore coordinate the other actors within the security sector. That parliaments be made aware of their important role and have knowledge of how to improve security sector governance would be a requirement for this to work. The harmonization of security policy is a step in the right direction if Southeast Asia is to remain of zone of peace. Parliaments have a significant role in conflict prevention and peacebuilding and through the assistance of academics for example, they are able to contribute to the project of building an ASEAN Security Community. Parliaments ensure that the process is inclusive, participatory, and embedded in a framework of accountability. Broad ownership of security policy review is a significant confidence-building measure that could also affect the process of ASEAN community building.

Since ASEAN is an executive heavy organization, at present there is no effective mechanism for parliamentarians at the ASEAN level to deal substantially with security sector governance issues.

Parliament's contribution to security sector governance is not fully used in the ASEAN community

The three pillars of the ASEAN Community (Security, Economic, and Socio-Cultural regional cooperation) have fully featured on the agenda of national parliaments. Most national parliamentarians have, for the most part, focused their energy and attention on domestic affairs. Therefore, parliament's potential for establishing good governance is not used to its full extent in the ASEAN region. One obstacle is the lack of civilian expertise as far as reviewing security policy is concerned. For example there are few, if any, courses on security management for civilians at the university level. These and other types of courses are crucial for civilians, including parliamentarians and their staff to obtain the necessarily skills to perform effective oversight over the security sector. In this context, using Cambodia as an example, it was noted that oversight powers of parliament are often poorly exercised because of the lack of orientation and capacity. Hence the importance for parliament to generate and possess the necessary information, knowledge and skills to conduct oversight, particularly in defence spending. Additionally, there is a need for parliamentarians right across the ASEAN region to help and learn from each other so as to contribute to the process of building an ASEAN Security Community.

Strengthening the role of ASEAN parliament in security sector governance

The following alternative actions were suggested:

- ASEAN parliaments should have their own think-tanks to provide them with analyses and data.
- The ASEAN Inter Parliamentary Organization's (AIPO) role should be optimized to push for more parliamentary substantial involvement in the ASEAN community.
- IF AIPO remains a high level protocol meeting platform of speakers of ASEAN parliaments only, then there is an urgent need to formulate another framework where

parliamentarians could gather to discuss pertinent regional issues beyond the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly (AIPA).

- The formation of a parliamentary or congressional committee on ASEAN affairs in each ASEAN member state.
- Parliaments should push for the development of a regional code of conduct of armed and security services – through the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC).

Special Issue:

Role of parliaments in combating human trafficking in ASEAN community

The MPs gathered in Manila discussed also specific topics relevant to their parliamentary work. One of these topics was the role of parliaments in combating human trafficking in Southeast Asia.

Since 1998 with the adoption of the Hanoi Declaration and the Hanoi Plan of Action, member countries of ASEAN have committed themselves to intensify individual as well as collective efforts to address transnational crimes, including trafficking of persons. The work of the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Transnational Crime (AMMTC) and the Senior Officials' Meeting on Transnational Crime (SOMTC), among others, focuses on trafficking of persons as stipulated in the Declaration to Combat Transnational Crime and the Action Plan to Combat Transnational Crime. At the same time, the ASEAN Declaration to Combat Trafficking in Persons, in Particular Women and Children adopted in Vientiane in 2004 is an important milestone in the region's effort to prevent and combat trafficking in persons.

It was argued that the national (e.g. in Indonesia) and ASEAN mechanisms established to prevent and combat human trafficking are in many aspects already strong. However, an important element remains missing, that is the implementation of these mechanisms through the establishment of practical guidelines. The following recommendations were noted:

- Legislative branches of each ASEAN country are encouraged to pursue the establishment of special national legislations and policies on anti-trafficking as well as to build up or to lead national and national and regional coalitions, policies, legislation and strategies against human trafficking.
- ASEAN member countries need to pursue the implementation of the relevant ASEAN Declarations, nationally or collectively, which directly or indirectly prevent and suppress trafficking in persons in the region.
- The ASEAN Secretariat is encouraged to strengthen coordination with other regional and international organizations and regional consultative processes, including the Bali Process on People Smuggling, Trafficking in Persons and Related Transnational Crimes, in order to avoid duplicating of works and programs.

At present, there is no Southeast Asian parliamentary union or caucus dealing specifically with human trafficking at the regional level in Southeast Asia. The existing Myanmar Inter-Parliamentary Caucus only touches on border issues involving Myanmar and Thailand. Legislators must set up a regional caucus to deal specifically with human trafficking.

CONCLUSIONS: WHAT WAY AHEAD?

It was noted that the general principles of parliamentary oversight, the need to improve the competencies of parliamentarians, and other related issues were discussed at the first meeting of parliamentarians which took place in Cambodia in February 2006. During this first meeting it was decided that the follow-up conference would concentrate on national security policy and would take the form of a workshop, allowing for discussions of current affairs which was, indeed, the main focus of this workshop of representatives of ASEAN parliaments in Manila in March 2007.

Follow up meeting in Bali mid/late November 2007

The next workshop with Southeast Asian parliaments will be held in mid- to late-November 2007 in Bali, Indonesia. This target date falls after the ASEAN Summit so that the workshop can be used to foster ideas on defence matters that were covered during the Summit, and that these can be points for discussion. In particular, ASEAN's three-year defence cooperation program which is to be adopted during the Summit could be tackled given the potential contributions that parliamentarians could make in this respect.

The workshop/forum should not accommodate too many topics and make discussions too crowded, which would potentially lead to a duplication of the ASEAN forum. Moreover, the debates can only be fruitful if concrete issues are discussed. The participants expressed an interest in considering the National Security Policy within their own country and the debates that lead to an NSP, during the next workshop. Several additional topics to be addressed at the next meeting were suggested, including: police, terrorism, trust building in conflict areas, international crime and paramilitary groups. At the upcoming workshop, a sharing of national security concepts and practices could be done by means of presentations of country papers. Knowing the state of affairs in each country would be beneficial for stock-taking. The papers should discuss the nature of the involvement of parliaments.

The attendance of the workshop should be balanced, with participants from different groups as well as non-ASEAN ones being invited. Furthermore, invitations to the next meeting should be extended to participants and resource persons from the executive branch of government.

ASEAN parliamentarians network on security sector governance

The sustainability of efforts to establish a network among ASEAN parliamentarians was discussed. It was stressed that the initiative really ought to come from the parliamentarians themselves. It was agreed that the platform to be created need not be an official body. It was decided that a committee of five parliamentarians coming from different countries be created to devise a concept paper about an informal regional caucus on SSR in which parliamentarians can engage with academics. The three leaders of the initial steering committee were selected. An e-group is to be created so that the plans and the groups' first steps towards the caucus can be discussed. It was suggested that caucuses within national parliaments be created. The participants could potentially write an op-ed article to be published in leading regional newspapers.