

# ASEAN OTORHINOLARYNGOLOGICAL - HEAD AND NECK FEDERATION

Its History and Background.

by  
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"History teaches everything, even the future" (Lamartine)

## **Introduction**

More than 14 years have elapsed since the establishment of the ASEAN OTORHINOLARYNGOLOGICAL FEDERATION (now known as ASEAN OTORHINOLARYNGOLOGICAL - HEAD AND NECK FEDERATION) in Medan (Indonesia) on the 2nd of July 1980.

Over the years, from a humble beginning, activities of the Federation have grown very fast as reflected particularly by the quality of the five Congresses which subsequently took place in Pattaya, Thailand (December 9- 13, 1981), Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (April 14-17, 1984), Manila, Philippines (December 4-6, 1986), Singapore (April 6-9, 1989) and Jakarta, Indonesia (June 28 - July 1, 1992).

It is not surprising, therefore, that the International Federation of Otorhinolaryngological Societies (IFOS) did not hesitate to recognize the ASEAN OTORHINOLARYNGOLOGICAL HEAD and NECK FEDERATION prior to the holding of the 5th Congress of the Federation as an important regional scientific body of ASEAN countries.

Many colleagues from within and outside Indonesia have asked me several times to write about the history of the origin of the ASEAN ORL FEDERATION. This is particularly true of Dr. Damayanti, the present President of the Federation and Dr. Suchitra Prasansuk, the present Vice President, who has served the Federation as Secretary and Treasurer for almost 14 years, and who has stated that knowledge of the history of our Federation is very important, particularly for the younger generation.

Initially I was doubtful about writing, considering that history belongs to the past, whereas that what we needed was to look forward into the future. I became more doubtful after reading a phrase by Edmund Burke, placed by a colleague in the ASEAN ORL Newsletter : "Nothing in progress can rest on its original plan. We may as well think of rocking a grown man in the cradle of an infant". However, when Dr. Suchitra honored me with the request that I deliver the Oration to the Plenary Session at the 6th Congress of the ASEAN ORL – HEAD and NECK FEDERATION. I thought of Lamartine's statement that, "History teaches everything, even the future". I accepted the challenge in hopes that the history of the ASEAN Otorhinolaryngological - Head and Neck Federation will serve as an authentic document from which future challenges and opportunities will emerge.

## History and Background

Exactly one year after returning home from my additional 4-year training at the ENT Department at Westfaelische Wilhelms University in West Germany and reassuming my position as staff member of the ENT Department University of Indonesia, I read about the foundation of the ASSOCIATION OF SOUTH-EAST ASIAN NATIONS on the 8th of August, 1967 which issued the ASEAN DECLARATION (BANGKOK DECLARATION) signed by the Foreign Ministers of Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand.

I was very impressed with the content of the Declaration, especially the part that encompass the aims and purposes of the Association, which read:

The aims and purposes of the Association shall be :

1. To accelerate the economic growth, social progress and cultural development in the region through joint endeavors in the spirit of equality and partnership in order to strengthen the foundation for a prosperous and peaceful community of South East Asian nations;
2. To promote regional peace and stability through abiding respect for justice and the rule of law in the relationship among countries of the region and adherence to the principles of the United Nations Charter;
3. To promote active collaboration and mutual assistance on matters of common interest in the economic, social, cultural, technical, scientific and administrative fields;
4. To provide assistance to each other in the form of training and research facilities in the educational, professional, technical and administrative spheres;
5. To collaborate more effectively for the greater utilization of their agricultures and industries, the expansion of their trade, including the study of the problems of international commodity trade, the improvement of their transportation and communication facilities and the raising of the living standards of their peoples;
6. To promote South-East Asian studies;
7. To maintain close and beneficial cooperation with existing international and regional organizations with similar aims and purposes, and explore all avenues for ever closer cooperation among themselves.

Since just reading the above Declaration, I have considered it a masterpiece and its content and meaning have never let my mind.

In early July 1970 I received a telephone call from the secretary of the Indonesian Foreign Minister Adam Malik (one of the founders of ASEAN) who asked me to see the Minister who was about to leave for Washington but had hearing problems due to a longstanding "flu". After returning from the United States on July 18, 1970, while rechecking his ENT condition, he gave me a book which I was longing for : "Plastic Surgery of the Head and Neck, Volume 1,

Corrective and Reconstructive Rhinoplasty by H.J. Denecke and R. Meyer. During the brief conversation that followed, Minister Adam Malik touched on problems of ASEAN. He stressed that any organization or movement that bears the name ASEAN must have a thorough knowledge of the aims and purposes of ASEAN and experiences it to the fullest because ASEAN is not merely a loose federation of countries but one that was based on a strong pledge. Consequently, their activities must be in line with the spirit of ASEAN. With this in mind, I began to ponder about the possibilities of establishing an ASEAN OTORHINOLARYNGOLOGICAL FEDERATION and holding meetings and congresses as an important vehicle for conveying thoughts, ideas and realizing ideals among colleagues from ASEAN countries.

I began realizing that in international and regional meetings little attention was paid to matters peculiar in ASEAN countries. Even at Asia-Oceania Congresses, very few doctors from ASEAN countries were present. ASEAN countries were not fully involved in the mainstream of international scientific knowledge.

In 1977, when I was elected President of the Indonesian Otorhinolaryngological Society, the idea of creating an ASEAN Federation, which had been in the back of my mind for so long, resurfaced. I felt that perhaps the creation of our professional association could become a reality. In 1979, at the 4th Asia-Oceania ORL Congress in Sydney, Australia, during a meeting with Dr. Caparas, President of the Philippines ORL Society, we discussed the common needs and interests of ASEAN countries and agreed to pursue the idea of establishing an ASEAN Otorhinolaryngological Federation.

While preparing for the 6th National Congress of ORL Society in Medan, Indonesia, I felt that finally the time was ripe to take active step towards the foundation of the ASEAN ORL Federation. In collaboration with Dr. Adenin Adenan, President of the 6th National Congress of the Indonesian ORL Society, we contacted Dr. Suchitra Prasansuk (Thailand), Dr. Kobkiat Ruckphaopunt (Thailand), Prof U. Prasad (Malaysia), Dr. Kunaratnam (Singapore) and Dr. Caparas (Philippines) and obtained very positive responses.

Finally, on July 2, 1980, when representatives of the National Otorhinolaryngological Societies of the founding ASEAN countries, Thailand, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Indonesia, met in Medan, Indonesia, the national otorhinolaryngological societies of the ASEAN countries formed a federation. Brunei was an observer during the 2nd ASEAN Congress in Genting Highlands, Malaysia, and subsequently became the sixth member of the Federation. Founding members constituted themselves into a Federation known as "The Asean Otorhinolaryngological Federation".

Although the aims of our Federation are well known, I feel that now that we gather together to review our Federation's history, is an appropriate time to jointly review why our Federation was created:

1. To foster the study and dissemination of all aspects of Otorhinolaryngological knowledge, particularly in the region of ASEAN.
2. To promote co-operation in scientific exchange amongst the member countries, and establish closer personal and professional contacts amongst those interested and working in this field.
3. To organize and hold an ASEAN Congress every two years and to promote and,

4. To support each other's activities as may be deemed necessary for the realization of the above aims.

#### **Achievements:**

The ASEAN Otorhinolaryngological Head & Neck Federation has made great progress since it came to existence fourteen years ago. We have achieved international recognition as we are now affiliated with IFOS, and we are considered a significant regional scientific body in South East Asia. The standards and quality of our congresses have consistently improved over the years as has the reputation of our Federation.

With each new congress there has been a considerable increase in number of participants, from within and outside ASEAN as scientist contributions presented in our congresses become more widely known. Our last Congress, which took place in Jakarta from June 28 to July 1, 1992, had the largest number of participants, 650, including accompanying persons. In addition to our neighboring countries, our colleagues came from far away corners of the world like Hong Kong, Korea, Japan, India, Taiwan, Sri Lanka, the People's Republic of China, Australia, Austria, France, United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Belgium, USA, Saudi Arabia and Jordan.

Not only has the number of participants increased, but, perhaps even more importantly, there has been a noticeable increase in number of internationally recognized scientists and professors eager to contribute to our Congresses. There has been a noticeable increase in number of ENT sub-specialties and consistent advancement in scientific information presented and papers delivered. Courses and Workshops have been included in the Congresses.

While our progress over these fourteen years can not be disputed, we still have many challenges ahead. As scientists we must continue striving to open up new frontiers of knowledge and inquiry:

Our congresses have represented the key means of exchange of scientific knowledge. These congresses have also afforded members the opportunity to further interpersonal relationships. However, we still must devise new and creative mechanisms to ensure more frequent and systematic exchanges among our members.

Founding members have succeeded in establishing successful National ORL associations which meet regularly to share knowledge and personal experiences. The sharing of experience and scientific advancement among member countries, however, presents a challenge yet to be met.

In closing, I would like to return to ideals of the ASEAN, the origin of the idea and ideals on which our Federation was created. As Minister Adam Malik described so wisely, the concept of ASEAN is much more than a loose federation of countries. ASEAN was based, on common ideals, principles and upon a pledge. Today, fourteen years after the birth of the "ASEAN Otorhinolaryngological Federation", we met together to reviewed our history. Together we renew our pledge to uphold our ideals and principles and to make the goals of the ASEAN Otorhinolaryngological - Head and Neck Federation a reality. *"History teaches everything, even the future"* (Lamartine).