

Opening Speech
EU-EAGA BizTech Partnership

YB Datuk Patinggi Tan Sri Dr. George Chan Hong Nam
Deputy Chief Minister of Sarawak

17 November 2009
Imperial Hotel, Miri, Sarawak

Selamat Sejahtera and Good Evening to:

His Excellency Vincent Piket
Ambassador and Head of Delegation of the European Commission to Malaysia

Mr. Bernardino Moningka Vega, Jr.
Chairman, BIMP-EAGA Business Council (BEBC)

Mr. Nicolas Bonnardel
Chief Executive Officer, French Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Vietnam (CCIFV)

Prof. Quintin G. Tan
Director and Treasurer, Chamber of Commerce of the Philippines Foundations, Inc. (CCPF)

Y.Bhg. Dato' Leong Kin Mun
Technical Advisor of EU-EAGA BizTech Partnership

Mr. Elmar Bouma
Director, Indonesian Netherlands Association (INA), Indonesian Benelux Chamber of Commerce, Indonesia

Ms. Eileen Zhang
Netherlands Council for Trade Promotion (NCH)

Dr. Peter Richter
Principal Advisor/Project Manager, GTZ BIMP-EAGA Project

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

1. First of all, on behalf of the State Government of Sarawak, I would like to welcome H.E. Vincent Picket, Ambassador & Head of Delegation of the European Commission to Malaysia for his presence in this evening event. It gives me great pleasure to be here at this auspicious occasion to officiate the Opening of the “EU-East Asean Growth Area Business and Technology Partnership” or EU-EAGA BizTech Partnership. Please allow me to take this opportunity to welcome delegates from the EU and EAGA region for participating in today’s event.

For EU participants from Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Poland, Portugal, The Netherlands, United Kingdom, please kindly stand up!

Please put our hands together to welcome our EU delegates!

For Asian participants from Brunei, Indonesia, Japan, Sri Lanka, Thailand, the Philippines, Vietnam, please kindly stand up!

Please give a round applause to welcome our Asian participants!

Selamat Datang to Miri!

2. The State Government of Sarawak is indeed very honoured to collaborate with the European Commission’s Asia Invest Programme as well as partners from Europe and Asia to make this event a success.

Excellencies, Distinguished guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

3. Sarawak is endowed with an abundance of natural resources. I therefore believe it has much to offer to prospective investors, particularly if its natural strengths and assets are fully optimized and given the opportunity to flourish. Despite of its bountiful supply of natural resources, Sarawak is well-known with its rich flora and fauna where the tropical rainforests harbor a large variety of species of animals, plants, fungi and other life forms. Climatically, it has an equatorial climate with relatively uniform temperature, high humidity and abundant rainfall which are well-positioned to become one of the most preferred investment opportunities for ecotourism-based industries among both local and foreign investors.

4. The large tracts of land and suitable agro-culture climate in Sarawak could be tapped for large-scale plantation of oil palm, rubber, pepper, coconut, sago, pineapple, and fruits as well as livestock and aquaculture development. Aquaculture which involves deep sea fishing, seaweed, herbs, ornamental fish, etc. is also one of the potential industries to be developed and commercialized on a large scale.

5. In the context of environment & energy sector, a lot of projects in BIMP-EAGA are qualified for Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) initiatives. These are deemed as important measures to address global climate change issues. The State Government of Sarawak also launched the Sarawak Corridor of Renewable Energy or simply known as SCORE of which the following sectors have been identified as priority industries i.e. oil-based industry, aluminum, steel, glass, tourism, palm oil, timber, livestock, aquaculture and marine engineering industry. With SCORE in place, Sarawak is capable of sustaining more resource-based industries and providing great potential in value-added processing ventures.

6. Meanwhile, to promote sub regional economic and trade activities, the governments of Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Philippines in 1994 formally launched an economic cooperation initiative, Brunei Darussalam-Indonesia-Malaysia-Philippines East ASEAN Growth Area (BIMP-EAGA). The vision of BIMP-EAGA is the realization of socially acceptable and sustainable economic development, which leads to the full participation of EAGA in the ASEAN development process. Its geographic expanse and the richness of sub region's natural resources has transformed BIMP-EAGA to become one of the more dynamic sub regional cooperation initiatives in Southeast Asia with the following strategic objectives:

- Promote intra- and extra-EAGA trade, investments and tourism in selected priority sectors, namely: agro-industry and natural resources, tourism, transport, infrastructure and ICT, with particular emphasis on SME development in these sectors;
- Coordinate the management of natural resources for sustainable development of the sub region;
- Coordinate the planning and implementation of infrastructure support to economic integration, with active participation of the private sector; and
- Strengthen the BIMP-EAGA institutional structures and mechanisms for effective implementation of the EAGA Roadmap and Action Plan.

Establishing a positive image for BIMP-EAGA as a viable investment and tourism destination is one of the priority activities identified under the development roadmap. Thus, the EU-EAGA BizTech Partnership event is a good branding vehicle to leaping BIMP-EAGA to greater heights.

7. The financial crisis has had serious adverse ramifications on the local Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). But this should not lead to a sense of despair and despondency. Further strengthening of SMEs cooperation can play an important role in turning these challenges into opportunities by way of greater cross border cooperation, in trade, investment and technology partnership.

8. Effective business development via greater market access opportunities can help to overcome the main constraints facing SMEs and generate sustainable and even exponential growth.

9. Finally, I am confident that the EU-EAGA BizTech Partnership is timely which can pave the way to develop new areas for business cooperation and enhance capacity building on trade related value chain in Europe as well as harnessing technological innovation from the EU for the economic benefit of this region.

On behalf of the State Government of Sarawak, I would like to thank the European Commission's Asia Invest Programme and other agencies involved for their unwavering support to make this initiative a success. I hope this event will create spin-off effects to improve the competitiveness of SMEs in both the EU and EAGA regions through direct trade and investment, joint venture, technology transfer and cooperation, and technical assistance via trade related capacity building programmes which ultimately will make a significant contribution to the economic growth in EAGA region.

10. Without any further deliberation, I wish all of you a fruitful discussion. On that note, I officially declare the Opening of the "EU-East ASEAN Growth Area Business and Technology Partnership".

Thank you.