

This developing regionalism will, if it continues to grow, make an important contribution to the cause of peace and social progress in Asia by—

Bridging over age-old rivalries and divisions among the peoples of Asia;

Accelerating social and economic progress;

Committing the leaders of the Asian nations even more strongly to the cause of development as their principal national objective;

Creating a sense of increased self-confidence and solidarity among the nations of free Asia; and

Helping to build a community of more independent and economically viable nations capable of meeting the aspirations of their peoples and less susceptible to destructive Communist aggression and ideology.

Support of these encouraging trends is in the national interest of the United States. The growth of regional cooperation in East Asia complements our effort to make Communist aggression unprofitable in Vietnam. The United States is on record as willing to support these Asian initiatives.

Indeed, Asian progress in regional cooperation over the last 2 years has been impressive. I would like to briefly note some of the high points of the progress achieved to date.

First, as I have already noted, there is now the Asian Development Bank, a landmark in Asian cooperation. Its membership includes virtually all the non-Communist developing countries in Asia, from Afghanistan to Korea. It has received broad support, not only from the affluent countries in the region—Australia, Japan, and New Zealand—but also from 11 Western European nations as well as Canada and the United States. The most recent addition to this multilateral group was Switzerland which joined the Bank at the end of last year.

Second, a whole series of initiatives among the Asian nations serves to dramatize their new interest in regional development. Japan has exercised constructive leadership in this process. In the spring of 1966, a conference of nine Southeast Asian governments convened in Tokyo to consider problems of Southeast Asia's development. The same countries met again in Manila last year and will meet again in Singapore in April. In December 1966 an Asian Agricultural Conference was convened in Tokyo. The proposal for an Asian agricultural fund under the administration of the Asian Development Bank was originally put forward at that conference.

On the political side, a significant recent development was formation of the Asian and Pacific Council—ASPAC—a consultative ministerial level organization, which has now had several meetings to discuss common social, cultural, and political problems. In August 1967 five countries of Southeast Asia—Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Philippines, and Indonesia—formed the Association of Southeast Asia Nations—ASEAN. In recent months distinguished leaders of some of these countries have visited the others and further strengthened the unity which has been forged among them in ASEAN.

In the economic and social field, the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education have constituted themselves as a ministerial council to promote educational activities on a regional basis. I met with the