

1994: PECC X, Kuala Lumpur Concord on Regionalism

History does not travel in a straight line. But over the last few decades, the history of the Pacific has been travelling - with twists and turns - towards a single direction: the emergence of a Pacific community and the primacy of the Pacific as the centre of economic gravity of the world.

In 1889, one of the earliest Pacificians said: "The Mediterranean is the ocean of the past, the Atlantic the ocean of the present, and the Pacific, the ocean of the future." It is clear that the future has arrived. The Pacific shift has been more rapid than most could have imagined. The Pacific Age has indeed begun.

The PECC was formed when the glimmerings of a Pacific Age could just be seen by those blessed by a clear vision. The dream of our founding fathers was of a diverse and rich Pacific that was whole and at one, imbued with a growing sense of community; not only co-existing in but also working actively and together for a common peace and harmony: not only developing vigorously but also working actively and together for a common and mutually shared prosperity.

PECC has already played a role in moving the Pacific super-region towards a Pacific partnership for cooperative peace and prosperity. We must remain true to the vision of our founding fathers. We must continue to play a role in the strengthening, enriching and maturing of such a Pacific partnership in the years to come. The future has, of course, to be created from today.

The danger to a Pacific community, to the Pacific Age, to our common future, can come from many directions. The end of the Cold War has clearly contributed to the making of a wider Pacific community. However, excessive domestic pre-occupation can put a brake on the Pacific movement. A diversion of commitment to narrow regional interests and pursuits can be a serious detour from a path to which some might never return.

Obviously all the issues cannot and should not be addressed by a single instrument or approach. The Pacific Age that we wish to see flourish must continue to be made each day by millions of hands in business, government and academic and other institutions.

We in PECC commit ourselves to becoming, quickly and effectively, a forceful movement for open regionalism. Such a commitment would constitute, in large part, a return to our roots: When the PECC movement was launched in Canberra in 1980, the concept of an "open region" was not only an inspiration but also a cornerstone of the movement itself. Prime Minister Masayoshi Ohira of Japan said:

"For the first time in history, the vast and broad Pacific Basin region has come to meet the pre-requisites for making possible the creation of a regional community."

We must establish, he said, "open regional cooperation befitting the age of the global community".

That Commitment was unequivocally reaffirmed in PECC's San Francisco Declaration on Open Regionalism. This Declaration states:

"The Council has agreed ... that its work in support of multilateralism will now be strengthened by a collective commitment to a dynamic vision of open regionalism, and declares that its future efforts will be directed towards supporting those public and private practises which help regional economies to:

- become increasingly open to flows of goods, investment, services, information and technology;
- comply with the disciplines, principles and practices developed by the world community through the General Agreement on Tariff and Trade;
- benefit from trade creation flowing from sub-regional arrangements that are consistent with GATT principles as a means of maintaining and promoting the overall benefits of the region's increasingly open character;
- develop commerce with economies outside the region and in the global economic system."

PECC does have the largest geographical spread and is the largest and most inclusive Pacific grouping involving no fewer than 21 economies from the north, south, east and west Pacific. And, because of its independent and tripartite nature, involving officials, business and academia, PECC Ministers' pledge to solicit the advice of the business/private sector on issues relevant to APEC's work, especially PECC.

A commitment to open regionalism is also necessary and appropriate because there is clear and present danger and because this clear and present danger -- from the many points of the compass -- will not go away.

PECC's commitment to open regionalism must of course start from the premise that this will contribute to the region of greater prosperity for all. We therefore wholeheartedly welcome the conclusion of the Uruguay Round and urge all governments to speedily implement the commitments made which will reduce obstacle and distortions impeding global trade and further extend the range of GATT's rules, disciplines and dispute settlement procedures.

Reaffirming the importance of global multilateralism, we believe that a world trade organisation must also work on the basis of inclusiveness and in this regard we urge the future inclusion of all PECC economies in the GATT process. Similarly, PECC expresses concern about the tendencies of some member economies to condition trade and investment on achievement of political or ideological objectives.

In order to meet the challenges of open regionalism, PECC will:

First, review its priorities in allocating resources to the mission of championing open regionalism in the pursuit of regional economic cooperation.

Second, fully develop the doctrine and legitimacy of open regionalism, two of whose central tenets must be the desire to open and liberalise a region and the actual achievement of regional liberalisation and opening.

Third, establish processes and instrumentalities for studying and monitoring the development of protectionism and liberalisation in the Pacific and elsewhere. In keeping with the historic San Francisco Declaration, PECC supports the right of all regions to organise in non-discriminatory groupings -- whether this be in the northern, southern, eastern or western Pacific. PECC will attempt to ensure that any sub-regional grouping contributes to open regionalism and to lowering the barriers to non-member economies.

Fourth, join hands and work together with processes, institutions and movements which are similarly committed to open regionalism and global liberalisation, and to take measures to ensure greater involvement of the business sector.