

1st Asian Mediation Association Conference

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Introduction of President Martti Ahtisaari by Prof Tommy Koh

President Martti Ahtisaari, Chief Justice Chan Sek Keong, Minister Shanmugam, Excellencies, Attorney General Walter Woon, Justice Andrew Ang, Judges, Friends from Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines and Hong Kong, Ladies and Gentlemen.

2 Some time last year, the Singapore Mediation Centre (SMC) informed me of its intention to organise the inaugural conference of the Asian Mediation Association and requested my help to identify and invite an inspiring keynote speaker. I agreed and proposed President Ahtisaari. I am proud to tell you that we did this before the 2008 Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to President Ahtisaari!

3 President Ahtisaari's commitment to peace and his life-long work as a peace negotiator and mediator could have its origin in his traumatic childhood. As a result of the notorious pact between Nazi Germany and Stalin's Soviet Union, a slice of Finland, including President Ahtisaari's hometown of Viipuri, now known as Vyborg in Russia, was given to the Soviet Union. The Ahtisaari family, together with many other Finnish families, had to abandon their homes and became refugees in their own country.

4 Let me share with you two of the highlights of President

Ahtisaari's record of achievements as a peace mediator.

5 First, I will refer to his role in guiding South-West Africa to independence. The League of Nations had given South Africa a mandate to govern South-West Africa as a trust territory. Although this mandate was subsequently revoked by the UN, and the ICJ had ruled that South Africa's continued occupation was illegal under international law, South Africa refused to give up the territory. In the meantime, the battle for the liberation of South-West Africa was fought on two battle fields: at the UN and on the ground between South Africa and SWAPO, the national liberation movement. This stalemate continued for several decades. Martti Ahtisaari had served as the Ambassador of Finland to Tanzania. He succeeded in gaining the confidence of all the African parties. When we first met at the UN, between 1977 and 1981, President Ahtisaari was the UN Commissioner for Namibia. I thought he must be a very optimistic and patient person to be willing to take on a job which looked hopeless at that time. However, when the Cold War ended and South Africa had an enlightened leader, F W de Klerk, the UN Secretary-General appointed President Ahtisaari as his Special Representative for Namibia. In a masterful display of diplomatic skill and negotiating genius, he managed to get the West, the Soviet Union, South Africa, SWAPO, OAU, Angola and Cuba to agree to stop fighting, to let the UN administer the territory temporarily and to hold free elections. President Ahtisaari was the de facto governor of the territory, with 8,000 UN soldiers, police officers, civilians working under him. As an aside, I would remind President Ahtisaari that Singapore had contributed a contingent of police officers and one of them even married a Namibian lady! The transition was a great success and, on 21 March 1990, the new State of Namibia was born. Martti Ahtisaari

had given 14 years of his life to Namibia.

6 Second, I will now refer to Aceh. Aceh had existed, for several hundred years, as an independent Islamic sultanate. There were some Acehnese who never accepted Aceh as a province of Indonesia. They wanted independence and waged an armed struggle from 1976 to achieve their goal. The pro-independence movement was called Gerakan Aceh Merdeka or GAM, for short.

7 The world changed on the 26th of December 2004. The so-called Boxing Day tsunami, literally wiped out much of Aceh. 170,000 Acehnese lives were lost, including many of the GAM's fighters. The leaders of GAM must have realised that their quest for independence had been washed away by the waves. In January 2005, representatives of GAM and the Indonesian Government approached President Ahtisaari to mediate the dispute. In a miraculous performance of only seven months, he managed to get the two sides to sign a peace treaty in Finland on 15 August 2005. The implementation of the peace process was monitored by the EU and ASEAN. Free elections in Aceh were held in April 2009. President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono has called Ahtisaari "the Master of Peace". If you want to know more about the peace process in Aceh, I recommend a book, "Making Peace: Ahtisaari and Aceh" by Katri Merikallio.

8 It now gives me great pleasure to invite my good friend, the 2008 Nobel Peace Laureate, President Martti Ahtisaari, to address us.

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