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NORTH KOREA: ASEAN IMMINENT CHALLENGE

North Korea, once again, shocked international community by conducting nuclear test on February 13. It is the third time since its prior test in 2006 and 2009, but could be just a beginning under Kim Jong-Un regime.

A report said that the communist country is preparing for the two next tests launched this year (Reuters, February 19 2013).

Nuclear weapon possession has been a classic in international concern. Since the catastrophic impact of Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombing in 1945, nuclear is becoming a terror for the entire nations in this world. Any effort has been initiated by any nations –especially by non-nuclear weapon state- to keep their territories save from nuclear hazard. One of them is to advocate the treaty of nuclear weapon free zone (NWFZ). This treaty has been signed by some group of state, including Southeast Asian countries, which means that there is no country in that region allowed to build nuclear weapon.

Southeast Asian countries which are united in Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) are well worth it to be appreciated for their struggle to fight against nuclear weapon. It started when 5 founder countries, Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand and Singapore signed a Declaration on Zone of Peace, Freedom, and Neutrality (ZOPFAN).

The first main agenda of ZOPFAN was to keep Southeast Asian territory save from nuclear weapon. By such courage, on December 1995, ten countries in the region agreed to sign the treaty of Southeast Asian Nuclear Weapon Free Zone in Bangkok.

The precarious situation on the international nuclear possession, especially caused by North Korea may prompt ASEAN to think about doing something more on international nuclear concern. On Regional Seminar on Maintaining a Southeast Asia Region Free of Nuclear Weapon in Jakarta, ASEAN represented by Indonesia define their commitment to build a peaceful and safe region without nuclear weapon. Marty Natalegawa, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Indonesia while opening the seminar stated that ASEAN Countries could play the major role to eliminate nuclear weapon, even at the global scope (Republika Online, February 12 2013)

Therefore, ASEAN imminent challenge will be coming up in the neighborhood. This could be the first step to prove ASEAN commitment to bring in free nuclear zone, not only in the region, but also all over the world.

ASEAN has a well-known track record on international conflict resolution, especially within the region. Moreover, ASEAN has its own style on managing conflict, called the ASEAN way. It is recognized to be Southeast Asia's distinctive approach to interstate relations. What makes ASEAN way is unique as conflict resolution method that it is relying on informal negotiations in loose settings as opposed to adversarial modes in legally grounded institutions (Weatherbee 2005 page 128).

Considering uncompromising outlook of North Korea responding to International criticism, particularly from United States who is tend to use hard power, the ASEAN way should be deliberated as an alternative approach. It will be interesting to see how ASEAN play its role in such global complexity.

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