

Opening Remarks by

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7th Southeast Asian Studies Symposium:
Exploring Uniqueness & Diversity of Southeast Asia
University of Indonesia, 22 March 2018

*H.E. Bapak Jusuf Kalla, Vice President of the Republic of Indonesia,
Prof. Dr. Ir. Muhammad Anis, Rector of the University of Indonesia (tbc)
Excellencies, Distinguished Speakers and Participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen:*

On behalf of the ASEAN Secretariat, I would like to congratulate the Universitas Indonesia, Oxford University and the Indonesia Environmental Scientist Association for convening this important symposium. Thank you for inviting the ASEAN Secretariat and it is an honor for me to share perspectives on the uniqueness and diversity of ASEAN in this distinguished forum, particularly on how these traits contribute to peace and prosperity for the ASEAN's peoples and the world at large.

With a population of over 635 million people, almost 400 ethnic groups, and more than 900 languages and dialects being spoken, ASEAN is certainly one of the most diverse regions in the world. Straddling in strategic landmass and sea-lanes, Southeast Asia has a long history of civilization and cultures, all of which have made ASEAN as we know of today as one of the versatile regions in terms of traditions, heritage, and cultures.

ASEAN diversity goes beyond cultural traits only. ASEAN is also incredibly rich in biodiversity. Altogether, our region boasts 24 UNESCO cultural heritage sites and 14 UNESCO natural heritage sites. While occupying only 3% of the earth's land, ASEAN covers four biodiversity hotspots and contains three of the world's 17 mega-diverse nations (Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines), all of which have exceptionally high levels of species endemism.

ASEAN has some of the longest coastlines and richest ocean resources in term of marine biodiversity. We host the world's center for marine biodiversity - otherwise known as the Coral Triangle, and we have the most extensive and diverse coral reefs in the world, which accounts for more than 28% of the global total.

The combination of unique and amazing cultures and richness in biodiversity has made tourism one of ASEAN's greatest assets. The world now travels to ASEAN. Since 2007, the number of international visitors to ASEAN has doubled from 62 million to over 125 million in 2017 with over 50% coming from outside the ASEAN Community. These are remarkable achievements and something we are all proud of.

While encouraging, we must remain vigilant of potential negative aspects of ever increasing influx of both domestic and international tourists. It is therefore vital for ASEAN to protect its natural and cultural heritages so its diversity and richness will continue for generations to come.

I am pleased to share with this meeting that ASEAN, guided by responsible and sustainable tourism principles, has carried out several key measures. They include: establishment of an inventory of protected areas, national parks and wildlife reserves; establishment of a network of ecotourism sites across the ASEAN Member States; and encouraging concerted actions among stakeholders for the sustainable development of ecotourism.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

If we take a moment to reflect on the fact that there are 250 million Muslims, 150 million Buddhists, 150 million Christians, and millions of Hindus, Sikhs, Confucians, Taoists and others all living together side-by-side in peace and harmony in this region for the last five decades, surely, we must ask “**how did ASEAN do it?**”

How did Southeast Asia transform from a region riven by conflicts and instability into one of the most competitive economies in the world where its peoples enjoy prosperity, stability, relative equitable development, fundamental rights and social freedom?

One cannot deny the fact that it is the commitment of all ASEAN Member States that binds the region together. ASEAN deliberately chooses community building and regional integration over individualism. It is a conscientious, consensus decision that ASEAN embraces non-violence over confrontation; moderation over extremism; peace building and reconciliation over the use of threats and conflicts. The launch of the ASEAN Community in December 2015 marked a key milestone in ASEAN's journey to preserve peace, stability and security in Southeast Asia and beyond. The ASEAN Way that seeks dialogue, consultation and consensus has served the region well.

However, it would be remiss on our part if we neglect to mention that it is ASEAN's diversity that makes the peoples of ASEAN appreciate the differences in cultures, customs, traditions and beliefs. It is this diversity that enhances our acceptance and tolerance of each other, and one that shapes our values i.e. the respect for our neighbours and the preference for peace and non-confrontation in resolving conflicts. These values are deeply rooted in the cultures of ASEAN peoples and in our way of life because we have learned to embrace diversity. In short, it is in our diversity that we find our commonality and our peace.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen:

In 2017, ASEAN turned a new leaf in its history when it celebrated its golden jubilee. As custodians of this great legacy, it is our duty to build on the progress that our Founding Fathers and Leaders have laid down for us. It is incumbent upon us that we preserve our diversity and uniqueness – the factors that make ASEAN stronger and richer – and our innate characteristics which lay the foundation for ASEAN's confidence in the path towards progress and development.

For this reason, I am thankful that this symposium on ASEAN diversity and uniqueness is taking place here in Jakarta, the home of the ASEAN Secretariat, and look forward to fruitful discussions and wish the symposium a great success.

Terima kasih! Thank you!