

**Keynote Address
by H.E. Bounnhang VORACHITH,
President of the Lao People's Democratic Republic
at the Opening Ceremony of the 28th and 29th ASEAN Summits and
Related Summits**

6 September 2016, National Convention Centre, Vientiane

Your Majesty,

Excellencies Heads of State and Government,

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my great honour and pleasure, having this opportunity to deliver my keynote address at the Opening Ceremony of the 28th and 29th ASEAN Summits and Related Summits today.

On behalf of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, the Lao multi-ethnic people and on my own behalf, I would like to extend my warmest welcome to Excellencies Heads of State and Government, Secretary-General of ASEAN and all distinguished delegates to Vientiane for attending the 28th and 29th ASEAN Summits and Related Summits.

Your Majesty,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

ASEAN is an important regional organisation which has evolved and overcome various challenges with steady achievements made in various fronts leading to the formal establishment of the ASEAN Community on the 31 December 2015. All the achievements made by ASEAN over the past 5 decades are resulted from collective efforts and cooperation within ASEAN and between ASEAN and its external partners through ASEAN-initiated mechanisms based on the ASEAN Way of cooperation and in accordance with the particularity and reality of the region.

ASEAN has become a single market and production base with a combined GDP of \$2,43 trillion USD in 2015, ranking as the 6th largest economy in the world. ASEAN's economy is also projected to grow with an annual rate of 7%, which will make ASEAN's economy even stronger in the future. ASEAN is an integral part and also central to the evolving regional architecture. Furthermore, ASEAN is a unique inter-governmental organisation comprising 10 Member States with different political systems and are characterised by diverse cultures, religions and languages, among others, but it has enjoyed peaceful coexistence, harmony and cooperation under the ASEAN Community of one identity and one vision. In this light, I am of the view that the ASEAN Community is a community of opportunities not only for the over 620 million people of ASEAN, but also for countries outside the region.

The Lao PDR highly values the accomplishments made by ASEAN over the past years and is truly proud of being a member of this diverse ASEAN family that adheres to the ASEAN Way and ASEAN principles, and coexisting with others in maintaining and promoting peace in ASEAN and the world at large.

ASEAN has become an important component in the Lao PDR's foreign policy based on the principle of peace, independence, friendship and cooperation. Since joining ASEAN in 1997, the Lao PDR has actively participated in the cooperation frameworks within ASEAN and between ASEAN and external partners as well as sub-regional cooperation frameworks related to ASEAN, all of which has made an important contribution to the socio-economic development of the Lao PDR.

Through the implementation of the 7th National Socio-Economic Development Plan (2010-2015), the Lao PDR's economy has witnessed a sustained growth. Earlier this year, we adopted the 8th National Socio-Economic Development Plan (2016-2020), the Socio-Economic Development Strategy 2025 and the Vision 2030, aimed at further advancing our national socio-economic development while contributing to the implementation of ASEAN Community Vision 2025 and the United Nations Sustainable Development Agenda 2030.

Taking this opportunity I would like to express our sincere gratitude and appreciation to all ASEAN Member States, ASEAN's Dialogue Partners and other external parties as well as friendly countries, and regional and international organisations for their valuable support and assistance extended to the Lao PDR in its national development efforts over the past years as well as in fulfilling its international obligations and commitments, including successfully hosting and chairing of important meetings under sub-regional, regional, and international cooperation frameworks.

The Lao PDR assumed its first chairmanship of ASEAN in 2004-2005 during which, I had the honour to chair the 10th ASEAN Summit and Related Summits. Indeed, the Lao PDR is honoured and proud to assume ASEAN chairmanship for the second time under the theme of ***“Turning Vision into Reality for a Dynamic ASEAN Community”*** in 2016 which marks a new era of ASEAN becoming the Community as well as implementation of the ASEAN Community Vision 2025.

Your Majesty,

Excellencies, Distinguished Guests,

In recent years, regional and international environments have undergone rapid and complex challenges. Multifaceted security challenges have occurred in many parts of the world such as terrorism and extremism, natural disasters, climate change, migration crisis, trafficking in persons, territorial disputes and armed conflicts, among others. At the same time, although the global economy has gradually recovered, growth remains slow and fragile. Against this backdrop, there is a need for us to closely follow these developments and continue to enhance ASEAN cooperation and collaboration with the international community, including ASEAN's Dialogue Partners and other external parties in order to be able to respond to and address the said challenges in a timely manner.

At the same time, ASEAN must continue adhering to ASEAN's principles in promoting the relevance and enhancing centrality of ASEAN in its relations with external partners based on the ASEAN Way and in accordance with the particularity and reality of the ASEAN region,

moving towards a dynamic, rules-based, people-oriented, people-centered ASEAN Community. Likewise, we should work together towards further advancing vibrant, sustained and highly integrated economies, enhancing ASEAN connectivity while supporting efforts to narrow the development gap within ASEAN through various mechanisms, including the Initiative for ASEAN Integration (IAI).

In addition, we should further strengthen external cooperation in various forms and modalities as appropriate corresponding to a growing number of countries and regional and international organisations which express interests in engaging with ASEAN in order to ensure maximum benefits to ASEAN, taking into account the existing potentials.

I am convinced that the 28th and 29th ASEAN Summits and Related Summits will be deliberated in a candid, comprehensive and constructive manner on how to effectively implement the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 and enhance cooperation with external partners through ASEAN-initiated mechanisms and enhance ASEAN Centrality as well as exchange views on regional and international issues of common interest and concern aiming at ***“Turning Vision into Reality for a Dynamic ASEAN Community”*** and thereby contributing to the common cause of maintaining and promoting peace, stability and development cooperation in the region and the world at large.

Your Majesty,

Excellencies, Distinguished Guests,

Once again, on behalf of the Lao People’s Democratic Republic and its multi-ethnic people, I would like to express my profound thanks and appreciations to all countries and regional and international organisations for their valuable support and assistance accorded to the Lao PDR during its ASEAN Chairmanship 2016, particularly in hosting and chairing the 28th and 29th ASEAN Summits and Related Summits.

Last but not least, I would like to extend my best wishes to Your Majesty, Excellencies Heads of State and Government and all delegates for good health, happiness, success and a pleasant stay in the Lao PDR.

On this auspicious occasion, I would like to officially declare open the 28th and 29th ASEAN Summits and Related Summits.

I wish all the Summits a great success.

Thank You.