

Keynote Speech
By
H.E. Dato Lim Jock Hoi
Secretary-General of ASEAN
At
The Opening Ceremony of
The ASEAN-Australia Young Leaders Forum (AAYLF)

29 November 2019
Jakarta, Indonesia

*Your Excellency Jane Duke, Ambassador of Australia to ASEAN,
Representatives of the ASEAN-Australia Strategic Youth
Partnership and Australian Universities,
Youth delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,
A very good morning and selamat pagi.*

1. Allow me to start my remarks by expressing my sincere appreciation to the Government of the Australia for the initiative to establish the ASEAN-Australia Strategic Youth Partnership and for organising this important ASEAN-Australia Young Leaders Forum.
2. It is also my pleasure to be meeting everyone here at the Forum today. I am pleased to be addressing a group of young promising individuals from across ASEAN and Australia. One

of ASEAN's most important priorities at the moment is to prepare the leaders of tomorrow.

Ladies and gentlemen,

3. Australia is one of our most steadfast and long-standing partners since 1974. Since then, Australia has been supporting ASEAN to achieve its vision of an integrated, peaceful and stable community.
4. ASEAN-Australia strategic partnership continues to be strengthened across the three pillars of the ASEAN Community as guided by the ASEAN-Australia Plan of Action.
5. ASEAN and Australia have been working together to promote peace and security in the region. These robust political relations have, in turn, led to stronger community building on the ground.
6. The sound political ties provide an enabling environment for healthy economic growth and partnerships. These partnerships further deepen our engagement with Australia as we jointly strive to bring economic prosperity to the region.
7. One example of these partnerships is the ASEAN-Australia-New Zealand Free Trade Area or AANZFTA. This is one platform where the youth could play a role in contributing to the sustainable economic growth and development in the region. The AANZFTA opens up and creates new opportunities for the citizens of ASEAN, Australia and New Zealand – a region with a combined Gross Domestic Product of approximately 4 trillion USD as of 2016.

8. One of the major benefits of this free trade agreement is that barriers to imports and exports are reduced, which means goods and services can be bought and sold across borders with low or no taxes or limits. In addition, the movement of persons engaged in trade and investment activities in the FTA region is made easier as a result of this free trade agreement.
9. Given that today's youth are more vibrant, more innovative and even bolder than ever, based on the demographics related to new start-ups and young entrepreneurship, the youth can actually participate in commercial activities to take advantage of the opportunities made available by the AANZFTA and benefit from it.
10. Aside from the AANZFTA, I would also like to highlight that Australia is also one of the six ASEAN Dialogue Partners that joined negotiations on the formation of the broader and bigger Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, or RCEP. The negotiation was concluded during the 35th ASEAN Summit in Bangkok earlier this month and the agreement will be ready to be signed by the end of next year, which is a very important treaty that will bring advantage for the young people and the economies across in region. As you know, RCEP will bring together a number of the world's fastest growing economies. It will significantly boost the region's future growth prospects and promote socio-economic development across the region. It will further expand and deepen regional value chains, benefitting businesses, including small and medium enterprises, as well as our workers, producers, and consumers.

Ladies and gentlemen,

11. It is crucial for ASEAN to ensure that peace, stability and economic growth translates into inclusive social development among its peoples. As we move closer towards becoming a caring and sharing ASEAN Community, the people of ASEAN must be able to enjoy the tangible benefits of regional integration.
12. In this regard, building competitive human resources and ensuring adequate social protection are key priorities for ASEAN as it strives to manage the social impact of economic integration.
13. ASEAN's special relationship with Australia is strengthened even more through increased *people-to-people connections*. Enhancing connectivity and mutual understanding between ASEAN and Australia is high on our agenda, and this has translated to many significant benefits *at the people-to-people level*.
14. ASEAN and Australia share deep and dynamic social and cultural connections. The Sydney Declaration, or the Joint Statement of the ASEAN-Australia Special Summit held in 2018, emphasizes a commitment to further strengthen our people-to-people links, with a special focus on investing in enduring connections among you – *our future leaders*.

So, to our youth delegates,

15. I am happy to highlight that ASEAN is a region that celebrates youth and their vibrant optimism. 34 percent of our population consists of young people, which is a segment of our population aged between 15 to 35 years old.
16. The ASEAN Community Vision 2025 underscores the role of young people, like yourselves, in achieving a peaceful, stable and resilient ASEAN. As you know, at the heart of ASEAN's mandate to foster peace and mutual understanding in the region and beyond is youth exchange programmes. These exchange programmes enable youth lay the foundations for regional social cohesion towards building the ASEAN Community and encourage our youth to celebrate diversity.
17. The 2016 Australian census reveals an interesting statistic. Around 900,000 people in Australia claimed heritage from the ASEAN nations. These numbers provide strong evidence of cultural links between the people of ASEAN and Australia, which underpin the special relationship between the two.
18. Youth development has always been central to the work of ASEAN. The ASEAN Work Plan on Youth in 2016-2020 recognises five key priorities: *First*, youth **entrepreneurship**, especially through opportunities such as the AANZFTA; *second*, ensuring employability through **skills development**; *third*, raising ASEAN awareness through **people-to-people exchange**; *fourth*, **youth volunteerism and leadership**; and *lastly*, advancement of technological and managerial skills through **cross-sectoral collaboration**.

19. I always believe that investing in youth development means investing in our future. I am pleased to note that education, people-to-people exchange and youth development are among the key areas of cooperation between ASEAN and Australia.
20. Our work around youth development has the potential to expand further through active collaboration between the ASEAN-Australia Strategic Youth Partnership Programme and ASEAN's youth sector mechanism.

Ladies and gentlemen,

21. ASEAN is committed to build an enabling ecosystem for the youth to contribute to community development. For post-2020, ASEAN's Youth Ministers have agreed to focus on preparing its youth to become future-ready and providing platforms for the youth to participate in policy discourse.
22. We consider preparing our young people to become 'future-ready' as a serious undertaking. This requires us to reimagine the future. This also requires us to look at our education and training systems, and to assess their effectiveness in equipping our youth with the knowledge and skills for a rapidly changing world.
23. The cooperation between ASEAN and Australia in higher education, skills development, and research continues to be growing. This has been further boosted by the package of initiatives announced during the ASEAN-Australia Special Summit last year including scholarships to build skills for the next generation of ASEAN leaders to contribute to the security

and prosperity of the region. These scholarships include the Australia Awards, the Endeavour Scholarships and Fellowships, and the New Colombo Plan. In 2017, Australia welcomed over 105,000 ASEAN students or one-sixth of all international students in the country. Of the students from ASEAN countries, around 1,000 received support through Australian government scholarships.¹

24. There has also been great interest in ASEAN among Australian students. At the end of last year, it was estimated that more than 13,500 Australian undergraduates chose to study or undertake internships in ASEAN countries under the New Colombo Plan. This is a very good initiative for its two-way traffic in the understanding of culture.
25. The ASEAN education sector also places a high priority in supporting the development of Technical and Vocational Education and Training, or TVET, and strengthening higher education. Australia has been a strong partner in this regard. Support was provided by Australia in developing a regional framework on quality assurance in TVET through the East Asia Summit.
26. Along with New Zealand, Australia also supports ASEAN integration by promoting better mobility among students and workers in ASEAN through the development and implementation of the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework or AQRF. This tool is important to ensure that the education and learning systems across ASEAN will be based on competencies that are comparable across the ASEAN

¹ “[Why ASEAN matters: our shared connections](https://dfat.gov.au/international-relations/regional-architecture/asean/Pages/why-asean-matters-our-shared-connections.aspx),” <https://dfat.gov.au/international-relations/regional-architecture/asean/Pages/why-asean-matters-our-shared-connections.aspx>

Member States. This would make it easier for skilled workers to work in any country in the region. I am hopeful that our engagement with Australia in this area will continue to flourish and lead to more constructive activities in the near future.

Ladies and gentlemen,

27. It is timely for me to emphasise that we are about to witness a dramatic transformation in labour markets. Within a few years, technology will disrupt jobs. There is also a growing demand for 21st century or soft skills, such as communication, teamwork, critical thinking and problem-solving.
28. With this in mind, ASEAN and Australia must find ways to adapt to a dynamic, fast-changing and inter-connected world. Concretely, this can be done through harnessing innovative thinking and encouraging creative ideas from multiple stakeholders. Instilling a 'growth mindset' among the youth, therefore, has become all the more important for ASEAN.
29. In 2017, ASEAN launched its First ASEAN Youth Development Index. One of the findings that struck me was the lack of participation and engagement of youth in community development in ASEAN. This reality has inspired ASEAN to foster greater interest and willingness among its youth to actively contribute to community development while at the same time, strengthening their soft skills.
30. Various activities such as entrepreneurship skills development, data science and problem-solving competitions, as well as community immersion and volunteering projects have been implemented by ASEAN's

partner organisations. Realising the effectiveness of these approaches, I would say that social entrepreneurship and narrowing the digital divide by leveraging technology in volunteering programmes are areas worth exploring under the ASEAN-Australia Strategic Youth Partnership.

To our youth delegates,

31. I believe that young people like you can offer new and creative perspectives on pre-existing and emerging challenges. I look forward to hearing your views on how to address some of the most current and pressing societal and environmental issues in the region.
32. In the next few days, you will be able to learn from each other's experiences and actively contribute to discussions on the ASEAN-Australia relations and regional development. So please, make the most of your time at the Forum — express your ideas, engage with new people and build your network.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

33. Lastly, I would like to express my sincere gratitude and appreciation to the Australian Mission to ASEAN, for engaging us in the Opening Ceremony of this Forum.
34. Building on the firm legacy of this partnership, I am confident this Forum will deeply enhance mutual understanding and further reinforce the solid relationship between ASEAN and Australia.

35. I wish the ASEAN-Australia Youth Leadership Forum a success.
36. Thank you very much.
