

## Opening Remarks

By H.E. Dato Lim Jock Hoi, Secretary-General of ASEAN

### **ASEAN Women Interfaith Dialogue: Promoting Understanding for an Inclusive and Peaceful Society**

Sheraton Grand Jakarta Gandaria City Hotel, Jakarta

Tuesday, 12 November 2019

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*Her Excellency Ms. Artauli Tobing, Indonesia Representative to the ASEAN-IPR Governing Council;*

*Her Excellency Ms. Phasorn Sangasubana, Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of Thailand to ASEAN and Chair of the ASEAN-IPR Advisory Board;*

*His Excellency Mr. Rezlan Ishar Jenie, Executive Director of ASEAN-IPR;*

*Ms. Megan Jones, Chargé d’Affaires of the Australian Mission to ASEAN;*

*Members of the ASEAN Committee of Permanent Representatives;*

*Excellencies,*

*Distinguished speakers, ladies and gentlemen,*

1. Good morning, *selamat pagi*. I am delighted to be here at the opening of the ‘ASEAN Women Interfaith Dialogue: Promoting Understanding for an Inclusive and Peaceful Society.’

2. I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the Government of Indonesia for the excellent arrangements and warm hospitality extended to all of you. My thanks also go to the Australian Aid and the Asia Foundation for making this event possible.
3. I would also like to thank our friends and colleagues at the ASEAN Institute for Peace and Reconciliation (ASEAN-IPR) for their hard work in realizing this very important event.
4. The ASEAN Community embraces tolerance and moderation and fully respects the differences in the beliefs, religions and cultures of our peoples, while upholding common values and the spirit of unity. In this connection, ASEAN Member States are strengthening cooperation to promote greater understanding in the building and sustaining of peace, security and prosperity in the region. We endeavor to build a solid ASEAN Community that is characterized by harmony and cohesion, where our peoples can reside and thrive in, regardless of who they are and what faith they hold.

*Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,*

5. The importance of interfaith dialogue and the roles of all actors, especially women, in fostering inter-religious understanding and intercultural acceptance are recognized and should be further advocated in forums such as this Dialogue. This Dialogue is very timely as it discusses two issues of great importance, namely women's

empowerment and the actualization of a peaceful and inclusive ASEAN.

6. Against this backdrop I would like to highlight that in 2010, ASEAN Member States were actively involved in the unanimous adoption process of the United Nations General Assembly on Resolution 65/5 on the 'World Interfaith Harmony Week.' This Resolution recognizes the pressing need for dialogue amongst people of different faiths and religions to enhance mutual rapport, affinity and cooperation. This Resolution also reaffirms that interreligious dialogue is a crucial element in a culture of peace.

*Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,*

7. In 2017, the ASEAN Leaders adopted the ASEAN Declaration on 'Culture of Prevention for a Peaceful, Inclusive, Resilient, Healthy and Harmonious Society'. The Declaration demonstrates ASEAN's commitment to realize a culture that supports the values of moderation, cultural pluralism and mutual understanding. In effect, these values would contribute to enhancing the resilience of communities in preventing racial, religious distrust, disharmony and intolerance. In October of the same year, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Indonesia and the Darul Ulum Pesantren University (UNIPDU) of Jombang hosted the ASEAN Youth Interfaith Camp under the theme 'Tolerance in Diversity for ASEAN and World Harmony'. Motivated by the firm belief in the power of youth as agents of peace, the Camp aimed to

contribute to the global discourse and efforts to seek resolutions on peace-building through interfaith dialogue.

8. I would like to emphasize that the role of women as promoters of peace and interfaith cooperation are increasingly acknowledged and espoused. It is evident that women have become a fervent force in bringing about peace, inclusiveness and tranquility in our societies. In this regard, women's contributions to the success of inter-faith dialogue is vital.
9. Women play an indispensable role in the implementation of peace agreements and post-conflict recovery. Meanwhile, women's organizations, particularly those with strong grassroots networks, are in a unique position to help in the detection of early warning signs of conflict to prevent its escalation.

*Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,*

10. Furthermore, the ASEAN Leaders adopted in 2017 the 'Joint Statement on Promoting Women, Peace and Security in ASEAN', to reaffirm the crucial role of women in sustaining peace and security. It also promotes the transformative role of women in fostering peace, upholding values of inclusion and countering violent extremism. Another relevant ASEAN initiative is the 'ASEAN Women for Peace Registry', which was established under the auspice of the ASEAN-IPR to enhance the participation of women in peacebuilding and reconciliation processes in a meaningful manner.

11. Both the Joint Statement and the establishment of the 'ASEAN Women for Peace Registry' are evidence of our region's commitment to promote peace and the empowerment of women. It is important for us to recognize that women are at the heart of peacekeeping efforts and interfaith conversations.

*Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,*

12. In today's interconnected world, we must be aware that existing and emerging threats to peace and harmony are complex due to a range of political, cultural and socio-economic causes. A challenge ASEAN continues to face is the building of an inclusive society, in which all segments are empowered with a sense of belonging and optimism in the ability to enjoy the benefits of development. We are, therefore, cognizant that new approaches are needed to handle these challenges.
13. We need to enhance our efforts to promote and uphold mutual understanding and respect between different cultures and religions. Only through these efforts, can we address the pressing issues brought about by intolerance such as Islamophobia, antisemitism and xenophobia that we are currently facing at the national, regional and global levels.

14. In our efforts to promote meaningful engagement and participation of women in interfaith dialogue, we need to encourage the presence of women as leaders and influencers within faith-based organizations. Their voices must be amplified and their agency strengthened in the promotion of peace, interfaith dialogue and human rights.
15. I believe this interfaith dialogue provides a valuable forum to discuss issues related to the participation of women in peace and reconciliation processes; relevant policies to facilitate women's contributions; partnerships between government and civil society towards social inclusivity; and the role of governments to support these efforts and processes.
16. This two-day forum presents an excellent opportunity for all stakeholders to share their perspectives, identify areas of cooperation, and to arrive at innovative solutions to foster diversity, pluralism and multiculturalism.

*Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,*

17. Our proactive participation in this Interfaith Dialogue shows our commitment towards empowering ASEAN, especially the women, in resolving disputes and addressing existing and emerging challenges peacefully through a whole-of-society approach.

18. To conclude, I would like to once again thank the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, the ASEAN-IPR, as well as the Australian Aid and Asia Foundation for organizing today's platform.

19. I wish you all productive and meaningful deliberations.

Thank you very much.