



LECTURE

H.E Dr. Kao Kim Hourn, Secretary-General of ASEAN,

“Role and Relevance of ASEAN in Global Affairs, ASEAN Centrality and Unity, and the Future of ASEAN – ASEAN Community Vision 2045 and its Relations with Chile”

University of Chile, Santiago, Chile, 5 September 2024

Excellencies, Ambassadors, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen, Friends and Students,

1. A very good morning. I wish to put on record my sincere gratitude to the University of Chile for inviting me here today. I am delighted to share with you on a very important topic, which is the role and relevance of ASEAN in global affairs, the issue of ASEAN Centrality and unity, as well as look at the future of ASEAN. I will also talk about ASEAN-Chile relations, its partnership and cooperation, as we celebrated the fifth anniversary of ASEAN-Chile Development Partnership.
2. The ASEAN region and Chile are separated by more than 15,000 kilometers — a journey that takes about 24 hours by air and spans several time zones. Yet, despite this very vast distance, it is fascinating to see how much ASEAN countries and Chile have been able to work together and build common ground in pursuit of common aspirations and interest. It is also heartening to see how many of you are interested in learning more about ASEAN’s journey in fostering peace, stability, security, and prosperity in Southeast Asia. Chile has indeed been a very constructive and reliable partner of ASEAN in promoting international cooperation for peace and prosperity across the Asia-Pacific region over many decades now. I therefore deeply appreciate the kind invitation and warm welcome extended to me by the University of Chile here in Santiago.
3. Let me start briefly with a bit of history of ASEAN. After the end of the Second World War and especially during the height of the Cold War, Southeast Asia was viewed as a battleground where great powers waged proxy wars. This period also marked a surge in nationalist sentiments as our young nations emerged from the shadows of colonialism, learning to navigate relationships with one another as neighbours. Compounded by issues of race and religion, this volatile environment led some observers to even label Southeast Asia as the “Balkans of the Orient”.

4. At this critical juncture, the Foreign Ministers of Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand gathered in Bangkok in 1967 to establish the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) with a view to turning Southeast Asia from a region of strife, conflict and poverty into a region of peace and development.
5. The underlying idea was that fostering good relations among neighbours would reduce the risk of conflict, creating a conducive regional environment for these young nations to concentrate their efforts on nation-building and cooperate with one another to deliver economic development, and make social progress. This commitment had fostered peace and prosperity in Southeast Asia, cultivated a habit of cooperation and a culture of dialogue within ASEAN, and elevated multilateralism as a cornerstone of the regional architecture in order to address shared interests and shared concerns.
6. Over the following decades, ASEAN expanded beyond its original five founding members, welcoming Brunei in 1984, Vietnam in 1995, Lao PDR and Myanmar in 1997, and Cambodia in 1999. Timor-Leste is poised to become the 11th member of ASEAN in the near future, which would realise the ASEAN Founding Father's aspiration that ASEAN should encompass the entire geography of Southeast Asia.

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7. As the Cold War receded into history, ASEAN recognised that it would need to reinvigorate its role and relevance over its own region lest Southeast Asia once again became a battleground for major powers. Thus, during this period, we witnessed the emergence of multilateral mechanisms that work at three levels: 1) mechanisms at the ASEAN-level among the ten Member States; 2) ASEAN-led mechanisms established to work with our partners across the region; and 3) mechanisms to work with other partners that go beyond our region.
8. ASEAN's role is focused on becoming the center of regional affairs and diplomacy and by becoming the convener to bring countries together in order to promote trade, investment, and practical economic cooperation as well as political-security cooperation. This concept of ASEAN Centrality is to have ASEAN play a driving role as the agenda-setter and the primary driving force for regional cooperation as well as in relations with external partners, both individually through the ASEAN Plus One framework and through multilateral mechanisms that ASEAN has been able to create over the years such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), ASEAN Plus Three (APT), East Asia Summit (EAS) and ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting Plus (ADMM-Plus).
9. With the many established mechanisms, it can be quite overwhelming to understand the roles and purposes of each of them. To understand it better, I use the analogy of a jigsaw puzzle, where each piece, unique in its form and function, are able to link together to form one complete landscape, which I would equate to the overall regional architecture. And within this regional architecture, ASEAN is at the centre of regional affairs and diplomacy, something that has been acknowledged and appreciated by ASEAN's external partners and friends.

10. I want to share what is considered the key instrument of ASEAN in how it engages among itself and with its friends and partners, namely the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC). This is the key code of conduct for inter-state relations, which calls for the renunciation of the use of force or threat to use force, settlement of differences through peaceful means, as well as the promotion of friendly cooperation between and among the High Contracting Parties.
11. As the saying goes that “good fences make good neighbours”, the TAC encapsulates this wisdom by upholding fundamental principles of inter-state relations, to ensure that all countries, regardless of size or strength, should only engage in peaceful, friendly and cooperative relationships.
12. Starting with five signatories, the TAC now includes 54 signatories from across the world. This list features countries Latin America, including Chile, Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Cuba, Panama and Peru. The TAC’s reach has now spanned all continents of the world: Asia (29 countries); Oceania (2 countries); North America (2 countries); Central and South America (7); Europe (11); and Africa (3). This number of signatories will continue to grow, as many other nations have expressed their intention to accede to the Treaty.
13. In recent years, ASEAN introduced the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) to guide regional cooperation amid the rise of various Indo-Pacific strategies put out by external partners and the evolving dynamics characterized by major power competition. Adopted back in 2019, the AOIP reaffirms our core principles and commitments of respect for national sovereignty, political independence, international law, and an open, inclusive, and rules-based regional architecture. It presents a positive and proactive agenda focused on practical areas of cooperation in four key priorities: maritime cooperation, connectivity, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), economic collaboration, among others.
14. The AOIP has since become a crucial framework for cooperation for external partnerships with ASEAN as well as in developing cooperative programmes and projects to be carried out to promote the mutual interests between ASEAN and our partners. The recognition and implementation of the AOIP has gained significant momentum over the years, as evidenced by the increasing interest of many partners and friends in undertaking specific projects under this framework. This, in turn, underscores ASEAN’s growing influence in shaping and guiding the regional architecture.

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15. On ASEAN’s potential and future trajectory, today, 57 years on since we started our journey in 1967, ASEAN is now a region with a population of 671 million, ranking third behind only India and China, with a combined GDP of USD 3.8 trillion, ASEAN is the fifth largest economy in the world, and poised to become the fourth largest by 2030. Collectively, ASEAN stands as the world’s fourth-largest trade player, with a total trade

volume valued at USD3.8 trillion, representing 7.8 percent of global trade. ASEAN continues to preserve its position as a preferred destination for global investment, which is manifested by the staggering USD228.9 billion of foreign direct investment (FDI) in 2023, the highest amongst developing economies.

16. But of course, we also face significant challenges that differ profoundly from those of previous decades. These challenges include, among others: (i) systemic shifts in global geopolitics and geoeconomics, which are driving deeper fragmentation and polarization within the international system; (ii) the increasingly severe and pervasive impact of climate change; (iii) the disruptive effects of digital technologies, including the spread of misinformation and disinformation, and the uncertain ramifications of emerging artificial intelligence. Addressing these issues demands a level of innovation and resilience unprecedented in our history, as we must navigate an era marked by rapid transformation and complexity.
17. Fortunately, ASEAN is well-positioned to meet the demands of our time. The future drivers of our economic growth will increasingly shift from reliance on labour and natural resources to a more innovation-driven, manufacturing-based development model. With our robust, tech-savvy, and youthful population, ASEAN is emerging as a global innovation hub. Over 60% of ASEAN's population is under the age of 35, providing a significant demographic advantage that fuels a thriving start-up ecosystem in the region. Consequently, the digital economy will become a key driver of prosperity and growth for ASEAN, which is why ASEAN launched negotiations for the ASEAN Digital Economy Framework Agreement (DEFA) last year and is expected to conclude by next year. Our digital economy, which today stands at USD 300 billion, will rise to USD 1 trillion or even USD 2 trillion in 2030 if we were to maximise DEFA.
18. ASEAN is also advancing regional efforts to improve the well-being of our peoples in the fields of environment protection, bio-diversity conservation, climate change mitigation and adaptation, working towards transition to green and clean energy for a low-carbon future.
19. Looking further, ASEAN is developing the ASEAN Community Vision 2045, which will serve as our strategic compass in the next two decades. This vision document identifies both present and future megatrends that present significant challenges and opportunities for ASEAN, including digitalization and artificial intelligence (AI); cybersecurity; supply chain resilience; food, water, and energy security; poverty and widening development gaps; climate change and environmental degradation; public health emergencies.
20. The ASEAN Community Vision 2045 underscores that these megatrends also present inherent opportunities for regional and international cooperation which can be leveraged from ASEAN-led mechanisms and initiatives. What this means is that ASEAN will continue to engage its partners and friends including through the implementation of the AOIP and the regular convening of the various ASEAN-led

mechanisms. I believe that this commitment helps to reinforce both ASEAN's relevance and reputation as a trusted and reliable partner for countries in our region and around the world as we jointly navigate the challenges ahead. Today we have 11 Dialogue Partners, eight Sectoral Dialogue Partners, and six Development Partners, which includes Chile who we are working closely with. At the same time, we have 55 ASEAN Committees in Third Countries (ACTCs) around the world, including in Santiago, thereby representing the global footprint of ASEAN.

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21. At this juncture I would like to highlight the potential for Chile to advance its growing cooperation with ASEAN. To recall, Chile acceded to the TAC in 2016 and became an ASEAN Development Partner in 2019, thus making Chile the first Latin American country to become a formal partner of ASEAN.
22. As a strong advocate of free trade agreements (FTAs), Chile has indicated its interest to join the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), which was built upon the existing FTAs between ASEAN and six of its Partners. As the world's largest free trade area in terms of combined Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and market size, the RCEP would help to propel our economies to new heights by further lowering trade barriers and improving market access for goods and services.
23. Eventually this would mean that Chile could play a greater role as the gateway for closer relations between the peoples of Southeast Asia and Latin America as we could learn more from each other through our products, our food, our music and our culture, among others, and education as well. The growing digitalisation of society would also mean that the physical distance between our two regions would no longer be an obstacle to greater people-to-people connections.
24. In this regard I am pleased to note that the University of Chile has a postgraduate programme on Asian Studies with lines of research which happen to be in line with the three Community pillars of ASEAN, namely political-security, economic and socio-cultural. I would thus like to encourage the University of Chile to consider adding Southeast Asian studies to complement the existing curricula.
25. I would also like to suggest that the University get in touch with the ASEAN Committee in Santiago and take advantage of regular visitors including government officials, business leaders, and civil society leaders, among others, that they could engage directly with to promote the mutual interests of both ASEAN and Chile.
26. As I reflect on the strength of ASEAN and its growing relationship with Chile, I am reminded of the words of one of Chile's foremost sons, Nobel Prize Laureate Pablo Neruda who said: "*You can cut all the flowers, but you cannot keep spring from coming.*" Despite the challenges and differences between ASEAN and Chile, the bonds we create between us can only continue to bloom and grow stronger over time.

Hence, physical distances and cultural differences cannot stop the inevitable growth of relationships like the one between ASEAN and Chile into the future.

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27. In conclusion, I want to stress the crucial role of the younger generation in ensuring a peaceful, secure, and prosperous future. I encourage you, especially the students here, to learn as much as you can about ASEAN and how you can contribute to strengthening ASEAN-Chile relations, cooperation, and partnership and bring together the regions of Southeast Asia and Latin America.

28. We rely on you to ensure that ASEAN-Chile relations become more robust and mutually beneficial in the years to come.

29. Thank you.
