



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

Opening Remarks

China-ASEAN Young Leaders' Roundtable Dialogue

26 September 2024, CAEXPO Plaza, Nanning, China

Your Excellency Liu Ning, Secretary of the Party Committee of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region,

Your Excellency Zhou Yijue, Secretary-General of the Party Committee of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region,

Your Excellency Dr. Wei Zhaohui, Secretary-General of China-ASEAN Expo (CAEXPO) Secretariat,

Young Leaders of ASEAN and China

Excellencies, Distinguished Guests and Youth Delegates,

A very good morning. It is my great pleasure to be here with all of you today, an amazing group of young leaders from both ASEAN and China. Your energy and vision are going to shape the future of ASEAN-China relations, and witnessing your enthusiasm fills me with a lot of optimism for what lies ahead.

I wish to congratulate the China-ASEAN Expo Secretariat for putting together this roundtable, a wonderful opportunity for our young people to connect, share ideas, and develop leadership skills. It is all about giving you the tools, insights and confidence to drive meaningful change to the ASEAN Community on the one hand, and at the same time, to the ASEAN-China Comprehensive Strategic Partnership on the other hand.

I would like to commend all of you, especially our youth delegates, for your commitment to building connections and engaging in meaningful discussions about the future of ASEAN-China relations. Your voices matter, and through your active participation, you are laying the groundwork for stronger partnerships between ASEAN and China. We have been working hard between the two sides, but with your leadership in this programme and beyond, will make a positive contribution.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

As we gather today, it is important to reflect on the significant progress and potential that ASEAN's and China's youth represent. In 2020, the youth population in ASEAN was approximately 224.2 million, and this number is projected to peak by 2038. Meanwhile, in 2020, China's population of youth aged 14-35 was about 400 million, making up 28.4 percent of the total population. If harnessed effectively, this demographic holds enormous potential and unlimited opportunities to drive progress and development across ASEAN and China.

China's youth have been instrumental in driving digital innovation, leveraging their tech-savvy skills and entrepreneurial spirit. Young Chinese entrepreneurs have launched successful startups like ByteDance, which created TikTok, and Pinduoduo, transforming e-commerce, entertainment, content creation and even cultural trends not only within China but also across the globe. Chinese youth also excel in fields such as artificial intelligence and fintech, often participating in hackathons and incubators that foster creativity and innovation. This vibrant tech culture has propelled China to the forefront of technological advancement, becoming a key player in the global digital economy.

In ASEAN, the ASEAN Leaders' Statement on the Year of ASEAN Youth in 2022 also underscores your vital role as catalysts for future growth, progress and change. Building on this, the ASEAN Work Plan on Youth 2021-2025 focuses on empowering the youth in five key areas: Education, Health, Employment, Participation, and ASEAN Identity. This plan is designed to equip you with the resources and opportunities needed to lead sustainable development and shape the future of our region.

Frameworks like this will add further momentum to the dynamic role that ASEAN youth are already playing in driving regional innovation and creativity. They have launched successful startups like Grab and Gojek, which have transformed transportation, food delivery, financial services and logistics across the region, and in that regard, I really applaud these great initiatives.

Leveraging their strong digital skills, young ASEAN entrepreneurs are also developing sectors like agriculture and healthcare through tech solutions. Similar to the vibrant tech scene in China, initiatives such as hackathons and incubators promote collaboration and creativity, empowering our youth to drive progress and success. Their entrepreneurial spirit and tech-savvy nature position them as key players in shaping a connected and sustainable future for ASEAN.

The theme of today's dialogue, "New Youth, New Age, New Future," underscores our confidence and trust in young people and leaders like you to lead the way in digital innovation and creativity. You are adapting to new technologies and driving change in all sorts of sectors.

Your ability to leverage tools like AI and fintech positions you as key players and vital contributors to both economic growth, social progress, and technological transformation. Beyond your tech skills, you bring fresh perspectives that fuel creativity and innovation. Why I mentioned creativity and innovation, I believe this is what drives the new dynamics particularly in terms of development. You are redefining how we use technology to tackle real-world problems and challenges. By embracing innovation, collaboration and problem-solving, you can develop practical sustainable solutions that impact the lives of the people, the communities, and the world.

To be sure and to truly seize these opportunities, it is crucial to equip yourselves with essential digital skills and a mindset that embraces change and adaptation. Tech-driven disruptions are now a defining feature of our time. So, we need to foster an environment where continuous and never-ending learning is the norm and digital proficiency a prerequisite, ensuring that you are well-prepared for a fast-changing job market. This not only boosts your career prospects but also strengthens our economies in this digital age.

My advice to you this morning is the 5 P's. Whatever you do in advancing your career and leadership, you must have a purpose. Have a purpose in what you do. Second, you must have passion. Passion will drive and motivate you, and will keep you moving forward. The third one would be, you must develop long-term professionalism. This will give you the tools but also the respect of your peers in whatever career or leadership you play. Fourth, you must develop a mindset of perseverance. You must not allow yourself to quit, meaning that you must have this strong mindset. Finally, whatever you do, you must serve the people. The people will inspire you, and you will provide positive contributions to your community and to ASEAN-China.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Once again, I would like to applaud the organizers for their dedication and commitment to empowering youth across our region. Events like this help you build connections, make friendships, and foster collaborations in our collective pursuit of progress and innovation. Moving forward, let us keep nurturing these opportunities. It is vital that you have the platforms to share your ideas, dreams, and visions for the future. I am committed to supporting you and creating an environment where you can thrive and realize your full potentials.

Finally, to all the youth delegates here today, I urge you to dive into discussions, get involved in practical projects, join exchange programs, and seize every opportunity to contribute to your communities, your nations, to ASEAN and to ASEAN-China.

Your insights, enthusiasm, and dedication are not only shaping a future-ready ASEAN Community but also advancing a forward-looking and enduring ASEAN-China relationship, and of course, our long-term relationship in the current format of the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP).

I wish you a wonderful discussion this morning and I hope that you share the outcomes of it with your friends and peers back home, and I hope you shine in this world.

Thank you.
