

**Remarks by Secretary-General of ASEAN  
H.E. Dr. Kao Kim Hourn**

**at the Opening Ceremony of the 33<sup>rd</sup> ASCC Council Meeting**

24 April 2025, Kuching, Sarawak, Malaysia  
10:15 – 11:00

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***The Right Honourable Datuk Patinggi Tan Sri (Dr) Abang Haji Abdul Rahman Zohari bin Tun Datuk Abang Haji Openg, Premier of Sarawak,***

***Your Excellency Dato Sri Tiong King Sing, ASCC Council Chair and Minister of Tourism, Arts and Culture of Malaysia,***

***Excellencies Council Ministers and Heads of Delegation of ASCC Council, SOCA Leaders,***

***Ladies and Gentlemen,***

Good Morning.

1. First, I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to the Right Honourable Datuk Patinggi Tan Sri (DR) Abang Haji Abdul Rahman Zohari Bin Tun Datuk Abang Haji Openg, Premier of Sarawak and His Excellency, Dato Sri Tiong King Sing, ASCC Council Chair and Minister of Tourism, Arts and Culture of Malaysia.
2. It is my great pleasure to be in this magnificent Malaysian state of Sarawak, renowned for its rich cultural diversity, unique heritage, and breath-taking landscapes. I am grateful to Malaysia for hosting us here, not only to address important ASCC Council matters but also to experience the beauty, cultural richness, and warm hospitality of the prosperous state of Sarawak. In fact, last night we were introduced and entertained by wonderful cultural performances.

***Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,***

3. We are living through a moment of profound disruption and volatility — a time when natural disasters strike with growing force, economic pressures from deglobalisation and decoupling intensify, and geo-political fault lines shift beneath our feet. The world we once knew is changing, and our region stands at a critical juncture. In the face of this uncertainty, ASEAN's centrality and the strength of our collective action remain our most reliable anchors.
4. While ASEAN has demonstrated remarkable resilience amid adverse impacts brought about by geo-economic and geo-strategic shifts in the global landscape, it is imperative for the ASCC, as the "People's Pillar", to strengthen its role in safeguarding our people's quality of life and well-being.
5. Whether confronting natural disasters, public health emergencies, environmental and climate change impacts, economic challenges, or disruptions in the global trading system, the ASCC plays a critical role in protecting ASEAN citizens from the adverse effects of these megatrends. This protection comes through sustained delivery of basic and social services, promotion of inclusive and sustainable development, and ensuring equitable access and protection for vulnerable groups and individuals.
6. We must recognize that the accelerating forces of digital transformation, climate change, and geo-political tensions are reshaping socio-economic landscapes across the globe. Navigating this complex and shifting terrain demands more than technological solutions or regulatory reform. ASEAN's path forward must remain anchored in its enduring commitment to community-centred development, consensus-building, and multi-stakeholder cooperation. This approach — which seeks to balance innovation with cultural identity, growth with inclusivity — is not only ASEAN's defining strength, but also a vital compass in an increasingly fragmented, divided and polarized world.

***Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,***

7. As the ASCC Blueprint 2025 approaches its conclusion, the ASCC has taken proactive steps to future-proof its post-2025 direction with the ASCC Strategic Plan. This plan presents a comprehensive strategy with measures firmly anchored in sectoral priorities and aligned with our people's needs and aspirations.

8. I would like to emphasize that the ASCC Strategic Plan places strong emphasis on addressing cross-cutting challenges such as environmental and climate resilience, disaster risk reduction and management, gender equality and women's empowerment, narrowing development gaps, and promoting sustainable growth. This approach highlights ASEAN's increasingly interconnected work while fostering a more holistic strategy for addressing regional challenges.
9. Following the signing of the ASEAN Community Vision 2045 and its Strategic Plans next month in Kuala Lumpur, the responsibility for ensuring effective and sustained implementation now rests with our sectoral bodies, relevant ASEAN Centres, and partners both within and outside the region. This task demands continued engagement, both bilateral and multilateral, and strengthened collaboration to transform the Strategic Plans, particularly the ASCC Strategic Plan into tangible outcomes and meaningful progress for our region.

*Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,*

10. As we chart the ASCC's strategic directions, we must remain attuned to the shifting trends, emerging challenges and opportunities, and the aspirations of our people. Our shared commitment to a caring and sharing ASEAN Community must guide us as we shape a future that is responsive to our people's needs, resilient in the face of rapid change, and forward-looking in addressing both regional and global challenges — all while upholding the centrality of ASEAN.
11. In conclusion, I wish to congratulate Malaysia on its successful assumption of the ASEAN Chairmanship and leadership in the ASCC pillar.

Thank you.