



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

Keynote Speech

World Artificial Intelligence Conference (WAIC)

“Global Solidarity in the AI Era”

26 July 2025, Shanghai World Expo Center, Shanghai, China

*Your Excellency **Li Qiang**, Premier of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China,*

*Your Excellency **Antonio Guterres**, Secretary-General of the United Nations,*

*Your Excellency **Anne Bouverot**, Special Envoy of the French President for the AI Action Summit,*

Excellencies Distinguished Ministers, Ambassadors, Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

A very Good Morning to you all.

1. I am honoured to join you today at the World Artificial Intelligence Conference here in China’s financial and innovation hub of Shanghai. My sincere thanks go to the WAIC Organizing Committee for bringing us together around the theme of *“Global Solidarity in the AI Era.”*
2. At a moment when Artificial Intelligence is redefining the foundations of our economies, societies, and everyday experiences, we have an unprecedented opportunity to align our strategic visions and chart collaborative pathways toward a future where trust, innovation, and inclusive AI development become the cornerstones of our shared digital transformation.
3. This vision of global solidarity resonates deeply with the dynamic partnership that ASEAN and China have cultivated over three decades of cooperation and partnership. Our relationship has evolved through significant developments: the 2002 ASEAN-China Free Trade Area, which marked ASEAN’s inaugural FTA with an external partner, followed by the 2020 Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)—the world’s largest free trade agreement. The elevation of our ties to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in 2021 reflects the depth of our collaboration. Today’s reality speaks volumes: ASEAN and China have become each other’s largest trading partners, with China ranking as ASEAN’s third-largest source of foreign direct investment in

2024.¹ This trajectory positions us well to advance regional cooperation and prosperity together.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

4. Building on this strong foundation, both regions now find themselves at the forefront of a broader global shift towards digital transformation. ASEAN and China have emerged as leading forces in this digital revolution. ASEAN's digital economy expanded by 15% in 2024, creating US\$263 billion in Gross Merchandise Value (GMV)², with forecasts that this will reach US\$1 trillion by 2030.
5. Meanwhile, China has built one of the most advanced and expansive digital ecosystems in the world. It is home to the world's largest online consumer base,³ with 1 billion internet users and 80% mobile internet penetration. Homegrown platforms such as WeChat, Alipay, and Meituan have reshaped global digital norms—fusing social connectivity, commerce, payments, and lifestyle into seamless digital experiences.
6. Together, ASEAN and China are well-positioned to lead as innovation hubs—powering economic growth, driving social transformation, and advancing shared prosperity. The upcoming upgrade of the ASEAN-China Free Trade Agreement (ACFTA 3.0) underscores this trajectory, placing digital economy cooperation at the heart of our integration agenda and opening new pathways for deeper digital alignment.
7. Artificial Intelligence is a new frontier of our digital economy and innovation. AI unleashes immense computing power, improving data analysis, and optimizing the decision-making process. When properly deployed, AI boosts productivity and sparks innovation, enabling millions of businesses—especially small and medium enterprises—to grow more rapidly and effectively. For ASEAN, AI implementation could increase the region's GDP by 10-18%, adding nearly US\$1 trillion in value by 2030.⁴
8. Yet the rapid advance of AI brings with it profound risks and challenges. Autonomous AI agents—from content generators to problem-solvers—have unlocked remarkable efficiencies, but their actions, absent human oversight, raise serious concerns. Lacking intrinsic ethical reasoning, AI systems are susceptible to bias, manipulation, and unintended harm. Generative AI further amplifies risks such as misinformation, deepfakes, and cybersecurity threats. Without robust governance, these developments could deepen social inequalities, entrench discrimination, and erode personal privacy. Generative AI creates additional concerns: including misinformation, deepfakes, and cybersecurity threats. These developments demand urgent, coordinated action from the international community to ensure AI serves human welfare and social good.

¹ ASEAN Statistics Database, FDI data as of 1 July 2025.

² e-Conomy SEA 2023 Report by Google, Temasek, and Bain & Company [link](#)

³ 54th Statistical Report on China's Internet Development, published by the China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC) [link](#)

⁴ [Kearney: Racing toward the future: artificial intelligence in Southeast Asia](#)

9. ASEAN has responded by adopting the ASEAN Guide on AI Governance and Ethics⁵ in February 2024, establishing our regional framework for coherent AI regulations and cross-border collaboration. Our commitment deepened in January 2025 when ASEAN Digital Ministers approved the Expanded ASEAN AI Guide⁶ and the ASEAN Responsible AI Roadmap⁷, giving member states practical tools to implement responsible AI practices.
10. Currently, under Malaysia's leadership, ASEAN is creating the ASEAN AI Safety Network (AI Safe)—an initiative focused on institutionalizing safety protocols, encouraging ethical innovation, and strengthening regional cooperation. These developments represent significant progress in making trust, transparency, and accountability fundamental to ASEAN's AI evolution.
11. ASEAN is prepared to work closely with China on building a resilient and equitable AI partnership through the ASEAN-China 2025 Digital Work Plan. Today, I welcome the launch of the China-ASEAN AI Centre, which will advance safe and responsible AI implementation across our regions. The establishment of the China-ASEAN Digital Academy marks another important step forward, addressing digital skills shortages through targeted re-skilling and upskilling initiatives. This academy will give small and medium-sized businesses and underserved communities access to advanced AI education and practical skills, helping create a more equitable society and inclusive digital future.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

12. We stand at a defining moment—not just for our generation, but for those to come—where the promise of AI's transformative power is matched by the weight of our shared responsibility to shape its impact wisely. This is our chance to co-create a future where AI serves humanity with purpose, guided by ethical principles, inclusive practices, and environmental consciousness. This conference shows what we can accomplish when we work together: creating bold pathways that make AI a driver of peace, prosperity, and progress in our changing world. I encourage active involvement from all sectors—governments, business communities, and the academia—to join this important mission with ASEAN and China and other partners.
13. Our task ahead and the path forward is clear: to unlock new areas of cooperation, power up new engines of growth, and open new doors to opportunity for all people and enterprises across ASEAN and China and around the world.
14. Thank you, and I look forward to the valuable exchanges that will unfold during this conference.

⁵ [ASEAN Guide on AI Governance and Ethics](#)

⁶ [Expanded ASEAN Guide on AI Governance and Ethics – Generative AI](#)

⁷ [ASEAN Responsible AI Roadmap](#)