



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

**Opening Remarks at the**

***Regional High-Level Dialogue on Enhancing Regional Cooperation and  
Resource Mobilisation in Mine/Explosive Remnants of War Action***

*8 December 2025, Mandarin Oriental, Jakarta, Indonesia*

---

***Your Excellency Shaharuddin bin Onn, Chairman of ARMAC Steering Committee 2025 and Ambassador of Malaysia to the Kingdom of Cambodia,***

***Your Excellency Dr. Ly Thuch, Senior Minister and First Vice President, Cambodian Mine Action and Victim Assistance Authority (CMAA),***

***Mr. Liang Guotao, Director of the Department of Arms Control, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China,***

***Ms. Buth Rothna, Executive Director of the ASEAN Regional Mine Action Center (ARMAC),***

***Excellencies Ambassadors, Representatives of ASEAN Member States, Distinguished Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen,***

I wish to start by taking this opportunity to express a warm welcome to everyone, especially the practitioners, policymakers, thought leaders, experts and all participants from ASEAN Member States and from our Partner Countries to this meeting.

*“Landmines distinguish themselves because once they have been sown, once the soldier walks away from the weapon, the landmine cannot tell the difference between a soldier or a civilian – a woman, a child, a grandmother going out to collect firewood to make the family meal. The crux of the problem is that while the use of the weapon might be militarily justifiable during the day of the battle, or even the two weeks of the battle, or maybe even the two months of the battle, once peace is declared the landmine does not recognize that peace.”*

Those were the profound words of Jody Williams, who received the Nobel Peace Prize together with the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, in her Nobel Lecture delivered on 10 December 1997 — a moment that took place nearly 28 years to the day, as we meet here on 8 December 2025. I wish to thank you for the opportunity to be with you at this important and timely gathering.

Humanitarian mine action is a distinctive and meaningful area of cooperation within ASEAN. It reflects our spirit of solidarity, where mine-affected and non-mine-affected Member States work together to support the vulnerable communities. It spans both security and socio-economic dimensions, requiring long-term commitment. This is cooperation in its most practical, collaborative, and people-centred dimension.

For this reason, humanitarian mine action continues to be featured in the ASEAN Political-Security Community Strategic Plan, which was launched along with ASEAN 2045: Our Shared Future and its other Strategic Plans during the 46th ASEAN Summit earlier this year to guide our cooperation for the next two decades. The Strategic Plan specifically calls for stronger support for ARMAC in leading comprehensive efforts to address the humanitarian challenges posed by explosive remnants of war. This High-Level Dialogue directly responds to that call.

In my engagements with ARMAC, I consistently highlight that the Centre is working to turn challenges into opportunities for deeper cooperation. Since the political commitment by ASEAN Leaders in 2012 and ARMAC's modest beginnings in 2016, it has developed into a robust regional centre of excellence with an expanding network of partners across ASEAN Member States and beyond ASEAN. Plans are under way to enhance ARMAC's internal processes, enabling the Centre to broaden its impact in the coming years. This momentum must be sustained, and it depends on the support of all present today.

In this regard, I encourage ASEAN's partners to further explore the wide range of potential avenues for collaboration. These include victim-assistance programmes such as risk education, gender-sensitive mine action, and psychological support. ARMAC has also been working to develop information and knowledge management in mine action, as well as to promote mine-action standards. I wish to note, too, that ARMAC is developing a regional victim-assistance network to improve coordination among national mine-action authorities, strengthen service delivery, and expand our shared knowledge base to benefit those who are working with us in this area.

Support for ARMAC is reflected in ASEAN Plans of Action with all 11 Dialogue Partners, as well as in the Practical Cooperation Areas with eight Sectoral Dialogue Partners and four Development Partners of ASEAN. However, this commitment has yet to fully translate into practical cooperation, as fewer than half of ASEAN's formal partners have meaningfully engaged with or supported ARMAC. It is our collective responsibility to draw on this broad pool of resources to advance ARMAC's work in this critical area. For ARMAC, deeper collaboration would also raise its profile and visibility internationally — a priority I have consistently promoted. For our partners, it offers another meaningful avenue to reinforce our shared commitment to regional peace and stability through initiatives that directly improve the lives of ASEAN's peoples.

*Distinguished Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen, Excellencies,*

Let me close by expressing my sincere appreciation to the Government of China, particularly the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, for sponsoring this High-Level Dialogue and its technical working group since 2021. I acknowledge China's continued commitment to a mine-free ASEAN, as reflected in the remarks made by Director Liang Guotao just now. Of course, this is also reflected in the ASEAN-China Foreign Ministers' Joint Statement on Strengthening Humanitarian Mine Action Cooperation which was adopted last year.

I also commend ARMAC for its accomplishments to date and look forward to its ongoing contributions to building a resilient, innovative, dynamic, and people-centred ASEAN. Explosive remnants of war are a part of our history. Yet through our cooperation, we can help turn this dark chapter into a safer future for those impacted today and for generations to come.

Here is Ms. William once again, and I quote, *"...The landmine is eternally prepared to take victims. In common parlance, it is the perfect soldier, the "eternal sentry." The war ends, the landmine goes on killing."*

I wish to take this opportunity to thank the Steering Committee of the ARMAC for their hard work and dedication, under the Chairmanship of Ambassador Shaharuddin. I would also like to thank all ASEAN Member States, partners and China who have been very supportive since 2021. And finally, I want to thank everyone for their participation, and I look forward to receiving the recommendations and the outcomes of this meeting. I wish the Regional High-Level Dialogue much success.

Thank you.

\*\*\*\*