



Opening Statement

Secretary-General of ASEAN, Dr. Kao Kim Hourn The 10th Forum of Entities Associated with ASEAN

ASEAN Headquarters / ASEAN Secretariat, 12 May 2026

Excellencies Committee of Permanent Representatives to ASEAN,

Distinguished Heads & Representatives of ASEAN Centres of Excellence and Entities,

Excellencies, Ambassadors,

Distinguished speakers and participants of the 10th ASEAN Entities Forum,

Colleagues, Friends, Ladies and Gentlemen.

1. It is with deep pride and a profound sense of unity that on this occasion I welcome each and every one of you to the 10th ASEAN Entities Forum here at the ASEAN Headquarters/ASEAN Secretariat. A decade has passed since the first Forum was held in 2017. Witnessing how far this platform has come, through the steadfast participation of all of you year after year, is genuinely moving forward and transforming itself into a meaningful forum.
2. What began as dialogue has since evolved into concrete action and meaningful initiative, driven by your own initiative, commitment, and respective capacities.
3. In this spirit, this Forum embraces the Philippines' Chairship theme: *'Navigating Our Future, Together.'* It is both a call to action and a reaffirmation that in times of uncertainty and unpredictability, our greatest strength lies in unity and shared purpose. As the future unfolds, the role of ASEAN Entities becomes even more critical in seizing opportunities and meeting the challenges before us. I encourage all of you to align your efforts with the Chairship's priorities and to explore how your programmes, expertise, projects, and partnerships can contribute to their realisation.
4. That imperative is sharpened by rising global tensions and volatility. The resurgence of protectionism, ongoing supply chain disruptions, trade conflicts, and technological rivalries are reshaping the international order today. In this

environment, ASEAN's role as a stabilising force, grounded in cooperation, dialogue, diplomacy, and collective resilience, is more vital and indispensable than ever. We have risen to this before, and we shall continue to do so, again and again.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

5. We must safeguard the foundations of regional cooperation and build on ASEAN's remarkable achievements in integration, connectivity and community-building to sustain the peace, stability, and shared prosperity that define our region. In this context, ASEAN Centrality, the anchor of our policies, regional strategies, and collective security architecture, is more vital than ever. Through it, we pursue our shared interests with unity and purpose as well as with courage and determination, while engaging external partners in a rules-based, inclusive, and forward-looking regional order. Your contributions as ASEAN Entities and Centres remain indispensable to this collective endeavour of our ASEAN Community-building.
6. From the perspective of the ASEAN Economic Community, your work has been pivotal in advancing trade, investment, and regional connectivity. The economic strength of our region rests on the success of this Community. Significant strides have been made toward a highly connected single market and production base that is globally competitive. Through landmark initiatives such as the ASEAN Free Trade Area, the ASEAN Trade in Goods Agreement, which was of course signed last year for upgrading, and comprehensive frameworks, such as FTAs and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, spanning investment, finance, tourism, agriculture, energy, mining, science and technology, and the digital economy, we have deepened physical, institutional, and people-to-people connectivity across the entire region.
7. These achievements have been complemented by equally important progress in the socio-cultural pillar. Contributions in fostering diversity, inclusivity, sustainability, and dynamism have strengthened community bonds, empowered our peoples, and deepened mutual understanding. From grassroots engagement to high-level partnerships, ASEAN has woven together governments, businesses, civil society, academia, and communities as co-creators of regional progress for peace, prosperity, planet, and especially our people.
8. What truly distinguishes ASEAN is our ability and capacity to turn diversity and challenges into strength and opportunity, and partnership into progress. We must now elevate that spirit further by accelerating digital transformation, enhancing trade facilitation, promoting sustainability and delivering even stronger connectivity so that the benefits of ASEAN integration reach every community and every citizen across the region.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

9. This 10th Forum is the first convened since Timor-Leste's accession to ASEAN completing our Southeast Asian family and opening a new and brighter chapter in our community's history. This is a moment of genuine historic importance: the fulfilment of a long-held aspiration. As Timor-Leste transitions from admission to full integration, the role of ASEAN Entities in supporting that journey is both timely and essential. I would encourage all Entities and Centres to extend your hands of collaboration to our newest member, explore joint initiatives, and help ensure that Timor-Leste's integration is as inclusive and meaningful as possible.

10. This brings us to the broader imperative of aligning our efforts with the *ASEAN Community Vision 2045*. This Forum marks the first year of its implementation. A vision means little unless action brings it to life, and ASEAN Entities, working across sectors, pillars, and borders, are the ones who make that vision real for our peoples. You are our principal partners, connectors, and bridge-builders. Align your programmes, projects, and activities deliberately and strategically with the pillars of *Vision 2045*, so that our collective efforts are coherent, mutually reinforcing, and aimed at our shared goals: a resilient, innovative, dynamic, and people-centred ASEAN Community.
11. But beyond the architecture of policy and the machinery of integration, our deeper purpose is this: that somewhere across our region - perhaps a farmer in the Mekong Delta, or a student in the BIMP-EAGA sub-region, or a worker in Timor-Leste, or a small trader crossing a land border for the first time - feels, in some tangible way, that this community was built with them in mind. That human experience, felt, not just measured, is the true metric of everything we do here.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

12. To mark ten years of structured engagement, this Forum spans two days, with ASEAN Centres of Excellence and ASEAN Entities co-hosting side events, a testament to the depth of our contribution, the strength of collaboration across our community and our commitment to a more substantive and inclusive engagement.
13. The ASEAN Entities Exhibition in the lobby of the ASEAN Secretariat is also worth exploring: ten years of dedication, innovation, and partnership rendered visible; not merely a record of the past, but the story of a family, diverse yet united in purpose.
14. And a family is, above all, what we are. The discussions, deliberations, exchanges, and partnerships that emerge from these two days will endure because they are grounded in something enduring: a plurality of perspectives, a diversity of views, and a concert of voices that together give ASEAN its unique and irreplaceable character. It is through this spirit of unity amid diversity that ASEAN continues to move forward with resilience and purpose. Families, in fact, navigate their futures together, and so shall we.

Thank you.