

**Remarks by H.E. Dr. Kao Kim Hourn, Secretary-General of ASEAN  
for the Groundbreaking Ceremony of the International Convention  
Centre**

**Dili, Timor-Leste, 20 May 2026**

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**Your Excellency José Manuel Ramos-Horta, President of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste,**

**Your Excellency Kay Rala Xanana Gusmão, Prime Minister of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste,**

**Your Excellency Francisco Kalbuadi Lay, Vice Prime Minister of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste,**

**The Hon Richard Marles MP, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Defence of Australia,**

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

Good afternoon.

1. It is my great honour to join you today on this important occasion of the groundbreaking ceremony of the International Convention Centre here in Dili. I wish to express my sincere appreciation to His Excellency Prime Minister Kay Rala Xanana Gusmão for the kind invitation to participate in this meaningful event.
2. I would also like to extend my warmest congratulations to the Government and people of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste on the commencement of this important project. Today's ceremony is not only a milestone in infrastructure development; it is a reflection of Timor-Leste's continued commitment to national development, international engagement, and regional integration.
3. This occasion is made even more meaningful as it takes place in conjunction with the celebration of the 24<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Restoration of Independence of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste. This groundbreaking ceremony marks an important milestone in Timor-Leste's development journey. The International Convention Centre will serve as a platform for dialogue, partnership, and regional cooperation. It will be a place where governments meet, where ideas are shared, and where partnerships are strengthened, further enhancing Timor-Leste's engagement with ASEAN and a wider international community.

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

4. As ASEAN navigates increasingly complex geopolitical and economic developments, investments in infrastructure that support connectivity, dialogue, and cooperation have become ever more important. Facilities such as this will enhance Timor-Leste's capacity to host regional and international engagements, facilitate exchanges, attract investment and tourism, and generate broader economic opportunities for local communities. More importantly, this project reflects Timor-Leste's forward-looking vision and commitment to deeper ASEAN engagement.
5. This project is also highly relevant as Timor-Leste advances its full and effective integration into ASEAN and prepares for its future responsibilities within the ASEAN family to support its growing role in ASEAN and regional cooperation in the years ahead.
6. Once completed, the Centre will stand as a symbol for Timor-Leste's growing confidence and readiness to host regional and international engagements. It will also support the country's preparations to take on greater responsibilities within ASEAN, including its expressed intention to assume the ASEAN Chairmanship in 2029. At this stage, no one has objected to your Chairmanship of ASEAN in 2029. In this sense, today's ceremony is not only about building a new venue, but also about strengthening Timor-Leste's capacity to contribute more actively to ASEAN Community-building and regional cooperation.

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

7. As ASEAN advances the implementation of *ASEAN 2045: Our Shared Future*, our region must continue to invest in the foundations of resilience, inclusiveness, innovation, and connectivity. Timor-Leste's youthful population, rich cultural heritage, and strategic location bring valuable contributions to this collective endeavour. With its energy, aspirations, and growing regional engagement, Timor-Leste will enrich ASEAN's diversity and strengthen our shared vision of a peaceful, prosperous, inclusive, and resilient regional Community. This project further reflects Timor-Leste's determination to position itself as an active participant in regional and international affairs and signals the country's readiness to welcome the region and the world to Dili.
8. I am confident that the International Convention Centre will become a landmark venue for regional cooperation and international engagement. I also hope that this project will support Timor-Leste's long-term development aspirations and strengthen the foundations for sustained growth, wider opportunity, and greater regional connectivity.

9. Please allow me to once again congratulate the Government and people of Timor-Leste on this important occasion. ASEAN stands ready to continue supporting Timor-Leste's development and integration efforts, as we work together to build a stronger, more connected, and more inclusive ASEAN Community.

Thank you.