Remarks

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

The 10th Huawei ICT Competition APAC Final & Award Ceremony

ASEAN Headquarters/ASEAN Secretariat, 13 May 2026

***Your Excellency Amb. Sarah Al Bakri Devadason**, Chair of the Board of Trustees of the ASEAN Foundation and Permanent Representative of Malaysia to ASEAN,*

Your Excellencies, Members of the Board of Trustees of the ASEAN Foundation

***Your Excellency Amb. Wang Qing,** Ambassador of China to ASEAN*

***Mr. Peter Pan Junfeng**, Vice President of Huawei Asia Pacific Region,*

***Dr. Piti Srisangnam**, Executive Director of the ASEAN Foundation,*

Students and Youth delegates from ASEAN and the Asia-Pacific,

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen.

A very Good Afternoon.

1. I want to begin by expressing my appreciation to the ASEAN Foundation and Huawei for the opportunity to speak at the 10th Huawei ICT Competition Asia-Pacific Final and Award Ceremony. Returning for the third time since 2024, I am struck once again by the calibre of this gathering, one that unites some of the region's most promising young talent with industry leaders and key stakeholders who share a deep investment in advancing digital competency and innovation across the entire region.

2. Huawei's contribution to the Asia-Pacific ICT landscape has been indeed significant and far-reaching. Over the years, the company has demonstrated a consistent

commitment not only to technological innovation, but also to building the human capacity needed to sustain it by investing in connectivity, digital infrastructure, and skills development across the region. It is this dual focus on technology and talent that makes Huawei a valued partner in ASEAN's digital journey.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

3. The Philippines' 2026 ASEAN Chairship theme, "Navigating our Future Together," speaks to something deeper than diplomacy. It affirms a shared orientation, a collective sense of purpose, and an enduring resolve to move forward in concert. Against a turbulent geo-economic backdrop that is reshaping trade flows and amplifying volatility across energy and financial markets, ASEAN is making a clear strategic choice: to leverage digital technologies as a primary driver for resilient, sustainable growth.

4. This year carries a particular weight, as it marks the anticipated signing of the ASEAN Digital Economy Framework Agreement (DEFA) — a landmark accord designed to establish a coherent, interoperable regulatory framework for a genuinely integrated regional digital ecosystem. Projections suggest DEFA could propel the region's digital economy from USD 1 trillion to USD 2 trillion by 2030[1], positioning ASEAN at the forefront of digital transformation. It is the region-wide legally binding agreement that we will have.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

5. This rapid digital transformation is propelled not only by technological advancement but also by the region's dynamic, digitally fluent youth. For years, ASEAN has worked closely with a broad range of stakeholders, including governments, industry, academia, and dialogue partners, to cultivate advanced digital skills and capacity-building programmes that anticipate the needs of emerging technologies and the future workforce.

6. I would like to highlight three strategic directions that ASEAN is pursuing to shape the region's role in the digital future.

7. First, empowering young talent is fundamental to the region's capacity for creativity, innovation, and entrepreneurship. As the ASEAN Digital Masterplan 2030 makes clear, our people are the force behind this vision. The Huawei ICT Competition, organised in partnership with the ASEAN Foundation, exemplifies precisely this commitment. It creates substantive opportunities for ASEAN's young innovators to step into leadership roles in the region's digital future. By placing these innovators at

[1] ASEAN DEFA Study

the centre of our ecosystem, we ensure that ASEAN is not merely a participant in the global digital economy, but one of its principal architects.

8. Second, enabling the mobility of young talent is foundational to building a cohesive ASEAN digital economy. The World Economic Forum's Future of Jobs Report, published in January 2025 and drawing on a survey of more than 1,000 leading global companies, projects a net gain of 78 million jobs by 2030 driven by AI, green energy, and demographic shifts, even as 92 million roles are displaced[2]. This structural shift is simultaneously generating new opportunities and fundamentally redrawing the workforce landscape. To remain competitive within this environment, ASEAN is embedding talent mobility and development provisions directly into DEFA. Through regional cooperation, targeted efforts to close skill gaps, and a unified framework for talent development, DEFA can anchor ASEAN's transition toward an innovation-driven economy.

9. Third, deepening ASEAN's startup ecosystem and fully harnessing the potential of its young talent is essential if the region is to lead in emerging technologies, such as AI and quantum computing. ASEAN is already home to more than 50 technology unicorns and thousands of high-growth enterprises[3]. Yet many startups continue to face concrete barriers when expanding across borders, where divergent regulations, standards, and procurement systems impede progress. For innovation to scale across the region, operating across our 11 markets must become simpler and more predictable. That is why the ASEAN Member States, particularly our ASEAN Economic Ministers, are now working to make sure that the ASEAN market becomes a single market production base. With the upgrade of the ASEAN Trade In Goods Agreement (ATIGA), that was signed last year during Malaysia's ASEAN Chairmanship, and this year under the Philippines' ASEAN Chairship, we are working to expedite the ratification to make sure that we are on a path to becoming a truly single market and production base.

10. To that end, ASEAN introduced the ASEAN Scale Hub[4] in 2024 — an annual initiative that has successfully connected established ASEAN startups with global and regional channel partners. We welcome more global companies, including Huawei, to join this initiative and engage directly with our outstanding startups. Complementing this, ASEAN launched the Startup ASEAN portal last year, bringing together more than 10,000 startups on a single platform and aggregating an ecosystem valued at over USD 130 billion.[5]

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

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[2] https://www.weforum.org/publications/the-future-of-jobs-report-2025/digest/
[3] ASEAN-for-Business-Bulletin-March-2023.pdf
[4] ASEAN Scale Hub - AEF
[5] Startup ASEAN

11. The partnership between the ASEAN Foundation and Huawei stands as a compelling example of what public-private collaboration can achieve in advancing ASEAN's digital ambitions. Beyond delivering technological solutions, this programme has become a genuine incubator for the region's next generation of digital talent. The 9th edition alone drew more than 170,000 students from over 80 countries, including more than 20,000 from the Asia-Pacific alone, a testament to its growing reach and relevance. By equipping young people with essential ICT skills, we are not simply bridging digital gaps; we are laying the groundwork for the innovation that will define our region's future.

12. To all the winners here today, my sincere congratulations. What you have accomplished reflects not only your technical ability, but your drive, your discipline, and your dedication to excellence. You are exactly the kind of talent ASEAN needs at this moment: bold, capable, and ready to lead. The problems you will solve and the technologies you will shape will leave a mark on this region and beyond.

13. This competition is not a finish line, but a starting point. Go forward with confidence and courage, and know that ASEAN is behind you

Thank you and congratulations to all winners and good afternoon to all of you.

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