



**H.E. Dr. Kao Kim Hourn, the Secretary-General of ASEAN
Pre-recorded Remarks at the
ASEAN Editors & Economic Opinion Leaders Forum**

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***Her Excellency Maria Cristina Aldeguer Roque, Secretary of Trade and Industry,
Republic of the Philippines***

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***Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Leading Editors across the region, Ladies
and Gentlemen,***

Good Morning.

The convening of the ASEAN Editors and Economic Opinion Leaders Forum could not be better timed. As the Philippines assumes the ASEAN Chairship in 2026, this gathering of policymakers, business leaders, and media representatives reflects exactly the kind of informed, cross-sector dialogue that the region needs. I commend the Government of the Philippines, and particularly the Department of Trade and Industry, for making it happen.

This Forum is taking place against a backdrop of significant global disruption. Geopolitical tensions, economic fragmentation, rapid technological change, and deepening sustainability pressures are reshaping the landscape in which ASEAN operates. And yet, ASEAN endures as one of the world's most dynamic regions — woven into global value chains, home to a vibrant and expanding middle class, and an increasingly decisive force in the global economy.

In this environment, ASEAN's collective task is as clear in principle as it is demanding in practice: to build resilience without retreating from openness; to lead transformation while ensuring no one is left behind; and to pursue growth that is sustainable, credible, and built for the long term. These are not abstract aspirations — they are the guiding principles behind ASEAN's economic integration agenda and the lens through which today's conversations should be viewed and be pursued.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Philippines' Chairship arrives as ASEAN presses ahead to build a future-ready regional economy. Progress on the ASEAN Digital Economy Framework Agreement, the upgrading of the ASEAN Trade in Goods Agreement and ASEAN Plus One Free Trade Agreements, deeper regional cooperation on sustainability, and stronger support for MSMEs and entrepreneurs — all of these reflect a region serious about innovation-led, inclusive growth and dynamic transformation. The aim is not simply to sharpen ASEAN's competitive edge, but to ensure that economic transformation produces real and lasting improvements in people's lives.

Technological change, meanwhile, is fundamentally altering how we produce, trade, learn, and connect. Digitalisation opens remarkable pathways to greater access and productivity — but it also introduces real risks: widening digital divides, skills mismatches, cybersecurity vulnerabilities, and gaps in consumer protection. ASEAN's response has been deliberate and grounded — expanding cross-border digital payments, deepening e-commerce cooperation, supporting MSMEs through the digital transition, and investing in skills that prepare people for the economy ahead. The goal is a technological future that is inclusive, secure, and worthy of public trust.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Throughout all of this, your role — as editors, journalists, reporters, producers, and economic opinion leaders — is not peripheral but central. You do more than chronicle developments; you make complexity legible, shape the terms of public debate, and translate regional policy into meaning for ordinary citizens. In an era of news and information overload and increasingly polarised narratives, a credible, analytically rigorous, and forward-looking media ecosystem is indispensable to sustaining public confidence and trust in regional cooperation — and to ensuring that ASEAN's work is understood beyond summits, official documents, and policy debates.

At its heart, ASEAN's story is one of sustained and committed cooperation. For nearly six decades, this community has shown that dialogue, consensus, and partnership can turn diversity into collective strength. That lesson carries renewed weight and strength at a time when global economic discourse is tilting toward fragmentation and insularity. ASEAN's experience makes the case — plainly and persistently — that openness, rules-based cooperation, and regional integration are not sources of vulnerability, but of resilience, stability, and promise.

This year, ASEAN marks the 50th Anniversary of the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia — a milestone worth pausing on. The Treaty enshrined what has since proven to be an enduring truth: that peace, stability, and economic progress are not separate pursuits — they reinforce one another. A stable and predictable regional environment attracts investment, fosters innovation, and deepens connectivity. In turn, growth that is inclusive and sustainable strengthens social cohesion and long-term security. Fifty years on, these mutually reinforcing commitments remain the bedrock of ASEAN's community-building work — and the reason this region continues to move forward together.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

In closing, I encourage this Forum to be a space for constructive dialogue, rigorous analysis and constructive debate. Let us work together to shape a shared understanding of ASEAN as a region that is resilient yet open, adaptive yet principle-

based, and firmly future-oriented while remaining rooted in the spirit of cooperation. The ASEAN Secretariat remains fully committed to working with the Philippines, all Member States, and partners across government, business, and the media to advance a strong, integrated, and people-centred ASEAN Community.

May the conversations today be as consequential as the issues before you.

Thank you.
