



**Welcoming Remarks by the Secretary-General of ASEAN,
H.E. Dr. Kao Kim Hourn**

**19th Governing Board Meeting of the
Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA)**

23 June 2026

Mr. Ramon Lopez, Chairperson of the ERIA Governing Board

Professor Tetsuya Watanabe, President of ERIA

Distinguished Members of the ERIA Governing Board,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good Morning.

1. When ERIA was established, nearly two decades ago, it was built on a premise: that the quality of regional policy depends, in large part, on the quality of the analysis behind it. That premise has only grown more vital today than ever before. I am glad to be with you at this Governing Board Meeting, as we review the progress of the past year and chart the work ahead of us.
2. The world ERIA was designed to serve has been substantially reordered. The assumptions underpinning post-Cold War economic globalization; stable supply chains, predictable multilateral rules, the gradual convergence of interests among major powers; are under serious strain. In their place, we see geoeconomic fragmentation, intensifying strategic competition, and mounting pressure on developing economies to align, hedge, or risk being bypassed. Our region sits at the centre of these tensions in ways that are simultaneously a challenge and a source of leverage.
3. Running alongside these tensions are deeper structural forces: the green transition, demographic divergence across the region, and the accelerating penetration of artificial intelligence into production, labour markets, and governance itself. These are not simply policy challenges to be managed. They are transformative forces that will redraw the economic geography of the region over the coming decades.

4. It is in this context that the work of an institution like ERIA acquires sharper strategic relevance. Policymakers navigating overlapping uncertainties need more than descriptive analysis. They need foresight, scenario-building, and frank assessments of difficult trade-offs and hard choices. What ERIA does well, and must continue to do, is to give decision-makers the intellectual tools to act with confidence, clarity, and certainty.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

5. Let me turn to three areas where ERIA's contribution will be particularly important in the period ahead.
6. The first is strengthening ASEAN's resilience and relevance in an increasingly uncertain global environment. Following the adoption of the *ASEAN Leaders' Statement on the Response to the Middle East Crisis at the 48th ASEAN Summit*, ASEAN is advancing work across six priority areas: crisis coordination; energy security; financial resilience; food security; trade and supply chain continuity; and the safety of our people. As ASEAN develops practical follow-up measures and builds its preparedness for future shocks, ERIA's expertise in strategic foresight, energy security, and resilience-building will be essential in helping the region move from crisis response to durable, long-term resilience and relevance.
7. ASEAN Leaders have tasked the relevant sectoral bodies with developing concrete follow-up actions, including the strengthening of early warning mechanisms and enhanced crisis preparedness frameworks. In this context, we particularly welcome ERIA's work on regional oil stockpiling strategies, energy security cooperation, and broader resilience measures. These are precisely the kinds of forward-looking policy recommendations that ASEAN needs as we seek to strengthen our preparedness for future shocks.
8. The second area is supporting the implementation of the ASEAN Community Vision 2045. The adoption of the Vision and its accompanying Strategic Plans marks the beginning of ASEAN's next chapter of integration and Community-building. Translating that ambition into outcomes will require sustained analytical support, policy innovation, and rigorous monitoring.
9. We look to ERIA for continued engagement on key initiatives, including the upgraded ASEAN Trade in Goods Agreement, the implementation of RCEP, the modernisation of the ASEAN Plus Three Agreement, and the ASEAN Digital Economy Framework Agreement, among others. Beyond these, ASEAN will increasingly need sharp, timely analysis on critical minerals, the energy transition, artificial intelligence governance, and new drivers of regional productivity and competitiveness.
10. Third, and certainly equally important, is strengthening ERIA itself as a strategic institution for ASEAN's future. As ASEAN's agenda grows in scope and

complexity, so too will the demands placed on ERIA's research, policy analysis, and capacity-building functions. It is therefore encouraging that ASEAN Member States have recognised the need to ensure ERIA remains adequately resourced and well-positioned to meet these growing expectations.

11. In parallel, the ongoing development of the Memorandum of Understanding between ASEAN and ERIA will provide a stronger framework for collaboration in support of Vision 2045. As consultations on the draft MoU continue, I would appreciate the Governing Board's active support in encouraging close engagement with the relevant ASEAN sectoral bodies and national authorities to help facilitate its timely consideration and finalisation.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

12. Southeast Asia's trajectory remains one of the more remarkable stories in contemporary economic history; but the conditions that made it possible are no longer guaranteed. The next chapter will be harder to write, and the policy choices more acute.

13. ERIA's value, ultimately, lies not in the volume of its research and output but in its capacity to help ASEAN think clearly under pressure and to deliver concrete outcomes. That is what we ask of it, and that is what we will continue to rely on.

14. I wish you a productive meeting.

Thank you.
