



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

**Opening Remarks at the Grand Opening of the
ASEAN City Leaders Conference**

8 June 2026, Ha Noi, Viet Nam

Your Excellency Pham Gia Tuc, Permanent Deputy Prime Minister of Viet Nam,

Your Excellency Nguyen Manh Cuong, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Viet Nam,

Your Excellency Vu Dai Thang, Chairman of the Hanoi People's Committee,

Excellencies Governors, Mayors, Local Leaders from ASEAN Member States,

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

A very good afternoon. It is my pleasure to be part of this Conference. I am delighted that leaders and representatives of local governments from across ASEAN have come together for what promises to be a significant and timely exchange. My sincere thanks to the City of Ha Noi and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Viet Nam for the kind invitation and for organising this event.

The theme of this Conference — Driving the Future through Smart, Sustainable and Connected Cities — reflects what this moment demands. Smart cities. Sustainable cities. Connected cities. These are not just aspirations. They are at the heart of how ASEAN is building a resilient, innovative, dynamic, and people-centred community.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

What does a smart city actually mean? Fundamentally, it is people-centred. It uses technology and innovation not as ends in themselves, but as tools to tackle congestion, pollution, inequality, and climate vulnerability. It drives economic and social progress while protecting the environment. And it ensures that no one is left behind.

Across ASEAN, at different levels of development and at different pace and scale, our cities are doing exactly this: integrating technology solutions into public services, tailored to local realities.

Since its launch in 2018, the ASEAN Smart Cities Network has steadily expanded its reach and impact. It has become a genuine platform for national, sub-national, and local governments to pursue smart and sustainable urban development. Together.

I am especially pleased by the active engagement of Ha Noi, Ho Chi Minh City, and Da Nang, and of cities right across our Member States. They have been implementing smart city projects, promoting knowledge exchange, and building partnerships with ASEAN's external partners, including through the ASEAN Sustainable Urbanisation Strategy.

Excellencies, Ladies, and Gentlemen,

Smart and sustainable urban development is now firmly anchored in the ASEAN Community Vision 2045. Through the ASEAN Connectivity Strategic Plan, we have set clear objectives and concrete actions for the next two decades not just to advance smart cities, but to strengthen rural development and urban-rural linkages as well. The plan is in place. Now we must act collectively, and without delay, especially amid evolving geopolitical developments and the current global energy landscape.

Today's programme focuses on two critical areas: digital transformation in urban governance, and sustainable, climate-resilient urban management. Allow me to share three thoughts on how we can deepen our collaboration.

First, people-centric governance demands multi-level, multi-stakeholder partnerships. Big data and smart city technologies offer measurable potential: real-time analytics, geospatial tools, digital platforms that connect people, businesses, and governments. But experience has taught us something important. The biggest obstacles are rarely technological. They are systemic, such as high costs, rigid architectures, solutions that do not fit local contexts. We need more partnerships on smart and sustainable urban development. Partnerships that expand urban-rural digital connectivity, undertake joint technical assistance, share knowledge on regulatory frameworks, and pool investment and financing mechanisms.

Second, climate resilience must be built into every city investment. Every new road, every new drainage system, every new housing development must be assessed against climate risk. We need stronger capacity-building programmes to strengthen climate-risk assessment at the city level, better integration of green infrastructure, and greater use of nature-based solutions, such as green roofs, permeable pavements, urban mangroves; drawing on local knowledge and local aspirations.

Third, there is no single template that works for every city. Each city carries its own priorities, capacities and resources, and cultural contexts. We can draw on good practices from around the world. But we must also work with what already exists: the policies and mechanisms at the national and local level. Only from that foundation can we build solutions that are truly relevant, appropriate, and lasting. ASEAN, through the Smart Cities Network, is committed to facilitating exactly that.

Excellencies, Ladies, and Gentlemen,

This Conference offers a meaningful opportunity for city leaders and local governments to learn from one another, to exchange experiences, and to strengthen the connections that will shape the future we are building together. The world's most liveable cities of the future will not necessarily be the most technologically advanced. They will be the ones that used technology wisely to reduce inequality, strengthen communities, and leave no neighbourhood behind. That is the standard ASEAN cities should aspire to.

ASEAN is fully committed to connecting our cities and our communities. I am confident that together, we will be a driving force for regional collaboration, and for *Our Shared Future*. I wish you all a successful conference.

Thank you very much.
