



**Congratulatory Remarks by
H.E. Dr. Kao Kim Hourn, Secretary-General of ASEAN
at the 2nd ASEAN-India Women Scientists Conclave (AIWSC)**

10 July 2026 | 8:00pm
Sun & Moon Hotel, Phnom Penh, Cambodia

- ***Your Excellency HEM Vanndy, Minister of Industry, Science, Technology and Innovation of the Kingdom of Cambodia;***
- ***Your Excellency Dr. HUL Seingheng, Cambodia COSTI Chairperson and Under-Secretary of State, Ministry of Industry, Science, Technology and Innovation;***
- ***Your Excellency Vanlalvawna Bawitlung, Ambassador of the Republic of India to the Kingdom of Cambodia;***
- ***Excellencies, Distinguished Representatives of ASEAN Member States and India;***
- ***Distinguished Scientists, Researchers, Innovators, Entrepreneurs, Partners, Ladies and Gentlemen.***

1. A very good evening, and thank you for having me at the Awarding Night of the 2nd ASEAN-India Women Scientists Conclave, here in Phnom Penh.
2. My thanks to the Royal Government of Cambodia, particularly the Ministry of Industry, Science, Technology and Innovation, for their warm hospitality and excellent arrangements, as well as to the Department of Science and Technology of India, IIT Gandhinagar, and all partners whose support have made this Conclave possible.
3. Cambodia's leadership in strengthening the science, technology and innovation ecosystem extends well beyond its own borders, into the wider ASEAN region.

Hosting this Conclave is itself a marker of Cambodia's growing role in regional STI cooperation, talent development and inclusive innovation.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

4. Held under the theme "Building Inclusive STI Communities," this Conclave brings together women scientists, researchers, innovators, entrepreneurs and policymakers from both ASEAN and India to exchange knowledge, showcase scientific achievements, and build networks across borders. It's all about mutual learning.
5. It also reflects how far the ASEAN-India Comprehensive Strategic Partnership has grown — across political-security, economic, and socio-cultural pillars — with science, technology and innovation now a rising priority, an area where India brings deep expertise. As our two sides tackle shared regional and global challenges, STI cooperation stands to become one of the most productive pillars of this partnership and a key driver of sustainable and inclusive development.
6. This Conclave also shows the ASEAN-India Science and Technology Development Fund¹, or AISTDF, at its best: turning dialogue into practical, people-centred cooperation. Through AISTDF, programmes like this one give scientists real opportunities to collaborate, mentor one another, innovate, and build long-term partnerships, especially through mutual learning. For women scientists in our region, this opens doors: visibility, access, confidence and connection; and the chance to present their work, exchange perspectives, and identify where science can respond to the needs of people and our communities.
7. More than that, it sends a clear message: women are not only beneficiaries of STI development, they are its leaders, innovators and changemakers. UNESCO reports that only around one in three researchers worldwide is a woman, and

¹ [ASEAN India S&T Cooperation](#)

women make up just 35% of STEM graduates globally². These are figures that should push us to move faster on women's participation and leadership in STI.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

8. This Conclave comes as ASEAN and India begin implementing the Plan of Action to Implement the ASEAN-India Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (2026-2030)³ — a solid framework that gives real shape to our ambitions for STI cooperation. The Plan of Action calls specifically for deeper cross-sectoral collaboration in STI, including joint research and development projects and support for the ASEAN Plan of Action on Science, Technology and Innovation, or APASTI 2026-2035⁴.
9. The Conclave's thematic focus of food security, sustainable energy, equitable access to education, and emerging technologies is clearly aligned with ASEAN's development priorities. Each is a reminder that STI only matters when it translates into real solutions: solutions that improve lives, support sustainability, and strengthen regional resilience.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

10. Tonight we celebrate the achievements of the women scientists who took part in the pitching competitions, poster presentations, booth exhibitions and discussions throughout this Conclave. My warmest congratulations to every award recipient.
11. I also congratulate ASEAN and India on the launch of the ASEAN-India Collaborative R&D Scheme⁵, or AICRD, which marks a real step forward in

² <https://www.unesco.org/en/science-technology-and-innovation>

³ <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/Final-POA-to-Implement-ASEAN-India-CSP-2026-2030-adopted.pdf>

⁴ [ASEAN Plan of Action on Science, Technology and Innovation \(APASTI\) 2026-2035 - ASEAN Main Portal](#)

⁵ [ASEAN India S&T Cooperation](#)

practical STI cooperation between us. AICRD gives scientists from ASEAN and India the first structured channel under this renewed cooperation to work together directly on shared research. I hope it will give women scientists, young researchers and research institutions on both sides the means to develop solutions jointly, and to build scientific partnerships that outlast any single project or program.

12. Looking ahead, the next five to ten years will decide how far women's leadership in STI actually goes. The real question is not how many women enter STEM, but how many rise into senior decision-making roles. UNESCO's finding⁶ tells only part of the story; without deliberate action, the leadership gap may remain stuck on the second floor, with women present in the system but under-represented at the top level. The stakes are rising too: ASEAN's digital economy is projected to reach USD 2 trillion by 2030⁷. If women are not meaningfully involved in shaping AI governance, digital policy and emerging technologies, the systems we build risk carrying that bias forward.
13. It is worth remembering the story of Nandini Harinath, deputy operations director for Mangalyaan, India's maiden Mars Orbiter Mission. On the day her team pushed the spacecraft out of Earth's orbit in December 2013, she wore a red and blue silk sari to the control room — what she described as the "single most critical day" of the mission. She and the other women scientists in the control room that day became known around the world as the "Rocket Women". Featured in press coverage just last month, that sari now sits in the Smithsonian's National Air and Space Museum in Washington D.C — the first sari, and the first object from India, in the museum's interplanetary science collection. It serves as an inspiring visual representation to encourage more women to pursue careers in STEM.
14. It should not be an exception ASEAN and India marvel at; it should be the standard we build forward. APASTI 2026-2035⁸ and ASEAN's gender mainstreaming

⁶ <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/2026-international-day-women-and-girls-science>

⁷ <https://asean.org/asean-defa-study-projects-digital-economy-leap-to-us2tn-by-2030/>

⁸ [ASEAN Plan of Action on Science, Technology and Innovation \(APASTI\) 2026-2035 - ASEAN Main Portal](#)

commitments give us the tools to do this; to build gender-responsive targets, indicators and reporting into STI funding and cooperation, so more women move from the lab bench to the leadership table. Done well, women will not just take part in ASEAN's scientific future — they will help shape, lead and define it. We must work in the spirit of making the impossible possible.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

15. Let us keep supporting women and girls in STEM. Let us keep investing in scientific talent and regional collaboration. Let us keep ensuring that science, technology and innovation serve inclusion, sustainability and shared prosperity. And let us have more of Mangalyaan Moments! From here onward, again, we must work in the spirit of making the impossible possible.

16. My congratulations again to every award recipient and participant on a successful 2nd ASEAN-India Women Scientists Conclave. I look forward to seeing the networks and ideas built here grow into lasting cooperation for ASEAN, India and our wider region.

17. With 2027 marking the 35th Anniversary of ASEAN-India relations and the 5th Anniversary of our Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, I am confident that Conclaves like this one will deepen our people-to-people ties and open new ground in digital technologies, artificial intelligence, biotechnology and sustainable development. Through greater exchange among our researchers, innovators, entrepreneurs and youth, we can unlock new opportunities for growth, and for a more inclusive, sustainable and prosperous future for our more than two billion people, as well as for the wider region.

End