



Keynote Address

**By H.E. Dr. Kao Kim Hourn, Secretary-General of ASEAN
at the Opening Ceremony of the Conference On Exchanges and Mutual
Learning on Rule of Law of Civilizations at the World Jurists Forum 2026**

Beijing, China, 5 July 2026,

***Excellency Wang Hongxiang, Secretary of the Leading Party Members Group,
China Law Society,***

Excellency Li Mingzheng, Vice Minister of Justice, People's Republic of China,

Excellency Yu Yingjie, Leader of Beijing Municipality,

Excellency Xie Jing, Vice Governor of Hainan Province,

***Distinguished Professor Zhang Wenxian, Senior Professor of Philosophy and
Social Sciences, Jilin University and Convener of the Jurisprudence Discipline
Review Group, Social Sciences Committee, Ministry of Education,***

***Distinguished Scholar Xu Xianming, Vice Director, Advisory Committee of the
Supreme People's Procuratorate; Former President (University),***

***Distinguished President Ma Huaide, President, Renmin University of China; Vice
President of the China Law Society; Chair of the Academic Committee, China Law
Society; Former President, China University of Political Science and Law,***

***Excellency Benedito Gonçalves, Justice of the Supreme Federal Court of Brazil
and Acting Chief Justice,***

***Excellency Jiang Zeting, Secretary of the CPC Committee, China University of
Political Science and Law,***

***Excellency Wang Shaofeng, Secretary of the CPC Fengtai District Committee,
Beijing,***

***Esteemed President Lu Chunlong, President, China University of Political Science
and Law,***

Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. It is a pleasure to join you at the 2026 Conference on Exchanges and Mutual Learning for the Rule of Law of Civilisations 2026, here in Beijing. At the outset, I wish to express my sincere appreciation to the China University of Political Science and Law (CUPL) and the Conference's organisers – CPC Fengtai District Committee and Fengtai District People's Government of Beijing Municipality - for inviting me and for bringing together such a distinguished gathering.
2. This year's theme – **“Exchanges and Mutual Learning between Chinese and Foreign Rule of Law Civilisations”** – reflects an underlying premise: no legal tradition has developed alone and in isolation. The historical record bears this out. The Tang Code in seventh-century China– one of the most systematic legal texts of the premodern world – shaped the legal traditions of Korea, Japan, and Vietnam. Roman law laid the foundations of modern civil law systems across Europe and beyond. Islamic jurisprudence has likewise informed legal development across the Muslim world, including parts of Southeast Asia. Though these traditions differ in their sources and methods, each fundamentally reflects a shared pursuit of justice – and each has evolved through time and in particular through exchange with others.
3. That spirit of exchange has found renewed articulation in our own time. President Xi Jinping's Global Civilisation Initiative announced in March 2023 reaffirms this principle by calling for respect for civilisational diversity and replacing estrangement with exchange and mutual learning. Applied to the rule of law, it affirms that legal traditions and rule-of-law civilisations – shaped by different histories, cultures, traditions, and sources of authority – can, and should, learn and enrich from one another.
4. What underpins these observations is something fundamental: the capacity for learning and adaptation – including by drawing on the experience of others – is itself a mark of legal maturity. History shows us that enduring legal systems are seldom static. China's legal tradition, like those of ASEAN and other civilisations, has evolved continuously with time in response to changing social, cultural, economic, and political realities. As today's challenges increasingly transcend national borders, our legal systems must display the same openness and adaptability. Legal systems grow stronger and more relevant when they learn from one another, and that spirit of mutual learning lies at the heart of this Conference.

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5. For ASEAN, dialogue, diplomacy, cooperation, regionalism, and multilateralism have long anchored our integration and community-building. They also shape

how we engage one another: through consultation, consensus, convergence building, and respect for diversity. We are home to one of the world's most diverse legal landscapes: across our 11 Member States, with nearly 700 million people, sit common law, civil law, Islamic legal principles, socialist legal traditions, customary law and indigenous norms, side by side and in the spirit of unity and solidarity of working together.

6. Yet this diversity has been a source of strength, not division. ASEAN's experience shows that legal diversity need not hinder cooperation. Rather than pursuing uniformity, we have built shared principles while respecting different constitutional traditions and legal systems. This has enabled Member States to build trust and consensus across different political, economic, social and cultural contexts, strengthening ASEAN's community-building, enhancing ASEAN integration, and making real contribution to the regional rules-based order.
7. This foundation has, in turn, created the certainty and trust that enable trade, investment, tourism, innovation, and cross-border exchanges to thrive and flourish. ASEAN is today the world's fifth-largest economy¹ and one of the most dynamic regions and set to become the fourth-largest economy by 2030. None of this would be possible without legal certainty, institutional trust, and effective dispute settlement, as well as a sustained commitment to the rule of law, good governance, and the regional rules-based order.
8. As ASEAN looks ahead, we are building on these key foundations. The **ASEAN Community Vision 2045** and its Strategic Plans – which chart ASEAN's direction for the next two decade – reaffirm our commitment to the rule of law, justice, and multilateralism as the basis for a resilient, innovative, people-centred, and rules-based Community. They also aim to strengthen ASEAN's role as a constructive contributor to the international rules-based order.
9. Under this Vision, ASEAN recognises that justice underpins security, public trust, and societal resilience. We are strengthening legal, judicial, and law enforcement cooperation to address transnational and non-traditional challenges more effectively. In an increasingly digital and interconnected region, trusted justice systems are as vital as physical infrastructure in responding collectively to cybercrime, online scams and fraud, and other cross-border threats.

¹ https://www.aseanstats.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/00.-ASEAN-Statistical-Brief-on-GDP_19Jan2024.pdf

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10. Principles acquire their fullest meaning when translated into institutions, policies and actions. For many years, ASEAN's legal cooperation has evolved incrementally, building trust through practical collaboration before codifying it in formal legal instruments. These instruments have, in turn, strengthened the legal architecture for regional cooperation in mutual legal assistance, extradition, trafficking in persons and counter-terrorism. More recently, cybercrime, online scams, and online fraud have emerged as further areas of focus and priority.
11. The ASEAN Treaty on Extradition, signed in Manila, on 14 November 2025, marks an important milestone in this collective effort. Together with the existing ASEAN Treaty on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters, the ASEAN Convention on Trafficking in Persons and the ASEAN Convention on Counter-Terrorism, it completes a core layer of the regional legal architecture for combating transnational crime in all its increasingly complex forms.
12. In fact, the recently established ASEAN Prosecutors/Attorneys General Meeting adds a further institutional pillar of cooperation. As a dedicated Sectoral Ministerial Body, it deepens cooperation among prosecutorial authorities across all ASEAN Member States, and complements existing mechanisms, including the ASEAN Law Ministers' Meeting, the ASEAN Ministers/Attorneys General Meeting of the Central Authorities on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters, and the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Transnational Crime. Together, these institutions reflect ASEAN's steadily maturing legal architecture and growing capacity to respond to transnational crime and other cross-border threats, affecting people and countries in the region.

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13. As a matter of fact, ASEAN's legal cooperation also extends far beyond the region. We work closely with Dialogue Partners, External Parties, and International Organisations to advance the rule of law and justice, reflecting our important belief that legal cooperation must continue to evolve alongside increasingly transnational challenges. For example, ASEAN is considering a non-ASEAN Member State's request to accede to the ASEAN Treaty on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters.
14. China stands out as a particularly close partner in ASEAN's justice cooperation. Given our shared land and maritime borders, the sheer scale of our people-to-people flows means that trafficking networks, cybercrime syndicates and online fraud operations find fertile ground across our shared space – and their victims

are our peoples. The ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Transnational Crime Plus China and our joint Work Plan to Combat Transnational Crime are our collective response, providing structured channels through which our law enforcement and justice agencies can work together concretely to address these challenges.

15. ASEAN's engagement with China is in itself a case of mutual learning in practice. Our legal traditions and development differ in history, structure and sources of law, yet both sides share an interest in promoting safety, justice and wellbeing of our peoples. As ASEAN carries forward the ASEAN Community Vision 2045, we will continue strengthening legal cooperation, the rule of law, good governance and a rules-based order within our region, while deepening partnerships and learning from friends such as China. Through such exchanges, we strengthen not only our respective legal systems, but also the foundations of peace, stability and shared prosperity.

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16. More than two millennia ago, the Chinese legal philosopher Han Fei observed that law must evolve with the times if society is to be well governed, and that governance succeeds when it responds to the changing circumstances. This idea remains highly relevant today. President Xi Jinping likewise has drawn on this tradition to emphasise that law must continue to develop in step with technological innovation, emerging industries and the changing needs and interests of the society.
17. As our societies become more interconnected and the challenges we face become more complex, no legal system can remain effective by standing still, and no single country, region or legal tradition can meet these challenges alone. That is exactly why fora and conferences such as this truly matter: they give judges, scholars and practitioners space and time to learn from one another's experience, deepen understanding of different legal traditions and systems, and find common ground while respecting our differences.
18. May this Forum continue to strengthen that spirit of dialogue and cooperation, reminding us that while our legal traditions may differ, our shared pursuit of justice, peace and prosperity unites us. For it is through adaptation and mutual learning that our legal systems remain relevant, resilient and worthy of the trust that our peoples place in them.
19. Once again, I wish to sincerely thank the Government of China as well as CUPL for hosting us, and I wish this Conference a resounding success.

Thank you.