



Keynote Speech by

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

2026 ASEAN-ROK Regional Connectivity Forum

**“Strengthening Supply Chain Resilience and Advancing the AKFTA
Upgrade in a Changing Global Economy”**

Jakarta, Indonesia, 16 July 2026

***Your Excellency Ambassador Lee Chul, Ambassador of the Republic of
Korea to ASEAN;***

***Your Excellency Ambassador Prinat Apirat, Permanent Representative of the
Kingdom of Thailand to ASEAN and Country Coordinator for ASEAN-
Republic of Korea Dialogue Relations;***

***Your Excellency Ambassador Evangeline T. Ong Jimenez-Ducrocq,
Permanent Representative of the Republic of the Philippines to ASEAN and
Chair of the ASEAN Connectivity Coordinating Committee (ACCC);***

***Dr. An Sungbae, Vice-President for External Affairs of the Korea Institute for
International Economic Policy;***

***Your Excellencies, Members of the Committee of Permanent
Representatives to ASEAN;***

Distinguished Speakers, Panelists, and Participants,

Ladies and Gentlemen, and Friends

Good Afternoon.

1. I am glad to be with you at the 2026 ASEAN-ROK Regional Connectivity Forum.
2. I wish to thank our co-hosts, the ROK Mission to ASEAN and the Korea Institute for International Economic Policy, KIEP, for convening this

Forum and for the invitation to deliver this keynote. I also thank the Permanent Mission of Thailand to ASEAN, as ASEAN's Country Coordinator for the Republic of Korea, for its continued support in bringing us together today.

3. The theme of this Forum, "Strengthening Supply Chain Resilience and Advancing the AKFTA Upgrade in a Changing Global Economy," names the task before us plainly. The regional and global landscape is shifting, and for ASEAN, and for the ASEAN-ROK partnership, this is not simply a challenge to manage: it is an opportunity to shape. And how we shape it matters. ASEAN is committed to ensuring that, amid greater global uncertainty, our region remains open, inclusive, and rules-based, capable of weathering shocks while delivering the benefits of connectivity and cooperation to all.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

4. The theme of today's Forum is also timely because the nature of connectivity itself is changing. Supply chains are becoming increasingly digital, data-driven, and technology-intensive, while emerging technologies, particularly artificial intelligence, are reshaping production, logistics, and trade, among others. The Republic of Korea's continued investments in advanced manufacturing, digital innovation, and resilient supply chain partnerships complement ASEAN's own aspirations. Together, they present fresh opportunities for ASEAN and the ROK to build supply chains that are not only more resilient, but also smarter, greener, and more competitive.
5. In this respect, I wish to share the following three points.
6. First, we have planned the work and now we must work the plan. In May last year, ASEAN put in place four strategic plans to guide our collective efforts towards our shared future of ASEAN 2045. Among them, the ASEAN Connectivity Strategic Plan, or ACSP, charts how we will build a region that is deeply and durably integrated, through sustainable infrastructure and urban development, digital innovation, people-to-people linkages, regulatory cooperation, and, critically for today's discussion, seamless logistics and supply chains.

7. In a world where supply chain disruptions cascade across borders and industries, and where critical minerals, semiconductors, and energy resources have become central to our economic security, the ability to move goods reliably, quickly, and transparently is of strategic importance.
8. I am pleased to note that the ACSP is already moving from vision to action. In April this year, the ASEAN Connectivity Coordinating Committee, ACCC, endorsed the ACSP Work Plan, comprising 162 Activities across 49 Strategic Measures. Built on the lessons of the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity 2025, or MPAC 2025, it is designed to evolve with our priorities: we are building on what worked and improving on what needs to change.
9. Second, we are widening existing bridges and opening new pathways. The Republic of Korea has long been a valued partner in ASEAN Connectivity. Under MPAC 2025, Korea supported work that brought our region closer together, from strengthening ASEAN's foundations in open data to opening pathways for our peoples through technical and vocational education and training, or TVET, exchanges.
10. That cooperation continues today under the ACSP, not least through the ASEAN Smart Cities Network, where Korea's support for smart and sustainable urban development is helping our cities become more liveable, resilient, and connected, including through short-term courses and master's degree programmes that are building a new generation of smart-city professionals and talents across our region.
11. We have also moved to upgrade the ASEAN-Korea Free Trade Area (AKFTA) Agreement, a commitment to modernise the economic foundation of our partnership for the years ahead. The upgrade is timely and indeed necessary, offering a genuine opportunity to diversify and strengthen supply chain resilience, where the ROK's technological depth and industrial capacity align closely with ASEAN's needs and aspirations under the ACSP.
12. Our cooperation and relations, elevated to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, or CSP, in 2024, define what we have built together, what we are now building, and what we intend to build in the years ahead.

13. Third, we must now translate these plans into concrete projects and commitments that strengthen ASEAN-ROK connectivity and advance the practical implementation of the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP), particularly within its connectivity and economic cooperation pillars. The architecture is already in place: our CSP provides the political mandate, the ACSP is operational, and the AKFTA upgrade negotiations are underway.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

14. This Forum exists to move us from dialogue to delivery. I am encouraged that today's discussions bring together government officials, the private sector, academia, and practitioners from both ASEAN and the ROK, each with a distinct role to play. Governments provide the policy framework and the enabling environment. The private sector brings capital, technology, and market knowledge. Academia and think tanks sharpen our understanding of where cooperation is working and where opportunities remain.
15. We already have examples to build on. Targeted, sector-specific collaboration, including in areas such as critical minerals, shows how strategic priorities can be turned into concrete projects on the ground. These are the initiatives that turn connectivity plans into connected reality. Nor is the opportunity confined to supply chains alone: it extends to sustainable economic growth and the other priority areas of mutual interest where our two sides can build together.
16. I would encourage all stakeholders here today to engage actively with ASEAN's connectivity agenda, and to bring forward proposals in the areas where your expertise and resources can make the greatest difference. Treat this Forum as part of an ongoing pipeline of cooperation rather than just a single event.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

17. The ASEAN-ROK partnership is among the most dynamic in our region. Both sides have the institutions and the ambition to deepen it further, and I strongly believe the will to match. We must do so in a manner that keeps our region open, inclusive, and resilient, and that delivers benefit to all our peoples.

18. I am confident that today's discussions will yield practical insights and concrete recommendations that serve both our peoples well. I look forward to the outcomes of this Forum, and to working with the Republic of Korea and all stakeholders in this room as we advance ASEAN Connectivity together.

Thank you very much.