



Welcoming Remarks

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

**At the Opening Ceremony of the 5th ASEAN Junior Fellowship Programme with
the ASEAN Secretariat (AJFP)**

ASEAN Headquarters/ASEAN Secretariat, 28 July 2026,

Ms. Jihan Abdul Rahman, Deputy Permanent Representative of Brunei Darussalam to ASEAN on behalf of Her Excellency Ambassador Latifah Zaini, Permanent Representative of Brunei Darussalam to ASEAN,

Your Excellency Yonetani Koji, Ambassador of Japan to ASEAN,

Your Excellencies, Permanent Representatives of ASEAN Member States to ASEAN,

Excellencies Ambassadors to ASEAN,

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good Afternoon and a very warm welcome.

1. Let me start by first of all thank Brunei Darussalam, and Her Excellency Ambassador Latifah in particular, for setting this programme in motion. Since it began in 2022, the Fellowship has graduated four cohorts, steadily building a network of young ASEAN leaders and deepening regional cooperation along the way. Brunei has stayed with this effort from the very start, helping shape the next generation of ASEAN leadership.
2. I am equally grateful to the Governments of Japan, France, and Cyprus for backing the ASEAN Junior Fellowship Programme. Japan's steady support has let us grow the Programme meaningfully, doubling the number of Junior Fellows across this cohort and the last. *Your Excellency Ambassador Yonetani Koji*, thank you for investing so consistently in ASEAN's future leaders.
3. France's active engagement has broadened the Fellows' perspectives and sharpened the quality of their learning experience. We are also very pleased this year to welcome Cyprus as a new partner, a sign that more of our friends are keen to invest in ASEAN's human capital, particularly our young leaders.

4. These partnerships show what is possible when we work together to nurture and grow the next generation of ASEAN leaders. I hope they are the start of deeper, more sustained collaboration in youth and leadership development, and I invite other partners to join this effort. Investing in people is how we shape ASEAN's shared future.

Excellencies, Junior Fellows, Ladies and Gentlemen,

5. We meet at a turning point in ASEAN's journey. With the adoption of the *ASEAN 2045: Our Shared Future*, we have entered a new phase of Community-building; one that asks us to be more resilient, more innovative, and more attentive to our people. Meanwhile, the region is navigating real turbulence: geopolitical tension, fast-moving technology, climate pressures, and rising expectations from the people whom we serve. Yet across nearly six decades, ASEAN's strength has come from the same source: unity, and a steadfast commitment to dialogue, diplomacy and cooperation.
6. As we move from vision to implementation, one thing is clear: ASEAN 2045 will succeed or fail not just on the strength of our policies and institutions, but on the people, who carry them out. It is also against this backdrop that the AJFP assumes even greater significance and meaning.
7. Since it began, the AJFP has grown into one of ASEAN's flagship efforts to develop the next generation of civil servants. It is more than a fellowship. It is a unique platform for cultivating regional perspectives, growing professional networks, and giving emerging leaders a genuine sense of ASEAN identity.
8. This year we welcome twenty-three Fellows, each carrying their own experience, expertise and perspective. In the weeks ahead, you will work alongside the ASEAN Secretariat, the Committee of Permanent Representatives, Dialogue Partners, ASEAN entities, and a range of guest speakers. More than that, you will see how ASEAN actually works - not just through meetings and paperworks, but through dialogue, consensus, mutual respect and the trust that has held this Community together for nearly six decades.

To our 23 Junior Fellows specifically:

9. Take every opportunity this Fellowship gives you. Beyond what you'll learn, I hope that this experience will sharpen your sense of what ASEAN is for, and why it's worth your commitment.
10. Three things I'd ask you to hold onto.

11. First: stay curious and have a sense of wonder. Don't stop at understanding how ASEAN works; push further and ask why it matters, to you, your community, your country, to ASEAN, and to our partners. For nearly six decades, our Member States have kept choosing dialogue over division, cooperation over confrontation, partnership over isolation. That choice, repeated again and again, is what makes ASEAN a force for peace and stability. It's not automatic, and someone has to keep choosing it. Soon, that will include you.
12. Second: build real trust. One of ASEAN's greatest strengths has always been the relationships between its people. Some of the friendships and professional networks you make here will outlast this Fellowship by decades. In a region facing more complexity, not less, the people you can call and trust will matter.
13. Third: lead with purpose and courage. Wherever you end up, do the work with integrity, humility, and professionalism. Public service, stripped down, is about making people's lives better. Do that well, and your dedication will already be advancing ASEAN's shared aspirations - strengthening this Community for generations to come.
14. ASEAN 2045 will need officials who are quick on their feet, genuinely collaborative, and comfortable with a landscape that keeps shifting and evolving. This Fellowship is one part of getting you ready for that. It's called Our Shared Future because no single country or institution can build it alone. It gets built through partnership, trust, and the work of people like you.
15. Years from now, I hope you look back on this Fellowship as the moment your belief in ASEAN took hold, and the point where you decided to help build a peaceful, resilient and prosperous Community for the people it serves. Let me leave you with this thought: a leader shows the way by walking it first. That is what this Fellowship asks of you now, and what ASEAN will ask of you for years to come.

Excellencies, Junior Fellows, Ladies and Gentlemen,

16. It is my pleasure now to declare the Fifth ASEAN Junior Fellowship Programme with the ASEAN Secretariat officially open.

Thank you.
