



**Remarks by
H.E. Dr. Kao Kim Hourn, Secretary-General of ASEAN
At the High-Level Meeting on Global AI Governance**

Shanghai, People's Republic of China, 18 July 2026

Excellencies Ministers and Distinguished Delegates.

A very Good Morning.

1. I thank the World Artificial Intelligence Conference (WAIC) 2026 Organising Committee for bringing us together in Shanghai, China's financial and innovation hub, to shape global AI governance under the theme "AI Partnership for a Brighter Future." The breakneck pace of AI advancement is outpacing most institutions' ability to keep up, transforming our economies, societies, and daily lives in ways we are still learning to understand. Its benefits and risks know no borders, and so the responsibility to govern it wisely cannot belong to any one nation alone.
2. I commend China's leadership in hosting WAIC and this High-Level Meeting, which offers a valuable opportunity to deepen regional cooperation and build strategic trust around a shared vision, one where innovation and inclusive development guide our collective journey into a new era of global AI governance. Partnership, in this context, means something practical: building trust, shared standards, and shared benefit together, across borders and institutions.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

3. Digital technologies are profoundly transforming our economies and social activities. China's digital economy reached US\$9.7 trillion in 2024, over half its GDP¹, driven by world-class advances in digital infrastructure, communication technologies, AI, and quantum computing. In parallel, the ASEAN digital economy continues to expand, surpassing US\$300 billion in Gross Merchandise Value in 2025, and is projected to reach US\$2 trillion by 2030². We have concluded negotiations on the ASEAN Digital Economy Framework Agreement (DEFA), which is legally-binding and region-wide, set for signing in the Philippines in November this year.
4. This momentum extends beyond trade and infrastructure into the heart of technological transformation itself. AI adoption is emerging as a new driver of this transformation, shaping the future of inclusive and sustainable economic growth. In ASEAN, AI is expected to contribute a GDP uplift of up to 18% growth. To fully leverage this, ASEAN has identified

¹ [China's Digital Economy Goes Global 2025](#)

² e-Conomy SEA 2025

cooperation in emerging technologies, with particular focus on AI in DEFA, setting the stage for regulatory frameworks that keep pace with technological innovation.

5. The UN Secretary-General's High-level Advisory Body on AI released its final report in 2024, titled "Governing AI for Humanity," which sets out the need for a global strategic framework to address AI risks and maximise its global benefits. And very recently on 6–7 July 2026, the first government-level Global Dialogue on AI Governance convened in Geneva, closing with a clear message: the measure of success will lie not only in the principles adopted, but also in the concrete actions taken before governments reconvene next year. It was a timely reminder that AI is advancing faster than regulation can keep pace, and that no country, large or small, can address this alone.
6. Governments worldwide are stepping forward to develop trustworthy and responsible AI frameworks. The United States launched its AI Action Plan³, balancing innovation with safety and societal responsibility, while China introduced its Global AI Governance Initiative⁴, aiming to shape global norms through a sovereignty-focused approach. The European Union adopted the AI Act⁵, the world's first cross-sector legislation to regulate AI based on risk assessment. These efforts reflect growing international momentum toward responsible and inclusive AI governance. At the same time, every country should have an equal opportunity to develop and benefit from AI. The longer AI evolves without universal rules, the harder it becomes to steer towards a safe and secure AI-enabled future.
7. Against this backdrop, ASEAN also actively contributing our part in shaping the global AI governance by developing the ASEAN AI Governance Framework for the region for the first time in 2024 that build consensus around the necessity to adopt a coherent strategy in promoting AI deployment on a principle-based approach.
8. In 2024, we adopted the ASEAN Guide on AI Governance and Ethics⁶. This Guide serves as a baseline standard to guide proper AI governance in the region, striking a balance between the economic advantages of rapidly advancing AI technology and its associated risks. ASEAN's commitment deepened in 2025 when we approved the Expanded ASEAN AI Guide, focusing on the risks of Generative AI⁷, and the ASEAN Responsible AI Roadmap⁸, providing member states with practical tools to implement responsible AI practices.
9. Recognising the rising urgency of a humanity-centric approach to AI development, ASEAN adopted the Declaration on the Establishment of the ASEAN AI Safety Network (AI SAFE) at the 47th ASEAN Summit in October last year. This represents a crucial step toward institutionalising AI safety, ethics, and governance principles, paving the way for effective implementation of the ASEAN Responsible AI Roadmap.
10. The establishment of ASEAN AI SAFE aligns with global calls for an international network to tackle AI safety risks through collaboration among governments, academia, and industry. Despite differing national interests, a shared consensus remains that AI must not

³ [The US AI Action Plan](#)

⁴ [China's Global AI Governance Initiative](#)

⁵ [EU AI Act](#)

⁶ [ASEAN Guide on AI Governance and Ethics](#)

⁷ [Expanded ASEAN Guide on AI Governance and Ethics – Generative AI](#)

⁸ [ASEAN Responsible AI Roadmap](#)

surpass or replace humans. As the world's first regionally endorsed AI Safety Network, ASEAN AI SAFE reflects our commitment to responsible AI development. ASEAN AI SAFE will be formally established within this year.

11. Looking ahead, under the Philippines' ASEAN Chairship this year, we are developing an ASEAN Leaders' Declaration on AI-Powered Medium-Small-and-Micro-Enterprises Growth, including its Action Plan, targeted for adoption at the 49th ASEAN Summit in November this year. The Declaration will shape ASEAN's shared digital future, building AI talent and readiness for MSMEs in the region, supported by public-private partnerships.
12. Today's High-Level Meeting offers an important platform to chart bold pathways so that AI becomes a genuine and responsible force for progress and prosperity in our changing world.
13. We stand at a defining moment – for this generation and those to come. AI's transformative power carries with it the weight of our shared responsibility to shape its impact wisely: to ensure it serves humanity with purpose, guided by ethical principles and inclusive practice, and mindful of its environmental footprint.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

14. ASEAN and China are well-placed to lead by example in this regard. ASEAN's early building blocks on AI governance and ethics, together with China's proactive engagement — including through its Global AI Governance Initiative — offer a strong foundation for our closer coordination on standards, capacity-building, and cross-border data and safety norms. Our partnership could help ensure that AI governance is shaped not only by the largest powers, but by a broader coalition mindful of the region and global's diverse needs and stages of development.
15. In this spirit, I look forward to the successful outcome of this meeting.

Thank you.
