



Remarks by

Secretary-General of ASEAN, Dr Kao Kim Hourn

**At the Luncheon in Conjunction with the 59th ASEAN Day Celebration
and ASEAN-Maybank Scholarship 2026 Awarding Ceremony**

ASEAN Headquarters/ASEAN Secretariat, 8 August 2026

Her Excellency Ambassador Sarah Nava Rani Al Bakri Devadason, Permanent Representative of Malaysia to ASEAN,

Tan Sri Dato' Sri Zamzamzairani Mohd Isa, Chairman of Maybank Group and Maybank Foundation Board of Trustees,

Excellencies, Permanent Representatives to ASEAN,

Excellencies, Ambassadors of the ASEAN's Dialogue Partners, Sectoral Partners, and Development Partners,

My colleagues in the ASEAN Secretariat, including the Deputy Secretary-General of ASEAN for Community and Corporate Affairs,

Excellencies, Distinguished guests, Ladies and Gentlemen, and Friends,

Good Morning.

1. First of all, I want to send my warmest congratulations to both the Permanent Mission of Malaysia to ASEAN and the Maybank Foundation for continuously organising this very unique programme, that is held back-to-back with ASEAN Day since I came on board as the Secretary-General of ASEAN. Of course, I want to also extend my sincere appreciation to the Malaysian Mission to ASEAN and the Maybank Foundation for once again hosting this ASEAN Day luncheon; a gathering that has become a cherished fixture on our calendar over the years.
2. I would like to congratulate the Maybank Foundation for organising the ASEAN-Maybank Scholarship for the fifth consecutive year. Since its inauguration in 2021, the award ceremony has been held alongside our ASEAN Day celebration at the ASEAN Secretariat/ASEAN Headquarters, and it has been encouraging to watch this initiative grow in terms of its relevance, meaning, and contribution.

3. I have full confidence that the ASEAN-Maybank Scholarship will continue to contribute meaningfully to ASEAN Community-building across our region to benefit our people, especially our young people. As a pioneer among ASEAN's private-sector partners in education, the Maybank Foundation plays a very important role in advancing high-quality education and in driving sustainable development. Quality education contributes significantly to the society, community, nation, and especially the ASEAN Community. It also prepares the citizens of ASEAN to be resilient, competitive, and ready for the future.

Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen.

4. ASEAN recently launched the ASEAN Work Plan on Education 2026–2030, which aims to widen access to higher education while keeping it equitable, inclusive, and responsive to our region's evolving needs. As higher education grows and diversifies, it matters just as much that we strengthen equitable access to the most disadvantaged and most vulnerable people among our communities.
5. The ASEAN Work Plan on Education, in essence, promotes targeted support; from educational technology to scholarships and other non-monetary measures; to help learners in vulnerable situations. It also champions gender-inclusive policies and leadership pathways to close persistent gaps in participation and academic leadership, and encourages flexible, alternative learning pathways, including recognition of prior learning, so that lifelong learning becomes the culture and philosophy of all.
6. In this spirit, I hope the Maybank Foundation will continue its excellent work through the ASEAN-Maybank Scholarship, empowering the next generation of ASEAN leaders through wider access and opportunity to quality higher education. I would also encourage the Foundation to keep investing in the future of our young ASEAN citizens from all ASEAN Member States, which is an important contribution to the ASEAN Community-building.

Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen.

7. I have said this before, and I am happy to say it again: As an educator myself, I have long believed in the power of education to transform lives, and much of my own work and passion has been devoted to helping young people to make the impossible possible. Education opens the door to a wealth of opportunities, to the future of possibilities, and to empower the lives with better understanding, knowledge, and appreciation of the world around us. I offer my warmest felicitations to each and every scholarship recipient this year. Please use this scholarship to learn, to leverage, and to leapfrog yourself in the world of unlimited opportunities, possibilities, and potentials.

8. You carry with you not only your own ambitions, but a part of ASEAN's future. And I have no doubt that you all will succeed and be the best of the best.
9. Today, I hope you have the opportunity to support young people who are among us here. Your contributions, whether it be ideas, encouragement, whatever that may be, will go a long way to support them. With that, I thank you and wish you all a wonderful lunch.

Thank You
