



Special Message of

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

For the ASEAN-China Ministerial Roundtable on Construction and Housing 2026

Ipoh, Malaysia, 1 August 2026

Your Excellency Nga Kor Ming, Minister of Housing and Local Government of Malaysia,

Your Excellency Ni Hong, Minister of Housing and Urban-Rural Development of the People's Republic of China,

Excellencies Ministers and Heads of Delegations of ASEAN Member States,

Distinguished Senior Officials, Esteemed Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. Let me begin by thanking Your Excellency Minister Nga Kor Ming and his team for their warm hospitality and the fine arrangements that have brought us together. This morning's ceremony was a fitting start to our deliberations here in the charming city of Ipoh. I am equally grateful to Excellency Ni Hong for China's continuing partnership and steady commitment to our shared regional goals.
2. I was delighted to learn that Ipoh itself hosted "*Program Madani Rakyat 2026*" in April on the theme of sustainable cities, quality housing, harmonious communities - a programme built around bringing urban development and public well-being together, from raising housing standards to strengthening social cohesion. This year's Roundtable theme reaches for the same objective. As ASEAN continues to urbanise, we face growing challenges, including housing affordability,

environmental degradation, climate risks, ageing infrastructure, and social inequalities.

3. Addressing these challenges requires an integrated approach, involving climate-smart infrastructure, efficient land use, and renewable energy, to build sustainable cities that are environmentally resilient and future-ready. This must be combined with innovative financing and collaborative partnerships to deliver quality and affordable housing that provides not just shelter, but access to services, public spaces, and economic opportunities.
4. Equally critical is investment in social capital, through inclusive public spaces, community facilities and cultural activities, that foster meaningful interactions across diverse populations, empowering residents to thrive within cohesive communities towards better quality of life for our peoples.

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,

5. Seizing these opportunities calls for collective will, coordinated action, and a decisive shift from dialogue to implementation. Allow me to share three areas where we can deepen ASEAN-China cooperation.
6. First, we must invest in comprehensive capacity building programmes on sustainable cities, quality housing and cohesive communities for our national and city officials. Local governments are at the forefront of translating regional commitments into tangible actions. Yet many of ASEAN's cities, particularly small and middleweight cities, still require assistance to enhance their capacity in planning, designing and financing sustainable urbanisation initiatives effectively.
7. ASEAN and China can work collaboratively through training programmes, technical assistance, and support for cities in developing viable investment plans.
8. I understand that China has just launched its 15th Five-Year Plan (2026–2030), marking the first time a national five-year plan has been developed entirely to

urban renewal. It aims to improve urban liveability, safety, and convenience while upgrading hundreds of thousands of housing units and adding thousands of hectares of new green space. This truly represents a key move to relook how its cities develop and renew, and offers a scale of experience China could usefully share as it builds on existing ASEAN initiatives such as the ASEAN Smart City Action Plan and the ASEAN Sustainable Urbanisation Strategy, helping our cities build the expertise needed to create smart, sustainable, and inclusive environments.

9. Second, we must invest in city-to-city partnerships. As ASEAN Member States are at different stages of urban development, a city-to-city partnership approach allows for greater connection and direct learning between cities in ASEAN and China. They can share how to overcome similar challenges, develop solutions to tackle issues such as affordable housing or waste management, and learn from each other's successes and setbacks.
10. The city-to-city model can also strengthen cultural linkages between ASEAN and Chinese cities, promoting better understanding across cultures and deepening people-to-people connectivity.
11. Ipoh itself offers a working example, having forged friendship agreements with several Chinese cities, including Nanning and Dalian, covering trade, culture, tourism, and education. I would encourage China to deepen such partnerships more broadly with ASEAN cities by tapping existing platforms such as the ASEAN Smart Cities Network — which comprises 38 member cities across the 11 ASEAN Member States.
12. Third, we must explore innovative financing options to unlock the necessary funds and capital for our plans. Different countries and cities have different capacities in identifying and accessing suitable financing options for their sustainable urban projects. Strengthening the capacity of national and local governments in exploring financing options, such as public-private partnerships (PPPs), green bonds, and other blended finance mechanisms, is indeed essential.

13. ASEAN and China can work together to share experiences on financing mechanisms that have proven effective. By improving institutional frameworks and creditworthiness, we can attract more public and private investment. Such financial cooperation is vital if we are to scale up our sustainable urban development initiatives from pilot projects to national and regional rollouts.

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,

14. This year marks a pivotal stage for ASEAN to translate the ASEAN Connectivity Strategic Plan and the ASEAN Smart City Action Plan into concrete, actionable outcomes. Deepening our engagement with our Dialogue Partners, particularly China, will be key to this endeavour.

15. Let us move beyond dialogue and work towards strengthening the capacity of our officials, the partnerships of our cities, and the financing of our urban future. Through mutually beneficial cooperation, we can build the sustainable cities and quality housing that will nurture cohesive, resilient, and thriving communities for generations to come.

16. Before I conclude my remarks, I wish to welcome all initiatives for the institutionalization of this meeting, ACMROCH, into an official mechanism of both ASEAN and ASEAN-Dialogue Partners, in this case with China. The ASEAN Secretariat will work with all ASEAN Member States to facilitate and realise this as soon as possible.

17. I look forward to productive deliberations and a successful Roundtable.

Thank you very much.
