



ASEAN GALA DINNER REMARKS BY

H.E. DR KAO KIM HOURN, SECRETARY-GENERAL OF ASEAN

Australia-ASEAN Business Forum 2026

Adelaide Convention Centre, 30 September 2026

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- ***Mr. Francis Wong OAM, Chairman, Australia-ASEAN Business Forum,***
 - ***The Right Honourable Dr. Jane Lomax-Smith AM, Lord Mayor, City of Adelaide,***
 - ***The Honourable Chris Picton MP, Minister for State Development, South Australia***
 - ***Mr. Joey Concepcion, Chairman of the ASEAN-BAC***
 - ***Excellencies Mayors, Members of Parliament,***
 - ***Excellencies Ambassadors of ASEAN Member States, Ladies and Gentlemen,***

1. Good Evening, everyone. It's a genuine pleasure to be with you at this ASEAN Gala Dinner, alongside the Australia–ASEAN Business Forum 2026. My thanks go to Mr Francis Wong OAM and his team for convening this Forum, and to the Government and people of Australia, especially here in Adelaide, for the warmth with which you've welcomed me and my delegation.
2. Over the course of this Forum, we've talked trade, investment, energy, innovation, food security, skills, and connectivity, among others. But an evening like this is really about the people in this room, and the trust and partnership between us that makes all that cooperation possible in the first place.

3. We are not new partners. Australia was ASEAN's first Dialogue Partner, and our relationship has grown steadily over the past five decades across political-security, economic, and socio-cultural cooperation. And since we established the ASEAN–Australia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in 2021, the relationship has become more forward-looking, more practical, and more responsive to the needs of our region.
4. This year we mark five years since this Partnership began. It's a good moment to take stock of what we've built together, and to recommit to a partnership that stays substantive, mutually beneficial, and aligned with ASEAN's long-term priorities under ASEAN 2045: Our Shared Future.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

5. The ASEAN–Australia partnership, in essence, is about connected futures. We are linked by geography, history, economy, education, culture, and, ultimately, the people. We share an interest in a peaceful, stable, open, inclusive, and prosperous region, and in making sure growth is sustainable and that opportunity reaches communities, businesses, and future generations.
6. Economically, two-way goods and services trade rose by AUD 3.5 billion in 2025, to AUD 197.5 billion, while two-way investment grew by AUD 6.2 billion, to AUD 296.2 billion.¹ Encouraging numbers, and also a reminder that there's more we can do together.
7. ASEAN itself remains a region of opportunity. Our GDP reached almost US\$4.3 trillion in 2025, and total trade in goods reached US\$4.39 trillion, up 14.1 per cent year-on-year. Inward FDI flows reached US\$241.9 billion in 2025.² Taken together, these trends point to a region that is resilient, commercially active, economically strong and closely tied to the global economy.
8. What matters most is that this translates into practical cooperation that improves people's lives: stronger supply chains, more support for MSMEs, expanding digital opportunities, advancing the energy transition, investing in

¹ Draft Chair's Statement of the 6th ASEAN-Australia Summit, 12 August 2026

² ASEAN Secretariat, ASEAN Statistics Quarterly Updates, May 2026

skills, promoting women and youth participation, and building bridges between our peoples.

9. In this regard, I want to acknowledge Australia's continued support for ASEAN's priorities. This includes the Aus4ASEAN Futures Initiative, the Regional Trade for Development Initiative, support for AANZFTA and RCEP implementation, cooperation on the ASEAN Power Grid, digital transformation, food security, connectivity, and human capital development.
10. These are not separate agendas. They are connected pieces of one shared future. Trade needs connectivity. Connectivity needs infrastructure. Infrastructure needs investment. Investment needs skills. And all of it depends on trust, openness, and a long-term partnership.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

11. This event is also a reminder that diplomacy and economic cooperation are ultimately built through relationships. Many partnerships take shape less in formal documents and more in dialogue and conversations, and conversations like the ones happening around this room tonight, conversations that build confidence, create understanding, and open doors to future collaboration.
12. So I'd encourage all of you, government representatives, business leaders, investors, academics, thought leaders, and community partners, to deepen your networks and explore what's possible. ASEAN and Australia have much to offer one another, and the task now is to turn goodwill into projects, and friendship into lasting impact.
13. I have no doubt this partnership will keep growing in the years ahead, and I hope it keeps growing through more evenings exactly like this one, where the conversations over dinner shape what happens long after the Forum itself ends. I wish to take this opportunity to express my sincere appreciation to the organizers of the Australia-ASEAN Business Forum 2026, especially to Chairman Francis Wong OAM, to our hosts, and to everyone gathered here tonight.
14. I hope this evening leaves you with new connections, good conversation, and good company. Thank you very much and have a good evening!