As Delivered

**VVIP DINNER REMARKS BY**

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

**Australia-ASEAN Business Forum 2026**

**28 September 2026, Adelaide, Australia**

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- ***Mr Francis Wong OAM, Chairman of the Australia–ASEAN Business Forum,***
- ***Your Excellency Anoulack Chanthivong, Minister for Industry and Trade of New South Wales Government,***
- ***The Honourable Chris Picton, Minister for State Development, Government of South Australia,***
- ***Mr. Brian Black, CEO of Business Council of Australia,***
- ***Mr. Joey Concepcion, Chairman of the ASEAN-BAC***
- ***Excellencies Ambassadors, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,***

Good Evening.

1. Let me begin by thanking Mr Francis Wong OAM for organising the dinner of the Australia–ASEAN Business Forum and for bringing us together this evening. Let me also express my sincere appreciation to the Government and people of South Australia for the warm hospitality extended to me and my delegation. It is a pleasure to share this dinner with so many friends of ASEAN and Australia.

2. Around this table, we have an opportunity to speak more candidly, and more directly, about where ASEAN and Australia can turn friendship into investment, and investment into long-term shared prosperity.

3. That partnership is already strong. But its next phase must be even more practical, more sector-driven, and more connected to real opportunities for business. Governments on both sides can create the conditions: open markets, clear rules, quality infrastructure, skills development, standards, connectivity, and trusted platforms for cooperation. However, private sector, will be the engine that turns these conditions into projects, jobs, innovation, and growth.

***Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,***

4. This evening, allow me to focus on three sectors where ASEAN and Australia can work together with greater ambition, and where private investment, supported by governments, can make a difference.

5. We should begin with the green energy transition and sustainable infrastructure. ASEAN's economies are growing, urbanising, and industrialising. This growth will require more energy, better infrastructure, stronger connectivity, and more sustainable cities. At the same time, we must ensure that this growth stays consistent with our climate commitments, and with the long-term resilience of our region.

6. Australia has major strengths in renewable energy, critical minerals, green hydrogen, energy technology, resources, infrastructure finance, and standards. ASEAN brings scale, demand, connectivity, and a strong need for investment in power generation, grids, transport, industrial zones, and sustainable urban development. Together, these strengths can support a regional energy transition that is not only cleaner, but also more secure, affordable, and inclusive.

7. The private sector can play a central role here, investing in renewable energy projects, transmission infrastructure, energy storage, green industrial parks, sustainable transport, and climate-resilient infrastructure. Governments, in turn, can support this by improving regulatory certainty, facilitating bankable projects, expanding public-private partnerships, supporting the ASEAN Power Grid, and mobilising blended finance. This is not only an environmental agenda; it is an economic one. The green transition can create new industries, new jobs, new

supply chains, and new opportunities for both ASEAN and Australian companies to build together.

8. From there, we turn to food security, agriculture, and resilient supply chains. Food security is one of the most practical and strategic areas of ASEAN–Australia cooperation. ASEAN has large and growing consumer markets, strong agricultural communities, and expanding food manufacturing capacity. Australia has world-class capabilities in agriculture, agri-tech, logistics, biosecurity, water management, food standards, and research. Recent global disruptions have reminded us that food systems must be efficient, but also resilient. We need supply chains that can withstand shocks, support farmers and producers, reduce waste, improve productivity, and deliver safe and affordable food to our people.

9. Here too, the private sector has much to offer: agri-tech, cold-chain logistics, sustainable aquaculture, food processing, halal industries such as in Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore, agricultural research, digital platforms for farmers, and regional distribution networks. These are areas where commercial opportunity and public interest certainly come together. Governments can support this by strengthening standards cooperation, improving trade facilitation, investing in logistics connectivity, supporting research partnerships, and helping MSMEs and farmers participate in regional value chains. If we get this right, ASEAN and Australia can help build a food system that is more productive, more sustainable, and more secure for the wider region.

10. The third area that I would like to address this evening is the digital economy, innovation, and skills. The future of ASEAN–Australia economic integration will increasingly be shaped by technology. Digital trade, artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, data governance, fintech, e-commerce, and digital services are transforming how businesses operate and how people participate in the economy.

11. ASEAN has a fast-growing digital economy, a young and connected population, and a large base of MSMEs ready to adopt new tools. Australia brings strengths in education, research, digital standards, cybersecurity, advanced services,

and innovation ecosystems. Together, we can build a digital partnership that is trusted, inclusive, and commercially meaningful.

12. The private sector can invest in digital platforms, AI-enabled services, fintech, health technology, education technology, cybersecurity solutions, smart manufacturing, and MSME digitalisation. Universities, training providers, and businesses can also work together to prepare the workforce for the digital and green economy. Governments can support this by advancing interoperable rules, trusted data frameworks, digital trade facilitation, cybersecurity cooperation, skills recognition, scholarships, TVET, and innovation partnerships. This is particularly important because technology must not widen gaps. It must help more people, more small businesses, more women, and more young entrepreneurs participate in growth and transformation.

***Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,***

13. If the green transition is about the future of how we power our economies, then food security is about the future of how we sustain our societies, then the digital economy is about the future of how we compete, connect, and create value.

14. Governments must continue to provide the frameworks, confidence, and connectivity that businesses need. The private sector, in turn, brings the investment, technology, entrepreneurship, and long-term commitment. Financial institutions have a role too, turning promising ideas into bankable projects. So do universities and training institutions, particularly in Australia here, preparing our people for the industries of tomorrow. And chambers and business councils can help connect partners who might not otherwise find each other.

15. Let me close with this. Our friendship gives us a starting point. What will carry this partnership forward is what we do with it: whether we mobilise investment into the sectors that matter most, help our businesses grow together, and create opportunities that improve the lives of our peoples. Tonight, I invite all of us to think boldly and practically. May our governments enable, our businesses invest, and our people benefit. Our energy should go forward toward the sectors

that will define the future of our region, so that ASEAN and Australia do not simply respond to change, but shape it together.

16. I wish all of you a pleasant dinner, fruitful conversations, and renewed determination to bring ASEAN and Australia even closer together. With that, thank you and please have a wonderful evening.

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