

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY
YB DATO' SRI ANIFAH AMAN
MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, MALAYSIA
ON THE OCCASION OF THE ASEAN ANNIVERSARY FORUM
“ASEAN: FORGING AHEAD TOGETHER”
INSTITUTE OF DIPLOMACY AND FOREIGN RELATIONS (IDFR)
28 OCTOBER 2015**

Bismillah-ir-Rahman-ir-Rahim.

Yang Berusaha Puan Noraini Ibrahim
Acting Director General, Institute of Diplomacy and Foreign Relations,

Yang Berbahagia Dato' Muhamad Noor Yacob
Director, Asia Pacific Centre for Economic Diplomacy Malaysia, and the
Moderator for the Panel Discussion,

Distinguished Panel of Speakers,

Excellencies, Ambassadors and High Commissioners,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Assalamu'alaikum wa rahmatullahi wa barakaatu,
Good Morning, Salam Sejahtera and Salam Satu Malaysia,

1. I wish to convey YB Minister's regrets for not being able to be here today. He has asked me to deliver the keynote address on his behalf.

2. It gives me great pleasure to be with you here today. I wish to congratulate the Institute of Diplomacy and Foreign Relations (IDFR), ASEAN-Malaysia National Secretariat (AMNS) of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM) and Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) for jointly organising today's ASEAN Anniversary forum in conjunction with the 48th anniversary of ASEAN.

3. I believe that today's theme "ASEAN: Forging Ahead Together" is fitting, given the fact that 2015 is a very important year for ASEAN and for Malaysia's chairmanship. By end of this year, we will witness not only the establishment of the ASEAN Community but will also see our ASEAN Leaders endorsing a new vision which will chart ASEAN's future for the next 10 years. This vision will be called ASEAN Vision 2025: Forging Ahead Together. This is indeed a historic development and important milestone for ASEAN after more than 48 years of community building efforts.

4. Two years ago, during the 10th ASEAN Leadership Forum in Kuala Lumpur, I spoke about Malaysia's Chairmanship of ASEAN being a historic responsibility thrust upon all of us. I am glad to say that we took on this 'historic responsibility' with full vigour and pride. I hope I am not being too presumptuous by saying that Malaysia took the lead in successfully developing a new post-2015 Vision and its attendant documents. There were many critics out there who said that we would not be able to develop a comprehensive document that is bold, visionary and forward-looking. But we managed to do it!

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

5. Since the ASEAN Vision 2025 and its three Community Blueprints have yet to be adopted by the Leaders, I cannot reveal too much their contents. But I would give you a sneak preview of what is in store. The focus of the ASEAN Community over the next ten years would be guided by but not limited to the following broad goals that will further consolidate and strengthen the regional grouping:

- First, emphasis will be on the peoples of ASEAN and their well-being;
- Second, enhancement of awareness of ASEAN and its Vision of a politically cohesive, economically integrated and socially responsible Community;
- Third, engagement of all nationals of ASEAN Member States through effective and innovative platforms to promote commitment and identification with ASEAN policies and regional interests;
- Fourth, committed to fundamental freedoms, human rights and better lives for all ASEAN peoples;
- Fifth, strengthened capacity to deal with existing and emerging challenges while maintaining ASEAN Centrality;
- Sixth, outward-looking and a global player;
- Seventh, implementation of the ASEAN agenda while pursuing national aspirations which contribute to ASEAN Community building; and
- Final but not least, strengthening of the ASEAN Organs and the ASEAN Secretariat.

6. I wish to emphasise here that the establishment of an ASEAN Community is not the end of the road for ASEAN. It is a milestone

indicating that we have begun the next lap on regional integration and community-building. To be clear, the regional integration and community-building are only parts, albeit important parts, of the region-building effort. To be equally clear, region-building aims to serve our peoples, the centre of the ASEAN Community.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

7. As ASEAN moves forward into the post-2015 period, regional community building will continue to be the main focus of ASEAN agenda. Efforts will continue to be geared towards building a deeper and more mature form of ASEAN Community as envisaged by ASEAN Vision 2025. More importantly, ASEAN will continue to provide opportunities for its 630 million people so that they can reap the gains and benefits of the ASEAN Community. While opportunities are abundant, there will be implications or challenges in this respect. Allow me to highlight some of the challenges in the broadest term:-

- i) **First: Ensuring that regional community-building initiatives, as envisaged by the ASEAN Vision 2025, are truly felt by the peoples whereby they can participate fully in the process.** This, perhaps, could be one of the main challenges which has been traditionally dominated by the governments. As we are all aware, governments all over the region are facing a far more sophisticated and demanding electorates. They want their voices to be heard. They demand for a better and effective governance. In short, they are part of the growing social forces that are gradually

challenging the dominance of ASEAN state-centric regionalism.

- ii) **Second: Greater economic integration.** ASEAN should focus on outstanding priorities in services liberalisation and the facilitation of trade and movement of skilled manpower. While progress has been made in reducing tariff levels, non-tariff barriers (NTB) also pose major obstacles to trade. It is important for ASEAN to work through the remaining barriers as services is expected to account for about half of the economic output of ASEAN economies this year.

- iii) **Third: Raising awareness and inculcating the sense of identity that underpin the idea of ASEAN Community.** As Prime Minister Dato' Sri Mohd Najib Tun Abdul Razak stressed during the 48th ASEAN Day this year, we need to exert greater efforts in raising awareness of ASEAN, its great achievements of the past and the brighter horizons for all it should bring about in the future.

- iv) **Fourth: Eradicating poverty and narrowing the development gap.** The eradication of poverty amongst ASEAN countries will also remain another major challenge in regional community building. Indeed, ASEAN, in recent decades, has done well in this respect. Nonetheless, according to a recent study by the Economic Research for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA) in 2010 there were 100 million people living in dire poverty and nearly 200 million, if the threshold income is set at USD2 per day.

Enhancing regional connectivity is another issue that is closely related with reducing poverty and narrowing development gap. Needless to say, an enhanced connectivity would assist ASEAN Member States in economic growth, attract investment and promote deeper people-to-people interaction. In this regard, the challenge is to find a more robust and sustained way of securing the needed financial resources in all three aspects of physical, institutional and people-to-people connectivity.

- v) **Fifth: Strengthening ASEAN centrality.** In the post-2015 period, the region will continue to see changing geostrategic environment that will exert more pressure to ASEAN in ensuring its centrality. ASEAN, in this regard, has no choice but to maintain a strong degree of cohesion, unity and credibility. Otherwise, it may render the Association irrelevant and divided.

As for Malaysia, it is our view that ASEAN centrality will continue to rest on continued peace within and among ASEAN members; neutrality vis-à-vis the major powers; and effectiveness of our own institutions. A strong and united ASEAN provides the framework for the maintenance of regional peace and stability. Only then ASEAN will continue to receive support from outside partners in driving the regional framework and processes.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

8. I would like to emphasise once again that with the establishment of the ASEAN Community, it is not the end of our work with regard to the ASEAN Community building and regional integration process. The challenges for ASEAN are immense but I believe we will succeed in overcoming them if we remain united, cohesive and strong.

9. I hope that you will have a very fruitful discussion that would yield practical and implementable ideas in the pursuit of a strengthened and integrated region. I also hope today's forum will explore the challenges that the ASEAN community is likely to face and solutions for them – realistic and feasible solutions, some of which I have expressed today. I wish you all the best in your deliberations.

Thank you.