

WELCOME ADDRESS BY
THE RIGHT HONOURABLE CHIEF JUSTICE OF MALAYSIA,
TUN TENGKU MAIMUN BINTI TUAN MAT
AND
CHAIR, ASEAN LAW ASSOCIATION MALAYSIA
ON THE OCCASION OF THE
14TH ASEAN LAW ASSOCIATION GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2023
19 OCTOBER 2023
SHANGRI-LA, KUALA LUMPUR

SALUTATIONS

- (1) The Right Honourable The Prime Minister of Malaysia,
Dato' Seri Anwar bin Ibrahim;
- (2) The Right Honourable The Chief Justice of Singapore cum President
of the ASEAN Law Association (ALA), Sundaresh Menon;
- (3) Right Honourable Chief Justices and Heads of Delegation of the
Council of ASEAN Chief Justices (CACJ) and ALA;
- (4) YABhg. Tun Zaki Bin Tun Azmi,
Former Chief Justice of Malaysia;
- (5) Mr Paul Quan,
Secretary-General of ALA
- (6) YBhg. Dato' Mah Weng Kwai

Chairman, Organising Committee of the ALA General Assembly and ASEAN Law Conference;

(7) Brother and sister Judges from the ASEAN Judiciaries;

Your Excellencies, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

Assalamualaikum warahmatullahi wabarakatuhu and a very good morning to all of you.

[1] I would like to begin by warmly welcoming each and every one of you to the 14th ASEAN Law Association (ALA) General Assembly 2023. For those experiencing Kuala Lumpur for the first time, I invite you to enjoy the best of what the city has to offer seeing that our event venue is after all, at the heart of the city. To our returning visitors, it is a pleasure to have you here again.

[2] As we convene here today, we are united by the guiding principle of our motto: “One Vision, One Identity, One Community.” Mirroring this unity is ASEAN, a vibrant Community comprising ten (10) distinct Member States – Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Brunei Darussalam, Vietnam, The Peoples’ Democratic Republic of Lao, Myanmar, and Cambodia.

[3] This all-embracing community stands as a testament to our theme for this year, “ASEAN Tapestry: Our Pride.” Each thread in this vast tapestry signifies a unique aspect of our diverse backgrounds which when woven together form the rich fabric of our unity augmented by our shared commitment to harmony, solidarity, and co-operation.

[4] The cherished diversity of our tapestry is not merely celebrated, but also actively preserved through mutual acceptance and moderation. Acceptance here involves more than mere tolerance; it involves celebrating each other's differences and recognising that these disparate elements enrich us, fostering unity rather than division. Equally important is the principle of moderation, which calls for equality and fairness as we navigate our discussions and decisions. It is through such collaboration, characterised by acceptance and moderation, that we can achieve our shared objectives, contributing meaningfully to the vibrant ASEAN Tapestry and ensuring its resilience and continuity.

[5] As we are all aware, ALA came into existence following a resolution passed during the Conference on Legal Development in ASEAN Countries held in Jakarta, Indonesia, in February 1979. The conference was attended by the initial five (5) ASEAN countries: Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand. In that same year, a working committee drafted the ALA Constitution and By-Laws, which were subsequently promulgated in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. These rules were officially adopted at the First General Assembly, which took place in November 1980 at the Philippine International Convention Centre in Manila. This significant gathering marked the establishment and convening of the ALA Governing Council and Secretariat for the very first time.

[6] Over time, since the establishment of ALA, the membership has expanded to include members from ASEAN countries following their accession to the ASEAN Community. Brunei Darussalam joined ASEAN on 7 January 1984; followed by Vietnam on 28 July 1995; Lao and Myanmar on

23 July 1997; and finally, Cambodia on 30 April 1999 – forming the current state of ALA as a full organisation representing all the ten ASEAN countries.

[7] Within the dynamic confines of the ASEAN region, we recently commemorated the 56th anniversary of its historic founding. Over this extensive period spanning more than half a century, ASEAN has not only attained commendable progress but has also paved its own course, emerging as a formidable institution in the eyes of the world. Our region is currently riding the waves of significant growth, providing a myriad of reasons to look towards the future with optimism. We take pride in not just preserving peace, freedom and neutrality, stability, and security but also propelling rapid progress and comprehensive development. In the grand scheme of the global economy, ASEAN is gradually solidifying its position on the world stage.¹

[8] Against this vibrant backdrop, it is relevant to refer to ALA's aspirations which are delineated in the ASEAN Community Vision 2025. This document underscores the creation of an integrated, peaceful, and stable ASEAN Community, driven by the core principles of peace, freedom and neutrality, permeating into the life of citizens and peoples of ASEAN. With the robust backing of the ASEAN Community Vision 2025, the collective ambition is to continue growing the ASEAN Community into a peaceful, stable, and resilient entity, equipped with enhanced capabilities to tackle challenges with efficacy and solidarity in diversity. The overarching aim is to establish ASEAN as an outward-looking region within the global community, maintaining and accentuating ASEAN's pivotal role in regional affairs, thereby contributing to the global dialogue.²

¹ <https://www.asean.org/wp-content/uploads/images/2015/November/aec-page/ASEAN-Community-Vision-2025.pdf>.

² <https://www.asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/ASEAN-2025-Forging-Ahead-Together-final.pdf>.

[9] The 14th General Assembly of ALA represents a significant milestone in our concerted journey towards realising the ASEAN Community Vision 2025. Reflecting on the path that has led us from ALA's inception, over forty years ago, to the present day-ALA has made remarkable strides in the realm of law, fostering legal networks, and strengthening co-operation among ASEAN Member States. When we first set out, the vision of lawyers from our ten nations, each with varying socio-economic conditions and distinct legal traditions, harmoniously collaborating was not immediately apparent. The mission to promote convergence in our laws and advance the Rule of Law seemed ambitious. Yet, the success of the ALA, evident today, is living proof to the enduring bonds of friendship and collective effort among the individuals who turned this vision into a reality.

[10] It is important to recognise that while the ASEAN region is characterised by different legal systems, the principles of adherence to the Rule of Law and promotion of good governance, nevertheless forms the essence of our diverse legal landscape. This shared aspiration, in my view, represents one of the fundamental threads woven into the vibrant ASEAN Tapestry; Our Pride.

[11] In this regard, I must also take this opportunity to thank the Government of Malaysia spearheaded by the Prime Minister who is present today, for giving the Malaysian Judiciary its support for hosting the prestigious events for which we are all gathered here today. As you may know the Prime Minister is himself a firm supporter of ASEAN and his Government's support and his personal presence here today is a clear indication of that fact. As the head of the Malaysian Judiciary, I can assure you that the Malaysian Judiciary, through the principles of Rule of Law espoused by the ASEAN collaboration, will continue to perform its function

without fear or favour and without bias for any particular party. The Prime Minister is an ardent believer of these principles and his support shows how the Executive and the Judiciary can continue to perform their functions independently of each other and yet, at the same time, provide support where support is needed.

[12] For us members of the legal profession in the ASEAN region, despite our differences, we share a deep-seated dedication to the pursuit of justice. This duty transcends national borders and legal systems. In the bigger scheme of things, our collective commitment to justice, irrespective of our individual backgrounds, reaffirms our unity and strengthens our resolve as we continue to uphold the Rule of Law and promote co-operation within the ASEAN region.

[13] This firm resolve is reflected in this year's ASEAN Law Conference, which stands out as a comprehensive platform, illuminating a wide array of crucial subjects. These topics span from the immediate necessity of protecting the rights of women and children to the rapidly advancing trends of digitalisation within the ASEAN landscape.

[14] In the interest of time I would not repeat the themes discussed in these and lightning sessions. Suffice to state that the ASEAN Law Conference brings together brilliant minds from different countries, cultures, and legal systems. In my view, it is in this harmonious amalgamation of perspectives that we can find solutions to the complex problems affecting our region.

[15] Like a tapestry without its threads, our community cannot thrive if any segment remains overlooked or unprotected. At the end of it all, our ASEAN tapestry which stretches beyond national boundaries encapsulates the

protection of our women, children, marginalised communities, and the environment, all of which require the strong reinforcement of the law to ensure a more promising future which would still preserve the ASEAN Tapestry; Our Pride.

CONCLUSION

[16] With that, I hope that this year's ASEAN Law Conference will serve as a springboard for this august association to venture into new frontiers of knowledge contribution, experience sharing, judicial co-operation and justice development in ASEAN.

[17] I wish each of you a memorable and productive time at the Assembly and would like to express again my appreciation for your attendance. Thank you.