

## **14<sup>th</sup> ASEAN LAW ASSOCIATION GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

### **ADDRESS**

Thursday, 19 October 2023

The Honourable the Chief Justice of Singapore Sundaresh Menon  
President, ASEAN Law Association

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The Right Honourable the Prime Minister of Malaysia, Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim  
The Right Honourable the Chief Justice of Malaysia, Tun Tengku Maimun  
The Honourable Minister in the Prime Minister's Department (Law and Institutional Reform), Dato' Sri Azalina Binti Othman Said  
Vice-Presidents of the ASEAN Law Association  
Heads of Delegation  
ALA Secretary-General Mr Paul Quan  
Chairman of the Organising Committee, Dato' Mah Weng Kwai  
ALA members, fellow judges, friends, ladies and gentlemen

1. A very good morning. Let me first and foremost thank the Prime Minister for taking the time to grace the opening of this Assembly. It is a great honour for us, Your Excellency, and we deeply appreciate your presence here today.
2. I would like also to thank the Right Honourable Tun Tengku Maimun, and the Malaysian National Committee for the tremendous effort that has gone into planning and hosting this General Assembly, which promises to break new ground in the continuing growth and development of the ASEAN Law Association ("ALA"). I also wish to extend our heartfelt appreciation to the Chief Justice and the Malaysian National Committee for the inimitably gracious and generous hospitality that has already been and will continue to be extended to us throughout the course of this Assembly. And let me

warmly echo the Chief Justice's welcome and say that it is a real pleasure to see you all here today.

3. Though it is now in its 14<sup>th</sup> iteration, this General Assembly, the accompanying 2<sup>nd</sup> ASEAN Law Conference and the 44<sup>th</sup> ALA Governing Council Meeting have been in gestation for a couple of years. As with so many things, the pandemic got in the way. If we had asked ourselves three years ago whether we would be able to commit to gathering here in person today, I think most of us would have hesitated to say 'yes'. And yet here we are; our gathering a testimony to the resilience of the human spirit. While COVID-19 is not quite a thing of the past, the fact that we are able to come together today despite the many disruptions of the past three years makes this long-awaited reunion of the ALA family all the more precious.
4. The past few years and the crises we have all had to negotiate have afforded us a pause for reflection and I wish to offer my perspectives in two parts. The first, which I will do in this address, centres around recalling the provenance of the ASEAN Law Conference and how it came to take the form that it does today. You heard the Chief Justice a few minutes ago trace the history and development of the ASEAN Law Association. In my remarks this morning, I would like to continue that narrative by taking a brief look into our future. In the second part, which I will cover when I present the report on my term as ALA President when this General Assembly reconvenes on Saturday, I will review our journey over the course of the last five years through four specific lenses: first, our *resilience* in standing against the

challenges posed by the pandemic and overcoming them; second, our efforts to ensure and enhance our continued *relevance* in ASEAN; third, the process of *renewal* directed primarily at drawing our younger colleagues to the work of ALA; and fourth, the process of *rejuvenation* that we have embarked on in order to reinvent our Association so it will be fit for the challenges that the future will bring.

5. Let me then begin by saying a few words about how the ASEAN Law Conference came to be. When Singapore hosted the last ALA General Assembly in 2018, we perceived the opportunity to position this triennial assembly as a premier legal event in the region by bringing together legal professionals from throughout ASEAN at a conference that would explore cutting-edge legal issues. With its unique makeup of a body of members that comprises judges, government and practising lawyers, as well as legal academics, ALA's unique value proposition is its ability to deliver substantive content to the legal fraternity with a breadth and depth in a way that perhaps no other organisation is able to do.
6. The inaugural ASEAN Law Conference held in Singapore in 2018, which centred around the theme, "The Power of ONE: Unlocking Opportunities in ASEAN Through Law", validated this perception. The conference featured rich discussions on how greater cooperation and convergence in the ASEAN region could be promoted through the instrumentality of the law. There were six plenary and four parallel sessions, one of which took the format of arguments in a mock case. During the conference, I had suggested that we

could perhaps think about establishing an ALA Moot Competition to sensitise law students to the importance of thinking about and applying ASEAN Law in the context of transnational legal issues and problems.

7. And so, I am extremely heartened that ALA Malaysia, led by Chief Justice Tun Tengku Maimun, has decided to retain the ASEAN Law Conference as a worthy endeavour. Five years on from the inaugural ASEAN Law Conference, the theme of the second iteration of this Conference – namely, “ASEAN Tapestry – Our Pride” – aptly focuses on the ties that bind us through a rich and vibrant tapestry of values that bear on the lives of our women, our children, the heritage of our marginalised communities, the environment and the practice of law, including the challenges and opportunities brought to us by the emergence and development of generative artificial intelligence. And all of this with ALA as the loom on which these values can be woven into the law. I echo Tun Tengku Maimun’s observations as to how these themes underpin the values of collaboration on which the ASEAN community stands and I very much hope that the ASEAN Law Conference will in time take its place as the ‘go-to’ legal event in the region, and in the process bring our best legal minds together to unpack and develop solutions to the many challenges that we all face, which is very much a part of ALA’s work and its mission.
8. I am also delighted that ALA Malaysia has decided to inaugurate a moot competition on matters of ASEAN law that we can proudly call our own. This has been named “The ASEAN Moot”, which is being held for the first time

this year. This is an undertaking of significant importance and will, I believe, prove to be a milestone development because it promises to establish a gateway through which ALA can renew itself, by drawing into our fold a younger generation of lawyers who will be more accustomed to navigating issues of ASEAN Law when they join the ranks of our profession. My sincere thanks to ALA Malaysia for pulling this off, and to the judges, participants and all the others who have contributed to making the inaugural ASEAN Moot a success.

9. I believe both these developments will prove significant in enhancing our collective efforts to strengthen the legal framework for trade in our region, and also raise the standards of our legal professionals. This in turn will afford a firm rules-based foundation on which the vision of our ASEAN leaders to advance the development of our region can stand.
10. Ladies and gentlemen, we have a packed agenda ahead of us. I am confident that all of us will find this excellent conference a deeply enriching one and I very much look forward to the important events and discussions that will be taking place at its sidelines, including The ASEAN Moot, the 44<sup>th</sup> meeting of the ALA Governing Council, and the retreat of the Council of ASEAN Chief Justices to mark the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its inauguration. I am also delighted to see so many dear friends face to face after a long hiatus, and I certainly look forward to catching up with all of you over the next few days.

11. Once again, let me thank His Excellency the Prime Minister for gracing this opening; the Honourable Minister in the Prime Minister's Department (Law and Institutional Reform), Dato' Sri Azalina Binti Othman Said, for hosting us to a wonderful welcome dinner last night; and our hosts for this event, the Right Honourable the Chief Justice Tun Tengku Maimun and her team, for their superb hospitality.
12. Thank you all very much, and I wish you a wonderful conference.