



**Remarks by Dr. Kao Kim Hourn,  
Secretary General of ASEAN, Delivered at the Opening of the  
Inaugural ASEAN Intercultural and Interreligious Dialogue Conference**

*The Grand Ballroom of the Ritz Carlton Mega Kuningan Hotel, Jakarta, 7 August 2023*

Your Excellency Joko Widodo, President of the Republic of Indonesia; Your Excellency Retno Marsudi, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Indonesia; Your Excellency Haji Yaqut Cholil Qoumas, Minister of Religious Affairs of Indonesia; Your Excellency Nadiem Makarim, Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of Indonesia; Kyai Haji Yahya Cholil Staqf, Chairman of the Nahdlatul Ulama Executive Board; Kyai Haji Miftachul Akhyar, Rais Aam of the Nahdlatul Ulama Executive Board; excellencies, ambassadors, all leaders of different faiths and religions of ASEAN Member States and also dialogue partners, excellencies, ladies, and gentlemen. A very good morning.

Allow me to take this opportunity to sincerely congratulate and highly commend Nahdlatul Ulama and the Government of the Republic of Indonesia for organizing the ASEAN Intercultural and Interreligious Dialogue Conference 2023.

In more than one way, Indonesia has undoubtedly been playing an important leadership role, and actively promoting ASEAN centrality and unity. This effort has been amply underscored by the chairman theme this year: “ASEAN Matters: Epicentrum of Growth.” Likewise, the core theme of this dialogue today — “ASEAN Shared Civilizational Values: Building an Epicentrum of Harmony to Foster Peace, Security, and Economic Prosperity” — speaks to the timely importance and relevance of sustaining concerted efforts to promote peace, harmony, and stability in our region and beyond.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, today we live in an increasingly troubled world where we are constantly reacting to challenges arising from cultural pessimism, a trust deficit, as well as increasing intolerance and extremism that threaten to undermine peace, social harmony, and stability.

Challenges to the maintenance of peace, social harmony, and stability are multi-dimensional and multi-faceted. Conflicts, intolerance, and polarization are today’s growing trends, due to a clash of cultures, beliefs, and values, among others. They are also the result of a trust deficit, suspicion, and misunderstanding.

Non-traditional security threats such as the impacts of climate change, natural and human-induced disasters, health emergencies, including pandemics, have the potential to exacerbate tensions and challenges.

Other asymmetric threats, including fake news, hate speech, extremist views, and radicalization have also contributed to a climate of mistrust and increasing intolerance.

Given the importance of trust to our society, and especially to our ASEAN community, we need to constantly nurture and sustain our concerted efforts to forge a stronger sense of trust for more integrated tolerance and better mutual understanding.

The conference that we have here today exemplifies the importance of regular and sustained meaningful dialogues with various stakeholders and segments of society and community such as this one. These dialogues will serve to enhance our efforts in building a peaceful, harmonious, tolerant, and inclusive community. In ASEAN we have put in place several strategic initiatives to foster peace, social harmony, and stability, including the *ASEAN Declaration on Culture of Prevention for a Peaceful, Inclusive, Resilient, Healthy and Harmonious Society* and the *Manila Declaration to Counter the Rise of Radicalisation and Violent Extremism*.

More recently, we are advancing the implementation of the Strategic Policy Framework on Promoting an Adaptive ASEAN Community of Greater Understanding, Tolerance and a Sense of Regional Agendas among Peoples of ASEAN.

In addition, several ASEAN sectoral bodies, including the culture and arts, as well as the information and media sectors, have been among the first regional cooperation mechanisms to demonstrate strong commitment and support within ASEAN in advancing intercultural dialogues and facilitating information accessibility to build trust and tolerance, as well as to enhance inclusiveness in order to contribute to the strengthening of ASEAN community building.

Together, these regional initiatives strongly advocate for greater dialogues and consultations to promote greater mutual understanding and to seek to inculcate values of moderation, a culture of peace, non-violence, and tolerance among the different stakeholders and people from all walks of life in ASEAN.

Finally, I hope that today's conference will discuss and direct greater attention and priority to our common understanding, values, and shared vision, for nurturing greater tolerance and harmony and for enhancing the strength of our unity in diversity. I am confident that your discussions today shall greatly contribute to our ASEAN community building efforts to truly make the ASEAN region an epicentrum of peace, dialogue, harmony, tolerance, and cooperation. Thank you very much.