

The ASEAN Sustainability Forum (ASF) 2019
Business Practices and Opportunities in the Age of
Sustainable Development Goals
14 September 2019 at KLCC
Organizers : ISIS Malaysia and Yayasan Budi Penyayang

Opening Remarks by
Tan Sri Rastam Mohd Isa
Chairman and Chief Executive
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Secretary General of Ministry of Foreign Affairs Malaysia

Puan Nori Tun Abdullah
Chairman of Yayasan Budi Penyayang Malaysia

YBhg Dato' Leela Mohd Ali
CEO of Yayasan Budi Penyayang Malaysia

YBhg Dato' Ahmad Rozian Abdul Ghani
Director General ASEAN Malaysia Secretariat

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

Assalamualaikum and Good Morning.

1. It is my honor and privilege, on behalf of ISIS Malaysia, to say how delighted we are to be able to partner with Yayasan Budi Penyayang Malaysia to organize this ASEAN Sustainability Forum 2019 on Business Practices and Opportunities in the Age of Sustainable Development Goals.

2. I am grateful to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other government agencies for their support. We are particularly indebted to YBhg Dato' Sri Muhammad Shahrul Ikram Yaakob for being here on behalf of YB Dato' Marzuki Yahya, the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, who would have wanted to be here today. However, I am told, he is abroad on official duty. I am sure the keynote address will further enrich the discussion for this Forum.
3. I wish to extend my deep appreciation to Yayasan Budi Penyayang Malaysia, our co-organiser for this Forum. We thank Yayasan Budi Penyayang for inviting ISIS Malaysia to become a strategic partner of the ASEAN Lifestyle Week. We recognise their efforts to further harness interest, commitment and action in accelerating the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through dialogue. I look forward to further collaboration between our organisations towards the promotion of sustainability initiatives.
4. I bid welcome to all the distinguished participants present here today, comprising government officials, members of the business community, experts in their own respective fields and representatives of civil society organisations. Your presence on a Saturday morning is much appreciated. It must not be easy having to sacrifice time with the family in favour of a forum held on a weekend.
5. But let me assure you that your Saturday morning will be well spent. The subject of our discussions and the array of experienced and esteemed speakers that we have today will make it all worthwhile. The discourse, I am sure will be rich and diverse, is an important one that we must have in Malaysia and ASEAN today, because the problems and challenges are here and now.

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

Engaging with the Sustainable Development Agenda

6. At the beginning of the millennium, in the year 2000, the United Nations adopted the Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Quite soon after that a noticeable characteristic emerged in the way governments operated. World leaders began subscribing to the concept of sustainable development as an overarching global development agenda and as a framework for global action and cooperation.
7. The key principle in global partnership is to instill in the international community and among governments a positive attitude towards balancing economic and social well-being with an eye on the future. We must not compromise the ability of the future generations to have access to resources and meet their needs.
8. At the same time, it underlines the importance of protecting natural resources and the environment. Just outside this building the air is thick with haze. We know how unbridled burning of the forests have caused serious haze and damage to the environment and posed a threat to human health and well-being. It has been reported that the haze has made Kuala Lumpur the seventh most polluted city in the world this week.
9. Malaysia since the late 80s has been an active voice on issues related to sustainable development. Our leadership earned the respect and confidence of the developing world through the Group of 77. The country worked well with others to champion the cause of the South concerning sustainable development and the non-negotiable rights to development. The South fought to ensure that development issues receive a 'balanced' treatment in addressing the North-South development debate.

10. YAB Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, the Prime Minister of Malaysia will be representing Malaysia at the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Summit 2019 scheduled on 24-25 September 2019. The Summit will present a unique opportunity for the UN member states to share their views and experiences on good practices and ways in which they have overcome challenges to ensure fulfillment of Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development.

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

ASEAN Progress Towards Sustainable Development Goals

11. The member countries of ASEAN continue to achieve strong growth. On average, growth among ASEAN countries is expected to be at 4.8% in 2019. But, of course, many challenges still persist. Income inequality remains relatively high and balancing the need for environmental protection with economic development remains a major challenge.
12. The SDGs have been embraced by ASEAN, with members states responding positively to its implementation. This includes aligning government work plans and annual budgets to the SDGs and the creation of roadmaps for national SDGs implementation.
13. At the regional level, concerted efforts have been made to harmonise the SDGs with ASEAN's own plans and visions. This includes establishing a framework for action to underline the complementarities between the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 and the SDGs.
14. The commitment of ASEAN to the SDGs is also evident in the theme "Advancing Partnership for Sustainability", now promoted under Thailand's ASEAN chairmanship. Under this theme, the importance of community building processes across the region is recognized, with a focus on regional cooperation.
15. The emphasis on SDGs and development cooperation has been further underlined by its inclusion in the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific, recently adopted by the ASEAN Summit where SDGs were identified as one of four areas of cooperation.
16. In the spirit of the ASEAN Economic Community and the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community, the ASEAN countries will need to continue to intensify partnerships and community building towards achieving the SDGs. In this context, the ASEAN Sustainability Forum 2019 today, can play a role in contributing to efforts to increase and widen engagement, encourage debate and discourse among multi-stakeholders across the region and offer policy options and recommendations for consideration by governments and the private sector.

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

Addressing Disparities Through Responsible Business

17. The SDGs are a product of years of multi-stakeholder negotiations. The negotiations also included businesses and private actors. Businesses play an important role in providing decent employment, driving economic growth as well as spearheading the innovation required to respond to the most critical challenges facing the world. Additionally, business practices can be improved to ensure that it does not damage the environment but indeed contributes to sustainability.
18. Recognising the important role of the business sector towards sustainable development, the ASEAN Lifestyle Week is an important event to showcase business industries and artisanal brands across the region. Moving forward, the ASEAN Sustainability Forum seeks to both discuss

how businesses can enhance its role as a force for good as well as showcasing some of the business models and practices that already exists in the region.

19. It is our goal to make the ASEAN Sustainability Forum an annual event. ISIS Malaysia looks forward to partnering with Yayasan Budi Penyayang towards achieving this goal.
20. I would like once again thank YBhg Dato' Sri Muhammad Shahrul Ikram Yaacob, who has honoured us by his presence in this Forum.
21. Finally, let me say that I believe this meeting will be a valuable contributions towards facilitating connectivity, market linkages and opportunities for supporting businesses by capitalising on the ASEAN Community Framework, while exploring alternative business models that are both innovative, transformative and sustainable.
22. I wish you a fruitful discussion and successful forum.

Thank you.