

**Opening Remarks of the 16th AANZ Dialogue
by Datuk Prof Dr Mohd Faiz Abdullah, Chairman, ISIS Malaysia**

23 Oct 2024, Sheraton Imperial KL

Prof Anthony Milner, Senior Advisor of Asialink,
Hone McGregor, Trustee of the Asia New Zealand Foundation,
Dato' Astanah Abdul Aziz, Deputy Secretary-General of ASEAN,
Excellencies Ambassadors to ASEAN,
High Commissioner Danielle Heinecke ,
His Excellency Stuart Calman, New Zealand Ambassador to
ASEAN,
Her Excellency Tiffany McDonald, Australian Ambassador to
ASEAN,
Ambassador Lada Phumas,
Honoured guests, Ladies & Gentlemen,

Welcome to the 16th edition of the ASEAN Australia New Zealand Dialogue. ISIS Malaysia organises this Dialogue with our partners, Asialink and the Asia New Zealand Foundation. This collaborative approach has resulted in a programme this year that is much more aptly curated to generate more robust discourse.

A vital part of this Dialogue is the participation from emerging professionals, activists, entrepreneurs and policy practitioners who immerse themselves in Track II discussions, although I must add that along the way, some of us do cross the lane on to Track I.5 and perhaps even Track I diplomacy as well.

Be that as it may, we are agreed that what matters most is that at the end of the day, our efforts entail the earnest pursuit of a better understanding of the diverse and often antagonistic points of view. And of course we aren't going about this with rose-tinted glasses but I do believe all of us share a common conviction that satisfaction lies in the effort, not in the attainment, not forgetting what Mahatma Gandhi has bequeathed us: "Peace is not the absence of conflict, but the ability to cope with it."

In this vein, it is pertinent that I mention and commend the Next Gen component of the Dialogue, which ANZF manages, mainly for younger scholars and practitioners. The Foundation successfully implemented it on the side lines of ISIS' flagship conference, the 37th Asia-Pacific Roundtable.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Australia and New Zealand are among ASEAN's earliest Dialogue Partners. 2024 marks the 50th anniversary of Australia's dialogue partnership, whereas New Zealand will celebrate its 50th year of formal engagements next year. On the latter, I am confident there will be substantial outcomes in KL next year, just like there was in 2015.

While contexts and experiences may vary for most Southeast Asian countries, the people, political, cultural, economic, education and defence links between us go back decades. Indeed, there are many anecdotes or data points on trade exchanges and people interactions, but to my mind, what stands out most significantly are the political and security frameworks that bind us.

Australia and New Zealand are key participants and supporters of regional mechanisms like the EAS, RCEP and ARF. Now, many in Southeast Asia believe these are vital parts of a patchwork in ensuring peace, cooperation and inclusivity in the wider Asia Pacific where institutions and norms are currently under pressure.

In geopolitics, pragmatism should prevail over ideological rigidity. And a “wait and see” strategy is tantamount to sitting on the fence. In this regard, I do believe that while ASEAN centred, Australia and New Zealand can and should proactively push to ensure that the regional mechanisms remain fit for purpose, and where necessary be given the much needed boost for revitalisation.

It is not something that ASEAN member states alone can do without the support of our dialogue partners. And with all due respect, it certainly cannot be left to the whims and fancies of the “major powers.”

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would be remiss if I missed out the following important acknowledgements.

ISIS Malaysia is deeply grateful to the Australian High Commission in KL and New Zealand’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs & Trade, for their longstanding support of this Dialogue. We would not be here today, without their help.

To the role players and participants of this 16th ASEAN Australia New Zealand Dialogue, thank for your time and commitment to this process.

I am also pleased that the Dialogue continues to get the support of the ASEAN Secretariat. We look forward to Dato' Astanah's keynote soon. Some of you will know that she has history with this Dialogue, and we are glad to have her back.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge those at ISIS, Asialink and the Foundation, who have worked tirelessly behind the scenes to pull this Dialogue together.

Thank you.