

**THE 33RD ASEAN ROUNDTABLE
ISEAS – YUSOF ISHAK INSTITUTE
26 NOVEMBER, RAFFLES CONVENTION CENTRE**

**WELCOMING REMARKS BY ISEAS DIRECTOR,
MR CHOI SHING KWOK**

Senior Minister of State for Defence and Foreign Affairs, Dr Maliki Osman,

Your Excellencies, Distinguished Speakers & Moderators,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning and a very warm welcome to the 33rd ASEAN Roundtable, organised by the ASEAN Studies Centre at ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute. This has been a special and exciting year as we closely followed the important events and developments of Singapore's ASEAN Chairmanship. This year also marks important milestones for us with the 50th anniversary of ISEAS and also the 10th anniversary of the ASEAN Studies Centre.

We made the decision to convene this Roundtable towards the end of the year, after the conclusion of the 33rd ASEAN Summit and Related Summits, so that we could take stock of ASEAN's achievements and Singapore's Chairmanship deliverables throughout 2018. We are honoured to have Senior of Minister of State, Dr Maliki Osman today at the Roundtable. He would share with us key highlights of Singapore's Chairmanship and address any questions that any of us will have during the Opening Session of this Roundtable. We are grateful for SMS Maliki's gracious support, as well as that of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Trade and Industry.

I would also like to take this opportunity to announce the establishment of the ASEAN Graduate Fellowship at our ASEAN Studies Centre. The fellowship will support pre-doctoral and graduate students researching topics relating to ASEAN or comparative studies on Southeast Asia to spend 3 to 6 months at ISEAS to tap into our expertise and materials as well as other Singapore-based resources. The programme is our small contribution to Singapore's ASEAN Chairmanship which will be carried forward to the forthcoming years. It is designed with a hope to encourage the development of ASEAN studies among university graduate students, cultivate new generations of ASEAN experts and scholars, and foster the understanding of ASEAN, its member states and the Southeast Asian region.

Distinguished Participants,

This year's Roundtable theme "Resilience in a Disruptive World" will look into different dimensions of ASEAN's resilience to help the organisation steer its way ahead in an increasingly uncertain world. The region's geopolitical landscape is in flux with not only a risen, more assertive China but also a US that is seemingly retrenching and retreating from multilateral engagement and commitments. Furthermore, these major powers have rolled out their own designs towards the region, be it the Community of

Common Destiny or the Free and Open Indo-Pacific, which are at variance with each other and putting ASEAN in an unenviable predicament.

In the economic arena, the US-China trade war is heightening the risk of a painful decoupling of the world's two largest economies and consequential restructuring the regional and global supply chain. This has had and will have extensive and complex impacts on ASEAN member economies. Furthermore, the unfolding trends of unilateral protectionism and bilateral deals are challenging the rules-based multilateral world trade system which has underpinned the region's stellar economic growth for decades.

Transformational changes are also sweeping through the region as a result of technology. Internet and social media penetration rates in ASEAN member states are among the fastest-growing in the world, unveiling great potentials of e-commerce for the region. But ASEAN's growing internet population is increasingly vulnerable to many forms of digital disruption, be it cyber-terrorism, online radicalisation, or misinformation and the phenomenon of 'echo-chambers' that potentially segregate and polarise the region's public and political sphere.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

ASEAN has not been idle as the macro dynamics of geopolitics and geo-economics are changing. The organisation is discussing ASEAN's Indo-Pacific outlook to uphold its own perspective of the regional order based on the principles of inclusiveness, openness and sanctity of international law, and anchored in the interests of its member states and the region's strategic autonomy.

Amidst the headwinds of the trade war and protectionism in other parts of the world, the role and relevance of ASEAN has been amplified as the regional backbone of multilateralism, globalisation, and open and free trade. ASEAN's most powerful message in this respect is reflected in the agreement to conclude the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) by 2019 and the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding between ASEAN and the Eurasian Economic Commission during the recent ASEAN Summitry.

ASEAN has also strived to strengthen its internal resilience by launching new initiatives and cooperative ventures on e-commerce, smart cities and cyber-security to harness the Fourth Industrial Revolution while seeking to enhance digital resilience at both the state and citizen levels.

Distinguished Participants,

We have therefore chosen to anchor today's discussions around four key aspects that would define ASEAN's resilience in adapting to changes and managing disruptions: Navigating the Power Shift; Raising the Flag of Open and Free Trade; Riding the Digital Wave; and Resilience from Within. Our central message is that amidst a lot of uncertainties, ASEAN must be nimble and innovative in problem-solving while remaining steadfast in building a cohesive and integrated ASEAN community that engages deeply with the world.

We are honoured that a panel of distinguished speakers gather here today to enrich our discussions with their perspectives. I would also like to express my deep appreciation to the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung for supporting the ASEAN Roundtable again this year. The ASEAN Roundtable and various ISEAS activities supported by the Foundation are telling examples of the fruitful and enduring partnership that our Institute has enjoyed with KAS throughout the years.

As the Singapore's ASEAN Chairmanship is drawing to a close, our Institute, especially the ASEAN Studies Centre, looks forward to collaborating with our Thai counterparts to continue our support to ASEAN in another chapter of its journey.

On that note, I thank all our distinguished speakers, moderators and participants, especially to Dr Maliki Osman, who have all taken time out of their busy schedule to come and add value to our discussions today. I wish you all a fruitful exchange of views. Thank you.