

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

CAN SOUTHEAST ASIA PLAY ITS PART FOR THE CLIMATE?

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MINISTER OF NATURAL RESOURCES, ENVIRONMENT
& CLIMATE CHANGE**

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ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute
Singapore

INTRODUCTION

Bismillahirrahmanirrahim

Assalamualaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuh and a very Good Morning,

[salutations]

Esteemed Guests, speakers, moderators, and fellow participants,

1. I am honoured to present a keynote address for an event hosted by an organisation which has contributed so much to Southeast Asia. I am very sorry I cannot be with you all physically but please accept my warmest felicitations. Today, the ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute has chosen to tackle a topic of great urgency, namely climate change and how our region can address it.
2. This is a topic often on my mind as Malaysia's Minister of Natural Resources, Environment and Climate Change (NRECC). I hope to be able to contribute in a small way to what already promises to be an engrossing discussion considering the distinguished line-up of speakers that follow.
3. Our region's success or failures in climate change will have a crucial impact not only in Asia but globally. The truth of this should be evident considering Southeast Asia's population of 680 million and counting as well as with our combined economies poised to emerge as the world's 4th largest by 2030. **The region had faced many challenges before such as the COVID-19 pandemic that caused economic downturn, but in reality the impacts from the triple planetary crises on climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss are far more severe and threaten our survival on this planet.**

THE SOUTHEAST ASIA CLIMATE OUTLOOK 2023 SURVEY REPORT

4. Before I begin however, I must commend the ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute on their launch of the “***Southeast Asia Climate Outlook 2023 Survey Report***”, now in its fourth year, for highlighting the prevailing perceptions and attitudes of Southeast Asians towards climate change. It is particularly useful for governments and other stakeholders to know how we are performing in the fight against climate change.
5. I understand that this year’s survey is interesting as it suggests that while the majority of Southeast Asians either feel that climate change poses an immediate threat or that it is important and deserves to be monitored, the sense of urgency apparently declined from 2021—2023 from 69% to 49%.
6. No doubt these figures will cause much comment. The “whys” can be debated—perhaps it simply reflects “bread and butter” issues being pushed to the fore across Southeast Asia—especially in light of the Covid-19 pandemic and the on-going recovery.
7. Also, it is important to remember that, as the saying goes, polls are snapshots in time, not full pictures. Certainly, as a Malaysian Minister and MP, I can tell you that, from what I have seen in my work and public engagements, concern over the environment and climate change, among my fellow citizens, especially the young, is as strong as ever.
8. Indeed, the survey is likely a sign that governments, the media and academia must work more urgently than ever to communicate the urgent need for climate action. Yes, the facts and science don’t care about our feelings. But public buy-in is important even for noble,

necessary national and international missions. And when it comes to fighting climate change, I have always felt that the way to win that support is to ensure climate action is just, inclusive and not merely a top-down, elite preoccupation.

ASEAN'S SURVIVAL DEPENDS ON CLIMATE ACTION

Ladies and gentlemen,

9. In 2021, **the Sixth Assessment Report of the IPCC** showed that emissions of greenhouse gases (GHG) from human activities were responsible for approximately 1.1°C of warming since 1850-1900. Averaged over the next 20 years, global temperature is expected to reach or exceed 1.5°C of warming.

10. For Southeast Asia, the IPCC 6th Assessment Report also highlighted vulnerabilities affecting our region. For example, the compounding effects of climate change, land subsidence, and local human activities, particularly in the Mekong Delta, has resulted in higher flood levels and prolonged inundation. Also, although the overall number of tropical cyclones remains stable, we are experiencing cyclones of growing ferocity. Urban coastal areas are likewise witnessing alarming sea-level rises and our urban areas in general, severe heat waves.

MALAYSIA'S ROLE IN CLIMATE CHANGE

Ladies and gentlemen,

11. While our contribution to global carbon emissions is a relatively modest 0.69%, Malaysia remains committed to tackling this pressing environmental concern. We embrace the responsibility to lead by example, and we view this pressure as a catalyst for growth, helping

us collectively evolve as a nation, as well as a region and emerge from this situation even stronger.

12. Under my leadership, Malaysia's NRECC Ministry is reinforcing our domestic efforts to address climate change. We are drafting a **Climate Change Act**, a monumental effort slated for completion by early 2025. The bill will not only encompass all the pressing environmental issues in our country but also stand as a comprehensive framework.
13. We are likewise making significant strides with the pivotal **National Carbon Policy**. Expected to be ready for implementation this year, it will provide essential direction, including guidance on carbon market mechanisms.
14. However, the most eagerly anticipated milestones in our climate journey are **the Nationally Determined Contribution Roadmap (NDC Roadmap)** and **the Long-Term Low Emissions Development Strategy (LT-LEDS)**. These visionary roadmaps will propel our country towards achieving our NDC targets and realizing our aspiration to become a net-zero nation, ideally by 2050. Indeed, all 10 ASEAN countries have communicated their updated NDCs while eight have set net-zero targets.
15. Furthermore, we are strategically formulating a **National Adaptation Plan** to enhance our resilience and readiness in the face of climate change. This extends across critical sectors, including public health, infrastructure, water resources and security, agriculture, forestry, and biodiversity.

MALAYSIA'S ENERGY TRANSITION

16. We have begun to ensure the resiliency of our energy system. Our path towards a low-carbon future is now being **guided by the recently released National Energy Transition Roadmap (NETR)**.
17. This journey encompasses **electrification, energy efficiency, and the accelerated deployment of Renewable Energy (RE)**. Simultaneously, we maintain a pledge to preserve no less than 50% of our nation's land under forest cover. This is in recognition that our flora and fauna are among the most precious of our natural resources.
18. Part of Malaysia's energy transition includes lifting a previous ban on cross-border RE trading. We see this not only as a means of meeting growing demand for clean energy among our neighbours but also as our contribution towards the realisation of the ASEAN Power Grid (APG) initiative and strengthening regional integration further.

SUSTAINABILITY AS A WAY OF LIFE

19. Malaysia recognises the imperative to fortify our disaster risk reduction strategies. The goal here is to mitigate the impact of climate-induced events, including the devastating floods that pose a significant threat to our communities. We reaffirm our resolve to ensure water security, including providing reliable, sufficient, clean, and high-quality water supply and sanitation services.
20. Our work extends beyond grand policy reforms—it encompasses seemingly small yet profoundly impactful decisions. For instance, we now allow government servants to wear batik attire beyond Thursdays—a step towards promoting both our cultural heritage and sustainability.

21. This helps us to maintain temperatures in government buildings to between 24°-25°C. This demonstrates our unwavering resolve to walk the talk in reducing energy consumption and minimizing our carbon footprint. It may seem like a merely symbolic gesture—but it arguably reflects how sustainability can and does cover all aspects of life.
22. These initiatives are not isolated efforts but parts of a unified strategy. Together, they reflect our proactive stance in mitigating climate change, fortifying our resilience, and advancing toward a sustainable and resilient future.

WHAT SOUTHEAST ASIA IS DOING FOR THE CLIMATE

Ladies and gentlemen,

23. The **43rd ASEAN Summit** recently took place in Jakarta, Indonesia. How ASEAN centrality can be strengthened continues to be discussed avidly, and in circles like ours, what it can do to effectively contribute to combating climate change. I would like to argue that ASEAN can be developed further as a platform towards this outcome.
24. It was recently announced that ASEAN will issue a **Joint Statement on Climate Change to the 28th Session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (or UNFCCC COP28)**. This statement underscores the recognition by ASEAN of the region's vital role in becoming more ambitious and aligning its agenda with that of the UNFCCC.
25. Separately, I am proud that Malaysia has assumed the **Chair of the ASEAN Working Group on Climate Change (AWGCC)** for the 2022—2025 term. Our primary focus will be to actively foster

collaboration among ASEAN member states. This task is not without its challenges, but we are grateful for the invaluable support we have received thus far, and no doubt will continue to get.

26. Guiding us throughout this journey is the **ASEAN Strategic Action Plan**, which outlines critical objectives, strategies, and milestones for enhancing climate resilience and mitigation efforts. It underscores the paramount importance of a unified, regionwide approach to achieve meaningful climate outcomes.

27. A significant step in this direction is the establishment of the **ASEAN Centre for Climate Change (ACCC)**, hosted by Brunei. It's poised to become a regional knowledge hub: facilitating research, knowledge-sharing, and capacity-building, with the aim to empower member states to collectively and more effectively address climate change. This is in addition to on-going projects like the **ASEAN Community-based Climate Action, Cooperation on Carbon Pricing**, and the **ASEAN Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan**.

28. Moreover, ASEAN recognizes the importance of nurturing international collaborations with dialogue partners and organizations. These are crucial in securing essential expertise, funding, and cutting-edge technology for climate-driven initiatives. Major programs include the **ASEAN–German Climate Action Programme**, **ASEAN–Japan Cooperation**, **EU-led initiatives**, cooperative endeavours with the **Republic of Korea (ROK)** and the **United States**, as well as **collaborative initiatives with China**.

29. Meanwhile, ensuring that ASEAN member states have access to essential climate finance mechanisms, grants, and funds is of utmost importance. Hence, we have meticulously developed the **ASEAN**

Climate Finance Strategy, serving as a blueprint for enhancing financial support within the ASEAN region.

Ladies and gentlemen,

ASEAN MUST STAND TOGETHER FOR CLIMATE JUSTICE

30. Finally, it is high time to advocate for ASEAN as a unified negotiation bloc within the UNFCCC. This allows us to wield impactful collective influence in global climate negotiations. It underscores our dedication to creating a potent force for positive change in global negotiations.

31. We have often heard how climate action and the energy transition must be just. There are of course different kinds of “justice”. There must be justice in terms of policy and enforcement within countries. Justice must likewise be done between countries; including developed countries supporting their developing counterparts, whether in terms of expectations on how climate action goals are to be achieved and the financing needed to do so.

32. We also need justice between and within regions. If the US and its allies were willing to fund the economic recovery and growth of its former enemies in Europe after the WWII via the Marshall Plan; today, developing countries which provide enormous carbon sinks to the world, including in Southeast Asia, are just as if not even more deserving.

33. This is something that might be difficult for ASEAN to achieve considering we have countries of vastly different sizes, development levels and ideologies. But we all must get over the line together, including the poorest and most vulnerable of our societies. Without

them, the impressive alphabet soup of initiatives I cited earlier will count for very little indeed.

34. Certainly, one frontline will be our region's **micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs)**. According to ASEAN—and considering the various definitions—there are more than **70 million MSMEs** in the region.

35. Often, it is often a question of persuading the have-a-littles about the need for climate action. If climate change is a market failure, then we must ensure that there is buy-in to address it not only from the public, but also all sectors of the market.

36. It goes back to that off-cited problem of how to make ASEAN real for its people and businesses. My Malaysian Cabinet colleagues and I as well as across the region must provide the political leadership for this. But leadership must also be present in the region's private sectors, civil society and academia. And for this, I thank our hosts for holding conferences like this.

CLOSING

Ladies and gentlemen,

37. The climate journeys of Malaysia and our ASEAN friends are similar: marked by steadfast determination, resolute policies, and meaningful actions—both grand and subtle. As we navigate this path, we remain mindful that rhetoric must be translated into action as it will shape the kind of legacy we leave for future generations.

38. On the questions of climate change, we have a choice between decline and destruction or reform and survival. The choice is stark—but it also is ours to make, as nations and as a region.

39. Before I end, I would like to again thank the organizer for having me today. May gatherings like this help us to choose wisely, for our children and their children. Thank you.