

By : **DATO' SRI MOHD NAJIB BIN TUN HAJI ABDUL RAZAK**  
**PERDANA MENTERI MALAYSIA**

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Title : **THE OPENING SESSION OF THE NATIONAL COLLOQUIUM ON MALAYSIA'S  
CHAIRMANSHIP OF ASEAN 2015**

Bismillahirrahmanirahim

Assalamualaikum warahmatullahi wabarakatuh

Good morning and Salam 1Malaysia

Yang Berhormat Senator Tan Sri Abu Zahar Ujang

President of the Senate;

Yang Berhormat Dato' Sri Anifah Haji Aman

Minister of Foreign Affairs;

Yang Berhormat Dato' Sri Mustapa Mohamed

Minister of International Trade and Industry;

Yang Berhormat Dato' Hamzah Zainudin

Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs;

YBhg. Datuk Othman Hashim

Ketua Setiausaha Kementerian Luar Negeri;

Your Excellencies;

Distinguished guests;

Ladies and gentlemen;

1. At the outset, I would like to congratulate all those who worked to establish the National Colloquium on Malaysia's Chairmanship of ASEAN 2015. As Malaysia prepares to shoulder a historic responsibility, I would like to share with you my thoughts about what a 'people-centred ASEAN' means.

2. Before I begin, I speak for all of us when I say that the friendships forged by ASEAN and its institutions have been illuminated in the search for flight MH370. I was touched by the support shown by our international partners, whom I would like to thank again today. Based on our experiences, I believe that ASEAN-led institutions such as the East Asia Summit could explore new ways of promoting cooperation in Search and Rescue operations, so that we are all better prepared when tragedy strikes.

Ladies and gentlemen,

3. The eyes of the region and the world will be on Malaysia in 2015, a historic date which will see the establishment of the ASEAN Community. It is the culmination of a five-decade long effort of region-building.

4. The Foreign Ministers who signed the Bangkok Declaration in 1967 – my father included – could scarcely have imagined the heights to which ASEAN would rise.

5. Back then, our region was associated with concepts such as 'balkanisation' and 'domino theory'. Few would have predicted that Southeast Asia would enjoy decades of prosperity and growing influence; fewer still, that we would be bound closer together with the passage of time.

6. Immediately after the signing of the Bangkok Declaration, my father said – and I quote:

*'We the nations and peoples of Southeast Asia must get together and form by ourselves a new perspective and a new framework for our region. It is important that individually and jointly we should create a deep awareness that we cannot survive for long as independent but isolated peoples unless we also think and act together and unless we prove by deeds that we belong to a family of Southeast Asian nations bound together by ties of friendship and goodwill and imbued with our own ideals and aspirations and determined to shape our own destiny. With the establishment of ASEAN, we have taken a firm and a bold step on that road.'*

7. 47 years later, that road has led us to the ASEAN Community. It is our chance to look beyond national borders to shared prosperity.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

8. ASEAN remains both the cornerstone of our foreign policy and the linchpin of our strategic interests, for the following reasons:

8.1 Firstly, as I mentioned at the 8<sup>th</sup> Heads of Missions Conference last February, Malaysia is situated at the heart of a strategic, resource rich, diverse and increasingly economically vibrant Southeast Asian region. Malaysia's trade dependency ratio is the fourth highest in the world. To continue to prosper, Malaysia needs a stable regional environment - with open sea lanes, and transparent and predictable behaviour by major regional powers. ASEAN, and the institutions that it leads – such as the ASEAN Plus One Dialogue Process, the ASEAN Regional Forum, the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting Plus and the East Asia Summit – are the best hope of achieving these objectives.

8.2 These institutions and their processes provide the necessary platform to promote confidence, transparency and the developments of rules and norms. In

this regard, I recognise that the South China Sea issue continues to be of concern for the international community. However, it is sufficient for me to say that the discussions between ASEAN and China on the Code of Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (COC) are making good progress. The COC will be the key instrument in ensuring the proper management of these vital sea lanes, upon which so much depends.

8.3 Secondly, because ASEAN plays a strong role in promoting a culture of peace. At present, the risk of military conflict between ASEAN members seems so small as to be negligible. However, conflict within ASEAN members, be they due to ethnic strife or political differences, continue to be a cause of concern. I must reaffirm that Malaysia will continue to play a facilitative role in addressing these internal conflicts, whenever such a request is made.

8.4 I believe that moderation has an important role to play in promoting peace in the region. So I am heartened that moderation has been adopted as a key ASEAN value. The challenge is how to turn moderation as a conception into moderation in action. Organisations such as the Global Movement of Moderates should work closely with existing ASEAN institutions such as the ASEAN Institute for Peace and Reconciliation. At the same time, programmes related to moderation must be included in the successor document to the Roadmap to Establish the ASEAN Community, which is to be adopted in Malaysia in 2015.

8.5 Thirdly, in an ever more connected and competitive global marketplace, 'open regionalism' - which ASEAN promotes through its network of FTAs – can help members not only adapt to emerging economic trends, but prosper from them.

8.6 Fourthly, ASEAN and its institutions are playing an ever more prominent role in responding to the demands of our peoples for better governance and increased democratic space. Southeast Asian governments now face a more sophisticated and demanding electorate. ASEAN's response is to strengthen its involvement in these issues, including by adopting the ASEAN Declaration on

Human Rights. For ASEAN to progress further, it must ride this wave; striving for better governance and giving our people a greater say in the way their societies are run.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

9. For this reason, Malaysia has identified the creation of a truly **'People-Centred ASEAN'** as the central element and overarching theme of our Chairmanship of ASEAN in 2015. A 'People-Centred ASEAN' will be a sharper instrument for the realisation of our peoples' dreams – more effective and responsive governance, better standards of living, strengthened environmental protection, further empowerment of women and greater opportunity for all. A 'People-Centred ASEAN' will see the more direct involvement of all sectors of society in ASEAN's activities. No longer will ASEAN be the domain of the elites and specialists alone. An ASEAN Community which is people-centred will truly be 'One ASEAN For All'.

10. The demand for greater democratisation and more effective governance is not the only impulse for the creation of a 'People-Centred ASEAN'. There are political and economic interests as well. For forty years, governments of the region have signed agreements, and treaties; issued communiqués, statements and declarations. Progress has been achieved and an infrastructure for regional integration has been created.

11. But the instruments we have adopted will be of little use if people do not take advantage of them: to promote trade, to better protect human rights and to help preserve the environment. Involving all sectors of society in the formulation and implementation of these agreements will make it more reflective of their needs.

12. I believe that only the more direct involvement of the peoples of ASEAN will truly advance regional integration. To use a plain metaphor – we have built an impressive house. To become a home however, it needs be lived in.

13. I am pleased that Malaysia's vision for a 'People-Centred ASEAN' has been adopted in the Bandar Seri Begawan Declaration on the ASEAN Community's Post-2015 Vision.

14. I am also heartened that some ASEAN members have responded by proposing specific measures to deliver this vision. For example, Thailand has spoken of making universal healthcare as one of the targets in the successor document.

15. In this regard, I encourage all of you, over the next three days, to deliberate on concrete targets, plans and programmes that will realise this vision.

Ladies and gentlemen,

16. We want to build an ASEAN which reflects the dreams of our peoples, is at ease with itself, and ready to contribute positively to global affairs.

17. To do so, ASEAN institutions, including the ASEAN Secretariat, must be properly funded and resourced. At present, each Member State contributes US\$1.7 million for the running of the Secretariat; a total budget of US\$17 million – or just 0.03 cents per person, a pittance for an organisation with a mandate as broad as ASEAN's. With more than 1,000 related meetings a year, ASEAN is at the heart of the evolving regional architecture; and the list of countries wishing to engage with it grows ever longer. Funding and resourcing ASEAN will be one of Malaysia's key focus areas.

18. I recognise that financial contributions are particularly sensitive. I am aware that this was the subject of prolonged discussions during the process of evolving the ASEAN Charter in 2006 to 2007. My own view is that instead of all members of ASEAN contributing equally, we could all agree on a minimum level of common contributions. However, those countries which want to voluntarily contribute more could do so. For the sake of funding predictability, these countries could be encouraged to make these additional contributions on a three to five year timeframe, rather than on an annual basis; and all members will have equal power to decide how

these additional funds are to be utilised. Given the consensual nature of ASEAN's decision-making process, Malaysia will continue to work with other Member States on this important issue.

19. The creation of strong, robust and efficient ASEAN institutions will also be a priority for Malaysia. In this regard, I am happy to note that the High Level Task Force on Strengthening of ASEAN Institutions has already begun its work.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

20. I believe ASEAN faces four challenges in the post-2015 period.

20.1 Firstly, we need to address the gap between the 'ASEAN Way' and the rules-based approach that we are trying to promote. Moving forward, the 'ASEAN Way', with its emphasis on personal relations and behind-the-scenes agreements, may be incompatible with a rules-based approach, which relies on the objective application of regulations, norms and dispute settlement mechanisms. For investors and members states alike, we must resolve this tension.

20.2 Secondly, ASEAN's goals must be expressed in more concrete and operational terms. They must be targets and goals, rather than action lines. They must be Specific; Measurable; Attainable; Relevant; and Time-Bound. Further, these goals must be organised in such a manner that reflects their importance. ASEAN's action lines are grouped into three 'pillars': political-security, economic and socio-cultural. Given that there are a number of important cross sectoral issues such as environment and governance, perhaps it is time for ASEAN to consider creating another pillar to deal with the issues. Only then, in my view, can we have a focused discussion on critical issues such as climate change and the haze problem.

20.3 Thirdly, ASEAN's achievements and significance must be made more widely known. The lack of ASEAN awareness amongst the public is a major obstacle towards fulfilling the vision of a 'People-Centred ASEAN'. A 2012 study by the ASEAN Secretariat showed that only 34 percent of Malaysians have heard of the ASEAN Community, compared to 96 percent of Laotians. This situation must change, and I am pleased that Wisma Putra, MITI and other agencies are working on an aggressive campaign to promote ASEAN in Malaysia.

20.4 Fourthly, as ASEAN progresses and matures, it is only natural that its scope of coverage will widen. It is, therefore, important to put into place measures to strengthen coordination and coherence; to promote efficiencies, while avoiding duplication.

Ladies and gentlemen,

21. In the course of this speech, I have set out my vision of Malaysia's Chairmanship of ASEAN in 2015; of our dreams and aspirations, our fears and our challenges. Some of these ideas may have far-reaching implications, and we would be wise to wait for final reports from the High Level Task Force on Strengthening of ASEAN Institutions, and the ASEAN Coordinating Council Working Group, before committing to them. But to build on the promise of ASEAN, and to repay trust placed in us as 2015 Chair, we should not be afraid to explore them.

22. This colloquium is an expression of our collective ambition as Malaysia fulfils its historic responsibility. I therefore wish you well in your deliberations. With these words, I hereby declare open the National Colloquium on Malaysia's Chairmanship of ASEAN 2015.

Thank you.

Wabillahi taufiq walhidayah wassalamualaikum warahmatullahi wabarakatuh.