

**18/11/2015 - ASEAN Civil Service Innovation Conference (ACSIC) 2015- Towards An ASEAN  
Citizen-Centric Civil Service**

Honourable ASEAN Heads of Civil Service;

Secretaries General and Directors General;

Your Excellencies, Members of the Diplomatic Corps;

Distinguished Representatives of the ASEAN Secretariat and International Organizations;

Distinguished Civil Servants;

Ladies and Gentlemen;

I bid you all a good morning, and, to our friends from abroad, I wish you a warm welcome to Kuala Lumpur. It gives me great pleasure to address this very distinguished audience representing government officials, experts and practitioners from the ASEAN Member States as well as other international organisations such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, and the Commonwealth Association for Public Administration and Management (CAPAM).

2. Public Administration is entrusted with the responsibility of effective delivery of public services, and today, there is a great emphasis on citizen-centricity. A citizen-centric civil service differs from traditional notions of civil service in that it entails greater public participation, more responsive organisational structures; well-functioning and efficient systems that address needs; a highly competent workforce; and an environment of continuous and rapid learning and development.

3. This gathering at the ASEAN Civil Service Innovation Conference is a very important reflection of the ASEAN civil service commitment towards realising the ASEAN Community by the end of this year.

4. Moving beyond 2015, however, efforts at enhancing the ASEAN civil service need to be intensified and elevated to the next level. In the Nay Pyi Taw Declaration on the ASEAN Community's Post 2015 Vision, the leaders of ASEAN have expressed their determination to shape a bold and forward-looking future for ASEAN for the next decade, which will further enhance and consolidate the ASEAN community-building and integration process. This vision aims to promote an inter-connected, caring and sharing community with unity in diversity.

There will be on-going endeavours to enhance and expand cooperation and coherence among states and among the three ASEAN Community pillars; as well as creates a truly rules-based, people-oriented, people-centred ASEAN in the post-2015 era.

5. For the civil service, this means the respective civil service of each ASEAN member state would have to work together to build a resilient community with enhanced capacity and capability, in order to collectively respond to emerging trends and challenges.

Ladies and Gentlemen;

Allow me to highlight a few trends and challenges.

6. First and foremost, challenging fiscal times are far from over. There is, therefore, always the **pressure to do more with limited resources**. At the same time we also face the challenge of assuring and convincing the people that the public services they receive are of par excellence. And we must do this alongside managing all other burdens on the State coffers, in addition to managing multitude of other fiscal challenges that the civil service faces.

7. The second trend is the **digital revolution and its role in altering citizen demands**. Technological advances have presented options and varieties of services that people are becoming more and more accustomed to, especially in the private sector. However, no less is expected from the public sector. Access to digital communication technology is widespread throughout the ASEAN region and covers all strata of society – rich and poor; urban and rural. Citizens across these various strata also demand more control over their lives and more choices and avenues of receiving government services; and no one should be excluded.

8. This environment of intense digital information exchange highlights a significant difference between the public sector and the private sector. The public sector has more stakeholders, in fact everyone is a stakeholder. This means that it comes under more intense scrutiny and a great deal more criticism than the private sector. It is not surprising that numerous global polls show that trust by the people in governments is on the decline, especially when information, regardless of its accuracy, disseminates so fast and freely. Sometimes the criticism is fair, sometimes not, but we cannot allow criticism to distract us from our core responsibility – delivering better services to the public. And when criticism is constructive, it must be engaged and received openly not defensively; just as change must be embraced, not resisted.

Ladies and Gentlemen;

9. Malaysia has begun its journey of public service transformation, as you will hear about in greater detail in the ensuing sessions. I do not intend to pre-empt my colleagues who will elaborate on our transformation journey, but would like to briefly outline the two imperatives of public service transformation; **processes and people**.

10. Where **processes** are concerned, in order to become more dynamic, agile, flexible and adaptable, we realise that we need to dispense with the silo mentality. Tackling issues at the national or regional level cannot be consigned to one ministry or department. Wherever there is a chance of overlap of interest and processes, not just inside government, but outside it – with the private sector, with NGOs, with academia, and with other countries – we need to ensure policy development, planning and delivery integrate with all parties seamlessly. This would ensure more effective implementation of plans and policies, and take consideration of the views and interests of all stakeholders.

11. In 2009, Malaysia introduced the National Blue Ocean Strategy (NBOS) to advocate 'thinking out of the box' based on the premise of 'low cost, high impact and rapid execution' to address issues affecting society and the economy. Inter-agency cooperation and discarding silos stand as major features of NBOS. A good example of such inter-agency cooperation is that of the police and the armed forces, whereby the latter is recruited to combat crime alongside the former. Another example is the one-stop-centres known as the 'Urban Transformation Centre' or UTC where the public can access multiple government services under one roof (from 8.00 AM to 10.00 PM), thus reducing the cost of having multiple contact centres and increasing the impact of service delivery to the people.

12. The way I see it, these achievements are a testimony that there is no reason to limit efforts within national boundaries and we can all certainly benefit from devising developing people-centered 'Blue Ocean' solutions at the ASEAN level.

13. At the end of the day, the ability of the civil service to be a strong and capable organisation rests squarely on the quality of its **people**. We need a highly capable workforce that operates efficiently and at a consistently high standard. In Malaysia, we realise how important it is for our civil servants to remain relevant with the changing times and respond well to contemporary and emerging challenges. It is with this realisation that we place a high

priority on leadership development, which in turn, cannot be isolated from a larger commitment to people development on a long-term basis.

14. We also want to attract the best talent and retain them, and to do so, we must ensure a performance-orientated civil service. We admit that this is no easy task, as we have to compete with the private sector for talent. Recruiting the 'best and brightest', however, is not solely a question of compensation. Of great importance are a sense of purpose and a sense of fulfilment; a system of recognition of performance and advancement based on merit; and the organisational and leadership culture.

15. We recognise that there is the need to inject positive change in cultural norms in the organisation that will permeate the entire organisation and public service as a whole. This includes a culture of constant learning and adaptation; creating more open and more global mind-sets; as well as embracing greater diversity in our organisations.

16. Let us not forget that we, the civil servants and public institutions in this region, are also part of the citizenry, as are our parents, siblings, children and friends. Being accountable to the citizenry also means being accountable to ourselves and those nearest and dearest to us. It is with this in mind that I introduced the concept of 'Humanising the Public Service' (*Merakyatkan Perkhidmatan Awam*) in June 2012.

17. This concept reminds us that firstly, we are public officials who provide services to the people, and secondly, we are also members of the citizenry, who receive services from our fellow colleagues in the civil service. We are entrusted to ensure the highest degree of responsibility, professionalism, usefulness, efficiency and ethics is practiced and delivered within the civil service. Hence, the theme of this Conference, "***Towards an ASEAN Citizen-Centric Civil Service***" is indeed apt and in line with the concept of Humanising the Public Service.

Ladies and Gentlemen;

18. The theme of Malaysia's Chairmanship of ASEAN for 2015 is "Our People, Our Community, Our Vision". In 2017, ASEAN will be celebrating its 50<sup>th</sup> year of establishment and the ASEAN Community must, by then, be an ever-present reality. It must be meaningfully felt by the ASEAN citizenry from all walks of life. The civil service is a central component in ensuring

that people can enjoy tangible benefits from ASEAN's 50 years of existence. Thus we can safely say that the future of ASEAN rests in the good capable hands of its civil servants.

19. The issues that will be deliberated at this Conference augurs well for the elevation of the ASEAN civil service by leaps and bounds in the coming years. We must continually remind ourselves that new challenges demand new ways of thinking and new ways of responding. At one level, we must keep the cogs of government turning to deliver seamless and flawless public services. At another level, we must continue to innovate in ways that will guarantee socio-economic wellbeing, security and social justice for our citizens.

20. In the spirit of brotherhood and ASEAN solidarity, I would like to wish you all very fruitful sharing of ideas, experiences and best practices over the next two days.

Thank you.

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