

**THE OPENING CEREMONY OF THE 11TH CONFERENCE OF ASEAN
MINISTERS RESPONSIBLE FOR INFORMATION (11TH AMRI)
01/03/2012**

Assalamualaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuh and Good Morning.

Excellency Dato' Seri Utama Dr. Rais Yatim,
Minister of Information, Communications and Culture, Malaysia;

Excellencies Ministers of Information from ASEAN Member States;

Excellencies Ministers from ASEAN Dialogue Partners;

Excellencies and Distinguished Guests;

Ladies and Gentlemen.

First and foremost, I am delighted to welcome all of you to Malaysia; “Selamat Datang”.

1. It is less than 3 years before 2015, when we will proclaim the establishment of the ASEAN Community. It will mark the achievement of an aspiration long-held by our countries and peoples. It is therefore timely that we are gathered here today to take stock of progress achieved. I believe that we can take pride in our achievements so far, and be optimistic that the target set will be realised.
2. Ours is a region that is outward-looking, living in peace, maintains stability and prosperity, bonded together in partnership in dynamic development and in a community of caring societies.
3. The success that we have experienced is grounded in economic growth. I believe that if we are able to make ASEAN more cohesive, by giving emphasis to our symbiotic relationships, then the potential and dynamism of this region of almost 600 million people will definitely be a force to be reckoned with in due time.
4. ASEAN has matured politically as well. More people are enjoying greater freedoms than ever before. This has happened in tandem with the evolving nature of our societies. I am confident that progress in this area will continue to be made. For example, we are heartened at the progress made in our efforts to formulate an ASEAN Human Rights Declaration.
5. At the same time, ASEAN-led processes are the foundation of an evolving regional architecture. This is a clear example of the acceptance of all the major powers of the notion of ASEAN Centrality.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

6. ASEAN is culturally, ethnically and linguistically diverse. This diversity must be appreciated and embraced, and it must become an intrinsic part of our thinking. ASEAN stresses the importance of cultural diversity and this has clearly been espoused with the signing of the “Declaration on ASEAN Unity in Cultural Diversity: Towards Strengthening

ASEAN Community” during the 19th ASEAN Summit.

7. In Malaysia, diversity is celebrated through the 1Malaysia concept which respects and embraces the cultural and religious differences of the community. We manage to achieve this because moderation is the core of the various cultures that exist in Malaysia. This trait is common in all the cultures of Southeast Asia. Therefore, Malaysia recently launched the Global Movement on Moderates (GMM) to provide an international platform for the voices of moderation to counter the increasing sentiment of extremism in all forms – be it in the realm of religion, politics, social, economy or international relations.

8. As a testimony of our seriousness in this endeavour, we have embarked on three initiatives that are; the launching of the GMM Foundation, the establishment of an Academic Chair at the University Malaya and establishment of the Institute of Wasatiyyah as part of the Prime Minister’s Office.

9. Our cultural diversity is an advantage in nurturing creativity that is the key to the region’s competitiveness. Creativity spurs innovation and therefore ASEAN must encourage its people to be more creative and innovative in propelling the economic activities of their country.

10. The 2009 Cha-am Hua Hin Declaration outlined a roadmap for the creation of an ASEAN Community by 2015. With this Declaration, we must strive to achieve the vision of ASEAN Community. There has to be greater public awareness of the roadmap for the establishment of the ASEAN Community. Awareness is empowering, but awareness without action is worthless. We have to get our act together and implement whatever action programmes needed to fulfil our aspiration. Therefore, the theme of the 11th AMRI which is “MEDIA: CONNECTING PEOPLE AND BRIDGING CULTURES TOWARDS ONE ASEAN COMMUNITY” is indeed timely and relevant.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

11. I am pleased to note that Malaysia has actively pursued the mission of AMRI and continue to implement programmes and projects that enhance cooperation in the media, information and broadcasting sectors. ASEAN awareness programmes, exchanges of radio and television news, co-productions in films and television programmes as well as exhibitions are some that worth mentioning.

12. Apart from the traditional media, the social media is already an important aspect of the global community and this is clearly evidenced in the recent events in the Middle East. Therefore, learning from this development, we must engage our people through the social media. The social media provides us with an excellent medium to reach out and understand the aspiration and the concerns of our people.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

13. In order to realize our vision of an ASEAN Community, we need to promote greater understanding and appreciation of the political systems, culture and history of our members. I would like to see more ASEAN sectoral bodies taking more projects and activities through academic conferences, workshops and seminars. We must also encourage the release of periodical publications on the dynamics of ASEAN Member States’ political development,

culture and history for dissemination to the public.

14. We need to lay out a multi-platform framework, by engaging both the mainstream media and social media in order to facilitate a free flow of information to enlighten our people and to create mutual support and assistance among ASEAN Member States. This must be given utmost priority so that our people may not be groping in the dark on this important development in our region. I believe that by being empowered with the right kind of information, we can then go on with our work with a greater sense of purpose and mission.

15. I also believe that we have to work harder to create an ASEAN Identity that represents our collective personality, norms, values and beliefs. To be able to do so, we must intensify our efforts to create a sense of belonging, consolidate unity in diversity and enhance deeper mutual understanding among ASEAN Member States of their culture, history, religion, and civilisation.

16. In ASEAN, the National Communication Plan was formulated to support ASEAN identity and awareness in building efforts through various programmes. I believe that we need a greater push in this area if we were to attain the required level of public awareness among our 600 million people.

17. With these thoughts, I would like to wish you every success in your deliberations for they will form invaluable inputs in your efforts towards making plans and programmes that will eventually contribute to ASEAN's aspirations to connect its people and to bridge its diverse cultures.

18. Finally, I also take this opportunity to congratulate the Ministry of Information, Communications and Culture for organizing this Conference. I also hope that you will take some time off to visit places of interest in Kuala Lumpur and if time permits, other parts of the country as well.

19. On that note, it is my pleasure and privilege to officially declare open the 11th Conference of ASEAN Ministers Responsible for Information (11th AMRI).

Thank you.

Wassalaamu'alaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarakaatuh.