

**SPEECH BY MR TAN CHUAN-JIN
SPEAKER OF THE PARLIAMENT OF SINGAPORE
AT THE FIRST PLENARY SESSION OF
THE 42ND ASEAN INTER-PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY
(AIPA) GENERAL ASSEMBLY
23 AUGUST 2021
VIA VIDEO-CONFERENCE**

His Excellency Pehin Dato Haji Abdul Rahman Taib

Speaker of the Legislative Council of Brunei Darussalam

Distinguished Colleagues

Your Excellencies

Ladies and Gentlemen

1 Allow me to extend my warmest greetings to my friends and colleagues here. I hope that this meeting finds all of you in good health. On behalf of the Singapore delegation, I would also like to take the opportunity to express my appreciation and gratitude to Pehin Dato Haji Abdul Rahman Taib for hosting the 42nd General Assembly of the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly. It is my pleasure to join my distinguished colleagues and fellow Parliamentarians here today, albeit virtually. I would also like to congratulate Brunei on its able chairmanship of ASEAN this year, amidst these trying times.

2 The COVID-19 pandemic has been the defining crisis of our generation. It has claimed the lives of millions, devastated our economies, and turned back years of social progress and development in a matter of months. However, in these dark times, the strength and resilience of our region shone through. ASEAN Member States (AMS) have risen to the occasion to support one another. In April 2020, we adopted the Hanoi Plan of Action on Strengthening ASEAN Economic Cooperation and Supply Chain Connectivity in Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic. Later that year, we created the COVID-19 ASEAN Response Fund and also launched the ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework and its Implementation Plan. Apart from enhancing our health systems, these initiatives have helped to preserve supply chain connectivity, strengthen economic integration and accelerate digital transformation within ASEAN.

3 Our fight against COVID-19 has lasted longer than expected. New variants have emerged, and our governments are working hard to mitigate the pandemic's effects on public health and livelihoods. Under Brunei's ASEAN Chairmanship theme of "We Care, We Prepare, and We Prosper", we have redoubled our joint efforts. In particular, with an eye towards positioning ASEAN for a COVID-19 endemic world.

4 First, to address the public health challenge, ASEAN has agreed to utilize the COVID-19 ASEAN Response Fund to purchase vaccines for our Member States. This will contribute positively to our region's vaccination efforts. Second, to position our economies to bounce back after the pandemic, ASEAN is working with our Partners towards the swift entry-into-force of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership agreement (RCEP). In this connection, I urge my parliamentary colleagues to support the swift domestic ratification of the RCEP so that this agreement can come into force by January 2022. As the world's largest Free Trade Agreement, the RCEP will boost regional trade as well as investment and help rejuvenate our economies. Third, to facilitate travel resumption across the region, we have established an ASEAN Travel Corridor Arrangement Framework (ATCAF). This will allow us to reopen our borders in a safe and calibrated manner.

5 Unfortunately, COVID-19 is not the only challenge ASEAN faces today. On the South China Sea (SCS), we must continue to support a rules-based ASEAN that supports multilateralism and upholds international law. As a non-claimant state, Singapore does not take sides on competing territorial claims. However, as a small nation dependent on trade for survival, we have fundamental interests at stake, including maintaining peace and stability in the SCS, upholding the right of all states to freedom of navigation and overflight, and supporting the peaceful resolution of disputes in accordance with

universally recognized principles of international law, including the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

6 The world is closely watching ASEAN's response to the situation in Myanmar. At the recent 54th ASEAN Foreign Ministers Meeting, all ASEAN Member States and Dialogue Partners reiterated their support for the swift implementation of ASEAN's Five-Point Consensus. In this regard, Singapore welcomed the appointment of Brunei's Minister of Foreign Affairs II Dato Erywan Pehin Yusof as Special Envoy of the ASEAN Chair to Myanmar. Singapore hopes that the Special Envoy will be given access to all parties concerned in order to facilitate meaningful dialogue among the stakeholders in Myanmar that can lead to a sustainable and peaceful political solution. Ultimately, we recognize that there are no quick fixes to the situation in Myanmar and the solution must be determined by the Myanmar people.

7 Similar to other AMS, Myanmar is now, unfortunately facing a surge in COVID-19 cases. ASEAN Leaders have directed the ASEAN Centre for Humanitarian Assistance or Disaster Management, or AHA Centre for short, to launch an effort to provide much needed humanitarian assistance to the Myanmar people. On our part, Singapore will contribute USD 100,000 to the AHA Centre in addition to our bilateral contributions. We hope that this will galvanize further

contributions from ASEAN and external partners to help the people of Myanmar.

8 Lastly, the pandemic has accelerated the digitalization of society, and this is rapidly transforming the way we all live, work and play. In this regard, this year's ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly theme of "Forging Parliamentary Cooperation in Digital Inclusion Towards ASEAN Community 2025" is especially pertinent as we gather here today for the 42nd General Assembly. As Parliamentarians, we must continue to support and advocate for inclusive policies that help ensure that technology remains accessible for everyone even as we encourage greater digitalisation in our respective countries.

9 Through the years, our countries have weathered many setbacks and challenges by remaining united as one ASEAN. To this end, the importance of ASEAN's cohesiveness and unity cannot be overstated. As we navigate through these challenging times, it is crucial that we continue to use platforms such as AIPA to communicate the importance of supporting a more integrated, digital and forward-looking ASEAN Community.

10 On that note, I would like to thank my friends and fellow Parliamentarians, and hope that our discussions will be both productive and enjoyable. Thank you.

.