



H.E. Dr. Kao Kim Hourn, Secretary-General of ASEAN

**Keynote Remarks at the
Joint Symposium on Deepening FOIP-AOIP Synergies on the Occasion of the
10th Anniversary of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific**

9 July 2026, ERIA, Jakarta, Indonesia

Professor Tetsuya Watanabe, President of ERIA,

Professor Nobuhiro Aizawa, Dean and Managing Director of the ERIA School of Government,

Excellency Ambassador Takio Yamada, Executive Director, the Japan Institute of International Affairs (JIIA) Center for Global Outreach and Executive Fellow,

Excellency Shingo Miyamoto, Director-General for Southeast and Southwest Asian Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan,

Excellencies, Ambassadors, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

A very good morning. I wish to express my appreciation for the opportunity to join this Joint Symposium, as we launch this inaugural AOIP Lecture Series, convened to mark the 10th Anniversary of Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific strategy. In particular, I would like to thank the Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA) and the Japan Institute for International Affairs (JIIA) for organising this event and bringing together policymakers, scholars, and practitioners to consider how cooperation between the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) and Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) can be strengthened.

This symposium convenes at a moment that invites deep reflection. The Indo-Pacific's strategic and economic weight continues to grow, yet the same interdependence that has driven our prosperity has become a source of exposure. The region contends with geopolitical competition, economic fragmentation, technological disruption and mounting strain on the rules-based international order. The crisis in the Strait of Hormuz, of course now, we've had another round of fighting, is a forceful reminder of this vulnerability: the disruption of a single chokepoint reverberating through energy markets, shipping costs and supply chains across Asia, among others. Connectivity carries risk as readily as it carries opportunity.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is against this backdrop that ASEAN's position has remained consistent and, I would argue, has acquired renewed relevance and resilience. As reflected in the AOIP, we believe the Indo-Pacific should be a region of inclusive cooperation rather than confrontation, one that transcends major power rivalry, exclusive spheres of influence and zero-sum competition. Dialogue, diplomacy, inclusivity and cooperation must continue to guide how we manage our differences, address our shared vulnerabilities, advance our shared interests, and strengthen our strategic trust.

It was this conviction that led ASEAN Leaders to adopt the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific in 2019. The AOIP provides a framework for advancing peace and stability through openness, inclusivity, and respect for international law. While the AOIP and Japan's FOIP reflect distinct strategic and policy approaches, they converge on key fundamental principles. The Leaders reaffirmed this at the 28th ASEAN-Japan Summit in 2025, pledging support for an open, transparent, resilient, inclusive, and rules-based regional architecture that would significantly contribute to peace, stability, freedom, and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific.

This convergence goes beyond shared language. It is anchored in the ASEAN-Japan Comprehensive Strategic Partnership established in 2023, and it is reinforced by the Joint Vision Statement on ASEAN-Japan Friendship and Cooperation: Trusted Partners and its accompanying Implementation Plan, adopted at the ASEAN-Japan Commemorative Summit for the 50th Year of ASEAN-Japan Friendship and Cooperation.

As of June 2026, various activities, programmes and projects have been carried out, addressing approximately 81% of the action lines in the Implementation Plan between ASEAN and Japan. These milestone achievements are the accumulated substance of our enduring partnership, and the solid basis for deepening AOIP-FOIP synergies. This shared commitment truly matters as both ASEAN and Japan adjust their approaches to a shifting and evolving strategic landscape.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

As Japan marks a decade of its Free and Open Indo-Pacific, ASEAN has entered a new phase of its own, through the implementation of *ASEAN 2045: Our Shared Future*, a 20-year old vision that has started with the implementation of its four strategic plans. Both reflect the same recognition: that our approaches and strategies going forward must adapt to changing circumstances.

ASEAN 2045 is designed to keep ASEAN adaptive and responsive in a world where change has become the only reliable constant. The AOIP will remain central to advancing ASEAN's vision for the region. Japan, for its part, has renewed its FOIP with greater emphasis on resilience, economic security and practical cooperation with regional partners. Here the alignment is striking. Resilience is, at its heart, what ASEAN 2045 seeks for our Community — the capacity not merely to withstand shocks, but to adapt and emerge stronger from them. When Prime Minister Takaichi spoke at Vietnam National University in Hanoi this May of a more resilient and prosperous Indo-Pacific, she was articulating an aspiration that resonates strongly with ASEAN as well.

Resilience also demands that regional frameworks move beyond proclaiming principles to delivering tangible outcomes for our peoples. It is here, in delivery, that frameworks must earn their legitimacy and support. There is significant scope to translate the principles shared by the AOIP and Japan's FOIP into practical cooperation across sustainable infrastructure, digital transformation, supply chain resilience, maritime cooperation, energy security, disaster management, connectivity, and people-to-people exchanges.

ASEAN and Japan can also deepen cooperation in emerging areas — cybersecurity, trusted digital ecosystems, and the responsible, human-centred governance of artificial intelligence, supported by initiatives such as the Japan-ASEAN Co-Creation Initiative for AI — so that the technologies reshaping our societies strengthen regional resilience and innovation rather than deepen our vulnerabilities.

We should also continue to advance the Women, Peace and Security agenda, including the meaningful participation of women in peace processes, conflict prevention, mediation, humanitarian action, and post-conflict recovery. Empowering women as agents of peace and resilience contributes directly to sustainable development, social cohesion, and regional stability — and reflects our shared commitment to regional cooperation that is inclusive and people-centred not merely in principle, but greatly in practice.

I believe that the Japan-ASEAN Integration Fund (JAIF) will continue to play a central role here, supporting practical cooperation between ASEAN and Japan and advancing AOIP implementation through concrete projects, programs and activities.

I encourage ASEAN's external partners, which includes Japan, to continue supporting AOIP implementation, including by aligning their own regional initiatives with its principles and priorities. Such support advances AOIP implementation and, more broadly, strengthens an open, inclusive and stable regional architecture grounded in shared norms, principles, international law, multilateralism and ASEAN Centrality.

As the Indo-Pacific's landscape of security partnerships and minilateral frameworks continues to expand, it is precisely ASEAN Centrality that gives this broader architecture its coherence and inclusive character — ensuring that the region's many cooperative frameworks reinforce one another rather than pull the region apart.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Beyond strategic considerations, the economic dimension of Indo-Pacific cooperation carries its own, growing weight. The convergence between the AOIP and FOIP that I have described extends to the architecture of trade itself. Both ASEAN and Japan have agreed on the need to enhance cooperation to address emerging disruptions and seize all opportunities in trade and investment.

This includes the possible upgrading of the ASEAN-Japan Comprehensive Economic Partnership (AJCEP) Agreement. Our shared aim is to sustain the momentum of open trade at a time when protectionist headwinds are gathering from more than one direction.

Alongside trade, the security of our shared maritime domain remains fundamental to the prosperity of both ASEAN and Japan, and the wider region. The Indo-Pacific encompasses some of the world's busiest sea lanes and most critical maritime chokepoints, carrying the trade, energy, and supply chains that underpin both regional and global prosperity.

Recent disruptions to maritime shipping have underscored how instability at sea can rapidly reverberate through the global economy. This is particularly true of strategic waterways such as the Straits of Malacca, the Sunda and Lombok Straits, the South China Sea, and the Sulu-Celebes Seas. Preserving a maritime environment that is open, stable, secure, and governed by international law is therefore not only a regional imperative, but a global economic necessity.

This is why ASEAN and Japan share a strong interest in upholding the principles that keep the maritime domain open, inclusive and secure. Freedom of navigation, exercised in accordance with the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, remains fundamental to regional stability, global trade, and economic security. Respect for international law provides the certainty and predictability necessary for commerce, investment, sustainable development, and the peaceful management of differences.

These principles remain indispensable if the Indo-Pacific, with ASEAN and Southeast Asia at its centre, is to continue serving as an engine of growth, connectivity, and shared prosperity.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The challenges before the Indo-Pacific are indeed significant, but so too, are the opportunities. The convergence between the AOIP and FOIP is more than an exercise in policy coordination. It reflects a wider recognition that no single country, institution, or framework can secure the future of the Indo-Pacific alone. As we mark the 10th anniversary of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific, this is an opportunity not only to reflect on how far we have come, but also to reaffirm our shared vision for the region and our collective responsibility to realise it.

As I noted last week at the 39th Asia-Pacific Roundtable in Malaysia, we cannot outsource peace and stability. Our region's future will depend on our collective will and collective ability to foster trust, uphold international law, strengthen resilience, and expand cooperation across both traditional and emerging domains.

In this regard, ASEAN deeply values Japan's steadfast support for the AOIP since its adoption in 2019. Japan was among the earliest partners to embrace ASEAN's vision for the Indo-Pacific and has consistently demonstrated its confidence in and support for ASEAN Centrality as the foundation for regional cooperation.

The past decade of our working together has shown that sustained dialogue and practical cooperation can build and strengthen trust across differences. Regional initiatives need not compete. The complementarity between the AOIP and the FOIP reminds us that lasting regional order is built not on uniformity, but on the ability of different visions to find common purpose for collective efforts. That spirit of convergence has long been one of the Indo-Pacific's greatest strengths, not weaknesses.

Ultimately, the future of the Indo-Pacific will depend on the trust we nurture, the partnerships we sustain, and the choices we make together. Guided by mutual respect and enhanced trust, international law, and a shared sense of responsibility, ASEAN and Japan can work with all partners to keep our region open, peaceful, stable, and prosperous for generations to come.

With that, I thank you and good morning to all of you.
