

**CONFERENCE ON “ASEAN-JAPAN PARTNERSHIP: CELEBRATING 45 YEARS
OF DIALOGUE RELATIONS,”**

**23 MARCH 2018, JURONG ISLAND BALLROOM, SHANGRI-LA HOTEL,
SINGAPORE**

**WELCOMING REMARKS BY MR CHOI SHINGK KWOK, DIRECTOR, ISEAS-
YUSOF ISHAK INSTITUTE**

His Excellency Kenji Shinoda, Ambassador of Japan to Singapore,
Distinguished Moderators and Speakers,
Honourable Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen

1. Good morning. It is my honour today to welcome you to our Conference on the “ASEAN-Japan Partnership” in commemoration of the 45 years of dialogue relations between ASEAN and Japan. This conference is organised by the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute with the support of the Embassy of Japan in Singapore. ISEAS is pleased to convene these discussions to reflect on the state of ties between the two longstanding partners, in the hope that our deliberations will help launch ASEAN-Japan relations to a new level in the future.
2. When ASEAN and Japan first began the informal dialogue relations back in 1973, the world was a very different place compared to today. Asia was gripped by the Cold War, and both ASEAN and Japan were concerned about the impact of the Vietnam War on regional security. Since then, these issues have receded and both sides have worked together to foster closer ties in the political, economic, and social fronts. Japan is an active participant in ASEAN-led political and security forums such as the East Asia Summit, the ASEAN Regional Forum and the ASEAN Defence Ministers’ Meeting Plus. Economically, it is already ASEAN’s second largest trading partner and the second largest source of foreign direct investment (FDI) to ASEAN. To continue this momentum, the Strategic

Economic Cooperation Roadmap signed in 2012 is aimed at doubling the existing trade and investment flows between the two sides.

3. Our peoples are also growing closer together, as more and more tourists from both sides visit each other. Facets of Japanese soft power can be found all over the region, from Japanese food to manga and cosplay. There are more than 45,000 Japanese restaurants in ASEAN. Likewise, Southeast Asian food is also making quite a splash in Japan. Perhaps there are no better examples of the people-to-people link between our two sides than the two flagship programmes dedicated to bringing ASEAN and Japan's leaders of tomorrow closer together – one is the Ship for Southeast Asian Youth Programme, and the second is the Japan-East Asia Network of Exchange for Students and Youths, or JENESYS, programme. Generations of young people from both sides have benefited from these programmes and will remember those experiences positively throughout their lives.
4. As we reflect on and celebrate the past 45 years, we look to the future with both anxiety and hope, as a result of the shifting geopolitical and geo-economic landscape in East and Southeast Asia. This has presented Japan with a good opportunity to step up its involvement in the affairs of the region. So far, Japan has risen to the task well. With the United States seemingly in retreat from the global stage, Japan had stepped up together with 10 other like-minded countries in Asia Pacific to push for the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement on Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), providing the concept of free and open trade with a much-needed boost amidst the turn in some places towards populism and protectionism.
5. We in ASEAN look forward to Japan taking a more active role in the regional security and economic architecture. There is also much more that can be done to foster closer relations between our two peoples. In this Conference, we will cover a wide range of topics reflecting the rich variety of cooperation between ASEAN and Japan. Through this Conference, we hope to stimulate discussions on how to bring the relationship forward in an age of uncertainty, and contribute in a small way to deeper ties between the two sides.

6. Today's conference also reflects the warm and close academic ties between ASEAN and Japan. Scholars from ASEAN and Japan will share with us their reflections and analyses of this important bilateral relationship, in addition to identifying ways to strengthen these ties. We hope to publish the proceedings of today's conference in an edited volume to mark the 45 years of ASEAN-Japan dialogue relations.

In this endeavour, we are very pleased to have the Embassy of Japan in Singapore as our partner. I thank His Excellency Ambassador Kenji Shinoda and his colleagues at the Embassy of Japan in Singapore for supporting today's conference and the book project. I am also grateful to our friends from Japan and Southeast Asia who have flown all the way to Singapore to be a part of this conference.

Finally, let me wish you all a fruitful and enriching conference. Thank you.