



OPENING MESSAGE

**H.E DATO' SRI HAJAH NANCY SHUKRI
MINISTER OF WOMEN, FAMILY AND COMMUNITY
DEVELOPMENT**

9TH ASEAN CHILDREN'S FORUM

**DEWAN PERDANA NUR
4 AUGUST 2026 (TUESDAY) | 9.15 AM**

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SALUTATIONS

INTRODUCTION

1. Assalamualaikum and a very good morning and warm welcome to everyone. It is my privilege and great honour to welcome you all to the **9th ASEAN Children's Forum.**

2. According to UNICEF data, **Asia and the Pacific is home to 1.12 billion children**, the largest child population of any region in the world. In Asean, the total population of children under 18 in the region is estimated at approximately **200 million**, representing **roughly 30% of the ASEAN member states total population**. These figures clearly demonstrate that the future of ASEAN rests in the hands of its children.

Distinguished delegates,

3. Every child is entitled to the same fundamental rights: the right to protection, dignity, and the opportunity to dream. At the heart of these rights lies a fundamental principle, the best interests of the child. This principle must guide every policy, and decision that affects children's lives, ensuring that their safety, and well-being remain our foremost priority.

4. Yet, for far too many children across the ASEAN region, childhood is overshadowed by violence. Instead of growing up in safety and love, they face abuse, neglect, and exploitation during the very years that should be filled with care, learning, and hope.

5. That is why our **theme this year, "Shielding ASEAN Childhood: Say No to Violence," is more than a slogan, it is a collective call to action.** The future of ASEAN will be shaped by the children we protect today. As ASEAN continues to build a resilient, inclusive, and people-centred Community, we must ensure that every child is raised in a safe, nurturing, and empowering environment where their rights are protected, their voices are heard, and their full potential can flourish.

6. The violence of today is deeply multifaceted. It is no longer confined to physical harm alone. Violence against children has evolved beyond physical harm. Today, it also manifests in digital spaces through cyberbullying, online exploitation, and other forms of abuse that undermine children's confidence, dignity, and well-being. ASEAN refuses to accept this as the status quo.

7. In ASEAN, we have proven time and again the power of solidarity, we are truly *all for one, and one for all*. We act as a unified front through the **ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on the Elimination of Violence against Children**. We have moved beyond mere reaction. We are actively strengthening our prevention systems, upgrading survivor support, and rewriting policies to place children firmly at the center of our development agenda.

Ladies and gentlemen,

8. Malaysia is deeply honoured to host this Forum, because we believe that child participation must never be reduced to a symbolic exercise. It must be the very cornerstone of our policymaking.
9. To the brilliant young delegates joining us today, both here in this room and virtually online: you are not just the leaders of tomorrow. I say this with

immense pride, **you have become our vital partners today.** You are the partners of ASEAN. We need your insights to bridge the gap between high-level strategy and ground reality.

10. My dear children, your experiences help us understand realities that statistics alone can never capture. Your recommendations will shape better policies, stronger protection systems, and a more compassionate ASEAN. This Forum belongs to you.

11. Therefore, I challenge each of you to seize this opportunity. By the end of this Forum, I hope you will have reached a consensus on meaningful recommendations to present to all ASEAN leaders. That is the underlying message of this entire forum. The voices of our children must be heard, and I assure you, **ASEAN is all ears.**

Distinguished delegates,

12. The true measure of ASEAN's success should not be measured solely by the growth of our Gross Domestic Product (GDP) or the sophistication of our digital economies. The ultimate benchmark of our progress will always be this: **how safe, how secure, and how happy our children are.**

13. As my final note, to all our young delegates, I encourage you to make the most of these two days. Listen with open minds, speak with courage, and learn from one another's experiences and perspectives. Take this opportunity to build lasting friendships and networks across our ASEAN family, for the connections you make today can become the partnerships that shape our region tomorrow.

14. With that, it is my great honour and privilege to officially declare the **9th ASEAN Children's Forum** open.

Thank you. Wabillahi taufik wal hidayah.
Wassalamualaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuh.

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