



MINISTRY OF NATURAL RESOURCES AND  
ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

**OPENING KEYNOTE SPEECH**

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MINISTER OF NATURAL RESOURCES AND  
ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY**

**FOR**

**YOUTH SUSTAINABILITY FORUM 2024**

***“Harmony in Diversity: Malaysia’s Pioneering Sustainable Futures  
in ASEAN”***

**17 AUGUST 2024 (SATURDAY)**

**JOHOR BHARU, JOHOR**

**Key points:**

1. *Diversity and harmony have always been part of Malaysia's ethos.*
2. *This is relevant to sustainability because it has to be implemented inclusively.*
3. *ASEAN is challenged by climate change, but it is also a platform that can be used to combat it.*
4. *The government is putting sustainability at the core of what it does—and is also listening to the youth.*
5. *The Malaysian youth should engage their ASEAN counterparts because ASEAN is our future.*

**Yang Amat Berhormat Dato' Onn Hafiz Ghazi**

Chief Minister of Johor

**His Excellency Mr Ng Kuan Khai**

Singapore's Consul-General in Johor Bahru

**Yang Berhormat Datuk Seri Utama Ir. Hasni Mohammad**

Executive Chairman on Johor Sustainability Centre

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Assalamualaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuh and Salam Malaysia Madani

**INTRODUCTION**

1. I am very pleased to be here today at the Youth Sustainability Forum 2024, a platform that brings together the brightest young minds from across ASEAN, united by a shared commitment to sustainability and a brighter future for our region.

2. The youth are at the vanguard in the fight against climate change and so I feel it is necessary to seize any chance I can get to engage with you all on this great challenge that confronts your generation and mine.
3. I would like to therefore extend my heartfelt congratulations to the Secretariat for successfully organising this impactful event. Your dedication and hard work have brought together an impressive assembly of young leaders, experts, and policymakers, creating a space where innovative ideas can flourish and meaningful collaborations can be forged.
4. I would also like to commend the state of Johor for consistently supporting events like this. This state's commitment to sustainability and its proactive role in fostering youth engagement is truly exemplary. By hosting this forum, Johor is not only showcasing its leadership within Malaysia but also reinforcing its position as a key player in promoting sustainable development across ASEAN.
5. I am particularly pleased to note that this forum is being actively supported by youth organisations such as Kelab Belia Prihatin Malaysia. It is an organisation that I have become familiar with in the best possible way.
6. As part of the Consultative Panel to my Ministry, their involvement exemplifies the crucial role that youth groups play in shaping our nation's sustainable policies. I warmly welcome such initiatives, as they are vital to ensuring that the voices of our younger generation are heard and acted upon.

7. Indeed, this is vital and essential because it will be the young who will bear the brunt of climate change if it is not tackled. It is your future at stake if leaders like me do not act. And so I make it a point to always listen and learn from your anxieties and hopes for the future.

## **DIVERSITY IS A PART OF MALAYSIA'S DNA**

Ladies and gentlemen,

8. As we know, Malaysia is a nation defined by its rich tapestry of cultures, languages, and traditions. Whatever some may claim, this is a part of our DNA, of our ability to both deeply imbibe our identities while remaining open, tolerant and accepting of others.
9. Our diversity is not just a source of pride; it is a wellspring of strength and innovation. In this diversity, we find the foundation for harmony—a harmony that is essential not only for social cohesion but also for sustainable development. Indeed, all faiths in the world enjoin its followers to live in harmony with nature, charging them to be good stewards of the patrimony of the earth.
10. As we navigate the complex challenges of our time—climate change, environmental degradation, and economic inequalities—it is this very harmony in diversity that guides our approach. We believe that sustainable futures are built on the principles of inclusivity, collaboration, and respect for the environment.

## ASEAN IS OUR FUTURE

11. And we believe that sustainability has to transcend national boundaries. Climate change is a threat to all nations. And so all nations must come together to forge new, more sustainable ways for development and commerce.
12. This idea, too, is not alien to Malaysia. We have never been an isolationist country. Our ancestors, whatever their origin, were travellers and traders. This would not be possible with closed minds or hearts. Again, it was a willingness to engage the wider world that has shaped our country and its economy.
13. Closer to the present, Malaysia was a founding member of ASEAN. The world and Southeast Asia has of course changed a lot since those heady days of 1967, during the height of the Cold War when our leaders forged the Bangkok Declaration that gave birth to ASEAN. Through many challenges but also triumphs, Southeast Asia has largely remained a region of peace, progress and neutrality thanks to their vision and their willingness to pursue harmony in diversity.
14. Today, we face challenges of a different kind, though no less stern. Geopolitical conflict rubs shoulders with climate change and the challenge of closing social polarisation as threats to nations and regions alike. And in the face of this, I would argue that ASEAN is an undeveloped and untapped platform that we ought to utilise to face these challenges.

15. We are, after all, a region of more than 650 million people. Economic gravity is shifting to Asia and our Southeast Asian flank will be at the forefront of this. The natural resources and manufacturing potential necessary to power the new economic paradigms are to be found in abundance on our shores.
16. Indeed, there can be no Asian Century if Southeast Asia is not at its core. But all of our rich economic potential will come to naught if we do not face down climate change. Indeed, our people will be the first to suffer—and the worse—if climate action fails. And so, just as Malaysia embraced, upheld and led ASEAN in navigating the Cold War and its aftermath, we believe that it must step up to help Southeast Asia meet the challenge of climate change.

## **SUSTAINABILITY IS AT THE CORE OF MALAYSIA MADANI**

17. This does not mean that Malaysia is neglecting its domestic needs. The Madani government realises that sustainability starts at home and we have hence made it the core of everything we do especially in light of the Malaysia Madani and Madani Economy frameworks. Our initiatives, such as the National Policy on Climate Change, the Nationally Determined Contributions Roadmap and the Long-Term Long Emissions Development Strategies (LT-LEDS) are designed to balance economic growth with environmental stewardship.
18. We are committed to reducing our carbon footprint, promoting renewable energy, and preserving our natural heritage. We have also sought to be as inclusive as we can in this process, empowering the states via initiatives such as the Ecological Fiscal

Transfer and the National Decarbonisation Committee as well as the framing of certain initiatives. NRES has also formed various consultative committees—including those involving the youth that I mentioned—as well as civil society, academia and the private sector—to ensure we get an all-hands approaching the tasks ahead.

19. Indeed, we understand that sustainability is not just a policy—it is a movement, and at the heart of this movement are our youth. As NRES Minister and even before as a backbencher, many of the young Malaysians I have met tell me about how anxious they are over climate change, and rightfully so.
20. But just as we must reject the forces of climate denial, we must also avoid the trap of doom-ism, the idea that nothing can be done or that everything is simply “greenwashing.” I do not deny the latter is a problem—but it’s far too cynical, and simply not true that we cannot fight climate change.
21. But we need political will and public support. This government arguably has the former—we need you to help us mobilise the latter. Your creativity, energy, and passion are the driving forces behind innovative solutions that can transform our societies. Malaysia is dedicated to empowering our youth to take the lead in this journey towards sustainability.
22. We are fostering a culture of innovation through programmes that provide young people with the skills, resources, and platforms they need to make a difference.

23. Initiatives like the Malaysian Youth Parliament and the National Youth Consultative Council ensure that your voices are heard in shaping our nation's sustainable policies.
24. Moreover, we are committed to working closely with our ASEAN neighbours to create a regional framework for sustainability that leverages our collective strengths. During Malaysia's chairmanship of ASEAN in 2025, we have a historic opportunity to chart a sustainable path forward for our region.
25. Acknowledging the severe impacts of climate change already being felt across Southeast Asia, Malaysia emphasises the urgent need for the region to present a united front on the global stage to address the climate crisis.
26. ASEAN is our future and we need to steer Malaysia to be at the forefront of the region moving forward. We must aspire to serve and also lead the region. We hope to pursue an ASEAN Approach to the COP process especially in relation to a more just climate financing—when Malaysia assumes the Chair of ASEAN next year.

## **CONCLUSION**

27. In Malaysia, we see our role as a bridge—connecting the diverse cultures and perspectives of ASEAN, and fostering a shared vision for a sustainable future. We believe that by embracing our diversity and working in harmony, we can pioneer new pathways to sustainability that will benefit generations to come.



28. As you engage in discussions and collaborations throughout this forum, I urge you to think boldly, act responsibly, and dream of a future where harmony in diversity is not just an aspiration, but a reality. Together, we can build a sustainable future for ASEAN—one that is resilient, inclusive, and vibrant.
  
29. Thank you, and may your efforts be guided by wisdom, compassion, and a steadfast commitment to our shared future.