

Speech at the APR Dinner Sponsored by the Chinese Embassy
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The Honourable Tan Sri Rastam Mohd Isa, Chairperson of ASEAN Institute of Strategic and International Studies, and Chairman and Chief Executive of Institute of Strategic and International Studies Malaysia,

Distinguished guests, Ladies and gentlemen,

Good evening!

It is a great honour for me to speak tonight on behalf of the Embassy of China in Malaysia.

The reasons for the Embassy to sponsor for the third time the Asia Pacific Round table are simply and clear. We acknowledge the intention of APR inviting thought leaders, intellectuals, officials and scholars to address strategic and security issues and contribute with policy recommendations; We acknowledge the value of APR for dialogue and cooperation; We acknowledge the channel provided by APR for people concerned to interact and communicate for better understanding and less misjudgement.

In the past years the region and the world have witnessed great and complicated changes, some of which surprised and confused all of us. The countries which take the most advantage of globalization begin to doubt about and even against globalization. The countries which benefit the most from the free trade prefer to have exclusive trade arrangement. The countries which had been open and friendly to immigration tend to close the door and build the wall. The countries which were praised for the fast integration slow down their paces and have to face transmutation and reorganization. Very impressively, security challenges do not shrink while non-traditional threats become more and more like new-normal which we have to deal with on the routine bases.

Against the background of changes, ASEAN has grown up to its 50 years old this year, step by step and on consensus. It is ridiculed by some that integration is a long way to go. Although it is not fast and quick runners have to wait for the slower, none of the members ever regrets or intends to withdraw since ASEAN knows the integration and community building are just on right track and it is important to lay a solid foundation of trust and confidence for a real community. But the new topics and challenges are there for ASEAN on how to narrow the gap of development, how to increase the level of community construction, how to deal in balance with its dialogues partners and how to strengthen the role of centrality.

China takes ASEAN as a priority in its neighborhood diplomacy supporting the construction of the community, its centrality and ASEAN to play a greater role in international and regional affairs. After 25 years dialogue partnership, the trade between China and ASEAN has reached \$452 billion in 2016. China has been ASEAN's biggest trading partner for 8 consecutive years while ASEAN ranked as China's third largest trading partner. People-to-people exchanges reached 30 million person-times last year and 2700 flights are shuttling between China and ASEAN countries every week.

China hopes ASEAN could be the first countries to benefit from the Belt and Road initiative and will continue to support a more united, stronger and prosperous ASEAN community. 10 days ago, there were 7 heads of state or government from ASEAN countries attended the Belt and Road Forum for International cooperation signing with China MOUs of cooperation and infrastructure contracts. One week ago, the 14th Senior Officials' Meeting and 21st Joint Working Group Meeting on the implementation of the DOC was held in China, adopted the COC framework and committed to try to conclude it on the basis of consensus at an early date.

We don't have short and clear answers to all of the changes but your contribution will become incubator for new ideas and triggering of solutions. During today's discussion, over 20 distinguished speakers have shared their perspectives on topics such as new major power relations, future of ASEAN, regional economic cooperation and non-traditional security threats which cover some of the most prominent and influential factors in shaping the current and future political and economic structure of Asia Pacific region. With another day to go, we expect more thorough discussions and brainstorming on the way.

I wish the 31st APR a great success and everyone present here enjoy the forum as well as this evening.

Thank you