

**9TH MEETING OF THE COUNCIL OF ASEAN CHIEF JUSTICES:
OPENING SPEECH**

Thursday, 7 October 2021

The Honourable the Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon

Supreme Court of Singapore

1. Thank you for giving me the floor.
2. 2021 has been a difficult year for many of us as we approach the second year of the pandemic. Last year, when the inaugural virtual meeting was graciously held by our Vietnamese colleagues, I am sure some of us thought – and all of us certainly hoped – that that would be a one-off virtual event, and that we would be able to meet physically this year. But here we are, catching up with old friends through computer screens and unable to enjoy the delicacies of Indonesia that Chief Justice Syarifuddin would surely have arranged for us. I must say, however, that the fact that we have remained committed to meeting today despite the continuing spread of COVID-19 in ASEAN and the tough challenges we each face, is testament to the strength of our shared belief in the need to maintain our multilateral relationships, and of our resolve to ensure an open line of communication at the highest levels of our Judiciaries. This is something we can all take heart in.
3. As COVID-19 continues to plague the world with no end in sight, the one silver lining is perhaps the speed and the extent to which Judiciaries

around the world have started to adopt technology, and correspondingly to adapt their procedures. Remote hearings, which only a few years ago were considered a novelty, and to some even an impossibility, are today part of the mainstream in many jurisdictions. Other initiatives, such as paper hearings and asynchronous case management, have also been piloted in some ASEAN jurisdictions. This is a fast-developing area in which I think there is much that we can learn from each other. To this end, I understand that most of the ASEAN Judiciaries have uploaded summaries of their pandemic crisis management experience on the ASEAN Judiciaries Portal. We in Singapore, I am sure in common with all of you, have been reviewing these documents and picking up learning points in order to refine our own ideas and policies.

4. The ASEAN Judiciaries Portal has been one of the most important ways in which we have continued to maintain contact and to share knowledge despite the disruptions caused by the pandemic. Arrangements for the Norwegian Government to fund the initial 4 years of the portal have concluded. But I am pleased to update, subject to finalisation, that we have secured in principle funding from the Singapore Academy of Law to cover the operational costs of the portal for 3 more years. We think it is important, especially in view of the pandemic and the rising economic significance of our region, to showcase the ASEAN Judiciaries – our values, strengths, and legal frameworks – in a manner that is clear, accurate, and aligned, and this portal is one of the best ways in which we can do so.

5. Finally, let me express my deepest gratitude to Chief Justice Syarifuddin and his wonderful team for the organisation of this virtual conference. As much as we appreciate the sterling efforts of our friends in Indonesia, I truly hope that we will be able to meet in person very soon.

6. I also want to close by thanking and congratulating the Honourable Chief Justice Nguyen Hoa Binh on completing his tenure as chair of the Council with distinction.

7. Thank you, and I look forward to a fruitful discussion today.