

13TH MEETING OF THE COUNCIL OF ASEAN CHIEF JUSTICES

Opening Remarks

Wednesday, 22 July 2026

The Honourable the Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon
Supreme Court of Singapore

Chief Justices

Heads of Delegation

Fellow Judges

Liaison Officers

Distinguished guests

Ladies and gentlemen

1. It is my privilege to address you this morning. Although exceptional circumstances mean that we meet in a hybrid format this year, I am glad that we have kept to our practice of gathering annually, and we should continue to do so.

2. Let me begin by congratulating the Honourable Viengthong Siphandone and the Honourable Le Minh Tri on the completion of their terms as Chief Justices, and I extend a warm welcome to the Honourable Phaivy Siboulapha and the Honourable Nguyen Van Quang. I also extend an especially warm welcome to Chief Justice Afonso Carmona and the delegation from Timor Leste, who join us as full members of the Council of ASEAN Chief Justices (“CACJ”) for the first time. I am delighted, too, that Dr Chem Widhya, Secretary-General of the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly, will address us today.

3. Before I proceed, let me on behalf of the Singapore delegation and our Judiciary express our deepest condolences to the Royal family and the people of Thailand on the passing of Her Royal Highness Princess Bajrakitiyabha Narendiradebyavati. Our thoughts are with the people of Thailand during this period of mourning.

4. A full agenda lies before us – a reflection of how much has been achieved in the eight months since the 12th CACJ Meeting was held in Singapore. This morning, I wish to draw attention to two initiatives that exemplify the spirit of our work together.

(a) The first is our Multilateral Memorandum of Understanding on Court-to-Court Communications, or MMoU. The MMoU establishes a framework through which courts from different ASEAN Member States may communicate in cross-border proceedings, enabling them to coordinate more effectively and so advance the speedier resolution of civil disputes that span our borders.

(b) The second is the Simplified Protocol on Verification Procedure to Authenticate Court Orders within ASEAN. The Protocol gives our courts a practical and a reliable means of helping one another verify the authenticity of our court orders, and so promotes the more efficient conduct of cross-border proceedings.

5. These initiatives are testament not only to the hard work we have undertaken, but also to the deep reservoir of trust we have built up through the friendships forged within the CACJ.

6. I am also delighted that we have convened joint meetings of judges and practitioners in insolvency and intellectual property. As I said last year, there is much synergy between the ASEAN Law Association and the CACJ, and continued co-operation between judges, practitioners and academics has become ever more critical in a more complex and interconnected world.

7. You will all have heard that this will be the last meeting of the CACJ that I will attend. In recent days, including here in Bangkok, so many of you have expressed, in the kindest words, your good wishes and appreciation for our collaboration throughout the years. I am most grateful. When we first gathered in 2013, I do not think any of us imagined how far we would come. I am the last of that inaugural group of Chief Justices that gathered in Singapore 13 years ago. And soon, I will take leave of this august body. I look back with tremendous pleasure at all that we have built together. But beyond the initiatives and the declarations and the concrete outcomes of this institution, important as they are, I will treasure most the friendships that have made all this possible and worth doing. I am deeply grateful for the trust, support and warmth that each of you, and your predecessors, have extended to me over the last 13 years, including during my terms as Chair. I must also express my heartfelt gratitude to my colleagues in the Singapore Judiciary who have been stalwart supporters of the CACJ throughout its existence. There are too many to name, but I must pay a special tribute to my friend and colleague Justice Lee Seiu Kin, who has been a constant counsellor and friend through our many journeys in deepening the links within the ASEAN legal fraternity. The CACJ is in excellent hands. As an

institution it is tremendously strong, and with my friend and colleague Justice Sushil Nair, who is with me here and will succeed me in February next year, Singapore, I assure you, will remain ever committed to this institution. And I have every confidence that we will continue to stand steadfast for the rule of law in ASEAN and to serve our people.

8. Chief Justice Wan Farid said that life begins with retirement. In that spirit, I would like to extend my warmest congratulations and best wishes to Chief Justice Alexander Gesmundo, who will end his distinguished term as the Chief Justice of the Philippines and begin life a few months before me. He has been an extremely distinguished leader of the Philippines judiciary and allow me to share an anecdote from my recent visit to the Philippines when a member of the Philippines judiciary described Chief Justice Gesmundo not just as an outstanding jurist but also as a deeply loved leader. He has been an extremely distinguished leader of the Philippines judiciary and allow me to share an anecdote from my recent visit to the Philippines when a member of the Philippines judiciary described Chief Justice Gesmundo not just as an outstanding jurist but also as a deeply loved leader. And as a somebody who has worked so closely with Alex over the years, I can identify with that completely. He has been a constant friend, and I know that we will continue to enjoy our friendship as life begins for both of us as we enter retirement in a few months. He has been a constant friend, and I know that we will continue to enjoy our friendship as life begins for both of us as we enter retirement in a few months.

9. Let me close by expressing my deepest appreciation to Chief Justice Adisak Tantiwong and his team. Hosting a meeting of this scale is no small undertaking, and this undertaking has been greatly amplified with all the other events that are also taking place and hosted on the sidelines of this meeting. But the Chief Justice and his team from Thailand have done it all with extraordinary dedication, meticulous care, and the unmistakable warmth, hospitality and generosity of spirit for which Thailand is renowned. On behalf of all of us, we thank you. I very much look forward to our discussions.