

**Session 1: Opening Speech by The Hon. Chief Justice Dato Seri Paduka
Steven Chong for the 13th CACJ Meeting in Bangkok, Thailand**

CACJ Chair, The Honourable Adisak Tantiwong, President of the Supreme Court of the Kingdom of Thailand,
Honourable Chief Justices,
Heads of Delegation,
Deputy Secretary-General of ASEAN,
Justices, Judges,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning to all.

1. On behalf of the Judiciary of Brunei Darussalam, please allow me to extend to the Royal Family and to the people of Thailand our deepest condolences on the passing of Her Royal Highness Princess Bajrakitiyabha Narendira Debyavati. Her Royal Highness was widely respected for her distinguished career in law and she will be remembered for her commitment to justice and dedication to public service in advocating for the development and well-being of women and children in Thailand. Our thoughts and prayers are with the Royal Family and the people of Thailand during this time of national mourning.
2. I wish to extend our sincere appreciation to the Judiciary of the Kingdom of Thailand as our gracious host for their warm hospitality and for the excellent arrangements made for the 13th Council of ASEAN Chief Justices (CACJ) Meeting and related events. It is a privilege to gather once again with my fellow ASEAN Chief Justices as we reaffirm our shared commitment to strengthening the rule of law and deepening judicial cooperation among the judiciaries in our region.
3. In 2026, as the ASEAN community continues to navigate our future together, the work of the CACJ has never been more relevant. An integrated ASEAN

cannot flourish without strong institutions and it is important that judiciaries are able to respond to evolving challenges and the needs of our peoples.

4. The administration of justice is being transformed by unprecedented technological and societal change. AI, digital assets and climate related disputes are reshaping the legal landscape in ways that were unimaginable at the formation of the CACJ. The CACJ has responded proactively by advancing work on court technology and AI governance, expanding the CACJ E-Learning Portal, and initiating dialogue on climate justice and digital assets. These initiatives underscore our collective determination to ensure that ASEAN judiciaries remain adaptive, innovative and resilient in the face of future challenges.
5. While technological innovation will undoubtedly shape the future of our courts, it is ultimately people who remain at the centre of the administration of justice. The Council's initiatives on judicial education and training, judicial wellbeing, trafficking in persons cases and therapeutic justice remind us that justice is about protecting the vulnerable, strengthening judicial competencies and ensuring that every person who comes before our courts is treated with dignity, fairness and compassion.
6. Earlier this year, Brunei Darussalam had the privilege of hosting the Second ASEAN Multilateral Judicial Knowledge Exchange on Victim Sensitive Adjudication of Trafficking in Persons Cases. The experience reaffirmed our belief that meaningful judicial cooperation is built through the exchanges of experiences, mutual learning and enduring friendships.
7. Over the years, the CACJ has matured into a successful platform for judicial collaboration. It has become a dynamic forum that promotes practical cooperation and we have seen the notable progress that has been made across our Working Groups. The challenges before our judiciaries will continue to evolve but so too will our capacity to respond collectively. The strength of ASEAN has always rested not only in our diversity but also in our willingness to work together in pursuit of common goals and the same is true of the CACJ.

8. Brunei Darussalam continues to support CACJ's initiatives and our shared commitment to justice and the rule of law provides a strong foundation upon which meaningful regional cooperation can continue to flourish. Allow me to share that 2027 will be a particularly significant year for Brunei Darussalam in that it will mark our Visit Brunei Year 2027 which coincides with the historic Diamond Jubilee commemorating the 60th anniversary of His Majesty Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah's accession to the throne. It is therefore especially fitting that we will have the honour of hosting the 14th CACJ Meeting next year and we look forward to warmly welcoming our CACJ colleagues to our Abode of Peace.
9. Before I conclude, I would like to pay tribute to our esteemed colleague Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon who will be retiring from judicial office in February 2027. He has been a steadfast friend of the ASEAN Judiciaries and his leadership and commitment to strengthen the rule of law and foster judicial closer cooperation within our region has earned the admiration and respect of us all. I wish to also thank Chief Justice Menon for his leadership as the outgoing CACJ Chair and on behalf of the Brunei Judiciary, I extend our heartfelt gratitude for his outstanding service and wish him every happiness and fulfilment in the years ahead.
10. May I conclude by expressing our appreciation to the Working Group chairs, Working Group members and the CACJ Secretariat for their dedication and tireless efforts over the past year. Thank you and I look forward to our productive deliberations and wish everyone a successful 13th CACJ Meeting.