



PARLIAMENT OF MALAYSIA

**42<sup>ND</sup> GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE  
ASEAN INTER-PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY (AIPA)**

**FORGING PARLIAMENTARY COOPERATION IN DIGITAL INCLUSION  
TOWARDS ASEAN COMMUNITY 2025**

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Addressed by  
His Excellency Datuk Azhar Azizan Harun  
Speaker of The House of Representatives  
Parliament of Malaysia

23 – 25 August 2021  
Brunei Darussalam

*Bismillahhirahmanirrahim.*

*Assalamu'alaikum warahmatullahi wabarakatuh.*

**[Salutations]**

**His Excellency Pehin Orang Kaya Seri Lela Dato Seri Setia Awang  
Haji Abdul Rahman bin Dato Setia Haji Mohamed Taib**  
The President of AIPA

Speakers and Presidents of Parliament and National Assembly,

**Madam Nguyễn Tuong Van**  
Secretary General of AIPA

Honourable Members of Parliament and Distinguished Guests.

A very good afternoon to all.

2. It is my great honour and esteemed privilege to have the opportunity to address this 42<sup>nd</sup> AIPA General Assembly today, despite these difficult pandemic times. Hence, it is with humility that I approach the issue at hand today: “Forging Parliamentary Cooperation in Digital Inclusion towards ASEAN Community 2025”.
3. Undeniably, the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic and the consequent physical closure of parliamentary buildings in early 2020 meant that many parliaments have had to resort to electronic means of business as a temporary stop-gap solution, including the consideration of a hybrid or virtual parliamentary sitting. Now more than ever, digital inclusion has become essential for parliaments.
4. Across the globe, parliaments have recognised this need and have experienced an increase in political and administrative interests in harnessing digital tools and reforming previously rigid and embedded attitudes towards novel ways of working. This newfound amenability presents a window of opportunity to make meaningful progress in both parliamentary and digital development.
5. However, it is important to note that there are many challenges that exists when it comes to digital technology that then translates to new forms of inequality. In example, while certain people have relevant skills to utilise these technologies and access their infrastructure, there exist others who will remain excluded due the lack thereof. The COVID-19 pandemic has glaringly exposed these disparities and disproportionately deepened this divide whilst exacerbating the resulting inequalities.

6. Digital equality should be at the forefront of our consideration now because it helps mitigate some of the deep social inequalities derived from being associated with disenfranchised groups of society who may be of low income, poor health, limited skills or disabilities.
7. In addressing these challenges, the 2016 World Development Report on 'Digital Dividends' explores ways of utilising digital technology to empower citizens, reduce poverty and increase income levels around the world. It is suggested that this can be achieved in 3 ways, namely through:
  - **Inclusion** – overcoming physical barriers and accessing remote communities
  - **Efficiency** – automating processes to help reduce the cost of transactions and services
  - **Innovation** – developing digital platforms rapidly, at minimal cost.
8. With that in mind, parliaments can apply these suggestions to improve and integrate digital inclusion within its institution, to limit and prevent eventual inequalities.
9. In the case for the Parliament of Malaysia, we recognise that digital inclusion is applicable in various forms within our democratic practice. Holding upon the understanding that modernising and digitalising activities could have significant positive impacts on institutional transparency and accountability, the potential leverage on greater public interests and engagement in the legislative process is exciting, to say the least.

10. During the Parliament of Malaysia's special sitting from July 26<sup>th</sup> to August 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2021, a number of digital initiatives have been adopted. These digital initiatives came with a common objective to reduce the spread of the COVID-19 virus and the will to embrace technology, in accordance with the urgency of its time.
11. Since members of the press and the public have been affected by physical restrictions to enter parliamentary premises, as a resolve, a hybrid press conference was made possible, with links provided to the press for an opportunity to conduct Q&A's with Members of Parliament through Zoom application. Secondly, a virtual interactive interview session was independently arranged in efforts to encourage MPs to be interviewed by the press through Zoom.
12. These initiatives aim to support good internal digital practices, and provide more participative, informative, and integrated communications between Members of Parliament and the media.
13. Now more than ever, it is imperative that transparency and accuracy of information are carefully protected.
14. For instance, in June 2020, the United Nations' Secretary-General Report on the 'Roadmap for Digital Cooperation' have highlighted (on the response) that 'While accurate data and information related to the (COVID-19) pandemic are fundamental for an effective response to the crisis, social media however, presents a challenge whereby the platforms have been misused by some to spread dangerous misinformation and fuel discrimination,

xenophobia and racism.’ Therefore, it is imperative for parliaments to ensure that the right ‘balance has to be struck between the use of technology and tracing applications to combat the spread of the virus and the safeguarding of privacy and individual rights.’

15. It is essential that we respond to these challenges robustly, with inclusiveness and in collaboration, so as to move our parliamentary institutions to its highest visionary ideals and distinction.

16. Therefore, it is imperative that greater regional solidarity and cooperation is not only instilled but also cultivated within the fabrics of our governance. What each of our proud nations have endured and overcome during these times of great extremes are nothing short of a testament to our individual strengths and excellence. Let that not distract us from the pursuit of a stronger and greater regional representation in ASEAN, built upon the riches in diversity and the commonality of developing our brilliant part of the world that we call home.

17. On behalf of the Parliament of Malaysia, we are ready to provide our undivided support of the remarkable efforts by our fellow AIPA members towards the realisation and collaboration of a greater ASEAN. I look forward to strengthening the relationships of our institutions.

*Terima kasih* and thank you.