

## **Video Message by State Minister for Foreign Affairs SUZUKI Takako**

Hello everyone in Singapore and participants from Japan Alumni Associations in ASEAN Member States. I'm SUZUKI Takako, State Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan.

First of all, I would like to express my heartfelt congratulations on holding the 26th ASCOJA Conference.

Due to COVID-19, people-to-people exchanges, including studying abroad, are greatly restricted. However, even under such circumstances, it is very important to maintain exchanges by utilizing online formats and other means in order to further strengthen future exchanges after COVID-19. In this regard, I would like to express my deepest respect to Mr. Gian Yi-Hsen, President of JUGAS, and all the people concerned in each country for their contributions in organizing this Conference.

In recent years, the international community has become more complex and diverse. This is precisely why alumni who have studied abroad and experienced firsthand the importance of accepting differences and understanding others, are becoming more and more irreplaceable. In particular, ASCOJA as a regional association of ASEAN countries, plays a significant role in fostering friendship, trust and knowledge instilled through study experiences in Japan. This is not limited to relations between you and Japan as a “simple line”, but also extends to an “area” which encompasses the entire ASEAN. For this reason, ASCOJA invariably constitutes a reliable entity for Japan.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan has been supporting symposiums organized by ASCOJA and the leadership training program for MEXT scholarship students recommended by ASCOJA. I was delighted to learn that this year both symposiums held in the Philippines and Malaysia as well as a cultural event “ASEAN Festival” organized by MEXT scholarship students were successfully conducted. We will continue to strongly support such initiatives in order to further develop our friendship with ASEAN people.

Next year marks the 50th Year of ASEAN-Japan Friendship and Cooperation. On the occasion of this commemorative year, we would like to reflect on the history of our relationship of mutual trust based on “heart-to-heart” understanding as true friends and to further promote exchanges with people of ASEAN countries, including ASCOJA, so that we can elevate ASEAN-Japan relations to a new level.

In closing, may I express my confidence that this conference titled “the new norm after COVID-19 for ASEAN and Japan” will be a resounding success and please accept my best wishes for your health and happiness.

Thank you.