

Speech by Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs,
Ms. ERI Arfiya
at the OECD-Southeast Asia High-Level Panel Discussion in Tokyo
January 16, 2025

Your Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,

I am ERI Arfiya, Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan.

On this occasion of the First OECD Southeast Asia High-Level Panel Discussion in Tokyo, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to so many of you for gathering here today to discuss how Southeast Asia and OECD can deepen their cooperation.

Our special thanks go to, Mr. TAKEUCHI Yoshiki, Deputy Secretary-General of the OECD, and Mr. Alexander BOEHMER, Head of the South and Southeast Asia division of the OECD, who have made the long trip to join us today.

The importance Japan places on its relationship with Southeast Asia is clearly demonstrated by Prime Minister ISHIBA's decision to commence his international engagements this year with a visit to Malaysia and Indonesia last week.

Since Southeast Asia was identified as a region of strategic priority by OECD members in 2007, Japan has continuously been supporting efforts to bring the OECD and the region closer together.

In 2014, fifty years after Japan became a member of the OECD, former Prime Minister ABE launched the OECD Southeast Asia Regional Programme in the Ministerial Council Meeting.

Ten years later, in 2024, Japan again chaired the Ministerial Council Meeting, and this time former Prime Minister KISHIDA commemorated the 10th anniversary of the Southeast Asia Regional Programme in the presence of many Ministers from Southeast Asia.

Last year was also an epoch-making one because, for the first time in OECD history, the OECD Council decided to open accession discussions with Indonesia and Thailand, in a process that could see those countries become the first Southeast Asian nations to become members.

As we strive to ensure OECD standards maintain and improve their effectiveness and universality in today's global economy, it is important more than ever for the OECD to strengthen relations with Southeast Asia, the world's engine for growth.

For Southeast Asia, strengthening cooperation with the OECD will help create an environment that attracts private investment, which will support the region's robust development and growth.

At the OECD Ministerial Council Meeting last year, Japan underlined that rather than imposing values, it is essential for the OECD to act as a companion in growth and development.

It is also in this spirit that we support the further deepening of the relationship between the OECD and Southeast Asia.

Last year, the OECD carried out an organisational restructuring, repurposing the Tokyo Centre, which had acted as the base for the organisation's public relations, into one that acts as an office for the OECD's outreach to Southeast Asia.

Today's Panel Discussion is the first of many upcoming events which we hope will be among the core activities of the Tokyo Centre, now called the Tokyo Office, in its new role.

Some of you may wonder why the OECD is undertaking an outreach event addressing Southeast Asia from Tokyo.

In fact, Japan was the first country from Asia to accede to the OECD.

It also has a longstanding relationship with Southeast Asia on many levels, including government, business, civil society and academia. Furthermore, many of the leading relevant international organisations are represented in Japan.

Against this backdrop, Japan is in a good position to be Southeast Asia's companion in growth and development in cooperation with the OECD, in particular in areas where Japan has notable strengths, including artificial intelligence.

In closing, I extend my heartfelt wishes to you all and your families for a joyous and prosperous New Year.

I thank you for your kind attention, and trust that you will enjoy fruitful discussions while gathered here.