United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs

ASEAN FUTURE FORUM 2026: "SHAPING OUR FUTURE TOGETHER: PEACE, PROSPERITY, PEOPLE-CENTERED"

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As delivered

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Your Excellency, Mr. Le Minh Hung, Prime Minister of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam,

Your Excellencies, Prime Ministers of Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Timor-Leste, SG of ASEAN,

Excellencies,

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honor to join you at this important Forum, and I thank the Government of Viet Nam for convening us at a time of profound global uncertainty.

We indeed meet at a moment when the **international security environment is undergoing rapid and unsettling transformation**.

Across regions, including in Southeast Asia, we are witnessing a convergence of risks:

- intensifying geopolitical tension,
- growing mistrust among major powers,
- rising military expenditures,
- and the erosion of long-standing international norms. Or put differently, the international order based on international law that we have known for the past more than 80 years is being tested, in our highly inter-dependent, inter-connected and globalized world.

Today's crises are no longer just military confrontation in a limited geographical region – they carry the risk of quickly developing into multi-dimensional crises of political, military, humanitarian, economic and supply-chain crises including energy or food security. Our collective resolve therefore needs to be multi-

dimensional and comprehensive as well, and that is why the international rule of law and human-centered approaches are more important than ever.

Looking at this broad strategic context from my immediate area of responsibility, disarmament and international security, there are some important observations to make.

First, we see an erosion of international norms and multilateralism: the very foundations that have helped prevent large-scale conflict for decades.

Second, the **reemergence of nuclear weapons as instruments of coercion**, including through threats of use or testing, risks undermining decades of progress under the nuclear non-proliferation regime.

Third, the **weakening of humanitarian norms**, with devastating consequences for civilians and growing pressure on hard-won disarmament agreements.

And **fourth**, a broader **return to militarized approaches to security**, reflected in sharp increases of defense spending and deepening strategic rivalries worldwide.

Taken together, these trends are reshaping the global security landscape in ways that are both **deeply destabilizing and fundamentally unsustainable**.

In this environment, ASEAN's role is more important than ever.

For decades, ASEAN has demonstrated that **regional cooperation, dialogue, and respect for sovereignty can coexist with stability and growth**. All ASEAN members are also members of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), which promotes middle-power diplomacy aiming at carefully avoiding drawn into major power tensions.

Its commitment to **consensus-building, preventive diplomacy, and peaceful dispute resolution** offers a powerful model, particularly at a time when trust between states is under strain.

At the same time, however, the Asia-Pacific region is not immune to global tensions. Defense spending continues to rise, while strategic competition risks spilling over into new domains, including cyberspace, outer space, amplified and enabled by new technologies such as artificial intelligence.

This is precisely why **inclusive, rules-based regional architectures - such as those led by ASEAN - are indispensable**.

Against this backdrop, allow me to highlight the central role of the **Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), and the recent leadership role of Vietnam as the President of the 11th Review Conference**.

The NPT remains a cornerstone of international peace and security. It has prevented the spread of nuclear weapons and established a framework for disarmament and peaceful uses of nuclear energy. But today, that framework is under pressure.

If the perception takes hold that nuclear weapons are the ultimate guarantee of security, we risk entering a far more dangerous world - one marked by proliferation, instability, and heightened risk of miscalculation. This must be firmly rejected.

In this regard, **Southeast Asia and Viet Nam in particular has shown important leadership**.

- The **Treaty of Bangkok** has established a Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone covering an entire region.

- ASEAN states have consistently advocated nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation.
- And Viet Nam has played a constructive leadership role in advancing dialogue within the NPT framework.

This leadership matters.

At a time of global fragmentation, it demonstrates that **regional commitment to non-proliferation can reinforce global norms and help sustain the legitimacy of the international system**.

At the same time, the nature of security itself is evolving.

Emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence, cyber capabilities, and autonomous systems, are **transforming how conflicts may be fought, deterred, or prevented**.

These technologies offer enormous potential benefits. But they also raise urgent questions:

- How do we prevent destabilizing technological race that has an impact on international peace and security?
- How do we manage the dual-use nature of these technologies?
- And how do we ensure human control and oversight in critical functions of autonomous systems?

Here, too, multilateral cooperation is essential.

Recent progress, such as the agreement to establish a **permanent UN mechanism on ICT security**, shows that **consensus is still possible even in difficult geopolitical environment**. But much more is needed.

We must **adapt existing frameworks and develop new ones** to address emerging risks, while ensuring that innovation is encouraged and guided by responsibility, transparency, and respect for international law.

ASEAN can play a vital role in shaping this agenda, particularly by fostering regional dialogue and building confidence in the governance of emerging technologies.

At the heart of all these challenges lies a fundamental question:

Will states continue to be guided by international law or will coercion and unilateralism prevail?

The answer will determine not only the future of global security, but also the prospects for sustainable development and human well-being.

International law is not an abstract principle.

It is what protects civilians in conflict.
It is what underpins economic stability and trade.
It is what enables cooperation across borders.

When these norms are eroded, **the risks of miscalculation, escalation, and conflict increase dramatically**.

Conversely, when they are upheld, they provide predictability, trust, and a foundation for peaceful coexistence, and real possibilities of international cooperation to find sustainable solutions to today's complex challenges.

This is why defending and strengthening the rule of law must remain a shared priority.

Ultimately, the challenges we face today require us to rethink what we mean by "security."

Security cannot be achieved through uncontrolled armament or arms race.

As history has shown, even at the height of the Cold War, **arms control, dialogue, and diplomacy played indispensable roles in preventing catastrophe**.

True security must be **human-centered**. It must address not only military threats, but also the underlying drivers of instability such as:

- **inequality,**
- **climate vulnerability,**
- **and social exclusion.**

Investing in these areas is not separate from security. It is essential to it.

Excellencies,

We are at a crossroads.

Are we going to allow fragmentation, mistrust, and competition to define this era?

Or are we going to choose cooperation, restraint, and shared responsibility.

The path forward is clear:

- **Reaffirm our commitment to multilateralism and the UN Charter**;
- **Uphold international law as the foundation of global order**;
- **Invest in dialogue, confidence-building and diplomacy over military-alone security strategies;**
- **Strengthen the NPT and the broader disarmament architecture as important instruments for security;**
- **Advance building and implementing norms around emerging technologies**.

ASEAN, through its unity, pragmatism, and commitment to dialogue, has an essential role to play in shaping this future.

Let me conclude with a simple but urgent message:

The erosion of norms and trust is not inevitable.

History reminds us that even in times of deep tension, **cooperation can prevail—and progress is possible**.

But it requires political will.

It requires leadership.

And it requires a shared understanding that our security is ultimately **interdependent**.

By working together - regionally and globally - we can ensure that the future is not defined by rivalry and risk, but by cooperation and stability.

I thank you very much for your attention.

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