



KEYNOTE ADDRESS

BY

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MINISTER OF INVESTMENT, TRADE AND
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IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE

**FORUM ON UNLEASHING THE POWER OF WOMEN IN ASEAN:
TRADE AND INDUSTRY ACROSS BORDERS**

**8 OCTOBER 2025 (WEDNESDAY) | 9.00 AM
MITI TOWER, KUALA LUMPUR**

**Assalamualaikum warahmatullahi wabarakatuh and Salam
Malaysia MADANI.**

[Salutations]

Tan Sri Shahrizat Abdul Jalil, President, HAWA Malaysia

Dato' Hairil Yahri Yaacob, Secretary General, MITI

Excellencies, High Commissioners, Ambassadors

MITI Officials, Panellists, Moderators and Distinguished Guests.

Selamat Pagi, Salam Malaysia MADANI and a very warm welcome to everyone.

1. As we gather today among many notable women involved in trade and industry - and my fellow men of course - it gives me great pleasure to be part of a moment that signifies a strategic powerful collaboration between the **Ministry of Investment, Trade and Industry (MITI), HAWA Malaysia, and the Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA).**
2. This Forum on ***“Unleashing the Power of Women in ASEAN: Trade and Industry Across Borders”*** is a testament to our collective commitment to a shared vision: **one where women are not just participants, but leaders and drivers of the ASEAN economy.**
3. Women have a long but often overlooked history in trade and industry, with their roles spanning family labour, wartime industries,

and organised labour movements. Despite periods of retreat, **women have consistently reclaimed their space** — and today, forums like this mark the **next step in ensuring women are firmly at the centre of economic growth**.

4. The significance of this forum cannot be overstated. Global trade is undergoing transformation - driven by **geopolitics**, the **climate crisis**, and the **AI revolution**. These challenges are universal, but they also create opportunities. It is the **agility, creativity, and resilience of women-led enterprises** that will **allow ASEAN** to **navigate these shifting frontiers**.
5. The global economic landscape today demands diversity of talent. Here in Malaysia, our focus is on **high-value, sustainable growth**. But we cannot achieve our national or regional aspirations if half of our talent pool remains untapped. Women's empowerment in trade and industry is not just social justice — it is an economic imperative.

WOMEN AS IMPACTFUL CONTRIBUTORS TO THE ECONOMY

Ladies and gentlemen,

6. Globally, studies by the **IMF** and **World Bank** show that **closing gender gaps in labour force participation** could **boost GDP** by as much as **20%** in some economies. Yet **women-led businesses** still face **barriers** — from **access to finance**, to **digital adoption**, to **entry into global value chains**.
7. Within **ASEAN**, **women-led enterprises** play a **vital role** in **intra-regional trade and global supply chains**. To unlock this potential,

we must break down barriers and enable women entrepreneurs to scale, innovate, and compete across borders.

8. **Malaysia's ASEAN Chairmanship in 2025** bears the theme **"Inclusivity and Sustainability"**, and **women's economic empowerment is one of the key KPIs of ASEAN's success**. For instance, in some ASEAN economies like **Cambodia**, women contribute around **77%** of the domestic value added in industry exports (such as textiles and apparel), illustrating how female labour power up their export engine.
9. In Malaysia, **women make up nearly half the population but less than one-third of business owners**. This is a gap we can neither ignore, nor afford. That is why **inclusivity** is also central to MITI's economic plans, like the **New Industrial Master Plan (NIMP) 2030** the **National Trade Blueprint**. Both aim to create opportunities for SMEs—including those led by women—to expand regionally and globally.
10. According to DOSM's **Economic Census 2023 report**, there were over **219,015 active women-owned establishments** in Malaysia in 2022. These numbers, on their own, don't mean much. What is more meaningful is how much they collectively contributed to the country's gross output – touching **RM137 billion. Yes, RM137 billion!**

WOMEN ARE CENTRAL TO ASEAN'S ECONOMIC AGENDA

Ladies and gentlemen,

11. That is the reason why **empowering women in trade and industry** is also **front and centre** in **ASEAN's agenda**. **ASEAN** is home to **over 330 million women**, many of whom are **already playing key roles in SMEs**, in **digital platforms** and in **creative industries**. But too many of these businesses **struggle to scale up and integrate into regional supply chains**.
12. That is why **this Forum** is so important. It is a **space to collaborate, curate solutions**, and **co-create an enabling ecosystem** where **women entrepreneurs** can **lead not just domestically, but also regionally and globally**.
13. MITI sees several **key priorities** that we can **address** such as:
 - (i) **Financing and resources** – ensuring women entrepreneurs have better access to credit, trade finance, venture capital, and green financing;
 - (ii) **Digital empowerment** – equipping women with tools to harness e-commerce, AI, and cybersecurity for cross-border trade;
 - (iii) **Sustainability** – enabling women-led businesses to align with ESG principles and seize opportunities in renewable energy and the circular economy;
 - (iv) **Leadership and mentorship** – building cross-border networks where seasoned leaders mentor emerging

entrepreneurs; and

- (v) **Regional cooperation** – leveraging ASEAN frameworks such as RCEP and the ASEAN Digital Economy initiatives to expand market access.

EMPOWERING WOMEN POWERS UP THE ECONOMY

Ladies and gentlemen,

14. The impact of women is felt across all pillars of our society. Women are not only **vibrant entrepreneurs, innovative industry leaders, and successful business owners**, but also **dedicated public servants, effective policymakers**, and **tireless advocates in civil society and NGOs**.
15. By empowering women in trade, industry, government, and the non-profit sector, we ensure that **diverse perspectives shape our economic future**. This **holistic empowerment** uplifts families, strengthens communities, and **creates the truly resilient, competitive, and inclusive economies that ASEAN aspires to build**.
16. **MITI's top leadership** for instance, includes a significant representation of women, making up around **69% of the total**. Their roles are critical, encompassing positions as **policy makers, negotiators**, and **leaders in trade and economic security**.
17. This collaborative spirit is further championed by our esteemed partners, **HAWA Malaysia** and **ERIA**. I wish to particularly

acknowledge the dedication and leadership of **Tan Sri Shahrizat Abdul Jalil, President of HAWA Malaysia**, whose vision has been instrumental in **bridging the private sector's trade needs** with **governmental support**, and the **crucial research partnership** with **ERIA**, led by **Professor Tetsuya Watanabe**, which has provided the **vital economic insights** that underpin this Forum.

CONCLUSION

18. In conclusion, this forum is not merely a dialogue — it is a **call to action**. I urge every participant here — entrepreneurs, academics, policymakers — to not only listen, but **to engage, network, and commit to mentorship**. Let this forum be the **start of tangible partnerships and actionable strategies** that shape a more inclusive ASEAN economy.
19. With that, it is my distinct honour to officially declare open the ***Forum on Unleashing the Power of Women in ASEAN: Trade and Industry Across Borders***.

Thank you.