



**MINISTRY OF
INVESTMENT, TRADE AND INDUSTRY**

KEYNOTE SPEECH BY

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AT THE

**WOMEN ECONOMIC FORUM
ASEAN 2025**

**THURSDAY, 19 JUNE 2025
MENARA MITI**

Salutations

Yang Amat Berbahagia Dato' Seri Dr Wan Azizah Dr Wan Ismail

YB Datuk Seri Dr. Noraini Ahmad

Deputy Minister of Women, Family and Community Development

Datin Dr Hartini binti Osman

President, Women Economic Forum ASEAN 2025

Dato' Seri Maimunah binti Mohd Sharif

Mayor of Kuala Lumpur

Datuk Bahria Mohd Tamil

Deputy Secretary-General (Investment and Management), MITI

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

Selamat Datang, salam Malaysia Madani and Welcome.

May I welcome all delegates, speakers, and guests to the Women Economic Forum ASEAN 2025, organised by Yayasan Bina Kesejahteraan (YBCARE) with the support of the Ministry of Investment, Trade and Industry, Malaysia (MITI).

I would like to thank Datuk Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail, wife of the Prime Minister and former Deputy Prime Minister herself, to Menara MITI. Dr Wan Azizah is a Malaysian icon and a symbol of resilience and quiet strength. I have personally witnessed her making tough political decisions as the president of her party and coalition while Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim went through a tumultuous journey.

I would also like to acknowledge the presence of Datuk Seri Maimunah Mohd Shariff, the Mayor of Kuala Lumpur. She was the highest-ever ranked Malaysian in the United Nations system as UN-Habitat Executive Director.

This forum brings together women leaders, entrepreneurs, policymakers, and changemakers from across ASEAN and around the world.

The theme "Women Leaders Beyond Borders: Shaping the Future of the ASEAN She-Economy" is ambitious and to meet this aspiration we need to act boldly.

The theme for Malaysia's ASEAN Chairmanship in 2025 is "Inclusivity and Sustainability". This theme reflects our commitment to ensuring shared progress and prosperity across the region, leaving no one behind as we aim to achieve stability and resilience.

It is therefore important that we put in more effort on female inclusion where we create an environment in which **women have equal opportunities, are valued, and can fully participate in all aspects of life, including the workplace and society.**

Malaysia offers an example of relatively high women participation in economic decision making at the higher level but a relatively low overall female labour participation rate, something that all of us would have to deal with in the years to come in Malaysia and across ASEAN.

About 65% of Malaysian public university students are women, indicating a higher enrollment rate of women compared to men. However, the balance changes upon these graduates entering the workforce.

The female labour participation rate (FLPR) in Malaysia is 56%, compared to 82.9% for men, which is lower than many of the Southeast Asian economies.

However, Malaysia has some key successes. **About 58% of the civil service is constituted by women. At the decision-making level of the civil service (JUSA/Super scale C and above), 42% are women, which is quite high among developing countries.**

MITI's workforce is 69% women and we are very proud of it.

From 2023 onwards, Malaysia has mandated 30% of public listed board membership to be constituted by women, and compliance is high.

This means, at the decision-making level of businesses and government, women are gaining tremendous ground. Yet, the overall female labour participation rate is low.

Why is this happening? The Malaysian economy has been depending on unskilled and cheap foreign labour for the last 3 decades, resulting in wage suppression and a lack of interest among the businesses to hire women in the workforce.

At the same time, insufficient provision of child care, aged care, and other soft and hard infrastructure for women to take part in the workforce further discouraged women from returning to work.

We have to change this. With Malaysia having the chance for a second economic takeoff after decades of stagnation, and with our economy moving up the value chain, we need more skilled workers, and a higher wage level to attract more women into the formal labour market.

A tight labour market will encourage employers to pay more attention in making it more attractive for women to join the workforce.

We also need a strong care economy. Societies need to build much stronger social conditions such as health care, child care and aged care, which will lead to a stronger service sector in all our societies and overall better and more resilient societies as a whole.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim has a vision of the MADANI economy which will aim to raise both the ceiling and the floor for Malaysians. It is important that Malaysia and ASEAN economies collectively set a floor to ensure there is no race-to-the-bottom in wage suppression as women will be most hurt.

The more women are paid better and the longer women stay in the workforce, the richer their families would be, and the richer the whole nation would be.

I hope the Women Economic Forum ASEAN 2025 from today until 21 June, among other things, will discuss ideas and ways not only to increase women's economic participation but also to get more women to join the workforce.

Thank you.