

**42<sup>ND</sup> ASEAN LAW ASSOCIATION GOVERNING COUNCIL MEETING  
OPENING ADDRESS**

Thursday, 11 November 2021

The Honourable the Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon  
President, ASEAN Law Association (“ALA”)  
Supreme Court of Singapore

---

ALA Vice-Presidents,

Heads of Delegation,

ALA Secretary-General, and

ALA members:

1. A very good afternoon, and welcome to this virtual meeting of the ALA Governing Council.
2. Let me begin today’s proceedings by expressing on behalf of all of us our heartfelt appreciation to our hosts, ALA Cambodia. This is historic because it is the first time that ALA Cambodia is hosting the meeting of the Governing Council, and what a wonderful job they have done! We hope before long that we will be able to repeat the experience in Cambodia and we look forward to that. I also wish to extend an especially warm welcome to the new ALA Vice-Presidents. These are the new Chairs of the ALA National Committees of Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Myanmar, and Thailand.

- (a) First, the new Chair of ALA Brunei, Yang Berhormat Awang Haji Ahmad bin Pehin Orang Kaya Laila Setia Bakti Diraja Dato Laila Utama Haji Awang Isa, who was appointed Attorney-General of Brunei on 6 October 2020, and who succeeds the outgoing Chair, Yang Berhormat Dato Seri Paduka Haji Hairol Arni bin Haji Abdul Majid.
- (b) Second, the new Chair of ALA Cambodia, Attorney Ly Chantola, who was appointed President of the Bar Association of Cambodia on 16 October 2020, and who succeeds the outgoing Chair, Attorney Soun Visal.
- (c) Third, the new Chair of ALA Indonesia, the Honourable Chief Justice Muhammad Syarifuddin, who was elected Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Indonesia on 6 April 2020, and who succeeds the outgoing Chair and a long-time stalwart of the ALA community, the Honourable Chief Justice Muhammad Hatta Ali.
- (d) Fourth, the new Chair of ALA Myanmar, Dr Thi Da Oo, who succeeds the outgoing Chair, U Tun Tun Oo.
- (e) Finally, the new Chair of ALA Thailand, the Honourable Chief Justice Piyakul Boonperm, who was appointed President of the Supreme Court of Thailand on 1 October 2021, and who

succeeds the outgoing Chair, the Honourable Chief Justice Metinee Chalodhorn.

3. I extend my heartiest congratulations to the new Chairs and ALA Vice-Presidents on their appointments, and look forward to collaborating with them to advance the work of the Association. I also extend my deepest appreciation to the outgoing Chairs and ALA Vice-Presidents for all their support and contributions to ALA over the years, and for their tremendous friendship.
  
4. Many of us last met in person in Phuket in 2019, when ALA Thailand graciously hosted us to a truly memorable meeting. At that time, we had looked forward to being welcomed by ALA Cambodia in Siem Reap last year, but as with so many other plans, the pandemic got in the way. The painful decision was thus taken to hold over last year's meeting to this year and to hold it online instead of in person. As a result, we are, as I have said, attending the first virtual ALA Governing Council Meeting. And I again thank ALA Cambodia for doing such a wonderful job and making all the arrangements to host us today. In the midst of all the disruptions, they have ably and enthusiastically taken on this challenge, and have worked tirelessly with the ALA Secretariat to adapt the proceedings to a suitable online format.

5. Last year, in our annual newsletter, I wrote of my pride that our Association had been resolute in the face of the COVID pandemic. Under some of the most trying circumstances, we responded by giving our best. Far from coming to a standstill, ALA's work has continued apace and there have been a number of developments since our last meeting that I would like to briefly mention.
  
6. The ASEAN Law Institute held its 3rd Governing Board Meeting virtually in July last year. Under the auspices of the Institute, ALA Philippines and ALA Singapore also respectively hosted the first and second Roundtable discussions on the ASEAN Comprehensive Investment Agreement. The Institute's 2020 annual report and proposed 2021 workplan are being tabled for endorsement at today's meeting.
  
7. We also continued our engagement with the ASEAN Senior Law Officials Meeting ("ASLOM"). Last year, ALA Singapore represented ALA and presented our proposed Guidelines for the Enforcement of Arbitral Awards within ASEAN at the 9th ASLOM Working Group Meeting. This is an important step towards closer collaboration between ALA and ASLOM, and we hope to work towards the eventual adoption of the Guidelines by ASLOM. ALA Singapore will be updating the Governing Council later today on developments on this front.

8. This year, ALA's operations have intensified, with the various ALA Working Groups meeting to discuss and finalise their recommendations on a number of initiatives that will be instrumental to the development of ASEAN law. These include the promotion of ASEAN legal instruments, the proposed ASEAN Protocol for communication with non-disputing states on treaty interpretation issues, and the idea of an ALA Virtual Marketplace for training opportunities. The ALA Standing Committees and the Trade and Investment Group have also been able to meet this year, and a number of interesting proposals have arisen from their deliberations. I look forward to hearing the updates from the Working Groups and the Standing Committees later today.
  
9. Looking ahead, ALA Malaysia has been working extremely hard to plan the next ALA General Assembly. The General Assembly was originally scheduled to take place this year, but we took the difficult decision last year to defer it to 2022, in view of the uncertain outlook of the pandemic. The present situation justifies continued caution in our social interactions, and we have therefore recently agreed that the General Assembly will be further deferred to 2023. The plan – and no doubt the fervent hope that we all share – is to hold the 2023 General Assembly in person. ALA Malaysia will update us on the status of their planning later today.

10. Before we reunite in Malaysia in 2023, there will be another Governing Council Meeting next year. This is likely to be another virtual meeting. We are exploring the possibility of ALA Indonesia hosting this event, and this will be the subject of the final discussion of today's meeting.
  
11. Finally, the pandemic may also have an impact on the leadership renewal of ALA. Judge Paul Quan and I were due to relinquish our respective positions as Secretary-General and President of the Association this year. However, in the light of the postponement of the General Assembly, a proposal has been tabled at today's meeting to correspondingly extend our terms until 2023, when Malaysia will take over. This is not an unprecedented move. As a result of the Asian financial crisis, Malaysia held the positions of ALA President and Secretary-General from 1995 until Singapore took over in 2003. In many ways, the COVID pandemic poses challenges that are as great, if not even greater, than back then. Both the Secretary-General and I wish to inform the Governing Council that we stand ready to continue serving ALA should the proposal to extend our terms be endorsed.
  
12. Here, let me take a moment to acknowledge and express my deepest gratitude to my colleague, Judge Paul Quan, whose assistance as Secretary-General has been crucial to the day-to-day running of ALA. The details of the good work done by the ALA Secretariat can be found

in the Secretary-General's report, which has been tabled before the Governing Council. I am also deeply appreciative of the Vice-Presidents, the ALA National Committees, and each and every member of the ALA family in extending us their full support despite these challenging times.

13. The past two years have not been easy, to say the least. However, the strong bonds that we share in the ALA family have allowed us to weather the storm thus far and to stay the course in the face of formidable challenges. I am delighted that we gather here today to discuss an agenda rich and filled with many exciting and promising developments that will continue advancing the cause of ASEAN law. I am confident that ALA will emerge from the pandemic even stronger than before, with all of us standing shoulder to shoulder with each other.

14. Thank you very much.