# 2026 AUN Rectors' Meeting
# Opening Remarks by Professor Tan Eng Chye, NUS President
# Thursday, 23 July 2026, 9.05am, Grand Hyatt Singapore

Associate Professor Dr Thanapan Laiprakobsup, Executive Director of the ASEAN University Network,

Fellow Presidents, Rectors, Vice-Chancellors and Chancellors,

Distinguished colleagues and friends,

A very good morning and a warm welcome to Singapore. It is both an honour and a privilege to welcome you to the 17th ASEAN University Network (AUN) Rectors' Meeting. Today, we gather not just as leaders of our respective institutions, but as stewards of a shared vision – a vision of ASEAN higher education as a beacon of hope, progress, and unity in a rapidly evolving world.

I would like to express my heartfelt appreciation to Dr Thanapan and the AUN Secretariat for their valued partnership in convening this meeting. To all the university leaders present, thank you for joining us and for your unwavering commitment to advancing higher education across our region.

At NUS and in Singapore, we always look forward to opportunities to meet and engage with our neighbours in the region. In ASEAN and the AUN, through deliberate effort and care from all members, we are fortunate to have a close-knit community and strong regional engagement. Especially in times of uncertainty and global turbulence, our unity and mutual support are not merely sources of comforts – they are our greatest strengths.

This year's theme, "ASEAN Higher Education at the Forefront: Student-Centred Leadership for a Global Era," is both timely and significant. Across our region and beyond, higher education is undergoing profound transformation. Artificial intelligence, digital innovation, and increasing global interconnectedness are reshaping how we learn, teach and lead. At the same time, expectations of what universities should offer have evolved.

Alongside these opportunities come significant challenges. Unequal access to opportunities and technology, intensifying global competition, and growing pressures on students' mental wellbeing are issues that demand our collective attention. These challenges are formidable, but they also present opportunities for collaboration. As members of AUN, we are well placed to work together to equip our institutions and communities to adapt and thrive in an increasingly complex and rapidly evolving world.

To do that, we must keep students at the heart of everything we do. Student-centred leadership is not simply about improving the student experience. We must reimagine how universities lead, teach, innovate, and create pathways that support students from enrolment through graduation and beyond. Our responsibility is to nurture well-rounded students who are not only adept in knowledge and skills, but are also resilient,

grounded in values, and committed to contributing meaningfully to society. Our students come from diverse backgrounds, with different aspirations, needs, and challenges. If ASEAN higher education is to be truly future-ready, then academic excellence must go hand in hand with access, well-being, inclusion, and a strong sense of belonging.

Today's programme reflects these priorities well. We will hear keynote perspectives on global positioning and partnerships, student well-being and holistic success, and how we can prepare our universities to become future-ready institutions. Our breakout discussions will allow us to reflect on strategic challenges, identify shared priorities, and explore how the AUN can provide stronger regional leadership.

I hope today's conversations will be candid, ambitious, and practical. This meeting is more than an annual gathering. It is a strategic platform for us to shape what ASEAN higher education stands for on the global stage. It is an opportunity to strengthen our collective voice, deepen collaboration, and build a more connected, innovative, and student-centred future for our universities. We look forward to learning from one another's insights and to advancing our shared agenda together.

I wish you a very fruitful, engaging and inspiring meeting. Thank you.