



SPEECH BY:

**YAB DATO' SERI DR. AHMAD ZAHID BIN HAMIDI
DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AND
MINISTER OF RURAL AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

IN CONJUNCTION WITH:

2025 ASEAN ICT FORUM ON CHILD PROTECTION

ON:

18 NOVEMBER 2025 (TUESDAY)

8.45 AM

VENUE:

HILTON HOTEL, KUALA LUMPUR

Bismillahirrahmanirrahim.

Assalamualaikum warahmatullahi wabarakatuh and Salam Malaysia
Madani

INTRODUCTION

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

1. **There was a time when we grew up in a world where danger was something we could see and understand.** Today, our children grow up in a world where danger is **invisible** - moving quietly through screens, algorithms, and digital spaces that even adults sometimes struggle to make sense of.
2. **One generation ago, parents taught us to look left and right before crossing the road.** Today, not only parents must teach their children to look left, right but *to stay alert to what they see online*, because the **threats they face are no longer just on the streets, but in the devices we place in their hands.**
3. **UNICEF reminds us that one in every three internet users today is a child.** This tells us one simple truth: childhood today is lived as much on the screen as it is on the playground. The digital world has become their classroom, their entertainment, their social space and sometimes, their greatest risk.
4. **And so, as I stand here today in this important ASEAN forum, we are not simply attending another conference.** We are answering a *regional call to conscience* because protecting children in the digital age is a responsibility that **no generation**

before us has ever faced, yet one that our generation must confront with courage, clarity, and unity.

ISSUES & CHALLENGES

Ladies and gentlemen,

5. The digital world offers opportunity but it also presents risks that are growing faster than our ability to respond.
6. Across the ASEAN region, we are seeing the warning signs. In Singapore, for example, **74% of internet users aged 15 and above reported encountering harmful content online** in 2024. In Malaysia, one survey shows that around **33% of young people reported being victims of online bullying**.
7. These figures are more than numbers. They are signals that our existing safety nets are being stretched thin. Artificial intelligence now enables predators to clone voices, create deep-fake images, manipulate children's identities and all this from behind a screen, without ever being in the same room.
8. In Malaysia, the daily reality is stark: the Communications and Multimedia Commission recorded **around 9,000 cyberbullying complaints** in 2024 - an average of **27 cases per day**.
9. And while national statistics vary, in the ASEAN region the **lack of awareness and data remains a major challenge**. Many parents, educators and policymakers still lack the full picture of what

children face online, and cross-border harms continue to complicate enforcement.

10. At the heart of all these numbers are children.. our children. Their safety, dignity and emotional wellbeing depend on the decisions we choose to make today.

PROTECTING CHILDREN WITHOUT LIMITING THEIR POTENTIAL

Ladies and gentlemen,

11. Malaysia holds to one clear principle: **we must protect children *without* limiting their potential.** We do not want to disconnect them from technology - **we want to empower them to use it safely and confidently.**
12. A child must be free to learn, to explore, and to imagine — but free *safely*, not free to be exploited. This is why Malaysia is **strengthening a whole-of-government approach** that unites ministries, regulators, educators, parents, communities, and technology companies.
13. **We believe that safety and freedom must coexist.** A child cannot thrive if they are unsafe, and they cannot succeed if they are unprepared. Our duty is to ensure they have both protection and opportunity.
14. Malaysia is therefore **updating our cybercrime laws, enhancing digital forensics, embedding digital literacy from the earliest**

years of schooling, and equipping parents and teachers with the skills to guide children in the digital environment.

15. **Protection must be holistic** - not merely reactive or punishment-based. We protect children not only from immediate dangers, but also for the future: for jobs, for innovation, and for a digital economy that will define their generation.

ASEAN COMMITMENT

Ladies and gentlemen,

16. Online harm has no borders. A predator does not need a passport. A dangerous video does not stop at immigration. One harmful post can reach eleven ASEAN countries in minutes. This is why ASEAN's collective action is not only important - **it is essential**.
17. Under Malaysia's ASEAN Chairmanship, we placed families, communities, and social wellbeing at the heart of our agenda. This year, we convened the ASEAN Conference on Care for Older Persons, the ASEAN Women, Peace and Security Summit, and the ASEAN Care Economy Forum. And today, we turn our focus to our **youngest generation**, who stand at the frontline of digital risks.
18. **ASEAN already has strong foundations** - the ASEAN Declaration on Online Abuse and Exploitation, the Regional Plan of Action, and years of dedicated leadership from Cambodia, Thailand, Indonesia, and now Malaysia.
19. But foundations alone are not enough. We must go further, and we must go faster. Because research suggests that **a nearly 70**

percent of parents in ASEAN remain unaware of the full range of digital risks their children face — reminding us that this challenge is not only international and cross-border, but also **within our homes, our schools, and our communities.**

20. But to protect children in this new digital frontier, we must strengthen these foundations with **practical, high-impact cooperation.**

21. **Malaysia therefore proposes three regional priorities:**

- **First, an ASEAN Child-Protection Information Exchange Network** - a cross-border communication mechanism for faster alerts, data-sharing, and coordinated responses to child-related online threats.
- **Second, a Shared Digital Forensics Protocol** - to accelerate investigations, streamline evidence exchange, and ensure predators cannot hide behind jurisdictional gaps.
- **Third, an ASEAN Digital Guardianship Curriculum** - a common module for schools to build digital resilience, ethics, and online safety skills from the earliest years.

22. These are initiatives that can be implemented quickly, improved over time, and scaled collectively. And InshaAllah they will bring ASEAN closer to becoming one of the safest digital regions for children.

23. And as ASEAN advances, Malaysia too must lead by example. This morning, I am honoured to launch the **National Child Policy and the National Child Action Plan (2026–2030)** - reaffirming

Malaysia's commitment to protect every child's safety, dignity, mental wellbeing, and digital future.

24. The updated policy strengthens safeguards against grooming, cyberbullying, sexual exploitation, and emotional harm. At the same time, it empowers children through digital literacy, ethical technology use, responsible expression, and resilience.
25. Our Action Plan advances Malaysia's priorities through clear pillars: **stronger laws, stronger digital forensics, stronger protection in schools, stronger support for families, stronger partnerships with industry, and stronger community mobilisation** across every faith and locality.

CLOSING

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

26. We began this conversation by acknowledging the threats that surround our children. Let us end it with a stronger truth **that we are not powerless in the face of them.**
27. Technology may move fast, but **our resolve can move faster.** Harm may cross borders, but **our cooperation can rise above them.** And while danger can appear in a single click, **protection can begin with a single decision made in rooms like this.**
28. If we act with courage today, our children will inherit a digital world that strengthens them, not scars them. But if we remain silent or slow, it is they - not us.. who will pay the price.

29. So let us move forward together to build a digital world where every child can learn without fear, grow without harm, and dream without limit.
30. And with that shared purpose, it is my great honour to officially open the **2025 ASEAN ICT Forum on Child Online Protection**.
31. May Allah guide our efforts, bless our unity, and safeguard the children who will one day inherit this region we lead.

Thank you.

Wassalamualaikum warahmatullahi wabarakatuh.