

# **“Youth Partnership for Shared Prosperity”**

**Special Lecture by  
The Honourable Dato’ Seri Anwar Ibrahim  
Prime Minister of Malaysia  
Afro-Malaysia Youth Forum**

**On 20 November 2025 in Addis Ababa**

---

## **Introduction**

Excellencies, distinguished audience, ladies and gentlemen.

I am pleased to be here in Addis Ababa, one of the global centres for multilateral diplomacy. Indeed, this isn’t merely a city steeped in rich culture and history, but also a city and population that is priming itself for the future, in commerce, services and connectivity.

Africa’s journey has never been without challenges, particularly its path towards nation-building, in a momentous era which saw the emergence of leaders with undiminished courage of conviction and exceptional tenacity of purpose.

It was a time of visionary leaders like Kwame Nkrumah and Gamal Abdel Nasser, of tireless activist-politicians like Albert Luthuli and Kenneth Kaunda, of revolutionary thinkers, poets and writers like Alhaji Cham Joof, Léopold Sédar Senghor and Kebede Michael. And I need not mention the great African freedom fighter and Nobel Laureate Nelson Mandela.

Certainly, a pivotal era for Africa, the Arab world and Southeast Asia when the spirit of anti-colonialism flew high and the fire of nationalism burnt bright. As colonised nations emerged with aspirations for self-determination and sovereignty, there was also a growing sense of fellowship.

## **Empowering the youth**

Ladies and gentlemen,

Today, we see the world undergoing another profound shift. Emerging economies of the Global South are rising, not only in economic weight but in moral and political voice.

With this rise comes both responsibility and opportunity to help shape global governance, to make it meaningful, impactful, and enduring, so that the international order ahead is more inclusive, balanced and equitable. But we must not wait for change to happen around us; we must be the architects of that change.

And by we, I mean you, the youth of today and the future. Who else could be the best and most instrumental agents of change but the youth?

Unfortunately, the youth are not treated as equal participants in the political process in large parts of the world which in turn exacerbates negative perceptions of governments being out-of-touch, unable to address effectively the critical challenges of our time.

Certainly, in the key areas of global governance and social progress, I firmly believe the youth can advocate for more inclusive structures that prioritize their voices in decision-making processes.

Everywhere, including in Malaysia, the youth are the masters of digital tools and the use of technology where they can push the agenda for greater participatory democracy to remind the powers that be of the imperatives of transparency and accountability.

The recent wave of Gen Z protests in several countries has made it clear that the will of the youth is no longer insignificant and that their prioritisation of good governance has increased.

Likewise, is their concern for climate change, economic inequality and violation of human rights. Hence, it is most encouraging to see youth pushing for policy initiatives to drive changes in these areas.

Beyond that, and this is a crucial aspect of the role of youth in effecting change is engagement in global dialogues that encourage understanding across cultures. This is not an academic exercise. I speak from my own experience as I recall one of my earliest engagements in the Asian Youth Movements in the 1970s.

Let us be clear: The youth are the movers of change, and society should harness their energy, creativity, and drive. This global phenomena should provide a wake-up call for governments around the world to improve the way business is done, and to cater more meaningfully to the needs of the youth.

With growing concerns around declining trust in institutions, digital misinformation, and uneven political participation, youth are stepping forward as champions of transparency, civic responsibility, and inclusive policymaking.

Through regional channels such as the ASEAN Youth Dialogue and the AU Youth Envoy mechanisms, they are already shaping conversations on electoral participation, anti-corruption, and social inclusion.

Deepening ASEAN–AU collaboration, such as through exchanges between youth parliaments, would not only equip young leaders with comparative insights but also inject fresh legitimacy and energy into regional governance processes.

## **Southeast Asia-Africa Relations & Global South Cooperation**

Ladies and gentlemen

Southeast Asia and Africa are well placed to further strengthen long-standing ties rooted in trade, movement of our peoples and our shared ideals for anti-colonialism and non-alignment.

We must build bridges: through bilateral partnerships, cooperation between ASEAN and the African Union; and coordinated action at multilateral platforms. Whatever the form, our cooperation must be grounded in principle and guided by purpose.

Some Southeast Asian nations have expanded their presence across Africa through trade and investment, while African enterprises have increasingly established roots in our region.

Malaysia, too, has seen steady growth in trade and investment across the continent, reflecting both the warmth of our African partners and the commitment of our own institutions and private sector. Malaysia's engagements in Africa must be geared towards uplifting communities, widening opportunities and equipping young people to lead.

ASEAN–African Union relations must move beyond symbolism and take shape through genuine, people-centred cooperation. While existing frameworks and initiatives offer a foundation, both regions must be more proactive in creating mechanisms based on shared priorities – rooted in our own experiences of resilience, reform, and renewal.

As the geopolitical realities of today compel us to recalibrate our strategic approaches, I am reminded of the spirit that saw the declaration for international cooperation adopted at the Asian-African Conference in Bandung seven decades ago, laying the ideological foundation for the Non-Aligned Movement.

Therefore, the time has come for the African Union and ASEAN to breathe new life into that spirit, to forge a new compact of cooperation for mutual benefit, and shared prosperity – not as convenient slogans but as real and tangible aspirations capable of fulfilment.

## **Addressing Transnationalism by Major Powers**

Ladies and gentlemen,

Today, while the landscape has changed, yet the echoes of old challenges remain, albeit with new dimensions.

The rivalry of major powers may take new forms, but its essence remains familiar. Once again, the global landscape is shaped by competition, coercion and the contest for influence, and once again, nations in Southeast Asia and Africa must navigate this uneasy terrain.

Many of us maintain deepening economic ties with China, while engagement with the United States remains vital for security and trade. These relationships are not contradictory. They reflect our right to pursue a balanced and pragmatic foreign policy guided by our own interests and priorities.

The freedom to choose our partners, set our priorities and chart our development paths is not a privilege. It is a sovereign right. With that right comes a duty: to act with moral conviction, to speak with clarity and to build partnerships grounded in mutual respect rather than pressure or rivalry.

This is the moment to widen our circle of cooperation. We must build bridges with regions that share our hopes and struggles. While we were once united by a common struggle against domination, today, we must be united by a shared struggle for justice, equity, and sustainability.

In the words of Kwame Nkrumah, “we face neither East nor West. We face forward”. Together, let us raise our collective voices – the voices of the Global South – to affirm that we will not be spoken for, and we will not allow our future to be written by others.

## **Shared Global Challenges**

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is imperative that the Global South, or the Global Majority, acts with vigour and purpose. Beyond great power rivalry and the weaponisation of trade and development, we face challenges that ignore borders and ideologies.

Across Africa and Southeast Asia, governments confront the realities of a changing climate and the need to build resilient systems for food security, livelihoods and sustainable growth. While developed economies have resources, we cannot depend on them entirely, as recent UN climate negotiations have shown how widely interests can diverge.

Thus, it is on us, to seek paths that both preserve our biodiversity and natural resources, while allowing for sustainable development to uplift our societies where necessary.

I believe there is much that our regions can share as we experience some of the same underlying issues, which constantly feature in discussions on Sustainable Development Goals. And yet as we debated, and made promises, their causes and effects have progressed inexorably, with mitigation goals missed multiple times.

Similarly, while we should not eschew the advancement of technology to improve the wellbeing of our society, and indeed, we should push for more equitable access, we cannot be blind to the ramifications of unintended consequences of adoption without a plan.

History reminds us that these shifts are rarely gradual. Where we have failed in prevention, we must now succeed in adaptation. It is the very least we can do to make up to our coming generations.

### **Conclusion – Reasserting our agency**

Ladies and gentlemen,

It bears stressing the need for communities from the Global South to rally together in these changing times, because we, collectively, whether in Africa, Asia, Central and South America, and other parts of the world, have never been presented with such an opportunity to reshape our roles and place in the global order.

We need more representative and equitable leadership in the regional and global architectures that are taking shape today. Leadership that is both based on collaboration, and accountable to all its stakeholders, not just the powerful and the wealthy.

These are the conversations that we have in parts of Asia, with our likeminded partners in Europe, the Pacific and Latin America, and I believe that it can only be truly complete with Africa in the picture.

Let us move, together, from solidarity to structured and active collaboration — to build bridges not designed elsewhere, but forged by our own hands, in the enduring pursuit of dignity, equity, and shared progress.

Thank you.