

OPENING REMARKS
to be delivered by PR EVANGELINE T. ONG JIMENEZ-DUCROCQ

ASEAN-IPR UNIVERSITY TOUR
27 August 2026, 10:06 AM to 10:15 AM
Leong Hall Auditorium, ADMU

Good morning, everyone.

Secretary Mel Sarmiento, Executive Director Aguinaldo, Dean Jennifer Oreta, AIPR Executive Director and Ambassador Puja, distinguished members of the ASEAN-IPR Governing Council and Advisory Board, colleagues from ASEAN Member States, members of the diplomatic community, faculty members, researchers, and, most especially, our students—welcome to the ASEAN-IPR University Tour 2026.

It is a particular pleasure for me to be here at the Ateneo de Manila University. I say that not only as the Permanent Representative of the Philippines to ASEAN and Chair of the ASEAN-IPR Governing Council, but also as an *Atenean*. I spent my university years here studying Philosophy, and coming back to Ateneo today, in my current capacity, is both personally meaningful and, I must say, a little nostalgic. We had only three buildings during my time, and how this campus has grown.

This growth attests to our continued search for truth and learning, in an institution well known for its teaching of the classical disciplines of philosophy, theology, and literature. Generations of students have since gone on to be leaders in their own fields, but who remained faithful to the excellent tradition of Ateneo for philosophical inquiry, in many ways oriented to the search for virtue, justice, and peace. The name of the university also derives from the Greek goddess of wisdom, Athena.

Ateneo is a fitting partner for the ASEAN Institute for Peace and Reconciliation, which I think is one of ASEAN's most political entities. Let me use a classical definition of politics, which states that it has the best of ends, and its main concern is to engender a certain character in the citizens and to make them good and disposed to perform noble actions. Aristotle qualifies man as suited to live in society and not in isolation, whose fulfillment is

in his participation in political life. ASEAN IPR is animated by the same questions of peace and its enabling conditions, and the state promoting a fulfilled life and a life of virtue for its citizens. At the risk of oversimplifying, more than 2000 years later, as our lives slam against modernity and the fragmenting, isolating impact of technology, these questions remain as germane to our human condition and our political lives as ever.

For those who may not yet be familiar with the ASEAN-IPR, the Institute was formally launched by the ASEAN Leaders on 18 November 2012 on the sidelines of the 21st ASEAN Summit in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. The Institute is dedicated to research and capacity building, extending support to ASEAN Member States and its other mechanisms on issues of peace, reconciliation, conflict management and conflict resolution.

I and fellow Permanent Representatives and Ambassadors of different ASEAN Member States to ASEAN in Jakarta, are here as members of the Institute's Governing Council, the principal governing body of the Institute, providing overall policy direction, guidance, and oversight of its work. May I introduce them individually:

Working alongside the Governing Council is the Advisory Board, who will be introduced by ED Aguinaldo in a while. It provides expert advice and substantive guidance to the Institute, particularly in the areas of research, peacebuilding, conflict prevention, conflict resolution, and reconciliation.

In this way, the two bodies play complementary roles. As Chair of the Governing Council this year, the Philippines is particularly pleased to bring this partnership and regional conversation to Ateneo and to our academic community.

I am especially happy that we are holding this University Tour during the Philippines' ASEAN Chairship in 2026. The Chairship comes to each ASEAN Member State only once every 11 years, and we have sought to use this opportunity to place peace and reconciliation at the heart of our regional political agenda and all throughout the year, to integrate some of our most significant lessons to the pressing issues of the region. This is a natural priority for the Philippines, given our longstanding track record as a peace-loving country and a strong proponent of multilateralism, with our experience in localized

peace building and community based peace processes. We believe that ASEAN's strength lies in its ability to dialogue in the search for consensus, to resolve differences peacefully, and to work together despite our diversity. 2026 also marks the 50th anniversary of the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation, an instrument that contains ASEAN's foundational political values of non aggression, the peaceful settlement of disputes, non interference, respect for sovereignty, and cooperation.

I remember spending long hours as a student trying to internalize ideas that in hindsight seem far removed from the realities of government and diplomacy. But perhaps that is precisely the point. Universities give us the space to ask difficult questions, to challenge assumptions, and to imagine solutions before they become policy. And that is very much in the spirit of what we hope to achieve today.

The University Tour is anchored on a simple but important idea: ***peacebuilding cannot be left only to governments and diplomats***, especially as peace and security challenges are becoming increasingly complex—from geopolitical tensions and maritime disputes, to violent extremism, cyber threats, disinformation, climate insecurity, and social polarization. Addressing these challenges requires not only political decisions, but also a knowledge of history, local conditions, all of which research, dialogue, and critical thinking can unpack.

So we bring ASEAN-IPR to our universities, as an investment in the next generation of ASEAN peacebuilders, policymakers, scholars, and leaders, and to create a space where ideas can move in all directions.

I acknowledge how OPAPRU has brought in the ASEAN–ROK think tank dialogue on the role of universities and research institutions, reflecting how external partnerships are key to ASEAN's peace and security architecture.

Further than just a series of presentations, the innovation of this tour is the Coaching Clinic with the AIPR Secretariat, designed to make this an interactive exchange with university officials, faculty, and students.

In true Socratic tradition, ask questions. Challenge our speakers. Express disagreements but do so respectfully. Diplomacy is, after all, about dialogue—and good dialogue begins with the willingness to listen.

As an Ateneo graduate, I am proud to be part of this endeavor to carry out our responsibilities to society, seeking consensus and addressing conflicts before they escalate. We call peace a process because it is a long, daily, grinding and difficult endeavor of conversations and compromise.

Thank you to Ateneo de Manila University, the Ateneo School of Government, especially to the Office of the Presidential Adviser on Peace, Reconciliation and Unity, the ASEAN-IPR Secretariat, and all our partners for making this initiative possible. Most of all, I thank our students and young participants for being part of this conversation. I hope that we will all leave with a renewed conviction that each of us has a role to play in shaping a more peaceful ASEAN.

It is wonderful to be back in Ateneo. And it is even more meaningful to be back for a conversation about peace.

Thank you very much, and I wish you a productive exchange today.