

Remarks OF PHILIPPINE AMBASSADOR LESLIE J. BAJA
CHAIR, ASEAN COMMITTEE IN RABAT
Iftar, 26 March 2024

Assalamu Alaikum! On behalf of my colleagues from the ASEAN Committee in Rabat or ACR, welcome to this Iftar. We invited you all tonight as representatives of countries which are Dialogue Partners, Development Partners, Sectoral Dialogue Partners of ASEAN and esteemed friends of ACR. Last year, Morocco became the latest Sectoral Dialogue Partner which has strengthened its ties with our region.

As you might know, Islam is the most widely practiced religion in Southeast Asia, numbering approximately 300 million Muslims which is almost 50 percent of the entire population, with majorities in Brunei, Indonesia and Malaysia and a considerable number in Southern Thailand and parts of Mindanao in the Philippines.

Ramadan is a holy month of reflection and devotion, forgiveness and compassion, peace and charity. It is an opportunity not only for Muslims but for members of all faiths and communities to rededicate themselves to the basic values of humanity - selflessness, peace and tolerance.

Iftar is one of the religious observances of Ramadan and is often done as one community. As a religion of tolerance, peace and brotherhood, Islam calls for the showing of love and affection for Muslims and non-Muslims alike, especially during this Holy month. We are thus fortunate to be in Morocco which is a strong advocate of interfaith dialogue and has a long tradition of peaceful co-existence among different faiths.

As we partake of our dinner tonight, let us remember our brothers and sisters Muslims in Gaza, who despite the terrible conflict they find themselves in, are staying true to their faith and observing Ramadan. May the blessings of the Holy month be with them, and may their faith in Allah become even stronger and give them even a tiny glimpse of rewards that await those who believe in Him.

Dear colleagues and friends, thank you once again for honoring our invitation. May this Iftar not just be the partaking of the physical food but most importantly of the spiritual food for our souls. Special thanks to our colleague, Indonesian Ambassador Hasrul Azwar and Madam for once again offering their residence as the venue of our Iftar and to the ACR Working Group for their tireless efforts to make this event possible. Ramadan Kareem!