

SIIA Dinner | Chairman's Message

Welcome to the January 2020 Dinner for Singapore Institute of International Affairs (SIIA). Held annually, the SIIA Dinner is a fund raiser where we bring together donors and friends to support the work that the Institute does.

On behalf of the Singapore Institute of International Affairs (SIIA), our Honorary Members, Advisors, Council and staff, thank you for joining us this evening and, even more, for your kind and generous support for our work and events over the past year. I would also like to extend our appreciation to Mr Dilhan Pillay Sandrasegara, Chief Executive Officer, Temasek International, and Dr Beh Swan Gin, Chairman, Economic Development Board, for taking time to be with us tonight and for addressing our guests.

We open 2020 with the world in flux. While the United States and China have agreed on a “phase one” deal, there is still no concrete conclusion to the Sino-American Trade War. China’s continued exertion of its influence, especially in the technology space, continues to worry leaders. The ongoing Hong Kong protests, along with developments such as US policies in the Middle East, heightens concerns among market observers. Beyond these political and economic developments, the world is also facing a climate emergency. The devastating effects of the forest fires in the Amazon, Australia, and Indonesia have made it even more apparent that we need to take collective action to address the issue of climate change.

As the world grapples with these pressing issues, there is a silver lining taking shape in the form of ASEAN. As a regional bloc, ASEAN is poised for positive growth and may even benefit from global trade tensions. While the countries in our region face many challenges, taken as a group, ASEAN continues to outperform and Singapore as a hub gains by investing and engaging in this regional dynamism.

In the SIIA’s work for 2019 and into the new year, we will continue to share analyses of the key regional economies in the global context. The SIIA has, in 2019, continued this journey of driving dialogue and leading corporates into action. We held the 12th ASEAN and Asia Forum (AAF) and our report, “Sino-American Conflict and ASEAN: Striving, Transforming, Succeeding”, highlighted how ASEAN centrality and collective leadership can act as a bulwark against long-term negative implications of Sino-American conflict. Looking ahead, with many uncertainties, we will focus on the politics and economic policies that matter to corporations and citizens.

Equally important is our work on sustainability. Our flagship has been the Singapore Dialogue on Sustainable World Resources (SDSWR). Launched in 2014, the SDSWR focuses on the haze that has blotted our region for many years. Today, this remains the bull’s eye of our concern, but the context has widened and deepened to deal with the resource sector, consumption, climate change and sustainability.

In May 2019, even before the dry season and the first fires, we released our SIIA Haze Outlook that warned of a serious risk that severe haze would return. In 2020, we will continue with this analysis to provide the region with a risk assessment and predictive tool to galvanise attention and action. We will also look more closely at ESG (Environment, Sustainability and Governance) factors and build on our work on sustainable finance.

With this in mind, the SIIA has themed our dinner “Investing Sustainably Across ASEAN and Asia: Capital and Purpose”. We hope that corporate leaders and professionals will be stirred to action. Beyond what governments do, the SIIA believes it is necessary and vital that corporations and citizens contribute and even bring new initiatives to these concerns. This is not only a charitable cause nor is it public policy but for our self-interest. There is an increasing business case for sustainability for businesses of all types, investors as well as financial institutions.

For 2020, the SIIA will also serve as the chair of the network of “Track II” think tanks in ASEAN. Working with our ASEAN counterparts, the SIIA will seek to catalyse efforts to make our region more integrated, progressive and sustainable.

2020 looks to be an exciting year for the SIIA. Our work is made possible with the support and participation of our members, friends, sponsors and partners. As we strive to continue building on our strengths and be the think tank that leads corporate into action, we look forward to your continued support and engagement with the SIIA.

Thank you and Happy New Year.

Simon Tay
Chairman