



## MEDIA RELEASE

### AJWELP to Support and Empower Women Startups in ASEAN

**Kuala Lumpur, 29 January 2019** – Recognising the importance and contribution of women entrepreneurs, the ASEAN-Japan Centre (AJC) organised the 3<sup>rd</sup> ASEAN-Japan Women Entrepreneurs' Linkage Program (AJWELP) to empower startup women entrepreneurs from 27 - 30 January 2019 in Kuala Lumpur, co-hosted by SME Corporation Malaysia. Supports by companies were announced during the networking reception on 29 January 2019, which was graced by Yang Amat Berhormat Dato' Seri Dr. Wan Azizah Dr. Wan Ismail, Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia who is also Minister of Women, Family and Community Development.

The Governments of the ASEAN Member States and Japan are committed towards promoting the development of SMEs including women entrepreneurs' empowerment towards the enhancement of gender-equal societies. To boost this effort, AJC launched AJWELP, a support programme for startup women entrepreneurs in ASEAN Member States (AMS), to forge linkages among startups, companies and mentors. It was first organised in Manila, the Philippines in 2016, followed by Jakarta, Indonesia in 2017.

The highlight of the 3<sup>rd</sup> AJWELP in Kuala Lumpur was a business presentation 29 January 2019, where startups from all AMS delivered presentations on their respective businesses and challenges, in the presence of representatives from companies and senior entrepreneurs who act as mentors. After the business presentation, company representatives decided which startups they would support, in line with the respective companies' business interests. Entrepreneurs representing each AMS were presented with certificates of attendance after which the result of supports from companies was announced. Some women entrepreneurs from Japan also took part in AJWELP to foster ASEAN-Japan people-to-people exchanges.

AJC believes that supports and mentorship provided by the companies and mentors will be encouraging and useful for the ten startups to further expand their businesses. AJC also hopes that participating startups will eventually become successful entrepreneurs who can be role models for junior fellow startups in the future and contribute to the realisation of a sustainable growth of their societies and improving the role of women.

In Malaysia, women-owned businesses constitute 20.6% (186,930) of total SMEs in Malaysia (907,065) and of this, majority (97.2%) are in the services sectors. Recognising the importance of women entrepreneurship, Malaysia has implemented a number of Government-led initiatives in this regard. In 2018, there were ten (10) women

entrepreneurship programmes implemented with an expenditure amounting to RM2.30 billion which benefitted 364,052 SME recipients in which assistance was provided in terms of intensive training in entrepreneurship, export programmes and financial assistance for women entrepreneurs.

Among the distinguished guests who attended the networking reception were YB Datuk Wira Dr. Mohd Hatta Ramli, Deputy Minister of Entrepreneur Development; Mr. Masataka Fujita, Secretary General, ASEAN-Japan Centre; Datuk Dr. Rose Lena Lazemi, Secretary General, Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development; Ms. Wan Suraya Wan Mohd Radzi, Secretary General, Ministry of Entrepreneur Development; Dato' Sri Syed Hussein Al Habshee, Chairman of SME Corp. Malaysia as well as Mr. Noor Azmi Mat Said, CEO of SME Corp. Malaysia. The event was also attended by Government officials and representatives from embassies of ASEAN Member States and Japan in Malaysia.

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## **About SME Corp. Malaysia**

SME Corp. Malaysia is the Central Coordinating Agency under the Ministry of Entrepreneur Development (MED) that coordinates the implementation of SME Development Programmes across all related Ministries and Agencies. It acts as the central point of reference for research and data dissemination on SMEs, as well as, provides advisory services for SMEs in Malaysia. SME Corp. Malaysia also assumes the role of the Secretariat to the National Entrepreneur and SME Development Council (NESDC) which is chaired by YAB Prime Minister of Malaysia.

## **About ASEAN-Japan Centre**

The ASEAN-Japan Centre is an intergovernmental organization established by the ASEAN Member States and Japan in 1981. It has been promoting exports from ASEAN to Japan while revitalizing investment, tourism as well as people-to-people exchanges between the ASEAN Member States and Japan.

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