

# 2020 CO-CHAIR'S SUMMARY OF THE 32ND ASEAN-AUSTRALIA FORUM ON COVID-19

*Adopted on 18 May 2020*

1. The 32nd ASEAN-Australia Forum was held via videoconference on 18 May 2020 to discuss the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic and our shared commitment to advancing the ASEAN-Australia Strategic Partnership. At a time of global uncertainty, continued cooperation between ASEAN and Australia to promote an open, stable and prosperous region remains vital. In this context, the Forum welcomed the cooperation between ASEAN and Australia on COVID-19 and looked forward to the convening of an ad hoc ASEAN-Australia Foreign Ministers' video conference on COVID-19 in the near future.
2. The Forum was co-chaired by H.E. Dato' Ahmad Rozian Abd Ghani, Director-General, ASEAN-Malaysia National Secretariat of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Malaysia; and Mr Justin Hayhurst, Australian ASEAN Senior Official and Acting Deputy Secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Australia. Representatives from the ASEAN Member States (AMS), Australia and the ASEAN Secretariat (ASEC) participated in the meeting. Australia thanked Malaysia for its ongoing efforts as the Country Coordinator for ASEAN-Australia Dialogue Relations for 2018-2021, and expressed support for Vietnam's ASEAN Chair theme of a "Cohesive and Responsive ASEAN" in 2020.
3. The Forum acknowledged the substantive ASEAN-Australia Strategic Partnership, which reflects our close regional ties, shared aspirations and common interests for the region. The Forum also discussed cooperation to ensure an open, transparent, inclusive and rules-based order in the region, where international law and the rights of all states are respected and upheld. In this regard, Australia reaffirmed its strong commitment to ASEAN Centrality and warmly welcomed the adoption of the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP), which reinforces the rules and norms that underpin the region's sovereignty, peace, stability and prosperity, including by reaffirming shared principles such as ASEAN Centrality, complementarity, openness, transparency, inclusivity, a rules-based framework, equality, mutual respect, mutual trust, mutual benefit and respect for international law. Australia and the AMS agreed to continue working together to advance the AOIP, including through supporting ASEAN initiatives and strengthening practical cooperation with ASEAN in the four key areas defined in the AOIP. ASEAN and Australia's Response to COVID-19
4. The Forum expressed its deepest sympathies and condolences to people around the world who have suffered or lost lives due to COVID-19; and commended all medical professionals, healthcare workers and other frontline personnel for their tireless and brave contribution. ASEAN and Australia committed to work closely together to mitigate the health and socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 and support regional recovery, while still ensuring the safety and security of their citizens. The Forum also reaffirmed the importance of a people-centred approach, upholding and integrating human rights and the principles of non-discrimination, participation and inclusion in their responses to the pandemic.
5. Australia welcomed the successful convening and the outcome of the Special ASEAN Summit on COVID-19 on 14 April 2020, which affirmed ASEAN's determination and commitment to remain united and effectively respond to control the spread of the disease while mitigating its adverse impact on ASEAN people's livelihood, societies and economies, in line with the spirit of a Cohesive and Responsive ASEAN Community.

6. The Forum recalled that as ASEAN's first Dialogue Partner, Australia has long recognised and valued ASEAN's central role in advancing regional peace, stability and prosperity. As in past crises, the vital importance of ASEAN's role has become even more apparent as we work to mitigate the impacts of COVID-19. Addressing the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic is the highest priority for all our governments. Australia reaffirmed its support for ASEAN in taking a central role in advancing an ongoing regional response to COVID-19 and the critical importance of ASEAN-led regional architecture, including the East Asia Summit (EAS), in this regard.
7. The Forum also recognised the well-established networks and platforms under the ASEAN Health Division, and the need to leverage these platforms to address the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Forum reaffirmed the importance of international collaboration and AMS and Australia's shared commitment to work with the World Health Organisation (WHO), other relevant international organisations, international financial institutions, and the broader global community to enhance collective pandemic preparedness and response, and support a sustained economic recovery. Participants noted that WHO is a key partner and has done important work in leading the global response and supporting preparedness in the region. As the world confronts this dangerous pandemic, it is critical that the WHO continues to play a strong and transparent role in addressing this pandemic and other global health emergencies in the future in close consultation with all member states.
8. Given the unprecedented scale of the current crisis and the continued threat of future pandemics, it is vital that the world is able to collectively learn the lessons we need from this crisis so we are better prepared to prevent and respond to similar, or potentially even greater, challenges in the future. AMS noted Australia's call for an independent review of the COVID-19 outbreak in order for the global community to better prepare for future pandemics. The Forum noted that any such review should be independent, impartial, objective and occur at the right time once the immediacy of responding to the COVID-19 outbreak has subsided.
9. The Forum discussed the COVID-19 pandemic and its socio-economic impact on regional communities, health systems, and supply chains, underlining the need for close consultation and cooperation on these impacts and longer-term efforts to build resilience and preparedness. AMS and Australia emphasised their commitment and resolve to strengthen regional efforts for the surveillance, detection and control of COVID-19 in collaboration with partners; sharing of experience and best practices in epidemiological research, clinical treatment, research and development of vaccines, drugs and diagnostics; as well as the importance of timely, transparent and accurate information sharing with the WHO and international partners, to ensure effective risk communications and reporting. The Forum reaffirmed the value of the ASEAN-Australia Strategic Partnership in this regard and welcomed enhanced cooperation to address COVID-19. Australia looked forward to learning more about the ASEAN COVID-19 Response Fund and the ASEAN Regional Medical Reserve.
10. The Forum welcomed AMS and Australian efforts to curb the spread of COVID-19 through public health and other measures to prevent, detect, control and mitigate the disease. Participants agreed to continue sharing best practices and enhancing cooperation to address the pandemic's public health impacts such as through ASEAN- Australia Health Security Fellows' work to boost critical field epidemiology capacity and the Australian Indo-Pacific Centre for Health Security. Participants welcomed collaboration between Australia's premier health and medical research institutions and regional partners on infectious disease prevention, detection, control and response, including in the ASEAN-Pacific Infectious Disease Detection and Response program; and through work to address zoonotic diseases and hygiene practices at live animal wet markets. AMS welcomed Australia's support for global efforts to find a COVID-19 vaccine, and antiviral medicines, and encouraged collaboration in manufacturing the vaccine, once it is developed, to ensure its affordability, equitable access and sufficient amount available in the region.

11. The Forum also welcomed AMS and Australian measures to promote economic stability and resilience in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants reaffirmed their shared commitment: to upholding an inclusive, transparent and rules-based multilateral trading system, open regionalism and rejecting protectionism in response to rising protectionist sentiment; and maintaining effective supply chains to ensure the flow of essential goods such as food, commodities, medical supplies and medicines; and to ensure trade measures taken in response to COVID-19 are targeted, proportionate, transparent, temporary and consistent with World Trade Organization (WTO) rules. The Forum agreed an open, rules-based global trading system and active engagement in WTO reform will be key to global economic recovery.
12. Australia welcomed the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM) Retreat's endorsement on 19 February 2020 of the need for a collective response to the COVID-19 outbreak and its commitment to promoting defence cooperation, including in information sharing and military medicine. Australia looks forward to exploring activities to support the region's response to COVID-19 through its longstanding defence cooperation with ASEAN. Examples included co-chairing with Brunei Darussalam the ASEAN-Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus (ADMM-Plus) Experts Working Group on Military Medicine in 2020-2023 and involvement in the proposed ADMM COVID-19 Table Top Exercise (TTX) on 27 May 2020 within the framework of the ASEAN Centre for Military Medicine.
13. The Forum acknowledged that it is in the mutual interest of ASEAN and Australia to safeguard the safety, health and well-being of their nationals residing in each other's countries. ASEAN and Australia stand ready to provide necessary support and appropriate assistance to nationals of AMS and Australia who visit, stay, work and study in each other's countries if they are affected by the pandemic, and to enable their return should they wish to. In this regard, ASEAN expressed gratitude to the Australian Government for helping ASEAN students studying in Australia during the COVID-19 outbreak.
14. Australia further noted that its development cooperation programs with ASEAN (and several member states) were already pivoting to focus on the impacts of COVID-19. The ASEAN-Australia Development Cooperation Program Phase II (AADCP II) is supporting the development of ASEAN priority logistics routes to sustain and facilitate vital regional supply chains; TRIANGLE in ASEAN is helping thousands of migrant workers who are particularly vulnerable at this uncertain time; the ASEAN-Australia Counter Trafficking Program is mitigating the risk of exploitation and human trafficking for women, children and other vulnerable groups who might be at higher risk due to impacts of COVID-19; the Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia is providing policy advice on mitigating COVID-19 impacts and promoting ASEAN's economic recovery; and Australia is supporting the ASEAN Secretariat (ASEC) to conduct rapid assessments on the impact of COVID-19 focused on 'second wave crises' such as those relating to livelihoods, social welfare, migrant labour, informal workers and other vulnerable groups. The Forum discussed how ASEAN and Australia could further enhance cooperation on the COVID-19 crisis through these and other initiatives.
15. ASEAN and Australia also agreed to work closely together in post-pandemic recovery efforts, including sustaining the normal flow of trade and investment, minimising disruptions to regional and global supply chains, restoring growth and preventing risks posed by the global economic recession.

## Regional and International Issues

16. The Forum reaffirmed the importance of maintaining and promoting peace, stability, maritime safety and security, and freedom of navigation and overflight in the region and other lawful uses of the seas. The Forum took note of concern expressed by some participants over developments in the South China Sea that further complicate the situation and escalate tensions. The Forum further emphasised the importance of non- militarisation and the need to enhance mutual trust and confidence, exercise self- restraint in the conduct of activities, and avoid actions that may complicate the situation. The Forum reaffirmed the need for states to pursue the peaceful resolution of disputes, in accordance with international law, including the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). The Forum emphasised the importance of compliance with the relevant standards and recommended practices of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) and the International Maritime Organization (IMO).
17. The Forum supported full and effective implementation of the Declaration on the Conduct of the Parties in the South China Sea (DOC) in its entirety and noted negotiations towards a Code of Conduct in the South China Sea (COC). Australia expressed its expectation that the COC would be consistent with international law including UNCLOS, not prejudice the interests of third parties, and reinforce and not undermine existing, inclusive regional architecture.
18. Participants also reaffirmed their commitment to further encourage maritime cooperation and to implement the ASEAN-Australia Maritime Cooperation initiatives agreed under the ASEAN-Australia Strategic Partnership (2020-2024).
19. The Forum reaffirmed its support for the complete, verifiable and irreversible denuclearisation of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), and the establishment of permanent peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula in a peaceful manner. The Forum recognised that permanent peace can only be achieved through sustained peaceful dialogue and diplomatic endeavours amongst all parties concerned. The Forum also called on DPRK to refrain from further nuclear and missile tests and re- engage in negotiations. The Forum reiterated its commitment to the full implementation of all relevant UN Security Council Resolutions and underscored the importance of ASEAN-led platforms such as the ARF in promoting a conducive atmosphere to peaceful dialogue amongst the parties concerned.
20. The Forum noted the situation in Rakhine State and welcomed ASEAN's role, including through the work of the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on disaster management (AHA Centre) in carrying out a the needs assessment to identify possible areas of cooperation in Rakhine State to facilitate the repatriation process, as well as the establishment of the Ad-Hoc Support Team of the ASEAN Secretariat. The Forum expressed its readiness to support the repatriation process, and welcomed Myanmar's commitment to: ensuring safety and security for all communities in Rakhine State as effectively as possible; and facilitating the voluntary return of displaced persons to Myanmar in a safe, secure and dignified manner.

## Review of ASEAN-Australia Relations

21. The Forum noted with satisfaction the full implementation of the Plan of Action to Implement the ASEAN-Australia Strategic Partnership (2015-19); and welcomed our Foreign Ministers' adoption in August 2019 of the Plan of Action to Implement the ASEAN-Australia Strategic Partnership (2020-2024). The new Plan of Action reaffirms that ASEAN and Australia are partners with a vital stake in a dynamic region undergoing profound changes. It also helps enhance cooperation to support the ASEAN Community- building and integration processes. It outlines priority areas to intensify our engagement—including in relation to public health—to shape a peaceful, prosperous and rules-based region with ASEAN at its centre.
22. The Forum noted ASEAN's agreement to the proposed annualisation of the ASEAN- Australia Leaders' Summit. Participants looked forward to working together to facilitate the possible announcement of this during the upcoming ASEAN Post-Ministerial Conference (PMC) with Australia in August 2020.

23. The Forum discussed the central role of ASEAN-led regional mechanisms in supporting the rules and norms that have underpinned regional security and stability for more than 50 years, and ways to further enhance ASEAN-Australia cooperation through the EAS, ARF and ADMM-Plus. Participants reaffirmed their shared commitment to continue strengthening the EAS, in its fifteenth anniversary year as the region's premier Leaders-led forum for discussion of strategic challenges. Participants welcomed enhanced ASEAN-Australia defence engagement, with ADMM-Plus now in its tenth year, and welcomed the ASEAN-Australia Informal Defence Ministers' Meeting held in the margins of the ADMM Retreat in Hanoi on 19 February 2020.
24. The Forum welcomed the strong ongoing cooperation between ASEAN and Australia on cyber issues, building on the success of the inaugural ASEAN-Australia Cyber Policy Dialogue in 2018. AMS and Australia looked forward to the next Cyber Policy Dialogue, as well as the EAS cyber capacity building workshop to be co-hosted by Singapore and Australia, subject to COVID-19 developments. Australia will continue to work with the ASEAN Digital Ministers' Meeting, and support ASEAN to develop its cyber and digital agenda, including through the ASEAN-Australia Digital Trade Standards Initiative. The Forum welcomed Australia's ongoing support for ASEAN's connectivity agenda, including through implementing the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity 2025 and establishing a Smart Cities Trust Fund with the Asian Development Bank under the ASEAN-Australia Smart Cities Initiative announced in 2018. This reflected our shared commitment to realising the 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
25. Australia reaffirmed its commitment to working with AMS to counter terrorism and violent extremism, including through the ASEAN Plus Australia Senior Officials Meeting on Transnational Crime consultations. The Forum welcomed the cooperation resulting from the 2018. ASEAN-Australia Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation to Counter International Terrorism and its package of initiatives, including to support development of best practice legislation, and regional dialogue and workshops on topics such as electronic evidence, financial intelligence, and countering online radicalisation.
26. The Forum discussed Australia's longstanding cooperation with ASEAN on law enforcement, customs and immigration to counter transnational crime. Australia expressed appreciation for ASEAN's strong support, including through AMS Foreign Ministers' attendance at the Australian Foreign Minister's launch of the new ASEAN- Australia Counter Trafficking Initiative in August 2019. AMS and Australia reiterated their commitment to the implementation of the 2019 EAS Leaders' Statement on Cooperation to Combat Transnational Crime. The Forum also recognised the importance of the promotion and protection of human rights in the region and welcomed Australia's ongoing engagement with the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights.
27. The Forum affirmed the importance of equal participation and the full involvement of women and girls in global efforts to maintain and promote principles of peace and security to prevent, resolve and recover from conflict; and shared commitment to implement UNSC Resolution 1325, subsequent resolutions on the Women, Peace and Security Agenda, and the 2017 Joint Statement on Promoting Women, Peace and Security in ASEAN. The Forum looked forward to the second ASEAN-Australia Women, Peace and Security Dialogue, which Australia hoped to schedule later in 2020.
28. Australia noted the longstanding importance of ASEAN to Australia's prosperity and economic engagement in the region. In 2018-19, Australia's trade with ASEAN was valued at around \$124 billion, 13.9 per cent of Australia's total trade. ASEAN expressed its hope that Australia could continue to increase its investment in the region. The Forum also noted the need to continue work in expanding the digital economy and the digitisation of supply chains.
29. In this regard, the Forum reiterated the commitment of Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) Participating Countries to sign RCEP in 2020, emphasising the benefit this would provide for a stable, predictable economic environment to support a much-needed recovery of trade and investment in the region.

30. The Forum reflected on the success of the ASEAN-Australia-New Zealand Free Trade Area (AANZFTA) in boosting economic ties and supporting ASEAN's regional economic integration, and looked forward to the commencement of planned upgrade negotiations in 2020 to ensure AANZFTA continues to deliver results for Australian and ASEAN business.
31. The Forum also acknowledged the potential of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) and other stakeholders to play a greater role in regional value chains and implementation of trade agreements. To this end, closer engagement with businesses and other stakeholders was encouraged through the active and sustained implementation of the AANZFTA Business Engagement Strategy 2018-2023.
32. To ensure the effective utilisation of digital technology to stimulate trade and economic development, the Forum encouraged cooperation and information sharing on ICT, including in broadband and mobile telephone connectivity, with support for the implementation of the ASEAN ICT Master Plan 2020 and its successor documents, in line with the new Plan of Action.
33. The Forum also encouraged greater cooperation on reskilling people to develop a digital-ready workforce equipped for the Fourth Industrial Revolution.
34. The Forum noted the importance of developing other economic complementarities between ASEAN and Australia. To this end, the Forum also noted the importance of other sub-regional groupings in ASEAN such as the Brunei-Indonesia-Malaysia- Philippines East ASEAN Growth Area (BIMP-EAGA), the Indonesia-Malaysia-Thailand Growth Triangle (IMT-GT) and the Ayeyawady Chao Phraya Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy (ACMECS) in creating new economic linkages with Australia in order to narrow the development gap throughout ASEAN and ensure no one is left behind.
35. The Forum noted our shared interest in promoting a more resilient and prosperous Mekong sub-region. The Forum welcomed the Mekong sub-regional development as a priority in Viet Nam's ASEAN Chairmanship 2020 and Viet Nam's proposal to convene a Mekong Development Forum in 2020, which will help synergise and align efforts for sustainable development in the Mekong sub-region with the overall development of the ASEAN Community. AMS acknowledged Australia's long history of engagement with Mekong countries and sub-regional architecture and looked forward to greater cooperation between Australia and ASEAN in the Mekong sub-region. AMS and Australia agreed to continue to enhance ASEAN unity and cohesion by advancing efforts to narrow the development gap among AMS, including through the Initiative for ASEAN Integration (IAI), in order to strengthen the ASEAN Community.
36. The Forum noted the importance of connectivity and quality infrastructure for fostering regional cohesion and economic recovery. The Forum also recognised the need to reprioritise projects under MPAC 2025 with a focus on digital infrastructure and digital connectivity in a post-COVID era. Participants welcomed the launch of the Initial Rolling Pipeline of Potential ASEAN Infrastructure Projects, which Australia's Minister for Trade, Tourism and Investment attended alongside ASEAN Foreign Ministers in November 2019.
37. Australia expressed its gratitude to AMS and the ASEAN Secretary General for their support during the recent bushfires, noting many bushfire-affected areas share longstanding, close bonds with the peoples and communities of ASEAN. Despite the challenges, which have been compounded by COVID-19, Australian communities are rebuilding and look forward to continued engagement with the ASEAN community, including to share lessons on scaling up tourism, education, business and investment by sharing marketing and promotions, sharing best practices, exchange of information on business and tourism statistics and investment opportunities, as well as capacity building programs. The Forum agreed that it is necessary to encourage training and advance programs for business and tourism professionals, including MSMEs and other relevant communities, in the wake of crises.

38. The Forum noted the vibrant socio-cultural cooperation between Australia and ASEAN. ASEAN welcomed the success of the 'Australia now ASEAN' public diplomacy program marking the 45th Anniversary of ASEAN-Australia relations in 2019. The Forum recalled our strong people-to-people links and some participants noted the need to continue to invest in human capital development, including in digital literacy and skills and technical and vocational education and training for youth and students. The Forum also welcomed deepening cooperation in education and youth, including through the New Colombo Plan and Australia Awards scholarships. The Forum welcomed the range of other highly successful programs, including the activities of the ASEAN-Australia Council (AAC), and encouraged engagement between the AAC and the ASEAN Foundation to explore ways of enhancing people-to-people exchanges.
39. The Forum discussed shared environmental challenges, particularly climate change, natural disasters and combating marine debris. ASEAN and Australia committed to enhance practical cooperation to combat marine debris, including through implementation of the 2018 EAS Leaders' Statement on Combating Marine Plastic Debris and support for the implementation of the Bangkok Declaration on Combating Marine Debris in ASEAN Region towards achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and 2015 Paris Agreement on Climate Change. ASEAN welcomed Australia's ongoing commitment to support regional disaster responses, including through support to the AHA Centre.
40. The Forum also valued ongoing cooperation to address the broader range of regional health challenges, including through the ASEAN-Australia Regional Health Security Fellowships and assistance to the Asia Pacific Leaders Malaria Alliance.
41. The Forum agreed to take forward the new Plan of Action and emphasised the importance of enhancing cooperation to address the many shared opportunities and challenges facing the region. The Forum recalled our Leaders' shared commitment to ongoing political dialogue and reaffirmed the importance of regular ASEAN-Australia leader-level dialogue in this regard. The Forum looked forward to the next ASEAN- Australia Leaders' Summit scheduled to be held in November 2020 in Ha Noi, Viet Nam. Australia expressed its intention to pursue an ambitious joint leaders' statement at that Summit to mark a new era in our Strategic Partnership, and reflect Australia's substantial cooperation with ASEAN, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 response and recovery.