

# 2021 CO-CHAIR'S SUMMARY OF THE 33<sup>RD</sup> ASEAN-AUSTRALIA FORUM

*Adopted on 17 March 2021*

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## **2021 CO-CHAIR'S SUMMARY OF THE 33<sup>RD</sup> ASEAN-AUSTRALIA FORUM**

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1. The 33rd ASEAN-Australia Forum was held via videoconference on 17 March 2021 to discuss ASEAN and Australia's shared commitment to progressing the ASEAN-Australia Strategic Partnership, advancing our region's comprehensive recovery from COVID-19, and addressing other shared regional and international challenges.
2. The Forum was co-chaired by HE Dato' Sri Muhammad Shahrul Ikram Yaakob, Malaysian ASEAN Senior Official and Secretary General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Malaysia; and HE Mr Justin Hayhurst, Australian ASEAN Senior Official and Deputy Secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Australia. The Forum was attended by Senior Officials or representatives from ASEAN Member States, Australia, and the ASEAN Secretariat (ASEC). Australia thanked Malaysia for its ongoing efforts as the Country Coordinator for ASEAN-Australia Dialogue Relations for 2018-2021 and expressed support for Brunei Darussalam's priorities and deliverables under its ASEAN Chairmanship theme of "We Care, We Prepare, We Prosper".
3. Participants agreed that ASEAN-Australia relations reflected the many threads that draw them together: their geography, their peoples, their economies, and their shared aspirations for the region. The Forum recognised that a strong, cohesive and responsive ASEAN is vital to the region's success and that ASEAN and Australia are enduring partners for a peaceful, open, inclusive, prosperous and resilient region where international law and the rules-based regional architecture are respected and upheld.
4. The Forum recognised Australia's commitment to ASEAN Centrality and its commitment to working constructively with ASEAN and through ASEAN-led mechanisms to support the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP), which reinforces the rules and norms that underpin the region's peace, stability, and prosperity. The Forum welcomed Australia's cooperation with ASEAN to advance practical implementation of the AOIP under its four priority areas of cooperation, including maritime cooperation, connectivity, the UN Sustainable Development Goals 2030 (SDGs), and economic and other possible areas of cooperation including through East Asia Summit mechanisms.
5. In this regard, in addition to Australia's approximately AUD1 billion annual development assistance to Southeast Asia, the Forum welcomed the implementation of Australia's approximately AUD500 million investment in new development, economic and security measures announced by Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison at the Second ASEAN-Australia Biennial Summit on 14 November 2020 via videoconference, to support regional COVID-19 recovery and enhanced partnership in line with AOIP priorities. These investments, alongside the region's vaccine access and health security initiative which Australia has committed AUD532.3 million to promote access to safe, effective and affordable COVID-19 vaccines in the Indo-Pacific and the AUD1.5 billion loan to Indonesia to support fiscal stability, represent Australia's most significant package of support for Southeast Asia since the Indian Ocean Tsunami in 2004.

6. The Forum recognised the unprecedented challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic and expressed condolences for the loss of lives and livelihoods around the world. Participants affirmed the importance of an open, inclusive, transparent, and rules-based approach in responding to the pandemic, including addressing the spread of disinformation and misinformation on COVID-19. The Forum acknowledged the leading role of the World Health Organisation (WHO) and welcomed the resolution on the COVID-19 response, adopted at the 73rd World Health Assembly in May 2020. The Forum noted the importance of further strengthening multilateral cooperation to support recovery, including equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines. In this regard, the Forum noted contributions from Australia and ASEAN Member States to global efforts to combat COVID-19, including via the COVAX Facility and COVAX Advance Market Commitment.
7. Australia reaffirmed its support for ASEAN's central role in advancing the region's collective approach to comprehensive recovery from COVID-19 and the critical importance of ASEAN-led regional architecture, particularly the East Asia Summit (EAS) including the implementation of the Manila Plan of Action to Advance the Phnom Penh Declaration on the East Asia Summit Development Initiative, in this regard. The Forum welcomed Australia's co-sponsorship of the EAS Health Experts' Meeting on COVID-19 co-chaired by Indonesia and Vietnam on 14 October 2020, as well as Australia's co-sponsorship of Vietnam's ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) Statement on Enhancing Cooperation to Prevent and Respond to Infectious Disease Outbreaks, together with New Zealand.
8. Participants affirmed the Leaders' commitment to maintaining a strong partnership for recovery in line with the Joint Statement of the Second ASEAN-Australia Biennial Summit. The Forum welcomed ASEAN and Australia's commitment to continue working closely under Australia's Partnerships for Recovery policy to help ASEAN bolster health security, stability and inclusive economic recovery in the region – acknowledging the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on women and children as well as those who have been made most vulnerable in the region – including via implementation of AUD83 million in ASEAN-Australia initiatives announced by Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs Marise Payne in 2020.
9. The Forum welcomed the adoption of the ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework and its Implementation Plan and welcomed Australia's support to establish a monitoring and implementation unit the ACRF Support Unit within the ASEAN Secretariat and its commitment of AUD1 million to support the Framework's successful implementation.

#### **REVIEW OF ASEAN-AUSTRALIA RELATIONS**

10. The Forum noted with satisfaction the significant progress in the implementation of the Plan of Action to Implement the ASEAN-Australia Strategic Partnership (2020-2024) across all ASEAN pillars in its first year of implementation.
11. As a reflection of the breadth and depth of our relationship, the Forum welcomed ASEAN and Australia Leaders' decision to convene annual ASEAN-Australia Summits, marking a new chapter in relations, and looked forward to the first annual summit in October 2021.
12. At a time of continued global uncertainty and strategic change, the Forum recognised the importance of further enhancing the ASEAN-Australia Strategic Partnership to support dialogue and constructive cooperation to harness opportunities and address shared challenges in our region.

13. The Forum discussed ways to further enhance ASEAN-Australia cooperation through the EAS, ARF and ADMM-Plus. Participants reaffirmed their shared commitment to continue strengthening the EAS, as the region's premier Leader-led forum for dialogue on broad strategic, political and economic issues of common interest and concern and welcomed the EAS' role in shaping the region's response to the pandemic. The Forum welcomed Australia's active engagement in ASEAN-led architecture, including Australia's co-chairing of the 2021 ARF Inter-Sessional Support Group Meeting on Confidence-Building Measures and Preventive Diplomacy with Brunei Darussalam, and ongoing co-chairing of the ARF maritime security workstream alongside Viet Nam.
14. The Forum noted the need to address risks to stability flowing from the pandemic and welcomed Australia's enhanced support to address shared security challenges, via the ASEAN-Australia Political Security Partnership and additional support to promote stable and resilient communities through safe, orderly and regular migration and supporting vulnerable and migrant worker communities in the context of the pandemic, including through additional support for the TRIANGLE in ASEAN program. The Forum welcomed cooperation to promote inclusive recovery, including Australia's support for new research to inform how ASEAN's COVID-19 response can support the specific needs of women and children and further support for the Disability Rights in ASEAN (DRiA) initiative to support the ASEAN Enabling Masterplan 2025.
15. The Forum welcomed continued ASEAN-Australia defence cooperation, including via the ARF and ADMM-Plus, and Australia's co-chairing of the ADMM-Plus Experts' Working Group on Military Medicine from 2021 to 2024 with Brunei Darussalam. Participants noted Australia's 2020 Vision for Defence Engagement with ASEAN and welcomed Australia's investment in further defence cooperation on military education, infectious diseases, cyber resilience, maritime security, and English language training as well as the expansion of Australia's Defence Adviser and Defence Attaché network to all ASEAN Member States, as announced by Prime Minister Morrison at the Second ASEAN-Australia Biennial Summit in November 2020. The Forum noted Australia's proposal for a second ASEAN-Australia Informal Defence Ministers' Meeting in 2021, building on the success of the first informal dialogue in 2020.
16. The Forum reaffirmed the importance of peaceful use of seas and oceans, including the right of all States to freedom of navigation and overflight for our region's security and prosperity, and the peaceful resolution of disputes, in accordance with the universally recognised principles of international law, including the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. Participants welcomed ongoing cooperation to address maritime challenges including crimes at sea such as piracy and armed robbery against ships as well as to promote the sustainable development of the seas and oceans, including addressing the issue of marine pollution. The Forum encouraged efforts to implement EAS Leaders' commitment to enhance regional maritime security cooperation, including through the implementation of the EAS Leaders' Statement on Enhancing Regional Maritime Cooperation and the EAS Leaders' Statement on Marine Sustainability, and noted Australia's co-chairing with India and Indonesia of the 4th EAS Conference on Maritime Security, 6-7 February 2020 in Chennai, India.

17. The Forum welcomed the strong ongoing cooperation between ASEAN and Australia on cybersecurity and promote voluntary and non-binding norms of responsible state behaviour in cyberspace, building on the success of the inaugural ASEAN-Australia Cyber Policy Dialogue in 2018. Participants looked forward to the convening of the next Cyber Policy Dialogue. Australia thanked Singapore for co-chairing the EAS Workshop on 'Regional Cyber Capacity Building: Seizing the Fourth Industrial Revolution' on 21-22 September 2020, which gave effect to the 2018 EAS Leaders' Statement on Deepening Cooperation in the Security of Information and Communications Technologies and of the Digital Economy, proposed by Singapore and co-sponsored by Australia. The Forum noted Australia's nomination to co-chair the ARF Inter-Sessional Meeting on Security of and in the Use of Information and Communications Technologies (ISM on ICTs) from 2021-24.
18. The Forum reaffirmed its commitment to countering terrorism and violent extremism in the region, including through the implementation of the 2018 ASEAN-Australia Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation to Counter International Terrorism. The Forum looked forward to inaugurating an ASEAN-Australia Dialogue on Counter-terrorism to further our collaboration.
19. The Forum discussed Australia's long-standing cooperation with ASEAN on law enforcement, customs and immigration to counter trafficking in persons, illicit drugs and online child exploitation, and other transnational crimes, including through the ASEAN-Australia Counter-Trafficking Initiative (ASEAN ACT) and continued dialogue via the ASEAN Plus Australia Senior Officials Meeting on Transnational Crime.
20. The Forum also recognised the importance of promoting and protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms in the region, particularly as the region responds to the pandemic, and welcomed Australia's ongoing engagement with the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR).
21. The Forum noted the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the escalation of violence against women and children, and the erosion of gender equality gains in the region. In this regard, the Forum is committed to prevent and respond to increased violence against women and children and promote an equitable, inclusive and gender sensitive response and central role for women in regional recovery efforts and noted the importance of increasing women's economic participation and empowerment. The Forum discussed the shared commitment to implement the Women, Peace and Security Agenda in ASEAN, including via the convening of the second ASEAN-Australia Women, Peace and Security Dialogue, to be held in 2021.
22. The Forum recognised that ASEAN and Australia are significant economic partners. Total two-way trade between ASEAN and Australia amounted to over AUD100 billion in 2019–2020 and two-way investment amounted cumulatively to over AUD250 billion in 2019.
23. The Forum welcomed ASEAN Member States and Australia's measures to continue promoting economic stability and resilience. Participants reaffirmed shared commitment to reject protectionism, maintain effective supply chains and ensure 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 reaffirmed enduring commitment to free and open markets for trade and investment and underlined the critical importance of the rules-based multilateral trading system—with the WTO at its core—to global economic recovery.

24. The Forum welcomed the signing of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) Agreement in November 2020, as a signal of support for the multilateral rules-based trading system that will further support a stable, predictable economic environment to support a much-needed recovery of trade and investment in the region. Participants committed to ensuring the RCEP becomes an effective mechanism for deepening economic integration, in line with the AOIP. The Forum urged continuing efforts by RCEP signatories to continue to exert best efforts to ensure the entry into force of the RCEP by 1 January 2022.
25. The Forum welcomed progress to upgrade the Agreement Establishing the ASEAN Australia New Zealand Free Trade Area (AANZFTA) to ensure that it continues to deliver results for ASEAN and Australian businesses and to maximise its contribution to regional economic recovery. The Forum also welcomed Australia's ongoing commitment to working with ASEAN Member States to implement RCEP and AANZFTA commitments through the AUD46 million Regional Trade for Development Initiative, announced in November 2020.
26. The Forum discussed the importance of people-to-people connectivity in safeguarding supply chains, enhancing regional cooperation, and maintaining stability. Participants agreed to continue sharing information and experiences and to work closely to restore logistic routes and travel links, including for international students, business travellers and other priority cohorts as the health situation allows.
27. The Forum noted ongoing cooperation to support ASEAN's inclusive economic recovery and further regional economic integration, including through supporting implementation and monitoring of the ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework. Participants welcomed Australia's commitment of AUD57 million for a successor to Australia's flagship economic cooperation program, the ASEAN-Australia Development Cooperation Program Phase II (AADCP II), to continue supporting ASEAN's priorities on connectivity, regional integration and narrowing the development gap including through support for the implementation of the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity 2025 (MPAC 2025), Initiative for ASEAN Integration Workplan IV, digital transformation, response to the fourth industrial revolution, closer sectoral integration and private sector engagement.
28. The Forum discussed the importance of a strong digital economy, including safe, secure, and trusted digital infrastructure and digital connectivity to facilitate our region's strong economic recovery. Participants welcomed ongoing cooperation to boost ASEAN's digital transformation, harness digital economy opportunities, bridge the divide for women's access to and meaningful participation in the digital economy, and support the development of digital-ready infrastructures, workforces and cities, including through the extended ASEAN-Australia Digital Trade Standards Initiative and the utilisation of the ASEAN Smart Cities Network (ASCN), the ASEAN Sustainable Urbanisation Strategy and the ASEAN-Australia Smart Cities Initiative. In this regard, the Forum took note of the initiative to hold an ASEAN Creative Economy Business Forum in 2021 and looked forward to Dialogue Partners support including from Australia to harness ASEAN's creative economy and digital economy potential towards economic recovery.

29. The Forum recognised the importance of narrowing the development gap within and between ASEAN for a resilient and prosperous region by strengthening sub-regional development including through Australia's long history of engagement with Mekong countries and sub-regional architecture and continued cooperation to support the development and implementation of the Initiative for ASEAN Integration Work Plan IV (2021-2025). The Forum noted the importance of promoting equitable and sustainable development across the ASEAN Community by aligning sub-regional growth with the comprehensive development of ASEAN, in line with ASEAN Centrality and unity. The Forum welcomed Australia's new investments to promote quality infrastructure, sustainable water resources management, combat transnational crime, further scholarship opportunities and strengthen technology capabilities to support economic integration and development in the Mekong sub-region, under the AUD232 million Mekong-Australia Partnership, announced by Prime Minister Morrison in November 2020. The Forum also expressed hope for further engagement between Australia and the BIMP-EAGA.
30. The Forum discussed opportunities to enhance dialogue between our treasury officials, including on issues such as regulating foreign investment as well as working to promote greater debt transparency, strengthen debt management and further develop sustainable financing to support long-term resilient development in our region.
31. The Forum reaffirmed the need to work closely to strengthen public health systems and prevent future pandemics. Participants reaffirmed the value of sharing of information, lessons learned and best practice among ASEAN and Australian health experts on COVID-19 response, pandemic preparedness, vaccines and health security, including mental health, and discussed opportunities for further dialogue among ASEAN and Australian health experts in 2021, building on the success of the inaugural ASEAN-Australia Health Experts' Meeting in July 2020.
32. The Forum welcomed enhanced ASEAN-Australia cooperation in the health sector, to respond to the health impacts of COVID-19 via Australia's commitment of AUD1 million to the COVID-19 ASEAN Response Fund and AUD21 million to work in partnership with Japan to support the establishment and sustainable operation of the ASEAN Centre for Public Health Emergencies and Emerging Diseases, (ACPHEED) recognising the importance of ASEAN-led responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Forum discussed the progress of the AUD5 million ASEAN Australia Health Security Initiative promoting the One Health approach, combining animal, human and environmental health, in the ASEAN region through capacity building and support for ASEAN-led mechanisms. The Forum recognised the work of the ASEAN-Australia Health Security Fellowships program, an initiative of the ASEAN-Australia Special Summit in 2018, to expand field epidemiology capacity in the region to address disease outbreaks, and recognised the valuable contribution of the fellows to their national COVID-19 responses.
33. The Forum also valued ongoing cooperation to address the broader range of regional health challenges, including malaria via Australia's continued funding support for the Asia-Pacific Leaders' Malaria Alliance (APLMA), including to implement the Asia Pacific Leaders' Malaria Elimination Roadmap and the 2012 EAS Declaration on Regional Responses to Malaria Control and Addressing Resistance to Anti-malaria Medicines as well as preparation of the five-year progress report to the 15th EAS on 14 November 2020. The Forum appreciated the opportunity for Australia and ASEAN to work together on mental health in the EAS.

34. The Forum recalled our strong people-to-people links, and long-running cooperation in education, including through the New Colombo Plan and Australia Awards scholarships, which continued to provide opportunities for ASEAN and Australian students, including via online programs, as soon as health conditions and associated travel restrictions allowed. The Forum encouraged further cooperation to support Technical and Vocational Education Training (TVET), as stipulated in the Plan of Action 2020-2024 to enhance ASEAN's capacity towards economic recovery. Participants acknowledged the contribution of other education, sports, arts and cultural programmes between ASEAN and Australia, including the activities supported by the ASEAN-Australia Council, which continue to deepen social and cultural linkages, support interfaith dialogue, and further strengthen long-standing people-to-people links between ASEAN and Australia.
35. The Forum discussed shared environmental challenges, including climate change, natural disasters and protecting the health and biodiversity of our oceans. ASEAN and Australia committed to enhancing practical cooperation to protect oceans and 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 and the ASEAN Framework of Action on Marine Debris. In this regard, participants noted Australia's commitment to phase out recyclable waste exports and welcomed opportunities to work together in promoting a circular economy. The Forum noted that Australia was working with India and Singapore to convene an EAS Workshop on Combatting Marine Pollution, especially Marine Plastic Debris. Participants discussed actions to address the adverse effects of climate change in line with the goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement.
36. ASEAN welcomed Australia's ongoing assistance to enhance ASEAN's resilience and capacity to respond to natural disasters, including support for the implementation of the new ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response (AADMER) Work Programme 2021-2025 and the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on disaster management (AHA Centre).
37. The Forum reaffirmed the commitment to continue exploring ways to provide capacity-building assistance to Timor-Leste, especially through participation in non-policy making activities in ASEAN. The Forum looked forward to the convening of the ASEAN Economic Community and ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Fact-Finding Missions, when circumstances surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic allow, after which a comprehensive assessment report of Timor-Leste's application for ASEAN membership would be developed.
38. The Forum looked forward to the next ASEAN-Australia Leaders' Summit to be held in October 2021 and welcomed efforts to further enhance the ASEAN-Australia Strategic Partnership. ASEAN acknowledged the proposal to elevate the ASEAN-Australia dialogue relations to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership level and agreed for the ASEAN Committee of Permanent Representatives in Jakarta to undertake further consultations on the proposal.

### **REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL ISSUES**

39. The Forum reaffirmed the importance of maintaining and promoting peace, stability, maritime safety and security, freedom of navigation and overflight in the region, and other lawful uses of the seas. The Forum took note of concerns expressed by some participants over developments in the South China Sea that may further complicate the situation, escalate tensions and undermine peace and stability in the region. 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 to pursue the peaceful resolution of disputes, in accordance with the universally recognised principles of international law, including the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).



The Forum emphasised the importance of compliance with the Standards and Recommended Practices of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) and the relevant instruments and conventions of the International Maritime Organization (IMO).

40. The Forum reaffirmed its support for the complete, verifiable, and irreversible denuclearisation of the DPRK and the importance of continued peaceful dialogue and diplomatic endeavours among all concerned parties in order to realise permanent peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula. The Forum also called on the 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.
  
41. The Forum discussed the current situation in Myanmar and welcomed the convening of the Informal ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting on 2 March 2021. The Forum noted the ASEAN Chairman's Statement on the Developments in the Republic of the Union of Myanmar issued on 1 February 2021 and the ASEAN Chair's Statement on the Informal ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on 2 March 2021 which expressed concern over the situation in Myanmar; reiterated the importance of political stability in all ASEAN Member States for a peaceful, stable and prosperous ASEAN Community; called on all relevant parties to exercise utmost restraint and refrain from further violence; and recalled the purposes and principles of the ASEAN Charter, including adherence to the rule of law, good governance, the principles of democracy and, respect for fundamental freedoms and promotion and protection of human rights. The Forum reaffirmed its support for ASEAN Centrality and unity and the ongoing diplomatic efforts in peacefully resolving the situation in Myanmar. ASEAN also expressed its readiness to assist Myanmar in a positive, peaceful, and constructive manner, including allowing Myanmar space and the self-determination to conduct its democratic processes in line with the will of the people. The Forum looked forward to the early stabilisation of the situation in Myanmar for the interests of the people of Myanmar as well as for peace and stability of the region. The Forum reiterated its support for the central role of ASEAN in this regard and looked forward to furthering constructive engagement by ASEAN via ASEAN-led mechanisms on this matter. Australia noted its long-standing support for the democratic transition and development of Myanmar. It expressed deep concern at the recent loss of life and violence in Myanmar and called on the military to respect the rule of law, to resolve disputes peacefully through lawful mechanisms and to release immediately all civilian leaders and others who have been arbitrarily detained. Australia called on the Myanmar military to engage in dialogue to support a return to democracy and reconciliation.