

# 2021 ASEAN LEADERS' DECLARATION ON UPHOLDING MULTILATERALISM

*Issued on 26 October 2021*

**WE**, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), namely Brunei Darussalam, the Kingdom of Cambodia, the Republic of Indonesia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, the Republic of the Philippines, the Republic of Singapore, the Kingdom of Thailand, and the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam, on the occasion of the 38th ASEAN Summit on 26 October 2021;

**COGNISANT** of the ASEAN Community Vision 2025, ASEAN Centrality and unity in the evolving regional architecture, and the need for ASEAN to take a proactive role to uphold development of regional and international norms, rules, principles, and values in effectively dealing with global and regional issues of common concern and interest, and in promoting dialogue, confidence building, and cooperation for peace, security, stability and prosperity in the region and beyond;

**REAFFIRMING** our belief that regionalism and multilateralism are important principles and frameworks of cooperation, and that their strength and value lie in their rules-based nature, inclusivity, transparency and openness, based on mutual benefit and respect;

**RECOGNISING** the increasingly complex and cross-cutting challenges the region continues to face, arising from geopolitical shifts, protectionism, complex transnational threats, regional conflicts, climate change and rapid technological change, which are exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and its adverse impact on our peoples' livelihoods and well-being, societies and economies; and

**FURTHER RECOGNISING** the interconnectedness and vulnerabilities brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has reaffirmed the critical importance of staying united in our shared Community and the urgent need to have a coherent, people-centred, multi-sectoral, multi-stakeholder and whole-of-ASEAN Community approach in ensuring ASEAN's timely and effective response to any global and regional threats and crises.

## **HEREBY DECLARE TO:**

1. **REAFFIRM** ASEAN's commitment to strengthen its Community by focusing on providing the necessary tools to benefit and protect all our peoples, through multilateral initiatives that will enhance ASEAN's resilience to navigate and effectively respond to emerging challenges, inter alia, by promoting maritime security and safety, supporting economic growth and the multilateral trading system, developing essential infrastructure, shaping digital transformation, enhancing climate action, and strengthening a comprehensive recovery, in-line with Brunei Darussalam's ASEAN 2021 Chairmanship theme of "We Care, We Prepare, We Prosper";
2. **REITERATE** the need for ASEAN to remain united, cohesive, and resilient in promoting its purposes and principles as enshrined in the ASEAN Charter and the commitment to support multilateralism founded on the principles stipulated in the Charter of the United Nations and on the basis of international law, which is the indispensable foundation of a more peaceful, prosperous and just world, as well as emphasising a committed multilateral approach in responding to emerging opportunities and challenges and actively shaping a rules-based regional architecture that is capable of tackling pressing common regional and global issues;

3. **EMPHASISE** ASEAN's shared commitment to maintaining and promoting peace, security, and stability in the region, as well as to the peaceful resolution of disputes, including full respect for legal and diplomatic processes, without resorting to the threat or use of force, in accordance with the universally recognised principles of international law, including the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS);
4. **STRENGTHEN** ASEAN Centrality and unity in ASEAN's constructive engagement with its external partners, through ASEAN-led mechanisms such as the ASEAN Plus-One, ASEAN Plus Three (APT), East Asia Summit (EAS), ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus (ADMM-Plus), in building mutual trust and confidence as well as reinforcing an open, transparent, inclusive and rules-based regional architecture with ASEAN at the centre;
5. **REAFFIRM** the objectives and principles of the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP), which provides a guide for ASEAN's engagement in the wider Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean regions and commit to realise the key elements of the AOIP through practical cooperation on the four identified priority areas, namely maritime cooperation, connectivity, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), economic and other possible areas of cooperation, while encouraging external partners to support and undertake cooperation with ASEAN, in accordance with the principles contained in the Outlook to promote mutual trust, mutual respect, and mutual benefit through ASEAN-led mechanisms, thereby contributing to peace, stability and prosperity in the region;
6. **REAFFIRM** the importance of multilateralism and the significance of ASEAN's partnerships with other external partners including regional and international organisations, such as the United Nations, to address global concerns, pursue shared goals and complementary initiatives, narrow the development gap, enhance sub-regional development, and promote sustainable development and inclusive growth for the benefit of our peoples, including through the effective realisation of the complementarities between the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 and the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;
7. **REITERATE** ASEAN's strong support for an open, inclusive, transparent, and non-discriminatory rules-based multilateral trading system with the World Trade Organization (WTO) at its centre that is responsive to the changing economic realities and promotes a more globally competitive ASEAN, including through the early entry into force of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) agreement and the full implementation of the various ASEAN-Plus One Free Trade Agreements;
8. **PROMOTE** a set of common voluntary and non-binding cyber norms of responsible State behaviour in cyberspace towards the eventual development of a rules-based multilateral order for cyberspace that is open, secure, stable, interoperable, peaceful, resilient, and accessible, which will serve as a key enabler for an inclusive digital economy;
9. **REAFFIRM** our commitment to a people-oriented and people-centred Community that embodies an adaptive spirit of preparedness and resilience, including by strengthening multilateral cooperation and partnerships on environmental protection, conservation and restoration with greater efforts to address cross-cutting issues for sustainable and resilient development, among others in the areas of marine debris, climate change, low-carbon energy transition, sustainable water management, biodiversity conservation, food security, transboundary haze pollution, and waste management; as well as commitment to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Paris Agreement, in particular the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities, in light of different national circumstances and capabilities;

10. **PROMOTE** synchronisation, complementarities and synergy of undertakings on cross-cutting issues such as climate action, environmental protection and cybersecurity across various relevant multilateral and regional fora and frameworks, to address the shared impacts and implications of these interconnected challenges on critical infrastructures including on key sectors such as water, food and energy to ensure human security;
11. **REAFFIRM** our commitment to be an adaptable and agile ASEAN Community that is ready to support initiatives and programmes, that reinforces international cooperation in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and future public health emergencies, and strengthen cooperation towards improving our global public health system, ensuring equitable access to medicines for COVID-19, and making extensive immunisation against COVID-19 available and affordable to all as a global public good towards a robust, sustainable, comprehensive, and resilient recovery;
12. **ENCOURAGE** further cooperation across all three pillars of the ASEAN Community and among relevant stakeholders to continue efforts in improving the coordination of cross-sectoral and cross-pillar issues through initiatives such as the Strategic and Holistic Initiative to Link ASEAN Responses to Emergencies and Disasters (ASEAN SHIELD); strengthening the overall functioning of the ASEAN Secretariat and all ASEAN Sectoral Bodies; and ensuring the effectiveness of ASEAN's mechanisms towards realising the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 and developing the ASEAN Community's Post-2025 Vision; and
13. **STRENGTHEN** ASEAN's institutions by further emphasising on the improvement of the efficiency of ASEAN's processes and working methods, as well as improving ASEAN's capacity and institutional effectiveness, along with bolstering existing centres and facilities to deepen Community-building efforts within ASEAN and with external partners, and further underline ASEAN Centrality and unity that will further deepen ASEAN's political, economic and social ties in the region and beyond.

**ADOPTED** on the Twenty-sixth Day of October in the Year Two Thousand and Twenty-One in a single original copy in the English language.