

# 2024 PRESS STATEMENT BY THE CHAIR OF THE ASEAN FOREIGN MINISTERS' RETREAT

*Issued in Luang Prabang, Lao PDR on 29 January 2024*

1. The ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Retreat (AMM Retreat) under the Chairmanship of H.E. Mr. Saleumxay KOMMASITH, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Lao PDR was convened on 29 January 2024, in Luang Prabang, Lao PDR to kick off the Lao PDR's Chairmanship of ASEAN 2024, under the theme "ASEAN: Enhancing Connectivity and Resilience." The AMM Retreat was also attended by Foreign Minister of Timor-Leste as Observer.
2. We had in-depth discussions on the implementation of the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 and priorities for the Lao PDR's ASEAN Chairmanship 2024, and on concrete and sustainable ways to further strengthen the ASEAN Community, ASEAN unity, Centrality, and resilience amidst regional and global challenges. We also exchanged views on ASEAN's external relations and recent regional and international developments of common interest and concern. We reaffirmed ASEAN's key principles, as well as reiterated the importance of shared values and norms, as enshrined in the ASEAN Charter and other key fundamental instruments of ASEAN.
3. We reiterated our strong commitment to upholding regionalism and multilateralism and emphasised the importance of adhering to key principles, shared values and norms enshrined in the UN Charter, the ASEAN Charter, the Declaration on Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality, the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC), the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), the Treaty on the Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone (SEANWFZ), the 2011 Declaration on the East Asia Summit on the Principles for Mutually Beneficial Relations and the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP).
4. We reaffirmed our 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 UNCLOS.
5. We acknowledged the good progress in, and reaffirmed our commitment to, the implementation and realisation of the ASEAN Community Vision 2025, including the three ASEAN Community Blueprints, the Masterplan on ASEAN Connectivity 2025 (MPAC) and the Initiative for ASEAN Integration (IAI) Work Plan IV. We noted that so far 99% action lines of the APSC Blueprint have been addressed, while 97% of the strategic measures of the ASCC Blueprint 2025 and 92% of action lines in the AEC Blueprint 2025 have been completed or are in progress. In this regard, we looked forward to the comprehensive and holistic end-of-term review and evaluation of the ASEAN Community Vision 2025.
6. We commended the High-Level Task Force on ASEAN Community's Post-2025 Vision (HLTF-ACV) for the development of the draft ASEAN Community Vision 2045: Resilient, Innovative, Dynamic, and People-Centred ASEAN, which was noted by the ASEAN Leaders at the 43rd ASEAN Summit. We looked forward to substantive progress in the development of the ASEAN Political-Security Community Strategic Plan, the ASEAN Economic Community Strategic Plan, the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Strategic Plan, and the ASEAN Connectivity Strategic Plan during the Lao PDR's ASEAN Chairmanship 2024. The Vision and its strategic plans will further be adopted in 2025.

7. We underscored the importance of an inclusive and holistic approach in the development of the strategic plans and in this regard, encouraged further consultations with relevant stakeholders across the three pillars of ASEAN Community on cross-cutting issues.
8. We supported the Lao PDR's priorities for its ASEAN Chairmanship 2024 centred on two components, namely "Enhancing Connectivity" and "Enhancing Resilience". Under "Enhancing Connectivity", there are four priorities, namely (1) Integrating and Connecting Economies, (2) Forging an Inclusive and Sustainable Future, (3) Transforming for the Digital Future, and (4) Culture and Arts: Promoting the Role of ASEAN Culture and the Arts for Inclusion and Sustainability. Under "Enhancing Resilience", there are five priorities, namely (1) Development of strategic plans to implement the ASEAN Community Vision 2045, (2) Enhancing ASEAN Centrality, (3) Promoting Environmental Cooperation: Climate Change Resilience, (4) Women and Children: Promoting the Role of Women and Children Towards the Transformation of Behaviourism in ASEAN, and (5) Health: Transforming ASEAN Health Development Resilience in a New Context. We also welcomed the Lao PDR's Priority Economic Deliverables for its Chairmanship, including making progress on the establishment of the ASEAN Power Grid.
9. We were encouraged by Timor-Leste's continued commitment to the implementation of the Roadmap for Timor-Leste's Full Membership in ASEAN adopted at the 42nd ASEAN Summit, including through its participation as an observer in ASEAN meetings and activities at all levels. We reaffirmed our commitment to continue providing capacity building assistance to Timor-Leste, as well as to engage ASEAN's Dialogue Partners and other external partners to support Timor-Leste.
10. We welcomed the successful convening of the 5th ASEAN Human Rights Dialogue in Jakarta on 6 November 2023 and looked forward to the regular convening of the ASEAN Human Rights Dialogue, as agreed by our Leaders in the 43rd ASEAN Summit, including the 6th ASEAN Human Rights Dialogue in 2024.
11. We are committed to implementing the ASEAN Blue Economy Framework through the establishment of the ASEAN Coordinating Task Force on Blue Economy and the convening of its first meeting and the 2nd ASEAN Blue Economy Forum, as well as organising the 14th ASEAN Maritime Forum and the 12th Expanded ASEAN Maritime Forum this year.
12. We underscored the importance of strengthening the ASEAN Community, its unity and Centrality in our engagement with external partners, including 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 order to build mutual trust and confidence as well as to reinforce an open, transparent, resilient, inclusive, and rules-based regional architecture with that upholds international law with ASEAN at the centre.
13. We commended the successful convening of the Commemorative Summit for the 50th Year of ASEAN-Japan Friendship and Cooperation in Tokyo, Japan, on 17 December 2023 and the First ASEAN-Gulf Cooperation Council Summit in Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, on 20 October 2023. We looked forward to the convening of the Special Summit to Commemorate the 50th Anniversary of ASEAN-Australia Dialogue Relations in Melbourne, Australia, on 4-6 March 2024 and the 24th ASEAN-EU Ministerial Meeting to be held in Brussels, Belgium, on 2 February 2024. We welcomed the Republic of Korea's request for the establishment of a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in 2024, in conjunction with the 35th Anniversary of ASEAN-ROK Dialogue Relations. We also welcomed the designation of 2024 as the ASEAN-China Year of People-to-People Exchanges (ACYPPE) and looked forward to the launching ceremony of the ACYPPE in Fuzhou, Fujian Province, China on 1-2 February 2024.

14. We agreed to further promote APT cooperation in promoting peace, stability, and prosperity in the East Asian region with ASEAN as the driving force, including through the implementation of its Cooperation Work Plan 2023-2027. We also agreed to further strengthen EAS cooperation, sustain its strategic value and relevance as well as enhance its responsiveness to fast-changing developments in the regional and global context, including through the implementation of the EAS Plan of Action 2024-2028.
15. We took note of the establishment of the Group of the East Asia Summit Participating Countries' Ambassadors to ASEAN in Jakarta (EAS Group) and agreed for the Terms of Reference of the EAS Group to be a guiding document for ASEAN to manage and navigate the work of the EAS Group.
16. We reaffirmed the importance of pursuing an outward-looking policy and agreed on the need to reach out to new potential external parties based on shared interest, constructive engagement, and mutual benefit which could contribute to the ASEAN Community building, regional integration, and development cooperation efforts.
17. We reiterated our commitment to having the AOIP as a guide for ASEAN's engagement in the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean regions. We welcomed the support of all our partners to the AOIP, among others, through the issuance of joint statements and other forms of collaboration and support. We are determined to further promote the AOIP in our interactions with partners to mainstream and promote the implementation of the AOIP through concrete projects and activities in order to promote mutual trust, respect and benefit through ASEAN-led mechanisms. We continued to encourage our partners to support and undertake substantive, practical, and tangible cooperation with ASEAN through ASEAN-led mechanisms, in accordance with the objectives and principles contained in the AOIP, on the four identified key areas, namely maritime cooperation, connectivity, UN Sustainable Development Goals 2030, economic and other possible areas of cooperation. We also welcomed the successful convening of the ASEAN-Indo-Pacific Forum 2023 in Indonesia and looked forward to the convening of a forum on AOIP's priority areas. We welcomed the adoption of the Concept Paper on the Implementation of the AOIP from a Defence Perspective, by the 17th ADMM.
18. We underscored ASEAN's determination to continue to lead the shaping of the region's economic and security architecture through the ASEAN-led mechanisms, anchored in the AOIP and to ensure that the ongoing dynamics in the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean regions or the Indo-Pacific can contribute positively to peace, security, stability, and prosperity in these regions. We noted the Concept Note on the AOIP-based Comprehensive Regional Architecture.
19. We supported the efforts of revitalising the ARF, so that it continues to function as the leading regional security forum in the Asia-Pacific region and further promoting concrete cooperation and consultation to address political and security issues of common interest and concern, with a view to building capacity, developing expertise, and enhancing coordination in areas that can contribute to the region's peace, security, and stability.
20. We reaffirmed the importance of the TAC as the key code of conduct governing inter-state relations in the region and as a foundation for maintaining regional peace and stability. We remained committed to further promoting the principles embodied in the TAC and emphasise the importance of all High Contracting Parties in fulfilling their obligations under the Treaty. We looked forward to the convening of the Conference of the High Contracting Parties to the TAC this year, reaffirming the purposes and commitment to the TAC, and the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the TAC in 2026.

21. We exchanged views on regional and international issues of common interest and concern. These include emerging traditional and non-traditional security challenges such as armed conflicts, cyber security, natural disasters, climate change, maritime security and cooperation, and developments in various regions, including the situation in Myanmar, the Korean Peninsula, South China Sea, Ukraine, and the Middle East, among others.
22. We discussed the developments in Myanmar and reaffirmed our united position that the Five-Point Consensus (5PC) remains our main reference to address the political crisis in Myanmar, with the sole objective of restoring peace, stability, and a Myanmar-owned and led comprehensive political resolution. We welcomed the ASEAN Leaders' Reviews and Decisions on the Implementation of the Five-Point Consensus adopted at the 40th and 41st ASEAN Summits in 2022 and the 43rd ASEAN Summit in 2023. We reaffirmed ASEAN's commitment to assisting Myanmar in finding a peaceful, comprehensive, and durable solution to the ongoing crisis, as Myanmar remains an integral part of ASEAN. We reaffirmed ASEAN unity and reiterated that any effort should support, in line with the 5PC and in coordination with the Chair of ASEAN.
23. ASEAN Member States welcomed the appointment of H.E. Mr. Alounkeo KITTIKHOUN, former Minister to the Prime Minister's Office of the Lao PDR as the Special Envoy of the ASEAN Chair on Myanmar for 2024 as we continue our efforts to promote progress in the implementation of the 5PC in its entirety. We appreciated his efforts thus far in reaching out to parties concerned and are confident in his resolve to help the people of Myanmar find a Myanmar-owned and led solution towards a peaceful, stable and unified Myanmar contributing to peace and prosperity of the region.
24. We welcomed progress on the delivery of the ASEAN humanitarian assistance to Myanmar under Phase 2 by the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance Disaster Management (AHA Centre), in particular the distribution of humanitarian assistance in January 2024 to the displaced and vulnerable people in Nyaung Shwe and Hsihseng township, Southern Shan State. We appreciated the resources contributed by ASEAN Member States, external partners, and the private sector thus far, and called for further support towards the more effective implementation of Phase 2. We urged for immediate cessation of violence by all parties in Myanmar to create a safe and conducive environment for ensuring the timely, unhindered, and safe delivery of humanitarian assistance to all those in need in Myanmar without discrimination. We urged all parties to exercise utmost restraint, uphold international humanitarian law and take all necessary measures to ensure the protection and safety of all civilians.
25. We welcomed the initiative between Thailand and Myanmar to scale up humanitarian assistance along the border through the Red Cross Societies of two countries to provide effective, credible, and transparent delivery of basic needs to those in need without discrimination. We look forward to engaging AHA Centre in joining the monitoring of the distribution of humanitarian assistance, as this initiative can contribute to ASEAN's collective efforts in implementing the 5PC.
26. Recalling the Joint Communiqués of the ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meetings, the ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Statement on the Ballistic Missile Launch on the Korean Peninsula issued on 13 July 2023, and the ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Statement on the Recent Surge of Missile Testing on the Korean Peninsula issued on 10 June 2022, we stressed the importance of continued peaceful dialogue among all parties concerned in order to realise lasting peace and stability in a denuclearised Korean Peninsula. We expressed grave concern over the surge in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's (DPRK) intercontinental ballistic missile testing and ballistic missile launches and the increased tension in the Korean Peninsula, which are a worrisome development that threatens peace, and stability in the region. We urged the DPRK to take action to de-escalate tension and called on all concerned parties to resume peaceful dialogue, including to create a conducive environment towards the realisation of lasting peace and stability in a denuclearised

Korean Peninsula. We re-emphasized the importance of full compliance with all relevant United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolutions and to abide by international law.

27. As stated in the ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Statement on Maintaining and Promoting Stability in the Maritime Sphere in Southeast Asia, 30 December 2023, we reaffirmed our unity and solidarity and our shared commitment to maintaining and further strengthening stability in our maritime sphere to bring about overall peace, security, stability, and prosperity in our region.
28. We discussed the situation in the South China Sea, during which concerns were expressed by some Ministers on the land reclamations and activities, which have eroded trust and confidence, increased tensions, and may undermine peace, security, and stability in the region. We reaffirmed the need to enhance mutual trust and confidence, exercise self-restraint in the conduct of activities that would complicate or escalate disputes and affect peace and stability and avoid actions that may further complicate the situation. We further reaffirmed the need to pursue peaceful resolution of disputes in accordance with the universally recognised principles of international law, including the 1982 UNCLOS. We emphasised the importance of self-restraint in the conduct of all activities by claimants and all other states, including those mentioned in the 2002 Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in South China Sea (DOC) that could further complicate the situation and escalate tensions in the South China Sea.
29. We reaffirmed the importance of maintaining and promoting peace, security, stability, safety, and freedom of navigation in and overflight above the South China Sea and recognised the benefits of having the South China Sea as a sea of peace, stability, and prosperity. We underscored the importance of the full and effective implementation of the DOC in its entirety. We welcomed the progress achieved so far in the ongoing negotiations on the Code of Conduct in the South China Sea (COC), including the official announcement of the commencement of the Third Reading of the Single Draft COC Negotiating Text (SDNT) at the 21st ASEAN-China SOM-DOC which was held on 26 October 2023, Beijing, China. We looked forward to the early conclusion of an effective and substantive COC that is in accordance with international law, including the 1982 UNCLOS. We emphasised the need to maintain and promote an environment conducive to the COC negotiations, and thus welcomed practical measures and cooperation initiatives which could promote trust and confidence, reduce tension and the risk of accidents, and avoid misunderstandings and miscalculation. We stressed the importance of undertaking confidence building and preventive measures to enhance, among others, trust, and confidence amongst parties, and we reaffirmed the importance of upholding international law, including the 1982 UNCLOS.
30. To further promote peace, security, stability, and prosperity in East Asia, we welcomed the continued efforts to revitalise the Trilateral Mechanism of Japan, China, and the Republic of Korea, including through the convening of the Tenth Japan-China-ROK Trilateral Foreign Ministers' Meeting on 26 November 2023, and looked forward to the convening of the Trilateral Summit planned this year. ASEAN stands ready to play a constructive role to facilitate such engagements in conjunction with ASEAN meetings where all three parties are also involved.
31. With regard to Ukraine, as for all nations, we continued to reaffirm our respect for sovereignty, political independence, and territorial integrity. We reiterated our call for compliance with the UN Charter and international law. We underlined the importance of an immediate cessation of hostilities and the serious engagement in a genuine dialogue for the peaceful resolution of the conflict. We supported the efforts of the UN Secretary-General in the search for a peaceful solution. We also called for the facilitation of rapid, safe, and unhindered access to humanitarian assistance for those in need in Ukraine, and for the protection of civilians, humanitarian personnel, and persons in vulnerable situations.

32. We expressed grave concern over the continued escalation of violence and armed conflict in the Middle East. We urged an immediate humanitarian ceasefire and called for the immediate and unconditional release of civilian hostages and detainees, especially women, children, the sick and the elderly. We strongly condemned the acts of violence which have led to the deaths and injury of civilians, including ASEAN nationals. We reaffirmed our support for the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people towards the creation of an independent State of Palestine on the basis of the two-state solution that allows both Israelis and Palestinians to live side-by-side in peace and security based on the pre-1967 borders, in accordance with international law and the relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions. We took note of the order on provisional measures issued by interim ruling by the International Court of Justice on 26 January 2024.