

2020 CO-CHAIRS' STATEMENT OF THE SPECIAL ASEAN-AUSTRALIA FOREIGN MINISTERS' MEETING ON COVID-19

Adopted on 30 June 2020

1. The Special ASEAN-Australia Foreign Ministers' Meeting on COVID-19 took place via video conference on 30 June 2020 to discuss ASEAN-Australia cooperation on public health emergencies, especially in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, and charting a recovery course towards a sustainable, peaceful and prosperous post COVID-19 region.
2. The Meeting was co-chaired by the Hon. Dato' Seri Hishammuddin Tun Hussein, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Malaysia, and Senator the Hon. Marise Payne, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Minister for Women of Australia. Foreign Ministers and representatives of all ASEAN Member States and the Secretary-General of ASEAN participated in the meeting. Representatives from the ASEAN Senior Officials (SOM), ASEAN Senior Officials for Health Development (SOMHD), ASEAN Senior Economic Officials (SEOM), Senior Officials' Committee for the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (SOCA), and Committee of Permanent Representatives to ASEAN (CPR) were also present at the meeting.
3. The Ministers conveyed their deep concern regarding the continued spread and severity of COVID-19, which the World Health Organization (WHO) declared as a pandemic on 11 March 2020, and its adverse impacts on livelihoods and socio-economic development around the world.
4. The Ministers expressed their deepest condolences and sympathies for the tragic loss of life and suffering caused by this pandemic across the region and globally, and extended their gratitude and support to all medical professionals, healthcare workers and other frontline personnel for their tireless contributions in responding to the crisis.
5. Australia welcomed the successful Special ASEAN Summit on COVID-19 on 14 April 2020, which demonstrated ASEAN's highest-level of commitment to collectively respond to COVID-19. The Summit adopted the ASEAN Leaders' Vision Statement on a Cohesive and Responsive ASEAN: Rising above Challenges and Sustaining Growth, which affirmed ASEAN's resolute commitment to a united and effective regional response to the public health, economic and social dimensions of the crisis, in line with the spirit of a Cohesive and Responsive ASEAN Community. Australia underscored its commitment to working closely with ASEAN and through ASEAN-led mechanisms to advance the ongoing regional response and mitigation from the negative impacts of COVID-19. In this regard, Australia warmly welcomed ASEAN's efforts to develop a comprehensive recovery plan, to be submitted to the 37th ASEAN Summit.
6. The Ministers recognised the unprecedented joint efforts by ASEAN Member States and Australia to mitigate COVID-19 through public health and other measures, and committed to continue sharing enhanced information and lessons from domestic responses to COVID-19. They reaffirmed that addressing the health, economic and social challenges of COVID-19 is the highest priority for their governments.
7. The Ministers supported the call by the United Nations Secretary-General for all nations to respond decisively and innovatively to suppress the spread of the virus and address the socio-economic impact of COVID-19. The Ministers also welcomed United Nations General Assembly Resolution on global solidarity to fight the Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) adopted on 2 April 2020, which recognises that the COVID-19 pandemic requires a global response based on unity, solidarity and renewed multilateral cooperation.
8. The Ministers stressed the important role of the WHO in the global campaign to control and contain the spread of COVID-19 and recognised the importance of implementing the health measures under the International Health Regulations (2005). The Ministers also welcomed the Resolution on the global COVID-19 response, adopted at the 73rd session of the World Health Assembly (WHA),

which among others, requests the Director-General of the WHO to initiate, at the earliest appropriate moment, in consultation with Member States, a stepwise process of impartial, independent and comprehensive evaluation, including using existing mechanisms, as appropriate to review experience gained and lessons learned from the WHO-coordinated international health response to COVID-19. They highlighted the importance of developing vaccines that are accessible and affordable for all, and encourage collaborative research between private sector and government-funded institutions. They underscored their commitment to work with the WHO in consultation with its Member States to advance this.

9. The Ministers noted with satisfaction ongoing pandemic response efforts by individual ASEAN Member States and Australia and commended the proactive and timely actions taken by the ASEAN and Australian health sectors to control the spread of COVID-19.
10. The Ministers emphasised the critical importance of international and regional cooperation on the COVID-19 response, recovery efforts and future pandemic preparedness, and encouraged enhanced sharing of experience and best practices in epidemiological research and development, clinical treatment, research and development of vaccines and anti-viral medicines, and enhancing capacity and preparedness to respond to public health emergencies. ASEAN Foreign Ministers welcomed Australia's commitment of over AUD630 million to support the global effort to fight COVID-19, find a vaccine, enhance health security and assist the Indo-Pacific region with response and recovery. The Ministers welcomed Australia's efforts to further increase cooperation in health related industries in ASEAN countries that are affected by COVID-19.
11. The Ministers underscored the need to strengthen regional economic integration and enhance cooperation in the World Trade Organization (WTO) based on open markets that promote free trade and encourage investment, and an inclusive and rules-based multilateral trading system, as well as the flexibilities of the Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights Agreement of the WTO. They reaffirmed their shared commitment to maintaining resilient supply chains for essential goods and to winding back restrictions imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Ministers reaffirmed ASEAN and Australia's commitment to sign the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) in 2020, serving as a clear signal of unwavering support for the multilateral trading system, regional integration as well as economic development across the region.
12. The Ministers reaffirmed their commitment to working closely together through inclusive ASEAN-led regional mechanisms, in particular the East Asia Summit (EAS), ASEAN-Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus (ADMM-Plus) and ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), in a spirit of responsibility, solidarity, cooperation and collective efforts in order to mitigate the health, socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 and support regional pandemic preparedness.
13. The Ministers acknowledged the substantive ASEAN-Australia Strategic Partnership, which reflects ASEAN and Australia's close regional ties, shared aspirations and common interests for the region. Australia reaffirmed its strong commitment to ASEAN centrality. The Ministers emphasised the importance of the principles set out in the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) for promoting economic recovery and longer-term peace, stability and prosperity in the region. ASEAN and Australia agreed to continue working together to advance the AOIP, including supporting ASEAN initiatives and strengthening practical cooperation under its four priority areas. They noted that the Plan of Action to Implement the ASEAN-Australia Strategic Partnership (2020-2024) would guide enhanced ASEAN-Australia cooperation to respond to COVID-19 and its long-term impacts.
14. The Ministers focused on enhancing ASEAN-Australia cooperation in three areas that reflect shared interests: health security; stability; and economic recovery. ASEAN Foreign Ministers welcomed Australia's announcement of a substantial package of initiatives to strengthen ASEAN-Australia partnership on COVID-19 response and recovery in these three areas.
15. The Ministers agreed to enhance cooperation on health security to respond to COVID-19 and ensure the region was better prepared for future pandemics. ASEAN and Australia exchanged experiences and best practices on prevention, detection and control of COVID-19. Australia indicated its readiness to support ASEAN-led initiatives to address COVID-19 and future public health emergencies including: the COVID-19 ASEAN Response Fund, planned establishment of a Regional Reserve of Medical Supplies, development of Standard Operating Procedures for Public

Health Emergencies, and development of region-wide disease control structures – subject to further details on these initiatives. ASEAN welcomed Australia's announcement of a new ASEAN-Australia Health Security Initiative to strengthen regional health systems to prevent and mitigate future pandemics, including possible cooperation on biodiversity and zoonotic diseases. The Meeting emphasised the need to improve existing tools on wildlife disease surveillance and develop the right measures to control, prevent and eradicate the spread of zoonotic diseases arising from the trade in animals and animal products.

16. The Ministers welcomed existing efforts and encouraged establishing networks and enhanced engagement among the ASEAN and Australian health officials and experts to strengthen collaboration on COVID-19, including in research and development, sharing scientific knowledge and innovative technologies, developing vaccines and medicines. The Ministers also underlined the need to engage universities and research centres to work together in mitigating the wider impact of the pandemic and prepare for future challenges, as well as to explore opportunity to cooperate in digital health related areas.
17. The Ministers also emphasised the importance of providing equitable access to medicines and vaccines for COVID-19 and other diseases in future public health emergencies, and recognised the role of extensive immunisation against COVID-19 as a global public good.
18. The Ministers noted that Australia would continue to examine how existing initiatives like the ASEAN-Australia Health Security Fellowships, Australia Awards and New Colombo Plan can support ASEAN Member States and complement this work by promoting two-way capacity building in the health sector.
19. The Ministers noted that COVID-19 would continue to pose risks to regional stability, including by placing severe strain on many societies, reducing resilience to shocks and creating an environment where the region is more exposed to challenges to the key principles that underpin the region's stability and prosperity. In this regard, some Ministers expressed views on the immediate need to focus on the fight against COVID-19, while promoting trust, confidence, dialogue and cooperation to maintain an open, transparent, inclusive and rules-based order in the region, where international law, including the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, is respected and upheld, including in relation to the maintenance and promotion of peace, stability, maritime safety and security, freedom of navigation and overflight and other lawful uses of the seas.
20. The Ministers acknowledged that it is in the mutual interest of ASEAN and Australia to safeguard the safety, health and well-being of their nationals, including migrant workers and other vulnerable groups, residing in each other's countries. ASEAN and Australia stand ready to provide the necessary support and assistance to nationals in each other's countries if their nationals are affected by the pandemic, including working together to enable their safe return, as appropriate.
21. The Ministers reiterated the importance of effective risk communication, transparency and openness in sharing timely and accurate information on COVID-19 to counter disinformation.
22. The Ministers expressed concern regarding the impact of the pandemic on women, children and those who are most vulnerable in the region. ASEAN and Australia noted the importance of including women and their contribution in the region's recovery efforts. The Ministers noted expanding efforts to mitigate the risks COVID-19 poses for exploitation and human trafficking of women, children and vulnerable groups under the ASEAN-Australia Counter Trafficking Program. The Ministers also welcomed Australia's support for the ASEAN Secretariat to conduct Rapid Assessments of potential 'second wave crises' arising from COVID-19 in areas such as livelihoods, informal workers, migrant populations and other vulnerable groups.
23. ASEAN Foreign Ministers welcomed the new ASEAN-Australia Political-Security Partnership to enhance capability to address shared challenges such as maritime and cyber security, as well as other geopolitical and security risks arising from COVID-19. The Ministers also welcomed Australia's funding to extend the TRIANGLE in ASEAN program, which is currently supporting migrant workers' well-being across ASEAN, including in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

24. The Ministers reaffirmed their shared commitment to charting a course towards early economic recovery from COVID-19, including by harnessing potential opportunities, guarding against protectionism, boosting resilience and maintaining open markets.
25. The Ministers welcomed the deepening collaboration between ASEAN and Australia to counter the longer-term socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 by reinforcing ASEAN-Australia trade and investment, supporting regional connectivity, including through implementing the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity 2025, and boosting cooperation in the digital economy between ASEAN and Australia. In this regard, the Ministers acknowledged the importance of cooperation under the ASEAN-Australia New Zealand Free Trade Area Economic Cooperation Support Programme (AECSP) and the ASEAN-Australia Development Cooperation Program Phase II (AADCP II) to mitigate the impact of COVID-19. The Ministers noted the measures taken by ASEAN Member States and Australia to improve economic stability and resilience, including through economic stimulus and capacity building by means of sharing expertise, knowledge and best practices to assist people and business affected by COVID-19, especially Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises and vulnerable groups.
26. The Ministers 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 commencing planned upgrade negotiations to ensure AANZFTA remains modern, high-quality and relevant, and that it adds greater commercial value to businesses and takes into account developments towards COVID19 economic recovery. ASEAN Foreign Ministers also welcomed the innovative co-funding initiative on the implementation of AECSP projects that support the upgrade negotiation of AANZFTA.
27. The Ministers welcomed Australia's additional funding to extend the ASEAN-Australia Digital Trade Standards Initiative, launched at the 2018 ASEAN-Australia Special Summit, to help accelerate the region's digital transformation in the wake of COVID-19. The Ministers also welcomed Australia's support of the ASEAN Smart Cities Network and under the ongoing implementation of the ASEAN-Australia Smart Cities Initiative announced in 2018. The Ministers acknowledged the need to equip our workforce with digital related skills to support the region's digital transformation and the Fourth Industrial Revolution. The Ministers also welcomed Australia's readiness to support ASEAN's economic recovery including the components of the forthcoming ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Plan.
28. The Ministers encouraged the exploration of further cooperation to accelerate the post-pandemic recovery, stimulate economic development and financial resilience, restore growth and mitigate the risk of global economic recession. At the same time, the Ministers committed to remain vigilant and to continue cooperation on existing priorities under the ASEAN-Australia Plan of Action 2020-24.
29. The Ministers expressed their commitment to striving towards a common approach to implementing travel restrictions including clear guidelines, based on science and data, with a shared understanding of when and how such restrictions should be imposed, relaxed, and lifted.
30. The Ministers encouraged the maintenance of necessary interconnectedness in the region by facilitating to the extent possible the essential movement of people, including business travels, while ensuring the safeguarding of public health in line with our efforts to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. In this regard, the Ministers welcomed information sharing on travel bubble best practice and ongoing cooperation to support effective and functional travel arrangements in the context of post COVID-19 recovery.
31. The Ministers reaffirmed that emergency measures designed to address COVID-19, should be targeted, proportionate, transparent, and temporary, and should not create unnecessary barriers to travel, trade or disruption to global supply chains. The Ministers emphasised their shared commitment to ensure the continued flow of food, medicines, medical supplies and equipment and other essential goods, including through the implementation of the Hanoi Plan of Action on Strengthening ASEAN Economic Cooperation and Supply Chain Connectivity in Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic. They reiterated ASEAN and Australia's commitment to promote the normal flow of trade in other goods and services, and investment across borders to sustain economic activity and ensure food security in the region. They also highlighted the important role of the private

sector in maintaining supply chains and ensuring the production, distribution and delivery of essential goods and services during the crisis.

32. The Ministers welcomed Australia's substantial cooperation with ASEAN on the COVID19 response and recovery, and looked forward to the convening of the ASEAN Post-Ministerial Conference (PMC) with Australia, scheduled to be held in August 2020. They reaffirmed the importance of regular leaders-level dialogue to help the region navigate complex challenges, and noted ASEAN Senior Officials' agreement to the proposed annualisation of ASEAN-Australia Leaders' Summits. The Ministers acknowledged the proposal by Australia for a Joint Leaders' Statement as the key outcome document for the upcoming ASEAN-Australia Leaders' Summit, scheduled to be held in November 2020. This joint statement will mark a new chapter in the ASEAN-Australia Strategic Partnership.