



**CHAIRMAN'S STATEMENT OF THE  
23<sup>rd</sup> ASEAN REGIONAL FORUM  
VIENTIANE, LAO PDR, 26 JULY 2016**

**“TURNING VISION INTO REALITY FOR A DYNAMIC ASEAN COMMUNITY”**

1. The Twenty-Third Meeting of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) was held in Vientiane, Lao PDR on 26 July 2016. The Meeting was chaired by H.E. Saleumxay Kommasith, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Lao PDR.
2. The Meeting was attended by the Foreign Ministers and Representatives of all ARF participants. The Secretary-General of ASEAN was also in attendance. The list of delegates appears as **ANNEX 1**.

**Overview of the ARF Process**

3. The Ministers emphasised the importance of the ARF as the primary forum for constructive dialogue and consultation on political and security issues of mutual interest and concern in the Asia-Pacific region. They recognised that the ARF has been successful in bringing together diverse participants in promoting peace and stability in the region on the basis of consultation and consensus and moving forward at a pace comfortable to all ARF participants.
4. The Ministers noted with satisfaction the growing number of ARF activities on Preventive Diplomacy (PD) conducted since 2014 which have significantly increased the momentum in the development of regional PD capacity and expertise. The Ministers stressed the importance of enhancing this momentum by conducting further PD activities in accordance with the ARF Work Plan on Preventive Diplomacy and consistent with agreed ARF PD principles as contained in the ARF Concept and Principles of Preventive Diplomacy adopted in 2001 and ARF principles as reflected in the ARF Vision Statement of 2004.
5. The Ministers acknowledged the progress in the implementation of the Hanoi Plan of Action to Implement the ARF Vision Statement which has enabled the ARF to enhance its effectiveness in addressing the increasingly complex regional challenges. In this connection, the Ministers underlined the importance of ensuring the comprehensive implementation of the remaining action lines of the Plan of Action

as well as the current ARF work plans under the respective priority areas in moving the ARF process forward.

### **Highlights of Discussions on Regional and International Issues**

6. The Ministers welcomed the establishment of the ASEAN Community on 31 December 2015 as well as the adoption of the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 together with three ASEAN Community Blueprints which includes the new ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC) Blueprint 2025. The Ministers also welcomed the signing of the ASEAN Convention Against Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (ACTIP) and noted the eight priorities for Lao PDR's ASEAN Chairmanship in 2016, namely the implementation of the ASEAN Community Vision 2025, narrowing of the development gap, trade facilitation, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) development, tourism development, connectivity, decent work promotion: transition to formal economy in ASEAN, and enhancement of regional cooperation for the preservation, protection and promotion of ASEAN cultural heritage.

7. The Ministers welcomed the adoption of the ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Statement on the Occasion of the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) and reaffirmed the TAC as the key code of conduct governing inter-State relations in the region and an indispensable foundation for the maintenance of regional peace and security.

8. The Ministers shared concern over current developments in the Korean Peninsula, including the nuclear test on 6 January 2016, rocket launch on 7 February 2016 and ballistic missile launch on 9 July 2016, by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) which are in violation of the UNSC resolutions. The Ministers reaffirmed the importance of peace and security in this region and reiterated ASEAN's support for the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula in a peaceful manner. Most Ministers also urged the DPRK to comply with all relevant UNSC resolutions, including the UNSC Resolution 2270 and called on all parties to exert common efforts to maintain peace and security in the said region and create an environment conducive to the early resumption of the Six-Party Talks to make further progress in denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula in a peaceful manner. The Ministers stressed the importance of addressing humanitarian concerns.

9. The Ministers exchanged views on maritime issues and reaffirmed the importance of maintaining and promoting peace, security and stability, safety and freedom of navigation in and over-flight above the South China Sea. Several Ministers remain seriously concerned over recent and ongoing developments and the Ministers took note of the concerns expressed by some Ministers on the land reclamations and escalation of activities in the South China Sea, which have eroded trust and confidence, increased tensions and may undermine peace, security and stability in the region. The Ministers reaffirmed the need to enhance mutual trust and confidence, exercise self-restraint in the conduct of activities and avoid actions that may further complicate the situation and pursue peaceful resolution of disputes by parties concerned in accordance with international law, including the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). The Ministers noted the commitment of the ASEAN Member States and China to ensure the full and effective

implementation of the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea in its entirety as well as substantive negotiation for early conclusion of a Code of Conduct in the South China Sea.

10. The Ministers reiterated the need for a comprehensive, just, and sustainable solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in order to achieve peace and stability in the Middle East region. The Ministers urged both sides to actively take positive steps to allow for negotiations to gain traction and work together towards the resumption of direct negotiations to achieve an enduring peace through a two-state solution where Palestinians and Israelis live side by side in peace. The Ministers acknowledged the international efforts, in support of the Middle East Peace Process, including the convening of the 5<sup>th</sup> Extraordinary Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) Summit on Palestine and Al-Quds Al-Sharif in Jakarta on 6-7 March 2016.

11. The Ministers condemned the recent heinous terrorist attacks in various regions including Baghdad, Pathankot, Kabul, Dhaka, Nice, Istanbul, Brussels and Paris and the continued violent and brutal terrorist acts of the self-proclaimed Islamic State (IS)/Da'esh and extended their deepest condolences to the victims and their families. They emphasised the need to counter the increasing terrorist activities and global network as well as the threat posed by foreign terrorist fighters. The Ministers welcomed the Fifth Review of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy and took note of the United Nations Secretary-General's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism. The Ministers called for a more coordinated and comprehensive approach to countering terrorism and violent extremism, respect for diversity, peace and moderation as a counter-narrative to violent extremism, including through the promotion of religious tolerance and the Global Movement of Moderates. The Ministers reaffirmed the importance of the full implementation of the ASEAN Convention on Counter Terrorism, the ASEAN Comprehensive Plan of Action on Counter Terrorism, and the relevant provisions of international law and the UN Charter. The Ministers further resolved to work to limit the access of terrorist groups to funding.

12. The Ministers recognised the immediate need to address efficiently, the irregular movement of people in Southeast Asia and the Mediterranean through a balance between humanitarian assistance, addressing the root causes of irregular migration and forced displacement, law enforcement and cooperation with the countries of origin to ensure stability and sustainable development and therefore address the root causes of migration. In this regard, the Ministers welcomed the adoption of the Kuala Lumpur Declaration on Combating Transnational Crime and the Kuala Lumpur Declaration on Irregular Movement of Persons in Southeast Asia by the 10<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Transnational Crime (AMMTC) in September 2015. They looked forward to the UN Summit on Addressing Large Movements of Refugees and Migrants on 19 September 2016.

13. The Ministers expressed condolences to the victims and their families of recent natural disasters, including the earthquakes in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Ecuador, India, Japan, Myanmar, Nepal and Pakistan, the floods in the United States, Europe (France, Germany, Turkey, United Kingdom and Italy), China and Sri Lanka and the wildfires in Russia, Canada and Australia. The Ministers recognised the region's vulnerability to natural disasters and reiterated the need to intensify

cooperation in disaster risk reduction, preparedness, response and recovery through the existing regional and international mechanisms. They reiterated the importance of strengthening synergies, across related regional fora, for the effective implementation of the ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response (AADMER) as the common platform for disaster management in the region and reaffirmed support for the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on disaster management (AHA Centre) as the operational engine of AADMER. The Ministers welcomed the adoption of the ASEAN Vision 2025 on Disaster Management by the 3<sup>rd</sup> ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Disaster Management (AMMDM) and the 4<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the AADMER held on 16 December 2015 in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, to serve as broad direction and policy guidance on implementing AADMER in the next ten (10) years. The Ministers also welcomed the recent launch of the AADMER Work Programme 2016-2020 at the Third AADMER Partnership Conference in April 2016 in Semarang, Indonesia and the ASEAN-United Nations Joint Strategic Plan of Action on Disaster Management 2016-2020 at the sidelines of the World Humanitarian Summit in May 2016 in Istanbul, Turkey. The Ministers looked forward to the One ASEAN One Response strategy which would harness the individual and collective strengths of relevant sectors and stakeholders to respond to disasters both inside and outside the region.

14. The Ministers reiterated the importance of strengthening the international cooperative efforts in nuclear non-proliferation, nuclear disarmament and peaceful uses of nuclear energy. The Ministers of the States Parties to the NPT reaffirmed their unwavering commitment to the NPT and stressed the importance of regional dialogues in implementing NPT commitments in a balanced manner. The Ministers recognised that transparency and confidence-building measures (TCBMs) and progress on global nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation can play a role in improving the security environment of the Asia-Pacific region. The Ministers noted the importance of preserving the Southeast Asia region as a Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone and free of all other weapons of mass destruction as enshrined in the ASEAN Charter and the Southeast Asia Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone (SEANWFZ) Treaty. The Ministers affirmed the importance of promoting peaceful uses of nuclear energy that meets norms of safety, security and non-proliferation.

### **Review of Activities of the Current Inter-Sessional Year (2015-2016)**

15. The Ministers noted with satisfaction the implementation of ARF Track 1 activities in the Inter-Sessional Year of 2015-2016 which has strengthened the ARF as a valuable multilateral platform for constructive dialogue and cooperation on political and security issues of common interests and concerns in the Asia-Pacific region. The Ministers commended the work of the ARF Senior Officials' Meeting (ARF SOM) held in Luang Prabang, Lao PDR on 8 May 2016 and the ARF Inter-sessional Support Group Meeting on Confidence Building Measures and Preventive Diplomacy (ARF ISG on CBMs and PD), co-chaired by the Lao PDR and India, that was held in New Delhi on 11-12 April 2016. The Ministers noted the reports and endorsed the recommendations made in the reports which appear as **ANNEX 2** and **ANNEX 3**.

16. The Ministers reiterated the importance of enhancing defence and security cooperation in the ARF as a means of strengthening civil-military cooperation and coordination, and to complement the work of the ADMM-Plus. In this regard, the Ministers appreciated the contributions of defence officials to the ARF process and endorsed the recommendations of the ARF DOD and the 13<sup>th</sup> ARF Security Policy Conference (ASPC). The reports of the DOD in April and May and the report of the 13<sup>th</sup> ASPC appear as **ANNEX 4**, **ANNEX 5** and **ANNEX 6**.

17. The Ministers noted the assessment by ASEAN on the practicality of convening one ARF ISG on CBMs and PD in the inter-sessional year 2015-2016 and endorsed the continuation of the practice in next inter-sessional years.

18. The Ministers welcomed the outcomes of the following Meetings. The reports of these meetings appear as **ANNEX 7**, **ANNEX 8**, **ANNEX 9**, **ANNEX 10**, and **ANNEX 11**.

- a. 15<sup>th</sup> ARF ISM on Disaster Relief (ISM on DR), co-chaired by Myanmar, China and Japan, in Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar on 25-26 February 2016;
- b. 14<sup>th</sup> ARF ISM on Counter-Terrorism and Transnational Crime (ISM on CTTC), co-chaired by Cambodia and European Union, in Siem Reap, Cambodia on 21-22 March 2016;
- c. 8<sup>th</sup> ARF ISM on Maritime Security (ISM on MS), co-chaired by the Philippines, Japan and the United States of America, in Manila, Philippines on 6-7 April 2016;
- d. 8<sup>th</sup> ARF ISM on Non-Proliferation and Disarmament (ISM on NPD), co-chaired by Canada, New Zealand and Malaysia, held in Putrajaya, Malaysia on 19-20 April 2016; and
- e. 10<sup>th</sup> ARF Expert and Eminent Persons Meeting (EEPs), co-chaired by Singapore and Australia, in Singapore on 29 February- 2 March 2016.

19. The Ministers also welcomed the outcomes of ARF Track 1 activities which were successfully implemented in the inter-sessional year 2015-2016 as follows:

- a. ARF Bio-Preparedness Table Top Exercise (TTX), Manila, Philippines, 11-13 August 2015;
- b. 19<sup>th</sup> ARF Heads of Defence Universities/Colleges/Institutions Meeting (HDUCIM), Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar, 1-4 September 2015;
- c. ARF Workshop on Promoting the Nuclear-Weapon-Free Status of Mongolia, Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, 3-4 September 2015;
- d. ARF Workshop on Raising Awareness and Promoting ARF Cooperation on CBRN Risk Mitigation, Manila, Philippines, 8-10 September 2015;
- e. ARF Workshop on First Response Support for Victims of Terrorism and Other Mass Casualty Events, Manila, Philippines, 22-23 September 2015;
- f. ARF Seminar on Operationalizing Cyber CBMs in the ARF, Singapore, 21-22 October 2015;
- g. ARF Seminar and Training on Preventive Diplomacy and Mediation, Yogyakarta, Indonesia, 29 November - 2 December 2015;
- h. 3<sup>rd</sup> ARF Workshop on Space Security, Beijing, China, 30 November - 2 December 2015;

- i. ARF Seminar on the Regional Confidence Building and Law of the Sea, Tokyo, Japan, 3-4 December 2015;
- j. ARF Workshop on Maritime Risks Management and Cooperation, Beijing, China, 13-15 December 2015;
- k. ARF Workshop on Marine Oil Spill Emergency Response Management and Disposal Cooperation, Kunming, China, 17-18 December 2015;
- l. 10<sup>th</sup> ARF Experts and Eminent Persons (EEPs) Meeting, Singapore, 29 February - 2 March 2016;
- m. ARF Workshop on Operationalising Confidence Building Measures for Cooperation during Cyber-incident Response, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 2-3 March 2016;
- n. ARF Training Course on Preventive Diplomacy, Ha Noi, Viet Nam, 2-4 March 2016;
- o. ARF Workshop on Strengthening Management of Cross-Border Movement of Criminals, Guangzhou, China, 8-10 March 2016;
- p. ARF Workshop on Improving Fisheries Management, Honolulu, United States, 22-23 March 2016;
- q. ARF Workshop on Green Shipping, Hangzhou, China, 29-30 March 2016;
- r. ARF Workshop on Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing, Bali, Indonesia, 19 -21 April 2016;
- s. ARF Workshop on National Maritime Single Points of Contact, Cebu City, Philippines, 28-29 April 2016;
- t. ARF Capacity Building Workshop on Ship Profiling, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 24-25 May 2016;
- u. ARF Workshop on Climate Change Adaptation and Disaster Management, Bangkok, Thailand, 31 May - 1 June 2016; and
- v. ARF Workshop on Urban Emergency Rescue, Shanghai, China, 10-14 July 2016.

### **Programme of Work for the Next Inter-Sessional Year (2016-2017)**

20. The Ministers reaffirmed the commitment to continue promoting confidence building measures while at the same time developing PD tools and expertise that are suited to the needs of the region. In this regard, the Ministers welcomed the convening of PD-related training sessions and activities in the next inter-sessional year in moving forward the development of PD in the region.

21. The Ministers welcomed the Philippines and Canada as the Co-Chairs of the ARF ISG on CBMs and PD and ARF DOD for the inter-sessional year 2016-2017.

22. The Ministers welcomed the progress made in the work of the ARF ISM on DR, on CTTC, on MS and on NPD in the previous Inter-Sessional Year. In this context, the Ministers welcomed Thailand and the Republic of Korea to co-chair the 16<sup>th</sup> ARF ISM on DR; Indonesia and India to co-chair the 15<sup>th</sup> ARF ISM on CTTC; the Philippines, Japan and the United States to continue co-chairing the 9<sup>th</sup> ARF ISM on MS; and Malaysia, Canada and New Zealand to continue co-chairing the 9<sup>th</sup> ISM on NPD. The Ministers also welcomed Viet Nam, Australia and the EU to co-chair the ISM on MS for the next cycle of 2017-2020.

23. The Ministers recognised the importance of Security of and in the Use of Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) and also affirmed the need to enhance cooperation to promote a peaceful, secure, open and cooperative ICTs environment and to prevent conflict and crises by developing trust and confidence between states and by capacity building in accordance with the implementation of the ARF Work Plan on Security of and in the Use of ICTs. They noted various efforts by some ARF participants to explore a way for further cooperation including the proposal for a meeting of ARF ICT experts in the 2016-2017 Inter-Sessional Year to make recommendations to establish an open-ended Study Group on Confidence Building Measures to reduce the risk of conflict stemming from the use of ICTs, the proposal to establish an ARF Directory of Cyber Points of Contact, and possibility of the establishment of the Inter-Sessional Meeting on ICTs (ISM on ICTs). In this regard, the Ministers tasked officials to continue consultations.

24. The Ministers welcomed the ongoing activities on space security and emphasized the role of the ARF, such as ARF Space Security Workshop to deepen understandings among the member countries on the space security issues.

25. The Ministers commended the work of the ARF EEPs in advancing the ARF process through their discussions and recommendations. In this regard, the Ministers noted the recommendations made by the ARF EEPs at their 10<sup>th</sup> Meeting in Singapore and expressed support for the proposed ARF EEPs Study on Lessons Learned and Best Practices in Managing Incidents at Sea. The Ministers welcomed Viet Nam and Australia as the Co-Chairs of the 11<sup>th</sup> ARF EEPs Meeting for the inter-sessional year 2016-2017.

26. The Ministers reaffirmed the procedure that all proposed ARF activities, work plans, concept papers and statements should first be discussed at the ISG/ISM level and endorsed at the ARF SOM before it is brought for the consideration of the ARF Ministers. The Ministers encouraged the respective Co-Chairs of proposed activities to schedule their respective activities so that they are conducted prior to the ARF SOM. In this regard, the Ministers approved the List of Track 1 Activities for the inter-sessional Year 2016-2017 which appears as **ANNEX 12**.

27. The Ministers decided to adopt the following Statements which appear as **ANNEX 13**, **ANNEX 14**, and **ANNEX 15**.

- a. ARF Statement on Strengthening Cooperation in the Management of Cross-Border Movement of Criminals;
- b. ARF Ministerial Statement on Enhancing Cooperation among Maritime Law Enforcement Agencies; and
- c. ARF Ministerial Statement on Recent Tragic Terrorist Attacks.

28. The Ministers noted the latest draft of the ARF Statement on Cooperation to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing, co-sponsored by Indonesia, the United States and Timor-Leste to be further revisited at a later stage. The latest draft is attached as **ANNEX 16**.

## Future Direction of the ARF Process

29. The Ministers welcomed the Philippines as the Chair of the 24<sup>th</sup> ARF, beginning on 1 January 2017.

30. The Ministers emphasised that civil-military cooperation and coordination have been an essential element of effective disaster relief and response.

31. The Ministers reaffirmed the important role of the Hanoi Plan of Action to Implement the ARF Vision Statement in guiding the ARF to become a more 'action-oriented' forum at a pace that is comfortable to all ARF participants. The Ministers noted the discussions on conducting an update of the Hanoi Plan of Action particularly on action lines that have been implemented or are no longer relevant. The Ministers commended the ARF Unit of the ASEAN Secretariat for its effort in preparing the Matrix of the Status of the Implementation of the Hanoi Plan of Action and in highlighting the implementation rates of the action lines. The Matrix appears as **ANNEX 17**.

32. The Ministers emphasised the need for enhanced coordination and synergy between the works of ARF with other ASEAN-led mechanisms to ensure the complementarity of initiatives and avoid unnecessary duplication of efforts.

33. The Ministers reaffirmed the importance of strengthening partnerships with Track 2 organisations such as the Network of ASEAN Defense Institutes (NADI), Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific (CSCAP) and the ASEAN Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ASEAN-ISIS) in order to add value to the ARF process and enhance ARF's role and relevance as the central pillar in the evolving regional security architecture.

34. The Ministers welcomed the involvement of ARF EEPs as well as Track 2 representatives at the relevant ARF meetings and activities. The Ministers also expressed appreciation to the EEPs for their active contributions in support of the ARF process. In this regard, the Ministers noted the recommendation for the EEPs to become Preventive Diplomacy focal points for the ARF.

35. The Ministers expressed their appreciation for the ARF Unit of the ASEAN Secretariat in supporting the 23<sup>rd</sup> ARF Chair, Co-Chairs of ARF ISMs and other ARF endorsed meetings and activities. The Ministers noted the Matrix of ARF Decisions and their Status which is regularly updated and has been a useful document in charting the ARF's progress through the years. The Matrix appears as **ANNEX 18**.

36. The Ministers welcomed the publication of the 2016 ARF Annual Security Outlook (ARF ASO) which is an essential document in fostering confidence building, mutual understanding and transparency among ARF participants. To this end, the Ministers called for regular contributions to the ARF ASO from a broader range of participants to promote further clarity and transparency.

