

JOINT STATEMENT BY THE ASEAN DEFENCE MINISTERS ON DEFENCE COOPERATION AGAINST DISEASE OUTBREAKS

WE, the Defence Ministers of the Member States of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) met in Ha Noi, Socialist Republic of Viet Nam on 19 February 2020;

NOTING with grave concern the current outbreak of severe respiratory illness caused by the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19), which affects the well-being of our people, the economic development as well as regional security and stability;

RECOGNISING the declaration by the World Health Organization (WHO) on 30 January 2020 that the situation is a “public health emergency of international concern” (PHEIC);

ENHANCING institutional and human capacities and approaches to support the effective implementation of policies, strategies and programmes in preparing and responding to all health-related hazards and emerging threats;

EXTENDING our deepest sympathies to the countries, communities and individuals impacted by the outbreak;

NOTING the effective efforts by ASEAN Member States in coping with COVID-19 to protect their citizens in their respective countries; share and value the efforts of the Government of the People’s Republic of China in dealing with the COVID-19 outbreak, in which the Chinese Ministry of National Defence plays an important part;

REAFFIRMING the Chairman’s Statement on ASEAN collective response to the outbreak of COVID-19 on 15 February 2020;

ACKNOWLEDGING the work of ASEAN in dealing with COVID-19 through the ASEAN Coordinating Council (ACC), including the ongoing measures being undertaken by the ASEAN Health sector;

APPLAUDING Viet Nam’s proactive, thorough and effective preparation for ASEAN 2020, including taking preventive measures against COVID-19;

COMMENDING the healthcare personnel who are at the frontlines of fighting the outbreak;

ACKNOWLEDGING that regional and international collaboration is required to deal with the effects of the outbreaks, which are unpredictable;

REAFFIRMING our commitment to promote defence cooperation, including in military medicine cooperation and information sharing to ensure a peaceful, safe and stable environment; and emphasise the importance of ASEAN unity and solidarity in response to the disease that may harm the people of ASEAN;

ENCOURAGED by the strong collaboration among ASEAN, including the ASEAN Center of Military Medicine, ASEAN Chiefs of Military Medicine Conference, ASEAN Military Medicine Conference, and the Network of ASEAN Chemical, Biological and Radiological Defence Experts as well as the cooperation with our external partners within the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting-Plus (ADMM-Plus) Experts' Working Group on Military Medicine;

EXEMPLIFYING the spirit of a Cohesive and Responsive ASEAN Community in times of crisis and **COMMITTING** to doing our part, and staying united to overcome the COVID-19 outbreak for the benefit of the people of ASEAN;

WE HEREBY RESOLVE TO:

1. **ENHANCE** practical cooperation among ASEAN defence establishments to organise information and best practice sharing activities, and with our external partners, bilaterally or multilaterally including considering to conduct a tabletop exercise within the framework of the ASEAN Center of Military Medicine, which Viet Nam is ready to host at the earliest opportunity in dealing with COVID-19;
2. **LEVERAGE** the Network of ASEAN Chemical, Biological and Radiological Defence Experts to enhance professional linkages, and promote scientific cooperation to manage infectious disease outbreaks;
3. **ENCOURAGE** new initiatives and ways of cooperation contributing to ASEAN's overall efforts to counter fake news regarding the COVID-19 outbreak and ensure our people are well informed of the situation;
4. **COOPERATE** proactively with other relevant sectoral bodies of ASEAN in tackling the COVID-19 in the spirit of ASEAN's solidarity, and with other countries in the region and the world;
5. **DO** our part for public health and social cohesion by supporting the efforts of our respective national health authorities as well as utilising ASEAN's regional health mechanisms for coordination and cooperation in response to this emerging public health threat;
6. **REMAIN** resolutely committed to doing our part, and staying united to overcome the COVID-19 outbreak for the benefit of the people of ASEAN.