



CHAIRMAN'S STATEMENT OF THE 26TH ASEAN REGIONAL FORUM BANGKOK, 2 AUGUST 2019

1. The Twenty-Sixth Meeting of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) was held in Bangkok, Thailand on 2 August 2019. The Meeting was chaired by H.E. Don Pramudwinai, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Thailand.
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 acknowledged with satisfaction that the ARF, through the active contributions of all ARF Participants, has continued to progress as an important multilateral platform for political-security dialogue and cooperation, as well as promoting confidence building measures and preventive diplomacy in the Asia-Pacific region. The Ministers were pleased with the progress made in the implementation of the ARF Vision Statement and Hanoi Plan of Action to Implement the ARF Vision Statement and looked forward to the implementation of the remaining action lines. With a view to affirming ASEAN's central role in advancing the ARF process, the Ministers tasked the ARF Senior Officials to develop the new Plan of Action to Implement the ARF Vision Statement for consideration and adoption by the 27th ARF in Viet Nam in 2020.
4. The Ministers recognised that the ARF has played a constructive role in enhancing mutual understanding and trust as well as promoting transparency in the region. The Ministers noted with satisfaction that the number of ARF activities on preventive diplomacy continued to increase, while confidence-building measures continued to be strengthened. The Ministers underlined the importance of sustaining the momentum and encouraged ARF Participants to undertake further preventive diplomacy activities in accordance with the ARF Work Plan on Preventive Diplomacy and consistent with the principles reflected in the ARF Concept and Principles of Preventive Diplomacy.
5. The Ministers stressed the importance of enhancing the ARF's relevance and effectiveness in addressing the increasingly complex challenges amidst the continuously evolving regional landscape. In this connection, they noted that the ARF has been successful in the promotion of peace and stability in the region through enhanced cooperation in the areas of disaster relief, counter-terrorism and transnational crime, maritime security, non-proliferation and disarmament, and security of and in the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs). The Ministers further underlined the importance of moving the ARF process forward at a pace comfortable to all and on the basis of consensus, while recognising the importance of continuing to make the ARF

relevant in addressing the shared challenges in the area under the ARF's geographical footprint. In this regard, the Ministers also recognised the need to improve the ARF process and working methods.

HIGHLIGHTS OF DISCUSSIONS ON REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL ISSUES

6. The Ministers stressed the importance of continued peaceful dialogue amongst all parties concerned in order to realising lasting peace and stability in a denuclearised Korean Peninsula. They welcomed the efforts by the Republic of Korea (ROK), the United States, Russia, and China to establish a sustainable dialogue with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). The Ministers welcomed the meeting between United States (US) President Donald Trump and Chairman of the State Affairs Commission of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) Kim Jong Un on 30 June 2019 at the Demilitarised Zone (DMZ) on the Korean Peninsula and looked forward to resumption of negotiations. They also urged the DPRK to fulfill its stated commitment to complete denuclearisation and its pledge to refrain from further nuclear and missile tests. The Ministers urged all parties concerned to continue or to resume peaceful dialogue and work together towards progress in the realisation of lasting peace and stability in a denuclearised Korean Peninsula, including through the full and expeditious implementation of the Panmunjom Declaration, the Joint Statement by the US and DPRK Leaders, and the Pyongyang Joint Declaration. They reiterated their commitment to the full implementation of all relevant United Nations Security Council Resolutions by all UN members and international efforts to bring about the complete denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula which will contribute to peace and stability of the region. Some Ministers emphasised the importance of addressing issues of humanitarian concerns of the international community, including the resolution of the abductions issue.

7. The Ministers 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. The Ministers underscored the importance of the full and effective implementation of the 2002 Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC) in its entirety. They warmly welcomed the continued improving cooperation between ASEAN and China and were encouraged by the progress of the substantive negotiations towards the early conclusion of an effective and substantive Code of Conduct in the South China Sea (COC) within a mutually-agreed timeline. They welcomed the completion of the first reading of the Single Draft COC Negotiating Text ahead of schedule this year. The Ministers emphasised the need to maintain an environment conducive to the COC negotiations, and thus welcomed practical measures that could reduce tensions and the risk of accidents, misunderstandings and miscalculation. The Ministers stressed the importance of undertaking confidence building and preventive measures to enhance, among others, trust and confidence amongst parties; and they reaffirmed the importance of upholding international law, including the 1982 UNCLOS.

8. The Ministers discussed the matters relating to the South China Sea and took note of some concerns on the land reclamations and activities in the area, which have eroded trust and confidence, increased tensions and may undermine peace, security and stability in the region. They 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 in accordance with international law, including the 1982 UNCLOS. The Ministers emphasised the importance of non-militarisation and self-restraint in the conduct of all activities by claimants and all other states, including those mentioned in the DOC that could further complicate the situation and escalate tensions in the South China Sea.

9. The Ministers condemned the acts of terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, including the recent attacks in the Philippines, India, New Zealand, and Sri Lanka. The Ministers welcomed the timely adoption of the ARF Work Plan for Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime 2019-2021, as well as relevant ARF activities in this area. They reaffirmed their strong commitment to countering terrorism and addressing its root causes as well as the threat posed by foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) through enhanced cooperation among law enforcement agencies, strengthening aviation security, timely information sharing, countering terrorism financing, and undertaking a comprehensive whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach, including the promotion of respect for diversity, moderation, involvement of women, youth and civil society, a culture of tolerance and peace, and preventing the use of ICTs, including the internet, online platform, social media and cyber space for terrorists purposes or the spread of violent extremism conducive to terrorism. The Ministers welcomed that cooperation on these issues would be discussed at the 14th United Nations Crime Congress on Criminal Justice and Crime Prevention, Kyoto Congress, to be held in April, 2020.

10. The Ministers exchanged views on various challenges relating to maritime domain, and shared concern over the degradation of marine eco-system and bio-diversity caused by the high and rapidly increasing levels of marine debris and marine pollution, especially marine plastic litter and microplastics. They therefore noted the progress of various maritime cooperation through raising public awareness, practical engagements, and continued constructive dialogue and the importance in coordination among various framework in addressing maritime challenges under the ARF and other ASEAN-led frameworks such as the Expanded ASEAN Maritime Forum (EAMF), the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting Plus (ADMM-Plus), and the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Transnational Crime (AMMTC), as well as other similar arrangements such as the Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery (ReCAAP).

11. The Ministers were mindful of the potential impact of climate change, rising sea levels and increasing disaster risks to the region's vulnerability and leading to disruption of socio-economic development and people's livelihood. They underlined the need to enhance ARF capabilities and cooperation in disaster management and emergency response. In this connection, they also noted with satisfaction the strengthening of humanitarian assistance and disaster relief efforts in the region, including the archipelagic nations, under the ARF Inter-Sessional Meeting on Disaster Relief. They also welcomed the establishment of the ASEAN Satellite Warehouses in Chai Nat, Thailand and in Manila, Philippines, which will enhance the mobilisation and delivery of relief items rapidly to disaster-affected areas. They noted the progress made in the implementation of internationally adopted principles and standards related to disaster risk reduction, including the Bangkok Principles for the implementation of the health aspects of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030.

12. The Ministers recognised the increasing importance of ICT Security to economic growth and the regional and global challenges arising from the rapidly changing cyber environment. They emphasised the need for enhanced ICT Security cooperation, including through capacity building, building an open, secure, stable, accessible, resilient, and peaceful cyberspace. The Ministers welcomed activities and initiatives that build confidence and promote trust in cyber space through constructive dialogue under the ARF Inter-Sessional Meeting on ICTs Security and relevant ASEAN-led mechanisms related to ICTs Security.

13. The Ministers reiterated the importance of strengthening international and regional cooperative efforts in nuclear non-proliferation, disarmament and peaceful uses of nuclear energy as well as in ensuring the elimination, non-proliferation and non-use of chemical and biological weapons. The Ministers noted the finalisation of the formalisation of partnership between ASEAN and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to promote cooperation in the areas of nuclear science and technology and applications, nuclear safety, security and safeguards.

14. With regard to the situation in Rakhine State, the Ministers appreciated the efforts of the Secretary-General of ASEAN (ASG), the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on Disaster Management (AHA Centre), and officials from the Government of Myanmar in conducting the Preliminary Needs Assessment (PNA) Mission, going further with the recommendations of the PNA and preparing for the Comprehensive Needs Assessment (CNA) based on the mandate given by ASEAN. They acknowledged the value added of international cooperation and support for these endeavours. They encouraged ASEAN to continue its efforts to help Myanmar in addressing the ongoing humanitarian situation in Rakhine State. The Ministers welcomed the extension of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Government of Myanmar, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to facilitate the repatriation process of the displaced persons from Rakhine State and looked forward to the full implementation of the MOU. They expressed their continued support for Myanmar's commitment to ensure safety and security for all communities in Rakhine State as effectively as possible and to facilitate the voluntary return of displaced persons in a safe, secure and dignified manner. In this regard, they encouraged Myanmar and Bangladesh to continue constructive and effective dialogue to facilitate the repatriation process. They welcomed the visit of the High-Level Mission led by the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Myanmar, together with representatives from the ASEAN Secretariat, the AHA Centre and members of the ASEAN-Emergency Response and Assessment Team (ERAT), to Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, from 27 to 29 July 2019 to share information on arrangements made by the Government of Myanmar for prospective returnees and to continue discussions. They looked forward to the conduct of the Comprehensive Needs Assessment at appropriate intervals. They also encouraged Myanmar to continue implementing the remaining recommendations of the final report of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State. The Ministers stressed the need to find comprehensive and durable solution to address the root causes of the conflict and to create a conducive environment so that the affected communities can rebuild their lives. They expressed their continued support for Myanmar's efforts to bring peace, stability, the rule of law, to promote harmony and reconciliation among the various communities as well as to ensure sustainable and equitable development in Rakhine State.

Review of Activities of the Current Inter-sessional Year (2018-2019)

15. The Ministers commended the work of the ARF Senior Officials' Meeting (SOM) Chaired by Thailand in Bangkok on 31 May 2019 and the ARF Inter-Sessional Support Group on Confidence Building Measures and Preventive Diplomacy (ARF ISG on CBMs and PD), co-chaired by Thailand and the Republic of Korea in Seoul on 3 May 2019. The Ministers noted the recommendations of the ARF ISG on CBMs and PD and the ARF SOM, and adopted the ARF Work Plan on Counter-Terrorism and Transnational Crime 2019-2021 which appears as **ANNEX 2**. The Co-Chairs Summary Report of the ARF ISG on CBMs and PD and the Summary Report of the ARF SOM appear as **ANNEX 3 and 4**, respectively.

16. The Ministers appreciated the contributions made by the defence officials and emphasised the importance of defence and security cooperation in the ARF process. Recognising the value of high-level ARF defence official's interaction in fostering mutual understanding and strengthening confidence among ARF Participants, the Ministers noted with satisfaction the outcome of the 16th ARF Security Policy Conference (ASPC) Chaired by Thailand in Bangkok on 23 May 2019 and the ARF Defence Officials' Dialogue (DOD) Co-Chaired by Thailand and the Republic of Korea in Seoul on 2 May 2019. The Summary Report of the 16th ASPC and the Co-Chairs' Summary Report of the ARF DOD appear as **ANNEX 5** and **ANNEX 6**.

Outcomes of ARF ISMs and other annually-held meetings

17. The Ministers welcomed the outcomes of the annually held ARF meetings including:

- (a) 11th ARF Inter-Sessional Meeting on Maritime Security (ISM on MS), Co-Chaired by Viet Nam, Australia and the European Union in Da Nang on 14-15 March 2019;
- (b) 16th ARF Inter-Sessional Meeting on Counter-Terrorism and Transnational Crime (ISM on CTTC), Co-Chaired by Indonesia and Russia in Bali on 21-22 March 2019;
- (c) 2nd ARF Inter-Sessional Meeting on Security of and in the Use of Information and Communication Technologies (ISM on ICTs Security), Co-Chaired by Malaysia, Singapore and Japan in Singapore on 28-29 March 2019;
- (d) 18th ARF Inter-Sessional Meeting on Disaster Relief (ISM on DR), Co-Chaired by Lao PDR, Canada and China in Vientiane on 3 April 2019;
- (e) 11th ARF Inter-Sessional Meeting on Non-Proliferation and Disarmament (ISM on NPD), Co-Chaired by Indonesia, Japan and Republic of Korea in Bali on 8-9 April 2019;
- (f) 13th ARF Experts and Eminent Persons Meeting (EEPs), Co-Chaired by Myanmar and Japan in Chiba on 26-27 February 2019; and
- (g) 22nd ARF Heads of Defence Universities/Colleges/Institutions Meeting (HDUCIM), Co-Chaired by Singapore and Japan in Tokyo on 25-29 September 2018.

The reports of these meetings appear as **ANNEX 7-13**, respectively.

18. The Ministers noted the outcomes of the following workshops and seminars, which were held in the Inter-Sessional Year 2018-2019:

- (a) 2nd ARF Workshop on National Single Points of Contact, Co-Chaired by Malaysia, Australia and the United States in Kuala Lumpur on 27-29 August 2018;
- (b) ARF Workshop on Preventive Diplomacy: Skills and Tools towards Effective Peacebuilding, Co-Chaired by Myanmar and the United States in Nay Pyi Taw on 17-19 September 2018;
- (c) ARF Workshop on Regional Climate Change and Coastal Disaster Mitigation, Co-Chaired by Thailand, Australia and China in Tianjin on 1-2 November 2018;
- (d) 2nd ARF Training Course on Urban Search and Rescue, Co-Chaired by Singapore and China in Singapore on 19-21 November 2018;
- (e) 2nd ARF Workshop on Ferry Safety, Co-Chaired by the Philippines and China in Guangzhou on 26-28 November 2018;
- (f) ARF Workshop on Preventive Diplomacy: New Ideas and New Approaches, Co-Chaired by Brunei Darussalam, China and the United States in Nanjing on 29-30 November 2018;
- (g) 3rd Open Ended Study Group on Confidence Building Measures to Reduce the Risk of Conflict Stemming from the Use of ICTs, Co-Chaired by Malaysia, Singapore and Japan in Singapore on 29 January 2019;
- (h) ARF Workshop on Implementing UNCLOS and Other International Instruments to Address Emerging Maritime Issues, Co-Chaired by Viet Nam and Australia in Nha Trang on 26-27 February 2019;
- (i) 2nd ARF Workshop on Enhancing Regional Maritime Law Enforcement Cooperation, Co-Chaired by Viet Nam, Australia and the European Union in Da Nang on 12-13 March 2019;
- (j) 4th Open Ended Study Group on Confidence Building Measures to Reduce the Risk of Conflict Stemming from the Use of ICTs, Co-Chaired by Malaysia, Singapore and Japan in Singapore on 26 March 2019;
- (k) ARF Workshop on Preventive Diplomacy and Early Warning: Linkages for Conflict Resolution, Co-Chaired by Indonesia, New Zealand, Timor Leste and the United States in Dili on 24-26 April 2019;
- (l) ARF Workshop on Marine Debris Management for Sustainable Fisheries and Food Security in Southeast Asia, Co-Chaired by Thailand, Viet Nam and the United States in Nha Trang on 13-15 May 2019;
- (m) ARF Workshop on Principles of Building Security in the Use of ICTs in the National Context, Co-Chaired by Singapore and Canada in Singapore on 25-26 June 2019;
- (n) ARF Workshop and Table-Top Exercise on Enhancing Law Enforcement, Preventive Measures and Cooperation to Address Complex Issues in the Fisheries Sector, Co-Chaired by Indonesia and the United States in Bali on 26-28 June 2019;
- (o) 7th ARF Peacekeeping Experts Meeting, Co-Chaired by Cambodia and China in Qingdao on 27-29 June 2019;
- (p) ARF Workshop on Aviation Security and Information Sharing, Co-Chaired by Malaysia and the United States in Kuala Lumpur on 10-11 July 2019.

The Ministers also noted that the ARF Workshop on Maritime Law Enforcement Promoting Comprehensive Approach to Address Maritime Crimes, Co-Chaired by Malaysia and the European Union will be carried over from the Inter-sessional Year (2018-2019) to Inter-sessional Year (2019-2020).

The Ministers also requested for Co-Chairs of these activities to submit the finalised Co-Chairs Summary Reports to the ARF Unit as the repository of all ARF documents for future reference.

Programme of Work for the Next Inter-sessional Year (2019-2020)

19. The Ministers were pleased to welcome the following Chair and Co-Chairs:

- (a) Viet Nam as Chair of the 27th ARF, ARF SOM and 17th ASPC;
- (b) Viet Nam and the United States as Co-Chairs of the ARF ISG on CBMs and PD and ARF DOD for the inter-sessional year 2019-2020;
- (c) Malaysia, the European Union and New Zealand as Co-Chairs of the ARF ISM on Counter-Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC) for the period of 2020-2022 ;
- (d) Myanmar and China as Co-Chairs of the 14th ARF Experts and Eminent Persons' Meeting;
- (e) Singapore and Pakistan as Co-Chairs of the 23rd ARF HDUCIM; and
- (f) Indonesia and Japan as Co-Chairs of the 8th ARF Peacekeeping Experts' Meeting.

20. The Ministers further noted that Viet Nam, Australia and the EU will continue to co-chair the ARF ISM on MS until 2020; Malaysia, Singapore and Japan will continue to serve as Co-Chairs of the ARF ISM on ICTs Security until 2020; Indonesia, Japan and ROK will continue to co-chair the ARF ISM on NPD for the period of 2018-2020; and Lao PDR, Canada and China will continue to co-chair the ARF ISM on DR until 2021. Noting that the term of co-chairmanship for some of these ISMs will expire in 2020, the Ministers encouraged ARF Participants to take up co-chairmanship for the next cycle to ensure continuity.

21. The Ministers reaffirmed the procedure that all proposed ARF activities, initiatives, work plans, concept papers and statements should first be discussed at the ISG/ISM level and endorsed at the ARF SOM before they are tabled for the consideration of the ARF Ministers. The Ministers also encouraged co-chairs of ARF meetings and activities to manage the schedule of their respective activities with a view to providing sufficient time to facilitate discussion on pending issues prior to the ARF ISG on CBMs and PD and the ARF SOM. With a view of streamlining the ARF process, the Ministers further reiterated that, once approved, the List of ARF Track 1 Activities shall not be further amended, including revisions to the proposal of the activity. All ARF Participants and the ARF Unit should be notified of any inclusion of new co-chairs to the Activities. In this regard, the Ministers approved the List of ARF Track 1 Activities for the Inter-Sessional Year 2019-2020 which appears as **ANNEX 14**.

22. Recognising the complexity and continuous evolution of the regional security landscape, the Ministers were of the view that there is a need to enhance cooperation to address the various security challenges in the region. On this note, the Ministers adopted the following:

- (a) ARF Statement on Aviation Partnership: Soaring Ahead Together;
- (b) Joint Statement on Promoting Women, Peace and Security at the ARF; and
- (c) ARF Statement on Preventing and Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism Conducive to Terrorism (VECT).

The Statements appear as **ANNEX 15-17**, respectively.

Future Direction of the ARF Process

23. Recognising that the challenges facing the region are becoming increasingly complex and cross-cutting in nature, the Ministers emphasised the need for enhanced synergy and coordination between the work of the ARF and other ASEAN-led mechanisms such as the ADMM-Plus, the AMMTC, the East Asia Summit (EAS) and the EAMF, among others. The Ministers underscored that greater and more concerted effort should be made to ensure coherence and to avoid unnecessary duplication of efforts.

24. In view of strengthening the work of the ARF, the Ministers concurred with the suggestion to streamline the ARF reporting process at the ARF SOM, wherein the Co-Chairs of the ARF ISG on CBMs and PD, on behalf of Co-Chairs of the ARF ISMs, present the outcomes of the ISMs to the ARF SOM. In this regard, Co-Chairs of ISMs and the ARF ISG on CBMs and PD are tasked to finalise their respective reports prior to the ARF SOM. The Ministers were of the view that such streamlining would allow the ARF SOM more time to focus their discussion on regional security issues of common interest and prepare for the ARF Ministerial Meeting.

25. The Ministers also took note of the discussion on improving the ARF process to enhance its effectiveness and responsiveness, taking into account various efforts that have been put forth over the years, including the proposals to streamline the ARF meetings, and look forward to the recommendations of the ARF SOM in this matter.

26. The Ministers expressed their appreciation to the EEPs for their active contributions in support of the ARF process on issues of relevance to their expertise. In this regard, the Ministers noted that ARF EEPs as well as others Track 2 representatives could be invited to take part in relevant ARF ISMs or activities as deemed appropriate by their respective governments. The Ministers noted that increased dialogue and interaction between the ARF and other regional organizations such as the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), with a view to exchanging best practices on CBMs, would be explored in the future.

27. The Ministers welcomed the 2019 ARF Annual Security Outlook (ASO) presented by Thailand, which is an essential document to foster trust and mutual understanding and called for greater and regular contributions in future ARF ASO publications.

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