

**SPEECH BY DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER,
MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS PHAM BINH MINH
AT THE OPENING SESSION OF THE
53RD ASEAN FOREIGN MINISTERS' MEETING (AMM)**

(8.00-8.15, 9 September 2020)

*Your Excellency Nguyen Xuan Phuc, Prime Minister of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam,
Excellencies Foreign Ministers of the ASEAN Member States and the Secretary General of ASEAN,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to His Excellency Nguyen Xuan Phuc, Prime Minister of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam for his attendance and important guidance.

I was hopeful of welcoming you to Ha Noi in this typical beautiful autumn, nonetheless conditions do not allow us to do so. I look forward to meeting you in Viet Nam at the earliest possible time.

Similar to the 36th ASEAN Summit, this is the first time ever our annual AMM is held via video-conference. Such rapid transformation in ASEAN operational modalities is perhaps one of the noticeable impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

*Your Excellency Prime Minister,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

Dynamic in action, flexible in response, and creative in cooperation are typical features of ASEAN over the past 50 years.

In the past decade, guided by the spirit of “*From vision to action*”, the ASEAN Community has gradually taken shape. The initial stage of that path has been completed, laying important foundation for the ASEAN Community building process. ASEAN has been, step by step, promoting its central role in shaping an open, inclusive, transparent and rules-based regional architecture.

Entering its 6th decade, ASEAN is now speeding up its Community building while maximizing its role and status in the region and actively contributing to the joint efforts for peace, stability and development of the international community.

We are witnessing the rigorous transformation of the way international relations interact. The roles of international law and multilateral institutions are

being greatly challenged. On the rise are the trends of power politics, egoistic calculations, and inconsistency in countries' behaviors. Globalization, regional integration and economic liberalization have, to some extent, are encountering stumbling blocks. In addition, we are also facing complicated developments of global issues, notably the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.

Being vigilant at challenges, proactive in response, and cohesive in action, ASEAN has upheld solidarity and persistently pursued its goals, and joined hands in combating the pandemic. Such ASEAN's determination has been demonstrated in the Vision Statement on a Cohesive and Responsive ASEAN adopted at the recent 36th ASEAN Summit.

ASEAN has obtained significant progress recently. Many ASEAN economies have been able to maintain positive growth rates, though lower than the set targets. Trade growth with Dialogue Partners have been maintained over the past months. ASEAN also made good use of the wave of investment shift to the region. The grouping's relations with Dialogues Partners have been further strengthened and expanded. The number of non-regional countries desiring to accede to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC), establish new partnerships or enhance their current partnerships with ASEAN are rising. In the fight against COVID-19, ASEAN's recovery rate has been relatively high with low mortality rate.

We have been also standing firm in conducting our own approach - the ASEAN way - to preserve peace, stability and development in the region in the face of multi-dimensional impacts from the outside strategic setting as mentioned in the Statement that we, the ASEAN Foreign Ministers, adopted on 8 August 2020, on the occasion of the ASEAN commemorative event.

Your Excellency Prime Minister,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

At this AMM, we will discuss specific measures to effectively implement the instructions of the ASEAN Leaders at the 36th ASEAN Summit. We will also exchange views on how to further promote regional cooperation and integration, overcome challenges and difficulties in order to successfully achieve the set targets and map out the way forward.

As stated by His Excellency Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc, we will continue to consolidate solidarity and unity, caring and sharing, respect for each other's interests and concerns, so that ASEAN Member States shall be sustainably bonded within a strong ASEAN Community.

We are resolved to overcome difficulties, effectively and timely achieve the targets in the ASEAN Community Vision 2025, ensure full implementation of all provisions and procedures in the ASEAN Charter, and to continue improving the operational effectiveness of ASEAN's sectoral bodies and other ASEAN-led dialogue and cooperation mechanisms.

Building upon the efforts made by ASEAN over the past years, we will continue to enhance connectivity and sustainable development, encourage innovation, promote inclusive and equitable growth so that no one is left behind. The ASEAN initiatives, such as the ASEAN Network of Smart Cities, Connecting Connectivities, etc., will continue to be effectively implemented. With the desire to help ASEAN sub-regions catch up with and closely link to the overall development process of the Community, I look forward to your valuable inputs at the Special Session of the ASEAN Coordinating Council on Sub-Regional Development at this AMM.

Being aware that the threat of the COVID-19 pandemic is still looming, we will, on the one hand, proactively contain the pandemic through prevention measures, development of accessible vaccines and medications, on the other, undertake early and effective actions to support the people and businesses to overcome the consequences of the disease, step by step recover the economy and return their life to normal. The ASEAN Coordinating Council will discuss thoroughly ways and means to effectively push forward ASEAN's efforts and initiatives to respond to the COVID-19.

To mitigate the adverse impacts of the complicated dynamics in the regional and international strategic landscape, and in order to maintain stability to focus on fighting the disease, we have to concentrate on consolidating the ASEAN-led dialogue and cooperation mechanisms. In the meetings with the Dialogue Partners during this AMM, we will deliberate issues relating to future of the forums, such as EAS on the occasion of its 15th anniversary, ARF with a new action program for the 2020 – 2030, and continue to broaden and deepen the cooperation with Dialogue Partners within the ASEAN+1 and ASEAN+3 frameworks to maximize these platforms' roles in the new circumstances.

In parallel with that are efforts to formulate and implement universally recognized norms, and to uphold the principles enshrined in the United Nations Charter and the ASEAN Charter concerning inter-state relations, including those on adhering to international law, equality, mutual respect, understanding and trust. Strategic trust as mentioned in the 8 August Statement will be an important factor to neutralize suspicions, to sincerely cooperate with each other on the win-win basis and to prevent the danger of conflicts.

ASEAN will continue making active contributions and promoting its role in efforts to sustain international peace and security. The Ministerial Dialogue between ASEAN and its Dialogue Partners, aimed at encouraging the role of women in sustainable peace and security, constitutes ASEAN's practical contribution to implementing Resolution No. 1325 of the UN Security Council on Women, Peace and Security.

Challenges to the regional security and stability are always present, including factors threatening peace, stability, security, safety and freedom of navigation and overflight in the South China Sea, a critical sea lane of communication of the region and the world. ASEAN will persistently hold onto

its principled position, emphasizing self-restraints, peaceful settlement of all disputes in accordance with international law, including the 1982 UNCLOS, promoting dialogues, strengthening confidence building, non-militarization and refraining from further complicating the situation. ASEAN will persistently promote the full and effective implementation of the DOC and will endeavor to conclude an effective, substantive COC in conformity with international law, including the 1982 UNCLOS.

To take the lead in setting our future development path, we will discuss ways and means to develop a new vision for the post-2025 ASEAN Community, inheriting the existing achievements so as to help ASEAN effectively respond to challenges and opportunities arising in the coming decades.

Excellency Prime Minister,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

With these expectations and taking into account Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc's directions, I look forward to productive discussions with all ASEAN colleagues and our Dialogue Partners.

“Embrace the pride in our heart, ASEAN we are bonded as one, Look-in out to the world”, the words from the ASEAN Song at the beginning of this opening ceremony seem to be still ringing in me with a lot of emotions.

Thank you for your attention and may I wish you, Prime Minister and all of you, Ladies and Gentlemen, the best of health./.