



SUMMARY REPORT

THE SEVENTEENTH ASEAN REGIONAL FORUM SECURITY POLICY CONFERENCE

Video Conference, 8 July 2020

1. The Seventeenth ARF Security Policy Conference (17th ASPC) was chaired by Sr. Lt. Gen. Nguyen Chi Vinh, Deputy Minister of Defence of Viet Nam and participated by representatives from all ARF Participants and the ASEAN Secretariat. The List of Participants appears as **ANNEX 1**.

AGENDA ITEM 1: CHAIR'S OPENING REMARKS

2. In his Opening Remarks, the Chair expressed his appreciation to all delegates for attending the Conference amidst the challenges posed by the COVID-19 global pandemic. Recognising that security challenges in the region continue to rise in frequency and severity, the Chair noted that the unpredictability of the COVID-19 pandemic has further brought about complexities in addressing security challenges. On this note, the Chair underlined the importance of strengthening cooperation among countries in the region to collectively and effectively address security threats. He further expressed hope that the Conference will provide an opportunity for ARF Participants to exchange experience, share views and lessons learnt in addressing and/or combating the COVID-19 pandemic as well as other regional security issues.

AGENDA ITEM 2: ADOPTION OF AGENDA

3. The Conference adopted the Agenda, which appears as **ANNEX 2**.

AGENDA ITEM 3: EXCHANGE OF VIEWS ON REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL ISSUES, DEFENCE POLICIES

4. The Conference exchanged views on the current situation with the COVID-19 pandemic and noted the various efforts of ARF Participants in combating the pandemic. The Conference recognised that the pandemic has affected every sector and noted that there is a possibility for irresponsible parties to exploit the current vulnerabilities brought upon by the pandemic. Taking into account the unprecedented nature and complexity of the pandemic, the Conference was of the view that collective and coordinated global response across all sectors are integral to ensure public health and safety, including through the utilisation of military medicine and non-medical military units, improving contact tracing and testing capabilities, enhancing research capabilities, promoting openness and transparency as well as timely information sharing.

5. Expressing hope towards positive developments in the region including on the situation in the Korean Peninsula and the South China Sea, the Conference underlined the need for continued cooperation and looked forward for the early conclusion of an effective Code of Conduct in the South China Sea as well as continued stability and peace in the Korean Peninsula. The Conference also urged all parties to refrain from actions that would escalate tensions and reiterated the need to enhance mutual trust, transparency and respect to international law, including the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. In this regard, the Conference underlined the value of the ARF as a framework to enhance confidence building measures and promote mutual trust in the region through dialogue and cooperation.

6. The Conference also discussed other security challenges, including transnational crime such as terrorism, illicit drug smuggling, trafficking of people, Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing, as well as the effects of climate change and natural disasters. The Conference noted that traditional and non-traditional security challenges have become increasingly complex, particularly due to the rapid changes in technological advancements. Noting that cybersecurity is one of the key factors influencing economic growth in the region, some ARF Participants also underlined the serious threat of cybercrimes that have disrupted trading activities and affected banking and healthcare systems in many countries in the region. Towards this end, the Conference was of the view that there is a pressing need to collectively address these challenges through enhancing transparency, information sharing and cross-border cooperation, in view of maintaining peace, stability and prosperity in the region amidst the increasing uncertainties.

AGENDA ITEM 4: STRENGTHENING THE LINKAGE BETWEEN ADMM-PLUS AND ARF, AND ENHANCING THE ROLE OF DEFENCE COOPERATION IN THE ARF

7. The Chair briefed the Conference on the proposal to strengthen linkages between the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting – Plus (ADMM-Plus) and the ARF, and to enhance defence cooperation in the ARF. In this connection, the Conference noted the following proposals: (i) for the ARF Defence Officials' Dialogue (DOD) to consolidate defence and relevant security cooperation activities to be reported to the ASPC and for the ASPC to report directly to the ARF Ministers; (ii) to enhance the coordination of activities under the ARF and the ADMM-Plus, such as the ARF Disaster Relief Exercise (DiREx) and the ADMM-Plus Experts' Working Group on Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (EWG on HADR) exercises; and (iii) to enhance exchange of information on defence cooperation within the ARF and the ADMM-Plus, at the level of ASPC and the ASEAN Defence Senior Officials' Meeting Plus (ADSOM-Plus). It is envisioned that the information sharing could be facilitated by the Chair of the ASPC/ADSOM-Plus or by the ASEAN Secretariat during their briefing on recent developments in ASEAN at the ADSOM-Plus.

8. The Conference noted the comments made by several ARF Participants on the proposal for the ARF DOD to consolidate all defence and security cooperation activities in the ARF, including on whether such practice would require changes to the current ARF process, which would then entail amendments to the existing Concept Papers of the ASPC and DOD. In this connection, some ARF Participants were of the view that further deliberation is needed and underlined the need for consultations with their respective Ministry of Foreign Affairs, particularly taking into consideration that a draft Guide to ARF Processes, Procedures, Practices and Protocol is currently being negotiated by ASEAN Member States. The Conference also noted that a concept note on "Rationalizing Defence Meetings under the ARF Process", which proposes to merge the ARF DOD and the ASPC into the ARF Defence and Security Policy Conference or ADSPC had been put forth in 2017 and followed-up in 2018, wherein the 25th ARF in August 2018 noted that as no consensus on the matter had been reached, the status quo of conducting one ARF DOD and one ASPC per inter-sessional year would be maintained. The Conference noted the Philippines' suggestion to relook at the proposal to avoid duplication of efforts and in this regard, the Chair suggested for the Philippines to develop a concept note for future deliberation.

9. The Conference exchanged views on the proposal to enhance coordination of activities under the ARF and the ADMM-Plus, including the possibility of combining the ARF DiREx and the Field Training Exercise (FTX) of the ADMM-Plus EWG on HADR. In this regard, the Conference noted that the platforms involved different

sectoral bodies and had different memberships, and thus there is a need to further study the proposal. On the issue of enhancing exchange of information on defence cooperation, the Conference noted the benefit that such practice would promote synergies between the ARF and the ADSOM-Plus which could minimise duplication of efforts in both platforms. In this regard, the ARF Participants expressed their support for such exchange of information which could be incorporated in the remarks of the Chair and/or by incorporating the information in the briefing of the ASEAN Secretariat at the ADSOM-Plus. Some ARF Participants were also of the view that it may be worthwhile to consider taking stock of ARF defence meetings to enhance the effectiveness of defence and security cooperation in the ARF, thus further strengthening linkages with other similar/related platforms and to avoid duplication of efforts. The Conference further noted that the proposals of the 17th ASPC will be duly shared to the upcoming ARF Senior Officials' Meeting (SOM) on 21 July 2020 for further deliberation.

AGENDA ITEM 5: CHAIR'S CLOSING REMARKS

10. In his Closing Remarks, the Chair expressed appreciation to all Participants for their active contribution and support rendered towards the success of the Conference. He reiterated that the robust exchange of ideas, sharing of experiences and lessons learned, provided valuable insights which will further contribute to the collective efforts to achieve peace, security and stability in the region in a sustainable manner.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

11. The Conference expressed appreciation to the Government of Viet Nam for the effective chairmanship and arrangements made for the Conference.

