

CHAIRMAN'S STATEMENT
15th ASEAN REGIONAL FORUM
24 JULY 2008
SINGAPORE

1 The Fifteenth Meeting of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) was convened in Singapore on 24 July 2008. The Meeting was chaired by H.E. George Yeo, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Singapore.

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**.

3 An ARF Defence Dialogue among defence and military officials attending the 15th ARF was also held in Singapore on 23 July 2008.

Overview of the ARF Process

4 The Ministers reaffirmed the importance of the ARF as the main multilateral political and security forum in the region, and reiterated their support for ASEAN as the primary driving force of the ARF. They encouraged the continued cooperation and contribution of all the ARF participants in moving the ARF process forward to the next stage of its development. The Ministers also agreed that confidence building and preventive diplomacy should be mutually reinforcing and parallel processes.

5 The Ministers noted with satisfaction the significant progress of the ARF and the role that it has played in enhancing political and security dialogue and cooperation as well as confidence building in the Asia-Pacific region. While acknowledging the importance of the basic principles of decision-making by consensus and non-interference, the Ministers agreed that the ARF should undertake more concrete cooperation to address both traditional and non-traditional security challenges confronting the region.

6 The Ministers recognised that the challenges facing the Asia Pacific region are becoming more complex and inter-related and require greater regional cooperation. Given the wide range of issues involved, such as counter terrorism, non-proliferation, disaster relief, maritime security, avian and pandemic influenza, human and drugs trafficking, the Ministers agreed on the need for the ARF to strengthen its efforts and carefully consider how to focus on those issues most relevant to its mandate, capabilities and membership.

Highlights of Discussions on Regional and International Security Issues

7 The Ministers expressed their condolences to Myanmar and China over the loss of lives and devastation caused by Cyclone Nargis and the earthquakes in Sichuan, China. The Ministers noted with satisfaction that the ASEAN Humanitarian Task Force had effectively delivered humanitarian assistance to the victims and survivors of Cyclone Nargis. This first ASEAN-led mechanism involving ASEAN Member States individually and collectively, as well as the United Nations and the international community, had brought positive results.

8 Recognising that many of the ARF countries are in a region prone to natural disasters, the Ministers emphasised the need for the forum to intensify cooperation in the areas of emergency preparedness, disaster relief and management, rehabilitation and recovery including with existing mechanisms and the United Nations. They agreed that there should be further training, technical assistance and coordination among ARF participants in advance of disasters. The Ministers considered the following areas of cooperation:

- a) The Ministers called for in greater civil-military coordination for major, multinational disaster responses through training, information sharing, and multinational exercises. They recognised that military assets and personnel, in full support and not in place of civilian responses, have played an increasingly important role in regional disaster responses.
- b) The Ministers instructed Senior Officials to continue work on developing the ARF Strategic Guidance for Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief. Along with the General Guidelines on Disaster Relief Cooperation adopted at the 14th ARF, these operational procedures will facilitate better understanding and cooperation among the relief agencies of ARF participants.
- c) The Ministers tasked the Co-Chairs of the ARF ISM on Disaster Relief to work with ARF participants to draw up an ARF disaster relief Workplan aimed at coordinating ARF-wide or sub-regional training for disaster preparedness, and to explore the feasibility of an ARF humanitarian assistance military and civil defence assets template that could be utilised for disaster relief. This should be bilateral, voluntary, and only a tool that could be called upon for use between interested affected and assisting states as needed.

d) The Minister also endorsed the proposal by the Philippines and the US to conduct an ARF Disaster Relief Exercise, termed Voluntary Demonstration of Response (VDR), in the next ARF Inter-Sessional year. The Philippines and the US have initiated discussions on potential sites and dates, identified logistical procedures and requirements, and draft proposed rules of participation.

9 In undertaking disaster relief cooperation, the Ministers agreed that several basic principles should continue to apply. These included the principle that the affected country has the primary responsibility to respond to the humanitarian needs of its people following natural disasters occurring within its territory in a prompt and effective manner; where needed, the affected country should facilitate humanitarian assistance from other countries and international organizations to achieve the overall objective of coordinated, timely and effective disaster management and relief based on identified needs; and that external assistance should be provided in response to a request from the affected country, and the disaster relief efforts should be under its overall coordination.

10 The Ministers welcomed the convening of the informal meeting of the Foreign Ministers of the Six-Party Talks at the sidelines of the 15th ARF. They reiterated their support for the Six-Party Talks toward the verifiable denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and the eventual normalisation of the relations between the relevant Six Party members through the full implementation of the Joint Statement of 19 September 2005. They welcomed the submission of the declaration by the DPRK on its nuclear programs and emphasised the importance of the early establishment of an effective verification and monitoring mechanism. They expressed their hope that the recent progress would contribute to an expedited completion of the Second-Phase actions.

11 The Ministers also emphasised the importance of addressing the issue of humanitarian and people concerns of the international community.

12 The Ministers reaffirmed the continuing importance of the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea of 2002 (DOC) as a milestone document between ASEAN and China, embodying their collective commitment to ensure the peaceful resolution of disputes in the area. They believed that the Declaration has been effective in building mutual trust and confidence among the claimants in the area and in maintaining peace and stability in the region. They reiterated the hope that ASEAN and China would expeditiously conclude the Guidelines on the Implementation of the DOC, and looked forward to the eventual conclusion of a Regional Code of Conduct in the South China Sea.

They encouraged the continued exercise of self-restraint by all the parties concerned and the promotion of confidence-building measures in this area and welcomed their commitment to resolving disputes in the South China Sea by peaceful means in conformity with the spirit of the DOC and recognised principles of international law including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

13 The Ministers welcomed the meeting between Mr Javier Solana, European Union High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy and Mr Saeed Jalili, Secretary of Supreme National Security Council of the Islamic Republic of Iran, joined by Political Directors of China, France, Germany, Russia, UK and US on 19 July 2008, and encouraged all the parties to continue diplomatic effort in accordance with the relevant UN Security Council Resolutions, and show flexibility in pursuit of a comprehensive, long-lasting and proper solution of the Iranian nuclear issue.

14 The Ministers strongly condemned the suicide bombing of the Embassy of India in Kabul, Afghanistan on 7 July 2008, and expressed their condolences over the loss of innocent lives. The Ministers underlined their continued support for all efforts to bring about peace and development of Afghanistan. Afghanistan's stability is crucial for the broader region and the Ministers encouraged ARF participants to consider exploring ways to cooperate with Afghanistan.

15 The Ministers expressed their concern over the continued danger of terrorism, and reaffirmed their commitment to countering it. They underlined the importance of inter-cultural and inter-civilisational dialogue in combating ideology of terrorism and called for greater involvement of civil society, private sector as well as mass media into its development. The Ministers also advocated active cooperation between the ARF and other international and regional organisations in fighting terrorism and transnational organised crime.

16 The Ministers took note of the briefing by Myanmar on the recent developments in the process of national reconciliation and its peaceful transition to democracy, as envisaged in the roadmap to democracy; in particular, the adoption of the State Constitution of 2008 by referendum. The Ministers urged Myanmar to take bolder steps towards a peaceful transition to democracy in the near future, and working towards the holding of free and fair General Elections in 2010. While recognising the steps undertaken by the Government of Myanmar to conduct meetings with all concerned parties, including the NLD leadership, the Ministers reiterated their calls for the release of all political

detainees, including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, to pave the way for meaningful dialogue involving all parties concerned.

17 The Ministers recognised the fact that Myanmar had tried to address many and complex challenges. The Ministers reaffirmed their commitment to remain constructively engaged with Myanmar as part of building the ASEAN Community. The Ministers encouraged Myanmar to continue to work closely with the Good Offices of the UN Secretary-General and his Special Advisor Ibrahim Gambari in ensuring an inclusive process towards national reconciliation. In this regard, they welcomed Myanmar's agreement to the upcoming visits of Mr Tomas Ojea Quintana, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar in August 2008, and Professor Ibrahim Gambari in August 2008, and reiterated their call for Myanmar to extend its full support for their missions.

18 The Ministers were briefed by both Cambodia and Thailand on the situation in the area around the Temple of Preah Vihear and noted this with concern. They urged both sides to exercise utmost restraint and resolve this issue amicably.

19 The Ministers were briefed on developments in Timor Leste, and commended Timor Leste on its determination to succeed as a new nation. They noted the progress made in the Indonesia-Timor Leste Commission of Truth and Friendship (CTF), including the recent submission of the final report by the CTF.

Review of Activities of the Current Inter-Sessional Year (August 2007-July 2008)

20 The Ministers expressed their satisfaction with the success of Track I and Track II activities that had taken place during the current inter-sessional year (August 2007-July 2008). They commended the work of the ARF Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) in Singapore on 9 May 2008 and ARF Inter-sessional Support Group on Confidence Building Measures & Preventive Diplomacy (ISG on CBMs & PD), co-chaired by Brunei Darussalam and Canada, which met in Bandar Seri Begawan, Brunei Darussalam on 31 October - 2 November 2007 and in Ottawa, Canada on 1-3 April 2008. The Ministers noted the summary report of the co-chairs and endorsed their recommendations. The Report of the SOM is at **ANNEX 2** and the Co-Chairs' Reports of the ISG appear as **ANNEX 3** and **4**.

21 The Ministers welcomed the contributions made by the defence officials in the ARF process. In this regard, the Ministers were pleased with the outcome

of the Fifth ASEAN Regional Forum Security Policy Conference (ASPC) hosted by Singapore on 8 May 2008. They noted with satisfaction that the high-level interaction among the ARF defence policy officials had contributed further to build confidence and fostered mutual understanding, thus contributing to the maintenance of peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific region and the world. The Chairman's Summary Report of the ASPC is **ANNEX 5**.

22 Reiterating the importance of enhancing cooperation in disaster relief, mitigation, and management, the Ministers noted the report of the 7th ARF Inter-sessional Meeting on Disaster relief (ISM on DR) held in Helsinki, the European Union, which appears as **ANNEX 6**. In particular, the Ministers welcomed the plan by the Philippines and the US to arrange for a Disaster Relief Exercise in the next Inter-Sessional year.

23 The Ministers welcomed the report of Indonesia and India as Co-Chairs of the 6th Inter-sessional Meeting on Counter-Terrorism and Transnational Crime (ISM on CTTC), which was held in Semarang, Indonesia on 21-22 February 2008, and endorsed its recommendations. The Co-Chairs Report appears as **ANNEX 7**.

24 Recognising the significant threat to the region posed by the manufacture and trafficking of illicit drugs, and the need to work together and within existing mechanisms to prevent the diversion of precursor chemicals into illicit drug manufacture, the Ministers adopted the ARF Statement Promoting Collaboration on the Prevention of Diversion of Precursors into Illicit Drug Manufacture which appears as **ANNEX 8**.

25 The Ministers noted the following workshops and seminars, which were completed in the inter-sessional year 2007-2008:

- ARF Round Table Discussion on Stocktaking of Maritime Security Issues, Jakarta, Indonesia, 23-24 August 2007
- ARF Desk Top Exercise on Disaster Relief Initial Planning Conference, Darwin, Australia, 4-7 September 2007
- ARF Seminar on Narcotics Control, Xian City, China, 19-21 September 2007
- 11th ARF Heads of Defense Universities/Colleges/Institutions, Australia, 9-11 October 2007

- 4th ARF Seminar on Cyber Terrorism, Busan, ROK, 16-19 October 2007
- ARF Workshop on “Management and Security of Stockpiles of Small Arms and Light Weapons including their ammunition”, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 13-14 December 2007
- 2nd ARF Peacekeeping Experts’ Meeting, Singapore, 5-7 March 2008
- ARF Workshop on Confidence Building Measures and Preventive Diplomacy in Asia and Europe, Berlin, Germany, 12-14 March 2008
- ARF Maritime Security Training Programme, Chennai, India, 24-29 March 2008
- ARF Seminar on Anti-Personal Landmines, Penang, Malaysia, 8-10 April 2008
- 2nd ARF Seminar on Energy Security, Singapore, 15-17 April 2008
- ARF Desk Top Exercise on Disaster Relief, Jakarta, Indonesia, 1-2 May 2008

Programme of Work for the Next Inter-sessional Year

26 The Ministers agreed that the ISG on CBMs & PD will continue to promote confidence building while progressing towards PD, and welcomed the offer by Singapore and the Republic of Korea to co-chair the ISG on CBMs & PD in the next Inter-Sessional year. The Ministers noted that the first meeting of the ISG on CBMs and PD for the Inter-Sessional year 2008-2009 will be held in Singapore tentatively on 9-10 October 2008 and the second meeting will be held in the Republic of Korea in the first half of 2009.

27 The Ministers acknowledged the importance of the continuation of the ISM on DR and agreed that the ISM on DR should continue its work in exploring ways to enhance regional disaster risk reduction and emergency management. The Ministers welcomed the offer of Indonesia and the EU to co-host the next ISM in Banda Aceh in December 2008.

28 The Ministers agreed that the ISM CTTC should continue its work to enhance cooperation in fighting against terrorism and transnational crime. In this regard, they agreed that the ISM should develop a CTTC Workplan to focus on key challenges which are most pertinent to the ARF participants, as

laid out in detail in paragraph 35 below. The Ministers welcomed the offer by Viet Nam and the Republic of Korea to co-chair the 7th ISM on CTTC, and the offer by Russia to co-chair the 8th ARF ISM on CTTC.

29 Recognising the importance of non-proliferation and disarmament, the Ministers agreed to establish an Inter-Sessional Meeting on Non-Proliferation and Disarmament, which will provide a regular platform for discussion and cooperation on these issues with a particular focus on UNSCR 1540 regional implementation. The concept paper for the Inter-Sessional Meeting on Non-Proliferation and Disarmament appears as **ANNEX 9**. In this regard, the Ministers welcomed the offer by China, Singapore and the United States to co-chair the first ISM.

30 Recognising also the importance of maritime security, the Ministers welcomed the establishment of the Inter-Sessional Meeting on Maritime Security, which will provide an annual platform for discussion of maritime security issues. The concept paper for the Inter-Sessional Meeting on Maritime Security appears as **ANNEX 10**. In this regard, the Ministers welcomed the offer by Indonesia, Japan, and New Zealand to co-chair the first ISM in the first half of 2009.

31 The Ministers reaffirmed the procedure that all proposed ARF activities should first be discussed at the ISG/ISM level and agreed to by the ARF SOM. In this regard, the Ministers approved the work program for the next Inter-Sessional year (July 2008-July 2009) (**ANNEX 11**).

Future Direction of the ARF Process

32 The Ministers agreed to institute the ASEAN Vice-Chair as the ARF Vice-Chair. Accordingly, Thailand was appointed as the first ARF Vice-Chair at the 15th ARF. Subsequently, Thailand (incoming ASEAN Chair) will serve as ARF Chair and Vietnam (incoming ASEAN Vice-Chair) as ARF Vice-Chair from July 2008 – December 2009.

33 The Ministers adopted the Singapore Declaration on the 15th ARF, which reaffirmed their individual and collective commitment to build upon the achievements of the ARF and strengthen dialogue and cooperation in existing and new areas to maintain and promote regional peace and security. The Declaration appears as **ANNEX 12**.

34 The Ministers had a comprehensive discussion on the Paper on the Review of the ARF (**ANNEX 13**), which provided a stocktake on the forum's progress and achievements, and outlined its future direction. The

Ministers adopted the recommendations as contained in the Review of the ARF, including the need to strengthen the role of all ARF participants; enhance practical cooperation; maintain the moratorium on membership; focus on concrete areas of cooperation; enhance the role of the ARF Chair and the ARF Unit, develop an ARF Vision Statement, standardise the format of the voluntary Annual Security outlook, enhance cooperation with Track II organisations; and improve the ARF's operating mechanisms. The Ministers tasked the Senior Officials to implement the recommendations and report on the progress at the next ARF Ministerial.

35 The Ministers noted the completion of the Study of best practices and lessons learned by selected international and regional organizations in preventive diplomacy (**ANNEX 14**). The Ministers expressed appreciation to the Pacific Forum and the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), which had been commissioned to undertake the Study. The Ministers further tasked the Senior Officials to study the recommendations.

36 The Ministers expressed their support for the ARF Workplan on Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC), which will help provide a focus to the forum's CTTC efforts by listing specific areas of cooperation. The Ministers tasked the Senior Officials to work out the details of the Workplan, including specific projects they may wish to submit to the Workplan, and the list of Lead Countries or Co-Sponsors. The Workplan appears as **ANNEX 15**.

37 The Ministers welcomed the establishment of the Virtual Meeting of Experts on Cyber Security and Cyber Terrorism, and noted that participation in the Meeting will be on a voluntary basis. The Terms of Reference is at **ANNEX 16**. The Ministers welcomed the offer made by the Republic of Korea and the Philippines to lead the group in the first year and complement efforts under the CTTC Workplan.

38 The Ministers adopted the paper on the assessment of the practicability of the recommendations of the Second Plenary Meeting of the ARF Experts/Eminent Persons (EEP) on Northeast Asia as contained in **ANNEX 17**. The Ministers also welcomed the convening of the Third ARF EEP Meeting which will be held in China in October 2008.

39 The Ministers emphasised the need to continue strengthening ties with other regional and international security organisations as well as linkages between Track I and Track II. In this regard, the Ministers welcomed the participation of Track II and regional and international organisations in ARF meetings, where appropriate, as they could value add

and enhance discussions. In this context, the Ministers also noted the CSCAP Memorandum on Human Trafficking as contained in **ANNEX 18**, and instructed the ISM on CTTC to consider the recommendations put forth in the Memorandum.

40 The Ministers commended the ARF Unit in assisting the ARF Chair and acting as its Secretariat despite its shortage of resources and personnel, including through regularly updating the Matrix of ARF Decisions and their Status, which is made available on the ARF Net. The Ministers acknowledged the assistance that some ARF participants were extending to the ARF Unit and encouraged others to do the same.

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