

**ASEAN REGIONAL FORUM STATEMENT ON
ENHANCING COOPERATION TO PREVENT AND RESPOND TO INFECTIOUS
DISEASE OUTBREAKS**

We, the Foreign Ministers of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) Participants, gather today on the occasion of the 27th ASEAN Regional Forum on 12 September 2020 in Ha Noi, Viet Nam.

EXPRESSING SERIOUS CONCERN over the severe challenges posed by outbreaks of infectious diseases and pandemics, including the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19), which the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared as a pandemic on 11 March 2020, to the well-being and sustaining growth of our peoples, the development of the global socio-economy and the sustainability, stability and security of our region and the world at large, **and DEEPLY SADDENED** by the loss of lives and sufferings caused by the COVID-19 pandemic;

EMPHASISING our gratitude and support to all medical professionals, healthcare workers and other frontline personnel, including volunteers fighting the pandemic;

RECOGNISING the devastating and multi-faceted impact that major infectious disease outbreaks have on our societies and economies, in particular on the most vulnerable as well as on regional security and stability, **and EMPHASISING** the importance of enhancing regional and international solidarity and cooperation at all levels of governance, and strengthening our collective preparedness and response capacities in order to prevent and minimise future outbreaks;

ACKNOWLEDGING that any prevention and response measures would need a multi-disciplinary and integrated approach;

RECOGNISING that the best way to mitigate infectious disease threats is increased prevention and enhanced preparedness and community engagement;

WELCOMING the adoption of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2532 on COVID-19 on 1 July 2020, which demands a general and immediate cessation of hostilities in all situations on its agenda and supports the efforts undertaken by the Secretary-General and his Special Representatives and Special Envoys in that respect;

RECALLING the United Nations General Assembly Resolutions A/RES/74/270 on “Global Solidarity to Fight the Coronavirus Disease 2019” of 2 April 2020 and A/RES/74/274 on “International cooperation to ensure global access to medicines, vaccines and medical equipment to face COVID-19” of 20 April 2020;

STRESSING the important role of the United Nations system, in the global campaign to coordinate, control and contain the spread of infectious diseases **and WELCOMING** the adoption of the Resolution WHA73.1 of 19 May 2020 on the “COVID-19 response” at the 73rd session of the World Health Assembly, which includes requesting the Director General of the WHO to initiate, at the earliest appropriate moment, a stepwise process of impartial, independent and

comprehensive evaluation to review experience gained and lessons learnt from the WHO-coordinated international health response to COVID-19, and taking note of the subsequent establishment of the Independent Panel for Pandemic Preparedness and Response (IPPR);

COMMENDING the concerted efforts and enhanced cooperation within ASEAN and between ASEAN and its partners in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic in the spirit of a Cohesive and Responsive ASEAN to remain united and to act jointly and decisively in a timely manner to control the spread of the disease, which are reflected, among others, in the ASEAN Chairman's Statement on ASEAN Collective Response to the Outbreak of Coronavirus Disease 2019 on 15 February 2020, the Declaration of the Special ASEAN Summit on COVID-19 and other related statements between ASEAN and its external partners;

ACKNOWLEDGING the importance of strengthening national and regional health care systems for promoting universal health coverage and fully implementing and complying with obligations under the International Health Regulations (2005);

REAFFIRMING our commitment to develop concrete and effective regional responses to common challenges as stated in the ARF Vision Statement and the ARF Ha Noi Plan of Action II (2020-2025);

Do hereby endeavour to:

1. Work together to prevent and respond to infectious disease outbreaks as well as to mitigate and subsequently eliminate the adverse and multi-faceted impacts in the spirit of solidarity, unity, cooperation and mutual assistance.
2. Strengthen the region's early warning system for outbreaks with pandemic or epidemic potential and encourage the timely exchange of relevant information to rapidly respond, such as measures taken by each country in combating infectious diseases as well as data sharing, expertise and best practices, and encouraging information sharing and knowledge exchange between scientists, clinicians, and policy makers, in a free, open, transparent, systematic, consistent, and timely manner, to enable more comprehensive prevention and preparedness strategies, and rapid detection capabilities in order to facilitate a timely, effective and collective effort to prevent, detect and respond to infectious disease outbreaks, including emerging zoonotic diseases.
3. Contribute to enhancing global pandemic prevention, preparedness, and response capacity, including by strengthening cooperation in bilateral, regional, and multilateral fora, including through the United Nations Systems, including the WHO, and other international organisations as relevant.
4. Facilitate collaboration between environment, animal and public health sectors on specific activities to prevent, detect and respond to zoonotic diseases, and encourage promoting the OneHealth approach.

5. Enhance capacity and preparedness to respond to public health emergencies by strengthening cooperation in preventing, preparing for responding to and controlling major infectious disease outbreaks, including through facilitating the provision of quality and safe deployable medical capabilities such as field hospitals and dedicated clinical services in isolation and mobile anti-epidemic units to support and strengthen national capacities in response to the outbreaks.
6. Call for the full implementation of and compliance with the International Health Regulations (2005), which aim to “prevent, protect against, control and provide a public health response to the international spread of disease in ways that are commensurate with and restricted to public health risks, and which avoid unnecessary interference with international traffic and trade”.
7. Work in collaboration with all relevant stakeholders, including through support to the UN systems and build capacity in preparing for and responding to infectious disease outbreaks, including through voluntary joint collaboration and timely and transparent knowledge exchange in epidemiological research, research and development of vaccines, diagnostics, therapeutics and clinical treatment, as well as sharing of experiences, lessons learned, best practices, and organising training courses and joint exercises, where applicable, building on the application and implementation of digital health technologies.
8. Work to facilitate timely, universal, and equitable access to safe, quality, effective and affordable vaccines to all countries, including ARF Participants, including through multilateral forums and initiatives.
9. Encourage global and regional collaboration including the sharing of best practices and technical expertise and sustained funding for developing and deploying effective antiviral medicines, diagnostics, treatments, and vaccines in order to support the availability for all at an affordable price.
10. Encourage the swift, and unimpeded provision and delivery of appropriate urgent resources and assistance in all possible manners, that is critical in sustaining national health systems in the region, improving the readiness and technical expertise of others and maintaining investment to strengthen and improve the resiliency of health systems to promote pandemic prevention, preparedness and response, including essential goods and services, medicines, vaccines, immunisation programs, diagnostic, medical and public health capabilities, supplies, equipment and technical expertise in the spirit of solidarity and mutual support.
11. Encourage swift action against attempts by organised crime groups to exploit pandemics and act jointly against the counterfeiting of personal protective equipment.
12. Reaffirm the importance of keeping markets open, and preserving supply chain connectivity in order to maintain food security and prevent disruption

of global and regional supply chains as well as sustainable economic activities, in the context of major infectious diseases outbreaks.

13. Emphasise that emergency measures designed to tackle infectious disease outbreaks, if deemed necessary at the national and regional level, should be targeted, proportionate, transparent, and temporary, and not create unnecessary barriers to trade or disruption of global supply chains or essential movement of people which are necessary to maintain supply chains, and be consistent with WTO rules.
14. Encourage stronger coordination on border control measures as appropriate and in accordance with existing national laws and policies, including through timely updates on national measures on border restrictions, sharing of information on epidemic prevention and control, and encouraging cooperation in providing support and appropriate assistance for the repatriation or safe return, of nationals of ARF Participants as may be requested, including consideration of visa extensions and access to essential medical services, and working together to take effective measures to prevent illegal border crossing, etc, so as to maintain border security and stability.
15. Emphasise that States should respect their obligations under international human right laws and that there is no place for any form of discrimination, racism, xenophobia, or stigmatisation in preparing for and responding to infectious disease outbreaks.
16. Promote concrete actions to minimise the negative impacts of any infectious disease outbreak on the most vulnerable.
17. Encourage actions that involve women's participation in all stages of decision-making processes, and mainstream a gender perspective in the COVID-19 response and recovery.
18. Encourage cooperation for the development and implementation of a comprehensive, equitable and sustainable response to any infectious disease outbreak with the full participation of the whole community.
19. Recognise the need to maintain a conducive environment for cooperation and dialogue in the fight against infectious disease outbreaks, including through maintaining and promoting peace, security, stability and respecting the rule of law in the region and the world.
20. Work closely together to resolve and mitigate the multi-faceted impacts of infectious disease outbreaks, including the COVID-19 pandemic and to promote people's well-being, safe living environment, maintain socio-economic stability, enhance preparedness and capacity and allocate adequate funding to prevent, detect, and respond to outbreaks in the future, while fostering a strong joined up approach.

21. Support the enhancement of ASEAN-led regional cooperation and initiatives in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and in the post-pandemic recovery efforts, including the COVID-19 ASEAN Response Fund and the establishment of the Regional Reserves of Medical Supplies and the ASEAN Pharmaceutical Product Working Group, while working in synergy with other regional and global fora to prevent, detect, and respond to the COVID-19 pandemic as well as future infectious disease outbreaks, including to facilitate timely global access to vaccines diagnostics and treatments needed to combat pandemic threats.
22. Encourage the sharing of good practices and the strengthening of cooperation in countering misinformation, disinformation and fake news on infectious disease outbreaks.
23. Encourage Senior Officials to work with relevant line agencies to explore the possibility to utilise ARF's and other ASEAN-led existing bodies and arrangements to prevent, detect, and respond to infectious disease outbreaks and recover from their effects.

Adopted on the Twelfth of September in the Year Two Thousand and Twenty (2020) at the 27th ASEAN Regional Forum in Ha Noi, Viet Nam

Statement ends