

ASEAN REGIONAL FORUM STATEMENT ON ENHANCING REGIONAL COOPERATION ON FERRY SAFETY

The 31st ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) was held on 27 July 2024, in Vientiane, Lao PDR, under Lao PDR's 2024 ASEAN Chairmanship under the theme of "ASEAN: Enhancing Connectivity and Resilience".

RECALLING the principal documents that lay the groundwork and guide the work of the ARF, including the 1995 ARF Concept Paper, the 2009 ARF Vision Statement, the ARF Ha Noi Plan of Action II (2022-2025), and the 2023 ARF Statement on the Commemoration of 30 Years of the ARF;

EMPHASISING the leading role of ASEAN in the ARF and **REAFFIRMING** that success of this ASEAN-led mechanism depends on the active, inclusive, constructive, full, equal and effective participation and cooperation of all ARF Participants;

REAFFIRMING our respect for and commitment to the safety of life at sea, in accordance with international law, including the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), and the 1974 International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS) and 1972 Convention on the International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea (COLREGs);

COGNISANT of the fact that ferries are a critical part of the national transport systems in the region; **EMPHASISING** the important role of ferry operations in the movement of people and goods between islands, along the coast, inland waterways and riverine systems;

RECOGNISING that the improvement of regional ferry safety is conducive to achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), Goal 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), Goal 14 (Life Below Water) and Goal 17 (Partnerships for the Goals), which are in line with the principles enshrined in the ASEAN Charter and the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC);

NOTING WITH CONCERN that ferry accidents continue to occur in the region and a considerable proportion of these accidents are caused by improper construction, human operation and extreme weather;

RECOGNISING the urgent need to enhance regional ferry safety cooperation in the context of post-pandemic recovery, especially for the tourism industry;

EMPHASISING the importance of strengthening regional dialogue and cooperation on ferry safety, sharing information, good experience and best practices with the view to enhancing mutual trust and confidence building;

SUPPORTING ASEAN as the driving force in regional ferry safety cooperation and **WELCOMING** efforts made by ARF Participants in improving ferry safety and measures taken to promote regional and international cooperation;

RECOGNISING ferry safety cooperation as an important part within the framework of ARF maritime security cooperation and **TAKING NOTE WITH APPRECIATION** that enhancing regional cooperation on ferry safety has been included in the ARF Work Plan for Maritime Security (2022-2026);

COMMENDING the important role of the ARF in promoting regional ferry safety cooperation, including workshops and seminars, technical assistance and capacity building projects, and its commitment reflected in the 2017 Guangzhou Statement;

WELCOMING the efforts made by other international organisations, including the International Maritime Organization (IMO), to enhance ferry safety, and the Action Plan adopted at the IMO-sponsored meeting in Bali in 2011, Manila Statement and Bangkok Declaration, among others; **RECALLING** the four main tasks identified by the IMO to improve ferry safety, including the Model Regulations on Domestic Ferry Safety adopted by Resolution MSC.518(105), and ongoing efforts to develop a guidance for the model regulations, online training materials and technical cooperation programs.

WE, ARF PARTICIPANTS, IN THE SPIRIT OF SOLIDARITY, DIALOGUE AND COOPERATION, DO HEREBY ENDEAVOUR TO:

1. **Affirm** their willingness and commitment to enhancing ferry safety and continuing the cooperation in this field.
2. **Call for** greater regional ferry safety cooperation, in accordance with international law, to protect lives and to enhance regional connectivity and resilience.
3. **Call upon** the ARF to make more efforts to promote regional ferry safety cooperation, by hosting workshops, capacity-building programs, sharing information good experience and best practices, among others.

4. **Consider** the establishment of an ARF expert group or cooperation network on ferry safety that jointly addresses ferry safety challenges and operate in a flexible and pragmatic manner and provide professional guidance to enhance the effectiveness of cooperation.

5. **Encourage** the domestic and regional efforts to ensure ferry safety and infrastructure upgrades to provide more efficient and safer ferry services.

6. **Encourage** cooperation in areas such as digital technology, technological innovation and the application of new technologies, including in the fields of accurate weather forecast and emergency communication based on satellite technology, and in the field of standardisation of ferries, ferry stability, ferry life-saving equipment, fire-extinguishing equipment, navigation and emergency communication equipment, consistent with international laws and regulations.

7. **Promote** greater public and governmental awareness of ferry safety, operational safety and strengthening dialogue and experience sharing through inter-governmental channels, and encourage countries to develop or continue to implement, as appropriate, coherent and fit-for-purpose regulations for ferry safety, while taking into consideration the standards and recommended practices by competent international organisations such as the IMO.

8. **Encourage** ARF Participants to carry out technical exchanges of information, with a view to better adapt to the development of terminal equipment, ship design and construction as well as shipboard safety equipment.

9. **Cooperate** on greater ferry safety management systematization, including safety management system for ferry companies, operational safety, crew competency and passenger safety awareness, among others.

10. **Promote** communication and cooperation among ARF Participants and between the ARF Participants and the IMO as well as other relevant international organisations.

11. **Encourage** ARF Experts and Eminent Persons Groups (EEPs) and other relevant track 2 mechanisms to provide recommendations regarding how to improve domestic capacity building and regional cooperation on ferry safety including through relevant ARF workshops, programs and processes.

Adopted in Vientiane, Lao PDR, on 27 July 2024.