



Press Statement
by the Chairman of the ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Retreat

Vientiane, 27 February 2016

1. The ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Retreat (AMM Retreat) on 27 February 2016 in Vientiane is the first gathering of ASEAN Foreign Ministers under Lao PDR's ASEAN Chairmanship in 2016.
2. Under the chairmanship of H.E. Thongloun Sisoulith, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Lao PDR, the Meeting focused on the implementation of the ASEAN Community Vision 2025, especially the ASEAN Political-Security Community Blueprint, and strengthening of ASEAN's external relations and ASEAN centrality in the evolving regional architecture. The Ministers also exchanged views on regional and international issues of common interest and concern. During this important meeting, Lao PDR introduced eight priorities for her ASEAN Chairmanship in 2016 with the theme of "*Turning Vision into Reality for a Dynamic ASEAN Community*".

ASEAN Community Vision 2025

3. The launch of the ASEAN Community on 31 December 2015 as well as the adoption of the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 together with the three ASEAN Community Blueprints has boosted the momentum for on-going efforts to consolidate and strengthen regional integration and community building. Against this background, the Ministers stressed the commitment to ensure effective implementation of the ASEAN Community Vision 2025, especially the APSC Blueprint 2025, building upon the achievements made in and lessons learned from the Roadmap for an ASEAN Community (2009-2015). The Ministers highlighted that such implementation would be pursued through, among others, strengthening ASEAN institutional capacity, improving ASEAN work processes, including streamlining ASEAN meetings and expediting the secondment of officers from the AEC and ASCC pillars to the respective permanent missions of ASEAN Member States in Jakarta and cross-sectoral/pillar coordination at the regional and national levels, and putting in place a robust monitoring and reporting system.
4. In addition, the Ministers emphasised the importance of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and underlined its complementarity with the ASEAN Community Building process and regional integration efforts, as contained in the ASEAN Ministerial Statement on the Occasion of the 70th Anniversary of the United Nations. In this connection, we agreed to Thailand's offer to coordinate this matter and report further details in due course.

2016 ASEAN Chairmanship Priorities

5. The Ministers discussed the eight priorities for ASEAN Chairmanship in 2016 introduced by Lao PDR, namely the implementation of the ASEAN Community Vision 2025, narrowing of the development gap, trade facilitation, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) development, tourism development, connectivity, decent work promotion: transition to formal economy in ASEAN, and enhancement of regional cooperation for the preservation, protection and promotion of ASEAN cultural heritage.
6. In line with the priorities of narrowing the development gap and enhancing regional connectivity, two key deliverables under Lao PDR's Chairmanship would be the Initiative for the ASEAN Integration (IAI) Work Plan III and the post-2015 agenda for ASEAN Connectivity. These two documents, upon adoption by the ASEAN Leaders in September 2016, will form an integral part of the ASEAN Community Vision 2025.

ASEAN's External Relations

7. The Ministers underlined the importance of ASEAN centrality in a dynamic and outward looking region. The Ministers discussed ways and means to further deepen cooperation with Dialogue Partners as well as strengthen engagement with other external parties for mutual benefit. ASEAN will work closely together with Dialogue Partners to ensure effective implementation of the action lines and measures under the various Plans of Action 2016-2020 which will support the realisation of the ASEAN Community Vision 2025.
8. The Ministers stressed the need for and the importance of preserving and promoting ASEAN Centrality and its relevance in the evolving regional architecture that is built upon ASEAN-led mechanisms. In this regard, the Ministers called for full and effective implementation of the revised Work Plan on Maintaining and Enhancing ASEAN Centrality. The Ministers also stressed the need for ASEAN to play a leading role in shaping the evolving regional architecture.

Exchange of views on regional and international issues

9. The Ministers exchanged views on regional and international issues of common interest and concern. These include emerging non-traditional security challenges such as terrorism, cyber security, natural disasters, climate change, irregular migration, trafficking in persons, maritime security and cooperation, and developments in various regions, including the Middle East, the Korean Peninsula and the South China Sea, among others.
10. Recalling the ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Statement on the Terrorist Attack in Jakarta, we reaffirmed ASEAN's commitment to working with the international community to further intensify its cooperation to combat terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, regardless of their motivation, wherever, whenever and by whom so ever it is committed.

11. Further recalling the ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Statement on the Nuclear Test by the Democratic People's Republic Korea (DPRK) and the ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Statement on the DPRK's Rocket Launch, ASEAN reiterated its full support for the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula in a peaceful manner and urged the DPRK to comply with all the relevant UNSC Resolutions and called on all parties concerned to exert common efforts to maintain peace and security in the said region and create an environment conducive to early resumption of the Six-Party Talks to help pave the way for maintaining and strengthening peace, security and stability in the Korean Peninsula.
12. On the South China Sea, the Ministers remained seriously concerned over recent and ongoing developments and took note of the concerns expressed by some Ministers on the land reclamations and escalation of activities in the area, which have eroded trust and confidence, increased tensions and may undermine peace, security and stability in the region.
13. The Ministers reaffirmed the importance of maintaining peace, security, stability, and freedom of navigation in and over - flight above the South China Sea.
14. The Ministers further reaffirmed the need to enhance mutual trust and confidence, exercise self-restraint in the conduct of activities and avoid actions that may further complicate the situation, and pursue peaceful resolution of disputes in accordance with international law.
15. The Ministers reaffirmed their shared commitment to maintaining and promoting peace, security and stability in the region, as well as to the peaceful resolution of disputes, including full respect for legal and diplomatic processes, without resorting to the threat or use of force, in accordance with the universally recognised principles of international law, including the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. The Ministers emphasized the importance of non-militarisation and self-restraint in the conduct of activities.
16. The Ministers underscored the importance of the full and effective implementation of the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC) in its entirety, and while noting the momentum and new phase of consultation, urged the expeditious establishment of the code of conduct (COC). They highlighted the need to intensify efforts to achieve further progress in the implementation of the DOC and substantive development of the COC.
