

**Joint Press Statement of the 39th Meeting of the ASEAN Committee on Science
and Technology (COST)
10-12 May 2000, Vientiane**

ASEAN science and technology cooperation moves forward

1. Around 100 science and technology leaders and decision-makers from all ten member countries of the ASEAN converged in Vientiane, Lao PDR, on the occasion of the 39th Meeting of the ASEAN Committee on Science and Technology (COST) and various meetings of its 9 sub-committees on 8-12 May 2000. It is the first time that Lao PDR hosted an ASEAN COST meeting and this heralds the country's entry into the mainstream of science and technology cooperation activities in the region.
2. The Meeting was formally opened by H.E. Prof. Dr. Souli Nanthavong, Minister to the Prime Minister's Office, in charge of Science, Technology and Environment, of the Lao PDR. In his Opening Address, the Minister announced that Lao PDR, even though it had just passed through a serious economic crisis, is now preparing to transfer its first installment for the year 2000 to the ASEAN Science Fund. The ASEAN Science Fund is a regional fund built up from member country contributions with the objective of seeding cooperative projects in science and technology development. In so doing, he also called upon the other member countries to fulfill their obligation accordingly in order to secure the building of science and technology capability in the region for the new millennium. He also exhorted COST to speed up the development and application of information technology to meet common socio-economic needs of the region.
3. Coming close on the heels of the 1st Informal Meeting of the ASEAN Ministers for Science and Technology held in Malaysia last month, the COST meeting focused on urgent implementation of the decisions and directives of the Ministers.
4. ASEAN COST is currently chaired by Thailand who assumed the post at the beginning of 2000. Mr. Chirapandh Arthachinta, Secretary-General of the National Research Council of Thailand (NRCT), in his capacity as COST Chairman, presided over the Meeting. In his Opening Remarks, he expressed the great honour for Thailand to lead ASEAN COST into the twenty-first century, and the confidence that ASEAN S&T cooperation will progress further with every member country sharing their experiences and resources to the task ahead.
5. The Meeting started work on the preparation of a Plan of Action for ASEAN S&T Cooperation for the period 2001-2004. The Plan of Action will take the cue from the Ministerial decision adopting the long-term goal of establishing an ASEAN Science and Technology Community for Innovation, Competitiveness and Knowledge (ASTICK) for the 21st century. It will also consider fast-track programmes on human resource development, information technology development, institutional networking and promotion of public awareness of science and technology that require urgent implementation.
6. During the meeting, all nine sub-committees of COST reviewed their objectives and priority programmes for the next 4 years. The Sub-Committees of COST are

in the areas of food science and technology, meteorology and geophysics, biotechnology, materials science and technology, microelectronics and information technology, marine science, non-conventional energy research, S&T infrastructure and resources development, and space technology and applications. The objectives and priority programmes identified by the Sub-Committees are likewise among the bases for the development of the Plan of Action for ASEAN S&T Cooperation.

7. Among the new projects approved by the COST meeting is the establishment of an Internet-based S&T Ministers' Forum using the existing COST website as the platform. The COST website is located at the address <http://www.astnet.org>. Structured like an Internet chat room but with appropriate security measures in place, the Forum will foster closer and direct personal consultation among the region's science and technology ministers regarding important policy issues. Key issues discussed will be summarised and posted regularly for the benefit of the public. Brunei Darussalam will take the lead in this activity. It will be formally launched in September 2001 in conjunction with the celebration of the 6th ASEAN Science and Technology Week (ASTW) in Brunei Darussalam.
8. The Meeting also firmed up plans to organise the 1st ASEAN Science and Technology Congress (ASTC) as an activity during the 6th ASTW and invite Nobel laureates and eminent ASEAN scientists to speak at the Congress, as a way of giving a higher profile to science and technology activities in the region. Technical conferences of the 9 Sub-Committees will complement the lectures of the eminent scientists.
9. Another upcoming major event is the 7th ASEAN Food Conference in Manila in November 2000. The conference is being organized by the Sub-Committee on Food Science and Technology in Manila with the cooperation of Philippine government agencies, the Federation of Institutes of Food Science and Technology in the ASEAN (FIFSTA), the Philippine Association of Food Technologists (PAFT) with partial support from the ASEAN Foundation.