28th ASEAN-Australia Forum
Co-Chair’s Statement

1. The 28th ASEAN-Australia Forum was held in Canberra on 22 April 2016, with participation by representatives from ASEAN Member States, Australia and the ASEAN Secretariat. This was the second Forum since the formation of the ASEAN-Australia Strategic Partnership in 2014 as well as the first Forum since the establishment of the ASEAN Community in 2015.

2. The Forum was co-chaired by Mr Gary Quinlan, Deputy Secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Australia and U Aung Lynn, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar.

3. Mr Quinlan welcomed the declaration of the ASEAN Community at the November 2015 ASEAN Summit in Kuala Lumpur, which represented a major milestone in ASEAN’s integration. Mr Quinlan also commended ASEAN’s new strategic framework, “ASEAN 2025: Forging Ahead Together”.

4. Participants reviewed regional developments, in particular the important contribution made by various ASEAN-led mechanisms in to addressing both traditional and non-traditional security concerns. Deeper cooperation in the East Asia Summit, ASEAN Regional Forum, ASEAN Defence Ministers’ Meeting Plus and the Expanded ASEAN Maritime Forum would help to foster a stable strategic environment and rules-based, open and inclusive regional order.

5. Participants welcomed the Declaration issued at the 10th anniversary of the East Asia Summit in Kuala Lumpur in November 2015, including measures focused on strengthening the East Asia Summit, institutionally. Both sides reaffirmed the commitment to work together in promoting a rules-based and norms-based regional architecture.

6. Participants highlighted the shared task of promoting continued prosperity in the region, noting the extraordinary economic achievements of ASEAN over recent decades, reflected in the commencement of the ASEAN Economic Community last year. ASEAN-Australia two-way trade surpassed A$100 billion in 2014, making the combined ASEAN economy Australia’s second largest trading partner. Participants agreed that concluding a comprehensive and high-quality Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) would be critical to driving further regional economic
integration.

7. Participants reaffirmed the progress of ASEAN-Australia cooperation across the three pillars of the ASEAN Community, as set out in the ASEAN-Australia Plan of Action for the Implementation of the Strategic Partnership (2015-2019). Participants agreed that progress of implementation would be discussed in more depth at the ASEAN-Australia Joint Cooperation Committee and would be presented to Ministers at the Post-Ministerial Conference in July 2016 in Vientiane.

8. Mr Quinlan reaffirmed Australia’s support to ASEAN economic integration and the institutional strengthening of the ASEAN Secretariat, through the ASEAN-Australia Development Cooperation Program Phase Two (AADCP II).

9. Participants also welcomed Australia’s continued support for the implementation of the ASEAN-Australia-New Zealand Free Trade Agreement (AANZFTA), and the extension of the AANZFTA Economic Cooperation Support Programme until 2018.

10. Participants discussed ASEAN’s connectivity agenda, including Australia’s support for a successor document to the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity (MPAC), scheduled for release later in 2016. Participants also discussed the Australian Government’s agenda for developing Northern Australia and the potential synergies with ASEAN connectivity, including revitalizing the development partnership between BIMP-EAGA and the Northern Territory.

11. Mr Quinlan welcomed ASEAN’s Convention on Trafficking in Persons. In that context, participants reviewed Australia’s long-standing contribution to address this challenge in the region, including through the Australia-Asia Program to Combat Trafficking in Persons. Participants welcomed Australia’s new ‘International Strategy to Combat Human Trafficking and Slavery’ launched at the sixth Bali Process Ministerial Conference on People Smuggling, Trafficking in Persons and Related Transnational Crime, held in Bali in March 2016. They noted the Bali Declaration adopted at that meeting, which recognised the need to enhance cooperation and coordination among members, and with other ongoing regional and global initiatives, to combat human trafficking.

12. Participants welcomed the establishment of the ASEAN-Australia Council, as a further demonstration of Australia’s commitment to strengthening people-to-people ties with ASEAN. They welcomed the
expansion of Australia’s New Colombo Plan, designed to engage young Australians with their region, to all ten ASEAN countries in 2015.

13. Participants underlined the importance of maintaining peace, security and stability, and freedom of navigation and overflight in the South China Sea. They agreed that disputes should be resolved peacefully, including full respect for legal and diplomatic processes and without resorting to the threat or use of force, in accordance with universally-recognised principles of international law, including the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). They agreed to promote maritime cooperation and committed to non-militarisation and self-restraint in the conduct of activities.

14. Participants welcomed the adoption of Resolution 2270 by the United Nations Security Council on 2 March 2016, which imposed new measures aimed at halting the DPRK’s efforts to advance nuclear and ballistic missile programs. They called on the DPRK to take constructive steps towards returning to dialogue, comply with its obligations under all relevant UNSC resolutions and abide by its commitments under the 19 September 2005 Joint Statement of the Six Party Talks, which would pave the way for the complete and verifiable denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula in a peaceful manner.