



**CHAIRMAN'S STATEMENT OF THE  
25<sup>TH</sup> ASEAN REGIONAL FORUM  
SINGAPORE, 4 AUGUST 2018**

1. The Twenty-Fifth Meeting of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) was held in Singapore on 4 August 2018. The Meeting was chaired by Dr Vivian Balakrishnan, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Singapore.
  
2. The Meeting was attended by the Foreign Ministers and Representatives of all ARF Participants. The Secretary-General of ASEAN was also in attendance. The list of delegates appears as **Annex 1**.

**OVERVIEW OF THE ARF PROCESS**

3. The Ministers noted with satisfaction the progress of the ARF and its role in enhancing political and security dialogue and cooperation, as well as promoting confidence building and preventive diplomacy in the Asia-Pacific, as it commemorates its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2018. The Ministers underlined the need to implement the pending action lines of the *Hanoi Plan of Action to Implement the ARF Vision Statement 2020*, and encouraged ARF Participants to look into updating the ARF Vision Statement beyond 2020 to ensure that the ARF maintains its relevance in the evolving regional environment.
  
4. The Ministers reaffirmed the importance of the ARF as one of the main multilateral forums for political and security dialogue in the region, and reiterated their support for ASEAN Centrality in the ARF. They encouraged ARF Participants to enhance cooperation at a pace comfortable to all on the basis of consensus, and to step up efforts in confidence building and preventive diplomacy in adherence to the principles stipulated in the ARF Preventive Diplomacy Work Plan.

5. The Ministers recognised the increasingly complex challenges facing the region, and emphasised the need to address such challenges in a holistic and comprehensive manner, including through increasing dialogue and practical cooperation in disaster relief, counter-terrorism and transnational crime, maritime security, non-proliferation and disarmament, and security of and in the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs).

## **HIGHLIGHTS OF DISCUSSIONS ON REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL ISSUES**

6. The Ministers welcomed the Inter-Korean Summits held on 27 April 2018 and 26 May 2018, as well as the Singapore Summit between the United States (US) and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) on 12 June 2018. They also welcomed the Panmunjom Declaration signed between President Moon Jae-in of the Republic of Korea (ROK) and Chairman of the State Affairs Commission of the DPRK Kim Jong Un, as well as the Joint Statement signed between US President Donald J Trump and Chairman Kim. The Ministers urged all concerned parties to continue working towards the realisation of lasting peace and stability on a denuclearised Korean Peninsula, including through the full and expeditious implementation of the Panmunjom Declaration and the Joint Statement by the US and DPRK leaders. They also urged the DPRK to fulfil its stated commitment to complete denuclearisation and its pledge to refrain from further nuclear and missile tests. The Ministers reiterated their commitment to the full implementation of all relevant United Nations Security Council Resolutions and international efforts to bring about the complete denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula which will contribute to peace and stability in the region. Some Ministers expressed their readiness to engage in dialogue with the DPRK to resolve other outstanding issues, including humanitarian concerns.

7. The Ministers reaffirmed the importance of maintaining and promoting peace, security, stability, safety and freedom of navigation in and overflight above the South China Sea and recognised the benefits of having the South China Sea as a sea of peace, stability and prosperity. They underscored the importance of the full and effective implementation of the 2002 Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC) in its entirety. They also warmly welcomed the continued improving cooperation between ASEAN and China and were encouraged by the progress of the substantive negotiations towards the early conclusion of an effective Code of Conduct in the South China Sea (COC) on a mutually-agreed timeline. The Ministers noted the agreement among ASEAN Member States and China on a Single Draft COC Negotiating Text. In this regard, the Ministers emphasised the need to maintain an environment conducive to the COC negotiations. They also welcomed practical measures that could reduce tensions,

and the risk of accidents, misunderstandings and miscalculation, such as the successful testing of the ASEAN Member States and China MFA-to-MFA hotline to manage maritime emergencies in the South China Sea, and the operationalisation of the Joint Statement on the Application of the Code for Unplanned Encounters at Sea (CUES) in the South China Sea adopted on 7 September 2016. They also stressed the importance of undertaking confidence building and preventive measures to enhance, among others, trust and confidence amongst parties.

8. The Ministers discussed the matters relating to the South China Sea and took note of some concerns on the land reclamations and activities in the area, which have eroded trust and confidence, increased tensions and may undermine peace, security and stability in the region. They 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, including the 1982 UNCLOS. They also emphasised the importance of non-militarisation and self-restraint in the conduct of all activities by claimants and all other states, including those mentioned in the DOC that could further complicate the situation and escalate tensions in the South China Sea.

9. The Ministers condemned terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, and reaffirmed their commitment to the threat posed by returning and relocating foreign terrorist fighters through the effective and balanced implementation of measures and counter-measures at the national, sub-regional, regional and international levels under the ASEAN Convention on Counter-Terrorism (ACCT), the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, and relevant United Nations Security Council Resolutions. They reaffirmed the importance and effectiveness of an integrated and whole-of-society approach in combating this challenge, including through preventive education, involvement of women and youth and civil society, promotion of principles such as peace, tolerance, respect for diversity and non-violence as a counter-narrative, and preventing and countering the use of ICTs, including the internet, social media and cyber space for terrorist purposes.

10. The Ministers welcomed positive developments in maritime cooperation among ARF Participants, including through continued constructive dialogue on issues of common interest and concern, marine scientific research, Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA), and marine environment protection under the ambit of the ARF, the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM) and the ADMM-Plus, the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Transnational Crime (AMMTC), the ASEAN Maritime Forum (AMF) and the Expanded ASEAN Maritime Forum (EAMF), and the Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in

Asia (ReCAAP). The Ministers noted the importance of enhancing cooperation among maritime law enforcement agencies, such as capacity building assistance, joint exercises, and information sharing, including MDA and other related initiatives. They looked forward to the 8<sup>th</sup> AMF and the 6<sup>th</sup> EAMF to be held in Manila later this year.

11. The Ministers reiterated the importance of strengthening international and regional cooperation in nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament, and the peaceful uses of nuclear energy, as well as in ensuring the elimination, non-proliferation and non-use of chemical and biological weapons.

12. The Ministers recognised that challenges to ICTs Security are transboundary issues that needed to be addressed through joint regional and sub-regional efforts. The Ministers welcomed the adoption of the ASEAN Leaders' Statement on Cybersecurity Cooperation at the 32<sup>nd</sup> ASEAN Summit in April 2018, and emphasised the importance of close coordination between the ARF and other relevant fora such as the ASEAN Telecommunications and Information Technology Ministers' Meeting (TELMIN), the ADMM-Plus, the AMMTC, and the ASEAN Ministerial Conference on Cybersecurity (AMCC) on matters pertaining to ICTs Security. They also welcomed the work of the Inter-sessional Meeting on ICTs Security in its first Inter-sessional Year.

13. The Ministers reaffirmed the importance of harnessing the individual and collective strength of different sectors and stakeholders in the region to enhance the resilience of communities and develop innovative solutions to mitigate the impact of disasters. They noted that the ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response (AADMER) remains the regional policy backbone, as well as the primary role of the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on disaster management (AHA Centre) in monitoring and coordinating emergency response to natural disasters to realise the Vision of One ASEAN One Response. They commended the efforts of the AHA Centre in capacity building and responding to disasters in ASEAN Member States since its inception, and its role in enabling ASEAN to respond to disasters outside the region at a later stage. The Ministers also welcomed efforts to explore networking among existing mechanisms and systems to promote sharing of real-time information on disasters, and strengthen humanitarian civil-military coordination through the existing ASEAN-led mechanisms which will enhance deployment of resources in response to disasters. They welcomed the conduct of the 2018 Asian Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction and efforts to incorporate climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction strategies in promoting sustainable development in the region, in line with the Sendai

Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, including the Bangkok Principles for the implementation of the health aspects.

14. On the humanitarian situation in Rakhine State, the Ministers welcomed the Arrangement on Return of Displaced Persons from Rakhine State between Myanmar and Bangladesh signed on 23 November 2017 and the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed among Myanmar, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) on 6 June 2018 to facilitate the repatriation process of displaced persons from Rakhine State. They underlined the importance of the expeditious commencement of the voluntary return of displaced persons to Myanmar in a safe, secure and dignified way without undue delay, and stressed the need to find a comprehensive and durable solution to address the root causes of the conflict and to create a conducive environment so that the affected communities can rebuild their lives. The Ministers noted the progress made by the Government of Myanmar in implementing the recommendations of the final report of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State, and encouraged Myanmar to continue to implement the remaining recommendations. The Ministers welcomed the establishment of an Independent Commission of Enquiry by the Government of Myanmar. They also expressed their continued support for Myanmar in its efforts to bring peace, stability, the rule of law, to promote harmony and reconciliation among the various communities, as well as to ensure sustainable and equitable development in Rakhine State.

#### **Review of Activities of the Current Inter-sessional Year (2017-2018)**

15. The Ministers noted the ARF Track 1 activities that had taken place during the Inter-sessional Year 2017-2018. They noted the outcomes of the ARF Senior Officials Meeting (ARF SOM) in Singapore on 7 June 2018, and the ARF Inter-sessional Support Group on Confidence Building Measures and Preventive Diplomacy (ARF ISG on CBMs and PD) co-chaired by Singapore and New Zealand in Auckland on 8 May 2018. The Ministers noted the recommendations of the ARF Senior Officials, including on the adoption of the Terms of Reference (TOR) of the Open-Ended Study Group on Confidence Building Measures to Reduce the Risk of Conflict Stemming from the Use of Information and Communication Technologies, the ARF Work Plan on Maritime Security 2018-2020, and the ARF Work Plan on Disaster Relief 2018-2020, which appear as **ANNEXES 2, 3 and 4** respectively. The Co-Chairs' Summary Report of the ARF ISG on CBMs and PD and the Summary Report of the ARF SOM appear as **ANNEXES 5 and 6** respectively.

16. The Ministers welcomed the contributions made by defence officials in the ARF, and noted the outcomes of the 15<sup>th</sup> ARF Security Policy Conference (ASPC) in

Singapore on 4 June 2018, and the ARF Defence Officials' Dialogue (DOD) in Auckland on 7 May 2018. The Ministers noted that the ARF DOD and ASPC had not reached consensus on the proposal to streamline the two Meetings into one, and that a revised concept paper incorporating the views of all ARF Participants could subsequently be tabled for consideration. The Ministers agreed that, in the meantime, the *status quo* of conducting one ARF DOD and one ASPC per Inter-sessional year would be maintained. The Summary Report of the 15<sup>th</sup> ASPC and the Co-Chairs' Summary Report of the ARF DOD appear as **ANNEXES 7** and **8** respectively.

17. The Ministers noted the outcomes of the annually held ARF meetings, including:

- (a) 10<sup>th</sup> ARF Inter-sessional Meeting on Maritime Security (ARF ISM on MS), co-chaired by Viet Nam, Australia, and the European Union (EU) in Brisbane from 27 to 28 March 2018;
- (b) 17<sup>th</sup> ARF Inter-sessional Meeting on Disaster Relief (ARF ISM on DR), co-chaired by Thailand and the Republic of Korea (ROK) in Seoul on 4 April 2018;
- (c) 10<sup>th</sup> ARF Inter-sessional Meeting on Non-Proliferation and Disarmament (ARF ISM on NPD), co-chaired by Indonesia, Japan, and the ROK in Seoul from 5 to 6 April 2018;
- (d) 1<sup>st</sup> ARF Inter-sessional Meeting on Security of and in the Use of Information and Communication Technologies (ARF ISM on ICTs Security), co-chaired by Malaysia, Singapore, and Japan in Kuala Lumpur from 25 to 26 April 2018;
- (e) 12<sup>th</sup> ARF Experts and Eminent Persons Meeting (EEPs), co-chaired by Viet Nam and Japan in Hanoi from 6 to 7 March 2018; and
- (f) 21<sup>st</sup> ARF Heads of Defence Universities/Colleges/Institutions Meeting (HDUCIM), co-chaired by the Philippines and Japan in Manila from 17 to 21 September 2017.

The reports of these meetings appear as **ANNEXES 9** to **14**.

18. The Ministers noted the outcomes of the following workshops and seminars held in the Inter-sessional Year 2017-2018:

- (a) ARF Training on Disaster Loss and Damage Assessment and the Recovery and Reconstruction Capacity Building, co-chaired by Lao PDR and China in Wuhan from 31 October to 2 November 2017;

- (b) ARF Workshop on Typhoon Disaster Risk Reduction and Damage Mitigation, co-chaired by Thailand, China, and the ROK in Guangzhou from 5 to 6 December 2017;
- (c) ARF Workshop on Ferry Safety, co-chaired by the Philippines and China in Guangzhou from 12 to 13 December 2017;
- (d) ARF Workshop on Peacekeeping Operations: Cooperation in Capacity Building and Developing Partnership with the U.N., co-chaired by Viet Nam, Canada, and the ROK in Hanoi from 19 to 21 December 2017;
- (e) ARF Workshop on Enhancing Regional Maritime Law Enforcement Cooperation, co-chaired by Viet Nam, Australia, and the EU in Nha Trang from 18 to 19 January 2018;
- (f) 1<sup>st</sup> Open Ended Study Group on CBMs to Reduce the Risk of Conflict Stemming from the Use of ICTs, co-chaired by Malaysia, Singapore, and Japan in Tokyo on 18 January 2018;
- (g) ARF Workshop on Raising Awareness and Promoting Cooperation on CBRN Risk Mitigation, co-chaired by Philippines, Canada, and the United States (US) in Manila from 6 to 8 March 2018;
- (h) ARF Workshop on International Cooperation on Maritime Domain Awareness, co-chaired by Malaysia and Japan in Tokyo from 7 to 8 March 2018;
- (i) ARF Workshop on Sustainable Fisheries Management and Food Security, co-chaired by Thailand, China, and the US in Bangkok from 13 to 14 March 2018;
- (j) 2<sup>nd</sup> Open Ended Study Group on CBMs to Reduce the Risk of Conflict Stemming from the Use of ICTs, co-chaired by Malaysia, Singapore, and Japan in Kuala Lumpur on 23 April 2018;
- (k) ARF Senior Training Course on Urban Search and Rescue Capacity Building, co-chaired by Singapore and China in Beijing and Chengdu from 7 to 14 May 2018;
- (l) 2<sup>nd</sup> ARF Workshop on Urban Emergency Response, co-chaired by Malaysia and China in Nanning from 9 to 12 July 2018; and
- (m) ARF Workshop on Best Practices in Maritime Data Analysis to Strengthen Regional Maritime Security, co-chaired by Indonesia and the US in Bali from 17 to 19 July 2018.

### **Programme of Work for the Next Inter-sessional Year (2018-2019)**

19. The Ministers welcomed the following Chair and Co-Chairs:
- (a) Thailand as Chair of the 26<sup>th</sup> ARF, ARF SOM and 16<sup>th</sup> ASPC;
  - (b) Thailand and the ROK as Co-Chairs of the ARF ISG on CBMs and PD and ARF DOD;
  - (c) Lao PDR, Canada and China as Co-Chairs of the 18<sup>th</sup> ARF ISM on DR;

- (d) Indonesia and Russia as Co-Chairs of the 17<sup>th</sup> ARF ISM on Counter-Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC);
- (e) Cambodia and China as Co-Chairs of the 7<sup>th</sup> ARF Peacekeeping Experts' Meeting; and
- (f) Singapore and Japan as Co-Chairs of the 22<sup>nd</sup> ARF HDUCIM.

20. The Ministers also noted that Viet Nam, Australia, and the EU will continue to co-chair the ARF ISM on MS until 2020; Malaysia, Singapore, and Japan will continue to co-chair the ARF ISM on ICTs Security until 2020; and Indonesia, Japan, and the ROK will continue to co-chair the ARF ISM on NPD until 2020.

21. The Ministers welcomed the contributions of the ARF EEPs to the ARF's work in confidence building and preventive diplomacy, and noted the recommendations of the 12<sup>th</sup> ARF EEPs Meeting. The Ministers welcomed Myanmar and Japan as Co-Chairs of the 13<sup>th</sup> ARF EEPs.

22. The Ministers adopted the List of ARF Track 1 Activities for the Inter-sessional Year 2018-2019, and encouraged all ARF Participants to participate in and contribute to those activities. The Ministers also encouraged the Co-Chairs of the respective ARF meetings and activities to schedule them ahead of the ARF SOM. The List of ARF Track 1 Activities for the Inter-sessional Year 2018-2019 appears as **ANNEX 15**.

23. The Ministers adopted the following statement;

- (a) ARF Statement on Disaster Management Cooperation;

The Statement appears as **ANNEX 16**.

### **Future Direction of the ARF Process**

24. The Ministers reiterated the importance of the *Hanoi Plan of Action* in guiding the ARF in developing and implementing concrete and practical cooperation, and noted that the implementation rate currently stood at 58.7%. The Ministers commended the ARF Unit in assisting the ARF Chair, including through regularly updating the *Matrix of Implementation of the Hanoi Plan of Action* and the *Matrix of ARF Decisions and their Status* which appear as **ANNEXES 17** and **18**.



25. To ensure that the ARF remains relevant, the Ministers recognised the need to look beyond 2020 and in this regard, task the senior officials to explore the possibility of a new action plan.

26. The Ministers underlined the need to strengthen coordination and streamline complementarities between the ARF and other ASEAN-led mechanisms, so as to minimise duplication of work. They also encouraged closer linkages between Track 1 and Track 2 ARF mechanisms

27. As part of the ARF tradition to promote confidence, understanding, transparency, and exchange of views among ARF Participants, the Ministers commended the ARF Chair's publication of the *2018 ARF Annual Security Outlook* (ARF ASO).

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