



**PRESS STATEMENT BY THE CHAIRMAN OF THE
ASEAN FOREIGN MINISTERS' RETREAT**

SINGAPORE, 6 FEBRUARY 2018

1. I chaired the ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Retreat today. The Retreat is the first gathering of the ASEAN Foreign Ministers in Singapore under Singapore's ASEAN Chairmanship in 2018.

2. We had candid and fruitful discussions on ASEAN's priorities for the year ahead, as well as deep exchanges on regional and international developments. We also discussed the way forward for ASEAN Community building, and the strengthening of ASEAN's external relations. We reiterated the importance of maintaining ASEAN Centrality and unity. We discussed Indonesia's proposal to further reinforce an open, transparent and inclusive regional architecture based on international law and the principles contained in the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC) and in line with the 2011 Declaration of the East Asia Summit on the Principles for Mutually Beneficial Relations (Bali Principles). The Ministers took stock of ASEAN's relations with external partners, and discussed how ASEAN can continue to maintain peace and stability in the region and beyond.

3. We reaffirmed our 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 (UNCLOS).

4. We agreed on the need to further strengthen ASEAN's financial and macroeconomic resilience, while deepening its trade ties with external partners. We also agreed on the need to improve market access for ASEAN's exports, and to spur investment and tourism. We supported the efforts made by both Indonesia and Malaysia to address the sustainability of palm oil, and in this regard urged all Parties to work constructively.

5. We reaffirmed ASEAN's strong commitment to open regionalism and the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) 2025 Blueprint, notwithstanding the uncertainties surrounding global economic recovery, the rising trends of protectionism, and global policy uncertainties. We therefore expressed support for the implementation of the AEC Blueprint to enhance regional integration including to double intra-ASEAN trade between 2017 and 2025. We also reiterated the need to step up efforts to conclude negotiations on a modern, comprehensive, high-quality and mutually beneficial Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership.

6. I briefed the Foreign Ministers on Singapore's initiatives under our Chairmanship theme of 'Resilience' and 'Innovation'. The Ministers expressed their support for ASEAN to articulate its strategic vision amidst the changing geostrategic environment, while remaining committed to the purposes and principles enshrined in the ASEAN Charter and the TAC, as well to the realisation of the ASEAN Community Vision 2025. We agreed that this strategic vision will be further considered by our Leaders at the 32nd ASEAN Summit in April 2018.

7. The Ministers agreed on the need for ASEAN Member States to make use of innovation and technology to improve the lives of our people. In this regard, the Ministers expressed their support for Singapore's proposal to create an *ASEAN Smart Cities Network*.

8. The Ministers agreed on the importance of strengthening cybersecurity cooperation as the development of the digital economy continues to gain momentum. We affirmed the importance of a rules-based order for cyberspace, and the need for basic operational and voluntary cyber norms of behaviour in the region as a means of building a secure and resilient cyberspace. We also recognised the

need for better coordination of cybersecurity policies and capacity building efforts in ASEAN.

9. The Ministers received a briefing from Myanmar on the humanitarian situation in Rakhine State. The Ministers expressed their continued support for Myanmar's humanitarian relief programme in Rakhine State and welcomed the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on disaster management (AHA Centre)'s ongoing work with the Myanmar Government-led mechanism to deliver humanitarian assistance to all displaced persons without discrimination. We welcomed the Arrangement on Return of Displaced Persons from Rakhine State between Myanmar and Bangladesh signed on 23 November 2017. The Ministers also looked forward to 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. We urged Myanmar to continue to implement the recommendations of the final report of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State and welcomed the establishment of the Advisory Board for the implementation of the recommendations on Rakhine State led in his individual capacity by Prof. Dr. Surakiart Sathirathai, former Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Thailand. The Ministers expressed their support to the Myanmar Government 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.

10. We exchanged views on regional and international issues of common interest and concern. Our discussions included security challenges such as terrorism, cyber threats and transnational crime, as well as regional developments in the Middle East, the Korean Peninsula and the South China Sea.

11. 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. We 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, warmly welcomed the improving cooperation between ASEAN and China and were encouraged by the conclusion and adoption of the framework of a Code of Conduct in the South China Sea (COC), as well as the official commencement of the substantive negotiations towards the conclusion of an effective COC on a mutually-agreed timeline. The Ministers welcomed practical measures that could reduce tensions, and the risks 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. We discussed the matters relating to the South China Sea and took note of the concerns expressed by some Ministers 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. We 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. We 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.

12. On the situation in the Korean Peninsula, while we welcomed the resumption of inter-Korean talks, which we hope will create favourable conditions for further dialogue on the denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula, we continued to strongly urge the DPRK to immediately and fully comply with its obligations under all relevant UN Security Council Resolutions. We also reiterated our support for the complete, irreversible and verifiable denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula in a peaceful manner, called for the exercise of self-restraint, and underscored the importance of creating conditions conducive for constructive dialogue to de-escalate tensions.

