CONCEPT PAPER ON STREAMLINING ASEAN DEFENCE MINISTERS’ MEETING (ADMM)-PLUS EXPERTS’ WORKING GROUPS (EWGS)

INTRODUCTION

1. As agreed upon during the inaugural ADMM-Plus in 2010, the ADMM-Plus will foster practical cooperation among its members in identified key areas. The ASEAN Defence Senior Officials’ Meeting (ADSM)-Plus was formed and tasked to establish specific Experts’ Working Groups (EWGs) on defence and security issues of mutual interest.

2. The 4th ADMM adopted the Concept Paper on ADMM-Plus: Modalities and Procedures, while the Attachment Paper to the said Concept Paper was adopted during the ADMM Retreat in 2010 to outline additional modalities of the ADMM-Plus, including the establishment of EWGs to promote cooperation among defence and military establishments to address security issues that affect the region.

3. The ADSOM-Plus then adopted the Concept Paper on Establishing an EWG in 2011, which was welcomed by the 5th ADMM, to further define the key principles and modalities of the EWGs.

4. It was initially agreed that EWGs on five (5) areas, namely counter-terrorism, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HA/DR), maritime security, military medicine, and peacekeeping operations (PKO), were to be established.

5. Since then, EWGs on humanitarian mine action (HMA) and cyber security were established during the 2nd ADMM-Plus in 2013 and the 10th ADMM in 2016, respectively, making the current number of EWGs under the auspices of the ADMM-Plus total to seven (7).

6. It is imperative to streamline activities and mechanisms in view of limited resources on the part of the ADMM-Plus members. In the Joint Declaration of the 9th ADMM in 2015, the Ministers observed that various mechanisms are in place that tackle similar security issues. The “limited financial and human resources available” were acknowledged, and the 9th ADMM agreed to “endeavor towards streamlining and improving work processes of different security platforms for more economical and efficient outcomes.”
7. The abovementioned concept papers and attachment paper state that an EWG can be dissolved when the ADMM-Plus assesses that the task has been fulfilled.

8. During the ADSOM Working Group (WG) Meeting in February 2016 in Lao PDR, Member States raised the need to come up with parameters on how to assess if the task of an EWG has been fulfilled.

ASSESSMENT OF TASKS OF EXISTING ADMM-PLUS EWGS

9. As stated in the Concept Paper on Establishing an EWG, the co-chairs shall ensure thorough assessment of all activities of the EWG. During every ADSOM WG meeting, the current EWG co-chairs from the ASEAN Member States shall present a review of the implementation of the EWG work plan.

10. The ADSOM WG will then discuss if the EWGs should be retained, dissolved, or combined with another EWG based on the following considerations:

10.1 Whether the action lines of the current work plan have been accomplished. Non-accomplishment of items in the work plan should not be used as a reason for retaining an EWG.

10.2 Whether the activities and initiatives of the EWG that facilitate defence and security cooperation are being duplicated by an existing ASEAN mechanism.

10.3 Whether the EWG has been able to fulfill the following objectives as stated in the Concept Paper on Establishing an EWG:

10.3.1 To strengthen regional capability in dealing with security challenges;

10.3.2 To oversee activities and carry out initiatives;

10.3.3 To facilitate joint training and joint exercises amongst the militaries of the ADMM-Plus members as a concrete step towards building capacity and enhancing capability; and

10.3.4 To explore possible ways to build upon and contribute to existing security initiatives.
10.4 Whether the action lines of the EWG’s work plan can be included or combined with those of another EWG.

10.5 Whether there are ASEAN Member States and Plus countries that are willing to co-chair the EWG.

11. Once the ADSOM WG comes up with an assessment, the appropriate recommendations on whether an EWG should be retained, dissolved, or combined with another EWG shall be discussed during the ADSOM-Plus WG. Common recommendations among ADSOM-Plus WG members shall be submitted to the ADSOM and ADSOM-Plus for consideration. The ADSOM and ADSOM-Plus shall decide on whether to endorse the recommendations to the ADMM for approval.

12. Assessing the tasks of the seven (7) EWGs shall begin during the 3rd cycle of co-chairmanships (2017-2020) to ascertain whether the EWGs should be retained, dissolved, or combined. Decisions should be arrived at prior to the 4th cycle of co-chairmanships in 2020-2023.

13. All records of activities and outputs of EWGs to be dissolved shall remain in the archives of the ADMM website and shall continue to be used as reference when necessary.

STREAMLINING ACTIVITIES OF EWGS

14. Activities of ADMM-Plus EWGs, which pertain to seminars, workshops, planning conferences, exercises, EWG meetings, among others, have increased with the establishment of additional EWGs and as EWGs undertake joint activities with other EWGs. The increases in the number of activities should be reviewed given the limited financial and human resources of ADMM-Plus members while ensuring that the gains of practical cooperation through the EWGs are sustained.

15. While the ADMM-Plus EWGs are being assessed to determine whether they should be retained, dissolved, or combined with another EWG in time for the next cycle, co-chairs of ADMM-Plus EWGs shall endeavor to reduce the number of activities conducted per year. As stated in the Concept Paper on Establishing an EWG, meetings of an EWG shall be convened at least once a
year. To reduce costs in connection with EWG activities, each EWG may opt to hold no more than two (2) activities per year to include planning conferences for exercises and the like. Where possible, such activities shall be held back-to-back with the EWG’s main meeting. Attendance to additional activities of EWGs shall be voluntary.

16. The co-chairs of the EWGs shall de-conflict all major activities of the EWGs, particularly field training exercises and joint exercises, and are encouraged to conduct joint exercises involving two or more EWGs so as to streamline EWG activities.

17. The ASEAN co-chairs of EWGs shall share updates on related ADMM initiatives with the rest of the EWG members to promote synergy among related initiatives. The Concept Paper on ADMM and ADMM-Plus Initiatives shall be used as a reference on facilitating coordination between ADMM initiatives with those of the ADMM-Plus EWGs. The session on reporting the progress of the ADMM-Plus EWGs at the ADSOM-Plus WG meeting would be a good venue for such coordination.

18. The ADMM Three Year Work Programme that was adopted during the transition year of the ADMM-Plus EWG co-chairmanships shall be used as a main reference for crafting the new work plans of ADMM-Plus EWGs to ensure that ADMM initiatives serve as the basis for ADMM-Plus activities.

CONCLUSION

19. The Concept Paper on Streamlining EWGs shall be used as guidelines and parameters in assessing ADMM-Plus EWGs and determination whether to retain, dissolve or merge particular EWGs. It shall be read in conjunction with the Concept Paper on Establishing an EWG and other relevant documents in connection with ADMM-Plus EWGs.