GUIDELINES REGARDING THE CONDUCT OF ASEAN DEFENCE MINISTERS’ MEETING’S (ADMM’S) INFORMAL ENGAGEMENTS OR MEETINGS WITH PLUS COUNTRIES

Background

1. In March 2015 in Kuala Lumpur, the 9th ADMM adopted the Guidelines to Respond to the Request for Informal Engagements or Meetings by the ADMM-Plus Countries to address the increasing requests by the Plus countries for more exclusive interactions through informal meetings with ASEAN Defence Ministers.

2. The said 2015 Guidelines was crafted as China and the US have been requesting for informal meetings with the ADMM since 2011. Likewise, an informal meeting with Japan was held at the sidelines of the ADMM Retreat in 2014.

3. In 2016, the ASEAN Defence Senior Officials’ Meeting (ADSOM) Working Group (WG) received requests for informal meetings from China, Japan, Russia and the US. China and Japan requested for informal meetings with the ADMM at the sidelines of the ADMM and ADMM Retreat, respectively; while Russia and the US requested for informal meetings to be held in Moscow and Hawaii, respectively.

4. China and Japan’s requests are in accordance with the 2015 Guidelines. However, it is to be noted that the 1st Informal Meeting with Japan was held in 2014 in Bagan with an understanding that the said meeting would be a one-off activity only. Russia’s request did not go through the ADMM process as its requested informal meeting was held prior to the ADSOM and ADSOM-Plus, hence, the ASEAN member states sent representatives to the said meeting on their individual capacity and not as ADMM members. Meanwhile, all ADMM members attended the informal meeting with the US in Hawaii.

5. Notwithstanding the decision to hold the ADMM-Plus annually and consequently the agreement that the ADMM shall no longer consider request from Plus countries for informal meetings, ADMM itself could call for special meetings with Plus countries. Thus, it is imperative to have a set of guidelines to serve as a framework for conducting such meetings.
Objectives

6. To provide a set of guidelines for the ADMM in engaging Plus countries through informal engagements or meetings.

7. To ensure that the ADMM-Plus remains to be the main platform for interaction between the ADMM and the Plus countries’ defence ministers.

Principles

8. Informal engagements or meetings shall uphold the spirit of ASEAN centrality, people-centeredness and people-orientedness.

9. Informal meetings shall only be called by the ADMM when it deems that there is an urgent and/or important matter to be discussed with a Plus country.

10. The decision to have informal meetings shall be decided through consensus.

11. In line with the informal nature of the engagements, there shall be no support mechanism such as working groups or follow-on activities from the informal meeting.

12. Informal meetings with a Plus country shall only be convened at the sidelines of the ADMM, ADMM-Plus, and/or ADMM Retreat. It is understood that even if it is the ADMM itself that requested for the informal meeting, such shall not be held in the Plus country.

13. The proposal to conduct an informal meeting with a Plus country shall be processed/considered and deliberated by the ADSOM WG Leaders and endorsed by the ADSOM Leaders for approval by the ASEAN Defence Ministers.

Conclusion

14. This Paper shall serve as guidance for all ASEAN Member States and Plus countries for future conduct of informal meetings. These guidelines shall be read together with the Concept Paper on the Annualisation of the ADMM-Plus, which was adopted during the 11th ADMM in Manila.