CHAIRMAN’S STATEMENT
OF THE 7TH ASEAN DEFENCE MINISTERS’ MEETING PLUS

10 December 2020

1. The 7th ASEAN Defence Minister Meeting Plus (ADMM-Plus) was conducted on 10 December 2020 via video conference. The Meeting was chaired by General Ngo Xuan Lich, Minister of National Defence of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam.

2. The Meeting was attended by the Defence Ministers and Senior Representatives of Defence Ministries from ASEAN Member States and the eight Plus countries namely, Australia, the People’s Republic of China, the Republic of India, Japan, the Republic of Korea, New Zealand, the Russian Federation, and the United States of America, as well as the Secretary-General of ASEAN.

3. The welcoming message by H.E. Nguyen Xuan Phuc, Prime Minister of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam was delivered at the 10th Anniversary of the founding of the ADMM-Plus, which was conducted prior to the ADMM-Plus. In his message, the Prime Minister underscored the significance of the ADMM-Plus in promoting consultations and substantive defence and military cooperation in the region, as well as its important contributions to the process of building ASEAN Community.

4. H.E. Dato Lim Jock Hoi, Secretary-General of ASEAN reported on recent developments in ASEAN, including updates on ASEAN’s initiatives to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic and other outcomes of the 37th ASEAN Summit and related Summits such as the Ha Noi Declaration on the ASEAN Community’s Post-2023 Vision and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement. The Secretary-General also shared the positive progress in the Code of Conduct in the South China Sea (COC) negotiations. Lastly, the Secretary-General highly appreciated the role of the ADMM-Plus in the realisation of the ASEAN Political-Security Community Blueprint 2025.

5. Senior Lieutenant General Nguyen Chi Vinh, ADSOM-Plus Chair briefed on the outcomes of the ADSOM-Plus, including exchange of views on global and regional security situations at the ADSOM-Plus, the ADMM-Plus Experts’ Working Groups (EWGs) Work Plans of the next cycle, and the discussion on the Joint
Declaration by the ADMM-Plus Ministers on Strategic Security Vision of the ADMM-Plus.

6. The Meeting acknowledged that ASEAN-led mechanisms have served as important platforms for dialogues, trust building, preventive diplomacy as well as substantive cooperation in response to security challenges, thus contributing to regional peace, stability, cooperation and development.

7. The Meeting reaffirmed the principles for friendly and mutually beneficial relations as set in the Declaration of the East Asia Summit on the Principles for Mutually Beneficial Relations. The Meeting also emphasised the importance of enhancing dialogue and cooperation as well as multilateral approach in addressing challenges in order to strengthen the regional multilateral architecture to resolve urgent common regional and global issues, and to support a regional and international order anchored in international law.

8. The Meeting discussed and exchanged views on global and regional security situations and took note of concerns about such regional security hotspots as the South China Sea, the East China Sea, the Korean Peninsula as well as the regional geopolitical and geostrategic shifts, including the implications of deepening regional integration and inter-regional economic cooperation and connectivity as well as the Fourth Industrial Revolution, which present both opportunities and challenges requiring relevant parties to avoid the deepening of mistrust, miscalculation, patterns of behaviour based on a zero-sum game.

9. The Meeting underscored the efforts of promoting the cohesiveness and responsiveness of ASEAN in adapting to geopolitical and geostrategic shifts through strengthening defence cooperation among ASEAN Member States as well as with the Plus Countries.

10. The Meeting underlined the importance of maintaining and promoting peace, security, stability, safety, and freedom of navigation and overflight at regional seas, as well as the need to foster mutual trust and confidence, exercise self-restraint in the conduct of activities, avoid actions that may further complicate the situation, and pursue peaceful resolution of disputes, jointly preserve regional peace and stability in the spirit of partnership and universally recognized principles of the international law, including the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, which sets out the legal framework within which all activities in the oceans and seas must be carried out.

11. For the South China Sea, the Meeting saw the merit of promoting dialogues and cooperation on the basis of equality, mutual respect so as to turn the South China Sea into a sea of openness, freedom, peace, friendship and cooperation; exercise self-restraint, avoid actions that may increase tensions, erode confidence and further complicate the situation; underscore the need for the strict, full and effective implementation of Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC) and the importance of early conclusion of a
legally binding, effective and substantive COC.

12. The Meeting conveyed deep concerns regarding the severity of COVID-19 and its adverse impacts on livelihoods and economic development across the region. The Meeting further commended the efforts by ASEAN Member States and Plus Countries to counter COVID-19, including the important role played by respective military forces. The Meeting also highlighted the significance of international and regional cooperation in response to COVID-19, including through mechanisms such as the ADMM and the ADMM-Plus.

13. The Meeting noted that while coping with the COVID-19 pandemic, ADMM-Plus countries must not neglect non-traditional security issues like terrorism, cyber security, maritime security, climate change among others. The Meeting in this context reiterated its commitment to enhancing defence cooperation in response to these non-traditional security challenges; upholding the principles of ASEAN Centrality, respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, consensus-based decision making as well as flexible, voluntary, and non-binding contributions.

14. The Meeting highly appreciated the progress and the achievements of the ADMM-Plus over the past decade, since the first ADMM-Plus in 2010 in Hanoi. The Meeting noted that although the ADMM-Plus was established not long ago, it has made significant contributions to the process of building ASEAN Community, deepened the relationship amongst ASEAN Member States as well as between ASEAN and its Partners, currently serving as an effective ministerial-level mechanism for consultations and defence and security cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region.

15. The Meeting agreed that the ADMM-Plus provides a useful platform to improve the cooperation based on a confluence of shared interests and further agreed that member countries need to forge concrete cooperation in the areas of common interest with a view to enhancing capacity, develop expertise and promote mutual understanding for regional peace, cooperation, stability and development. The Meeting also reaffirmed that the ADMM-Plus was built upon a good foundation for practical cooperation and there was a huge potential for it to further enhance cooperation in the future.

16. The Meeting acknowledged the positive contributions of the Plus Countries to the continued cooperative effort in enhancing capacity amongst the ADMM-Plus countries for peace, stability and development in the Southeast Asian region through the ADMM-Plus process and in accordance with all the parties' needs.

17. The Meeting recognised the progress of practical cooperation under the ADMM-Plus EWGs, namely Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief, Maritime Security, Military Medicine, Counter-Terrorism, Peacekeeping Operations, Humanitarian Mine Action and Cyber Security, which have
contributed to building capacity and enhancing interoperability amongst ADMM-Plus countries, in order to address current and future challenges and opportunities for the collective benefit of the region.

18. The Meeting reaffirmed the importance of maintaining the ASEAN Centrality and the role of the ADMM in the ADMM-Plus process. The Meeting stressed that cooperation within the ADMM-Plus framework needs to abide by ASEAN fundamental principles of respecting for independence, national sovereignty, non-interference in the internal affairs of States, consultancy, consensus at a pace comfortable to all member countries.

19. The Meeting welcomed the goodwill of regional and extra-regional countries as well as international organizations, which endeavour to strengthen cooperation for peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific region.

20. The Meeting adopted the Joint Declaration by the ADMM-Plus Ministers on Strategic Security Vision of the ADMM-Plus and expressed commitment to its advancement entering the second decade.

21. The Meeting expressed their appreciation to the Government and the Ministry of National Defence of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam for their excellent arrangements as well as their proactive, thorough and effective preparation in the 2020 ASEAN Chairmanship, including measures for technical insurance, safety, cyber security, and especially preventive actions against the COVID-19 pandemic.

22. The 7th ADMM-Plus was followed with the Handover Ceremony that marked the transition of chairmanship from Viet Nam to Brunei Darussalam.