



**Press Release**  
**by the Chairman of the ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Retreat (AMM Retreat)**  
**21 January 2021**

1. The ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Retreat was held on 21 January 2021 via videoconference. The Retreat was the first major meeting under Brunei Darussalam's Chairmanship of ASEAN in 2021.
2. We had in-depth discussions on ASEAN's priorities for the whole year and on ways to further strengthen the ASEAN Community and ASEAN Centrality as well as advance ASEAN's comprehensive recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. We exchanged views on recent regional and international developments and reaffirmed ASEAN Member States' common values and principles, as enshrined in the ASEAN Charter and their shared commitment towards promoting peace, security, stability, and sustainable prosperity in the region.
3. We discussed the follow-up to the outcomes and decisions of the 37<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Summit and Related Summits, including the outcomes from the Mid-Term Review of the ASEAN Community Blueprints 2025, strengthening cross-pillar and cross-sectoral coordination in ASEAN, and work towards the ASEAN Community Vision Post-2025.
4. We also discussed the regional response to and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and committed to swiftly implementing the ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework (ACRF) and its Implementation Plan, as well as working towards the timely establishment of the ASEAN Travel Corridor Arrangement Framework (ACRF) and operationalisation of the ASEAN Regional Reserve of Medical Supplies for Public Health Emergencies (RRMS); as well as the timely establishment of the ASEAN Centre for Public Health Emergencies and Emerging Diseases (ACPHEED). We also reaffirmed our commitment to work with external partners to address the long-term impacts such as on mental health issues. We recognised that the individual efforts undertaken by ASEAN Member States are important contributions to the region's collective efforts to curb the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic.

5. We reaffirmed the importance of ensuring fair, equitable and affordable access to safe and quality vaccines and their procurement for all people in ASEAN. In this regard, we agreed to utilise the COVID-19 ASEAN Response Fund in the procurement of vaccines, medical supplies and equipment for the people of ASEAN.
6. We supported Brunei Darussalam's priorities and deliverables under the theme of "We Care, We Prepare, We Prosper", which focuses on harnessing the caring nature of ASEAN to build a harmonious and resilient Community with the people at its centre; preparing and adapting for the future to ensure ASEAN remains relevant and resilient, so its people can overcome existing and future challenges and threats; and creating opportunities for people to benefit through initiatives that enhance the sustainable prosperity of the region.
7. We underscored the need for ASEAN to pursue a Strategic and Holistic Initiative to Link ASEAN Responses to Emergencies and Disasters (ASEAN SHIELD) across the three ASEAN Community Pillars, with a view to better shield the society, economy and the broader developmental agenda, as well as to enable a swift and collective response in mitigating impacts of emergencies and disasters. In this regard, we aimed to establish a platform to enable the peoples of ASEAN to contribute to natural disaster relief efforts in the region. We also agreed that multilateralism is key to successfully addressing challenges of mutual concern and therefore, reaffirmed ASEAN's commitment to upholding multilateral cooperation, anchored in international law, towards achieving peace, security, stability, and prosperity in the region and beyond. We stressed the importance of fostering a greater sense of ASEAN identity and belonging, including amongst junior officials. We also recognised the importance of instilling in our youth an appreciation for peace and a sense of responsibility towards society, through the promotion of a Youth, Peace and Security agenda.
8. We also stressed the importance of deepening ASEAN economic integration, enhancing intra-ASEAN trade and investment, promoting sustainable development, digital economy and enhancing supply chain connectivity. We recognised ASEAN's commitment to sustainable economic development, including efforts in energy security, supporting MSMEs, and maximising the efficiency of resources such as through cooperation on Circular Economy and promoting green growth. We further reaffirmed ASEAN's efforts in addressing the challenges and opportunities of the Fourth Industrial Revolution that incorporates political-security, economic, and socio-cultural perspectives. We looked forward to the finalisation of the Consolidated Strategy on the Fourth Industrial Revolution for ASEAN as one of ASEAN's priorities in 2021, which will contribute to the region's recovery efforts and its overall long-term resilience. We reaffirmed our commitment to the early ratification and implementation of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) agreement. We also reaffirmed our commitment to build a safe, secure and resilient cyberspace, as well as to develop technological and innovative solutions to support the smart and sustainable development of our countries, rural areas and cities, including through the ASEAN Smart Cities Network (ASCN).

9. We reaffirmed our commitment towards the full and effective implementation of the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 and underscored the importance to accelerate ASEAN integration through the implementation of the IAI Work Plan IV (2021-2025) as well as to enhance regional connectivity through the full implementation of the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity 2025, especially in supporting the region's recovery from the pandemic. We also discussed the follow-up to the 2017 ASEAN Joint Statement on Promoting Women, Peace and Security and stressed the need to work towards the establishment of an ASEAN regional action plan on women, peace and security.
10. We welcomed the growing number of countries interested to accede to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC), on the basis of respect for and in conformity with the purposes and principles of the TAC. We looked forward to the accession of Greece, the Netherlands, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar in the future.
11. We agreed to maintain ASEAN's outward-looking approach for ASEAN's external relations based on shared interest, constructive engagements, and mutual benefits, which can contribute to ASEAN's Community-building and development cooperation efforts. We also agreed on the need to reach out to new potential partners based on shared interest, constructive engagement and mutual benefit.
12. We underscored the importance of strengthening ASEAN Centrality and unity in our engagement with ASEAN's external partners through ASEAN-led mechanisms such as the ASEAN-Plus One, ASEAN Plus Three (APT), East Asia Summit, ASEAN Regional Forum, and ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting-Plus, in order to build mutual trust and confidence as well as to reinforce an open, transparent, inclusive, and rules-based regional architecture with ASEAN at the centre. We reaffirmed the objectives and principles of the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP), which provides a guide for ASEAN's engagement in the wider Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean regions. We encouraged our external partners to support and undertake cooperation with ASEAN in accordance with the principles contained in the Outlook, on the four identified key areas.
13. We stressed the importance of ensuring substantive progress in ASEAN's deliberation on Timor-Leste's application for ASEAN membership. We looked forward to the convening of the Fact-Finding Missions (FFMs) to Timor-Leste by the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) and ASEAN Social-Cultural Community (ASCC) Pillars when circumstances surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic allow, and to the outcomes of the FFMs, after which a comprehensive assessment of Timor-Leste's application for ASEAN membership would be developed. In this regard, we reaffirmed our commitment to redouble our efforts to support Timor-Leste through capacity building assistance at the bilateral and regional levels, as well as its participation in non-policy making meetings/activities of ASEAN. We look forward to the set of guidelines to enable Timor-Leste to participate in ASEAN activities of Sectoral Bodies across all three ASEAN Community pillars.

14. We reiterated our commitment to preserve the Southeast Asian region as a Nuclear Weapon Free Zone and free of all other weapons of mass destruction as enshrined in the Treaty on the Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone (SEANWFZ Treaty) and the ASEAN Charter. We stressed the importance of the full and effective implementation of the SEANWFZ Treaty, including through implementing the Plan of Action to Strengthen the Implementation of the SEANWFZ (2018-2022). We reaffirmed our commitment to continuously engage the Nuclear Weapon States (NWS) and intensify the ongoing efforts of all parties to resolve all outstanding issues in accordance with the objectives and principles of the SEANWFZ Treaty. Our ASEAN experts could explore ways to bridge the differences, including the possibility of engaging with the NWS experts. We would continue to submit the biennial SEANWFZ Resolution through the First Committee to the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA).
15. On regional and international issues, we discussed the various challenges faced by ASEAN, including terrorism and violent extremism, piracy and armed robbery against ships, cybersecurity, natural disasters, climate change, transboundary haze, irregular migration, trafficking in persons and illicit drugs, and maritime security. We also exchanged views on the changing geo-political dynamics in the regional and global landscape, which could affect us directly as well as the situations in other regions, including the Korean Peninsula and the Middle East, among others. We underscored the need to maintain our unity, centrality, and relevance in the region and to collectively address common challenges.
16. We also reaffirmed our commitment to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Paris Agreement in particular the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities, in light of different national circumstances. In this regard, we look forward to the 26<sup>th</sup> United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26) in November 2021 in Glasgow, United Kingdom.
17. 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).

18. We 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. We warmly welcomed the continuously improving cooperation between ASEAN and China, and were encouraged by the progress of the substantive negotiations towards the early conclusion of an effective and substantive Code of Conduct in the South China Sea (COC) consistent with international law, including the 1982 UNCLOS, within a mutually-agreed timeline. We appreciated efforts undertaken to continue the second reading of the Single Draft COC Negotiating Text in spite of the evolving pandemic situation. We emphasised the need to maintain and promote an environment conducive to the COC negotiations, and thus welcomed practical measures that could reduce tensions and the risk of accidents, misunderstandings and miscalculation. We stressed the importance of undertaking confidence building and preventive measures to enhance, among others, trust and confidence amongst parties; and we reaffirmed the importance of upholding international law, including the 1982 UNCLOS.
19. We discussed the situation in the South China Sea, during which concerns were expressed by some Ministers on the land reclamations, activities, and serious incidents 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 that would complicate or escalate disputes and affect peace and stability and avoid actions that may further complicate the situation. We further reaffirmed the need to pursue peaceful resolution of disputes in accordance with the universally recognised principles of 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.
20. We welcomed the Government of Myanmar's continued efforts in addressing the situation in the Rakhine State, including commencing the repatriation process in accordance with its bilateral agreements with Bangladesh. We reaffirmed ASEAN's continued support for Myanmar's efforts to bring peace and stability, to promote harmony and reconciliation among the various communities as well as to promote inclusive and sustainable development in the Rakhine State. We also reaffirmed ASEAN's readiness to play a more visible and enhanced role to support Myanmar in those endeavours and therefore, reiterated our appreciation to the Secretary-General of ASEAN for his efforts in leading the implementation of the recommendations of the Preliminary Needs Assessment (PNA). We looked forward to the conduct of the Comprehensive Needs Assessment (CNA) and encouraged the Secretary-General of ASEAN to continue identifying possible areas to effectively facilitate the repatriation process.

21. In view of the recent inauguration of the President of the United States, Joseph R. Biden Jr. and Vice President Kamala Harris, we look forward to working with the new administration to further strengthen the strategic partnership between ASEAN and the United States (US) for the region's peace, security, stability and prosperity. We further looked forward to our cooperation in promoting and strengthening multilateralism and international cooperation, to accelerate global economic recovery and to mitigate the COVID-19 pandemic. We welcomed the US' continued commitment to and support for ASEAN unity and Centrality in its engagement in the region, based on the principles and objectives of the AOIP. We looked forward to the next meeting between ASEAN and the US Leaders and between us and our US counterpart.

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