OPENING ADDRESS BY MR TEO CHEE HEAN, DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER & COORDINATING MINISTER FOR NATIONAL SECURITY AT THE 5TH ASEAN MINISTERIAL MEETING ON DRUG MATTERS AT THE GRAND COPTHORNE WATERFRONT HOTEL ON 20 OCTOBER 2016, 9.30 A.M., SINGAPORE

“Strengthening Our Response for a Drug-Free ASEAN”

Your Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

A warm welcome to Singapore. We are honoured to host the 5th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Drug Matters (AMMD). Before we begin, may I first express our sincerest condolences to the late King Bhumibol Adulyadej, the Thai King. He was a strong supporter of the fight against drugs, a great leader for Thailand and a model for all of us in ASEAN.

Standing together as ASEAN

2 This year has been significant in our fight against drug abuse. We spoke with one voice for a Drug-Free ASEAN and our zero-tolerance approach against drugs. All of us are committed to suppress and eliminate the scourge of drugs. To prevent harm from drugs, we must uphold the rule of law and take firm action against drug traffickers and drug abusers. We are strongly against drug abuse and must not allow drug abuse to take root in our societies.

3 Our ASEAN Ministers delivered strong statements on our zero tolerance approach at the 59th Session of the United Nations (UN) Commission on Narcotic Drugs and the UN General Assembly Special Session on the World Drug Problem earlier this year. This reflects ASEAN’s strong commitment to a robust international and regional framework to tackle drugs.

4 Singapore and ASEAN therefore support the centrality and ideals of the three existing international drug control conventions.¹ They remain important and relevant as we tackle drug control in the 21st century.

look forward to your endorsement of the ASEAN Work Plan on Securing Communities Against Illicit Drugs at this AMMD. More importantly, we have to see through the implementation of the activities in our Work Plan over the next decade. This will support the larger ASEAN 2025 vision of “Forging Ahead Together”.

Challenges in the Drug Situation

5 As we work towards a Drug-Free ASEAN and prevent harm from drugs, we continue to face a challenging drug situation in the region, made worse by the use of synthetic drugs and opiates.

6 The UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) estimated that there are over 3 million heroin users and 5 million methamphetamine users in East and Southeast Asia. About 22% of the world’s land area used for opium poppy cultivation is in the Golden Triangle. At the same time, the region is also one of the largest and fastest-growing methamphetamine markets in the world. Between 2009 and 2014, the quantity of methamphetamine seized in East and Southeast Asia almost quadrupled, or increased by four times, to close to 50 tonnes.

7 Illicit drug dealers have also used the “Dark Net” to attract new drug abusers. Our agencies have worked hard to catch such abusers and hold them responsible for their actions. The issue is a growing one and requires collective action to tackle it. The Global Drug Survey found that 1 in 10 drug users surveyed in 2015 had purchased drugs on the internet at least once, double from those surveyed in 2013.

8 The harms of drug abuse are indisputable. However, some countries have tried to normalise and decriminalise drugs. We must guard against this as the consequences are serious. The abuse of highly

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2 The ASEAN Work Plan on Securing Communities Against Illicit Drugs stems from elements in the ASEAN Political-Security Community Blueprint and the ASEAN Social Cultural Community Blueprint 2025, adopted by ASEAN Heads of States under the Kuala Lumpur Declaration on “ASEAN 2025: Forging Ahead Together”.


addictive prescription opioids is just one example. The ostensible reason is for pain relief, but this can lead to heroin abuse to satisfy the addiction that is created by these drugs. We have seen how this problem has escalated rapidly in the US. Between 2011 and 2013, about half of heroin abusers in the US had also abused prescription opioids. In 2014, more than 14,000 people in the US died from overdoses involving prescription opioids.\textsuperscript{6} We must be very careful not to let this problem take root in our region.

Drug abuse and criminal exploitation will continue to threaten the well-being of our people. To achieve a Drug-Free ASEAN and prevent harm from drugs, we must tackle the problem at all levels. We must prevent the drug scourge from taking a further toll on our communities. We can do so by acting firmly against those who traffick in drugs and helping abusers overcome their addiction, and supporting their reintegration into society so that they move on to lead meaningful, drug-free lives.

### Strategies to meet Challenges

I will speak on three areas where ASEAN can focus our response to the regional drug situation.

a. First, enhancing upstream efforts to protect our young from drugs;
b. Second, enhancing our legislative measures against drugs and drug syndicates.
c. Third, strengthening collaboration within ASEAN and with our partner countries.

#### Enhancing upstream efforts to protect our young from drugs

First, on upstream measures. We must protect our children and future generations from drug abuse and its associated problems. Last month, in a photograph of an American couple released by the US police, we saw how a couple who allegedly overdosed on heroin had passed out in their car, leaving their young child unattended.\textsuperscript{7} It was a

\textsuperscript{6} Prescriptions Opioid Overdose Data, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, \url{http://www.cdc.gov}, assessed 16 Oct 2016.

stark picture of how the abuse of drugs can bring harm to the next generation, and it can also affect the generation beyond.

12 Our upstream efforts will educate our youths to say “no” to drugs and prevent children of drug abusers from picking up drug habits. We must reinforce our message to youths that “Drugs are addictive. Escaping is hard. Don’t start.”

13 A good way is to exchange information on the best practices within ASEAN. For instance, Malaysia organises the SHIELDS camp to educate youths-at-risk. Thailand’s Youth Initiative Against Drugs brings young people together to raise awareness on the dangers of drug abuse. In Singapore, we have launched toolkits for educators and counsellors. The ASEAN Training Centre for Preventive Drug Education based in the Philippines organises workshops to raise the standard of preventive education in our region. The Centre will organise a regional conference on International Standards on Drug Use Prevention this December. I strongly encourage our officials and educators to work together and run programmes in ASEAN to strengthen preventive education and protect our next generation from drugs.

Enhancing legislative measures against drugs and drug syndicates

14 Second, we must continue our firm and vigorous enforcement efforts to reduce drug supply. However, criminal syndicates will always try to find new ways to circumvent the criminal justice system. Therefore, our legislative measures must be constantly updated to support our law enforcement agencies. For instance, ASEAN countries are at different stages to legislate measures against New Psychoactive Substances (NPS) which mimic the effects of controlled drugs such as cannabis and methamphetamine. I recommend that our Ministries and our Ministers help to expedite and complete this work soon.

15 In addition, robust legislation on asset forfeiture helps us counter the lure of profits from drug trafficking, and disrupt the operations of international drug syndicates. I welcome Thailand’s hosting of the

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11 In Singapore, we have legislated these as controlled substances since 2014.
ASEAN Seminar on Asset Seizure in Drug Trafficking and Production Cases in June this year\textsuperscript{12}. This allowed ASEAN members to share information on their national laws and measures. Such platforms are important for our law enforcement agencies to learn from each other, and strengthen our collective enforcement capabilities.

**Strengthening regional and international cooperation**

16 Third, we must strengthen collaboration within and beyond ASEAN. Our enforcement agencies collaborate at borders and checkpoints to disrupt the drug trade. We are beginning to see more successes. Initiatives such as the ASEAN Airport Interdiction Taskforce and the ASEAN Seaport Interdiction Taskforce help to coordinate efforts to disrupt the operations of drug syndicates across borders in our region. Our agencies can build on the momentum to further cooperate in gathering intelligence and conducting joint operations.

17 Our senior officials also coordinate ASEAN’s actions with dialogue partners – China, South Korea and Japan, and with the US Drug Enforcement Administration Southeast Asia offices to combat the drug trade. Together, we can train and equip our law enforcement officers with skills to deal with emerging threats such as New Psychoactive Substances and online drug trafficking.

18 As we implement the ASEAN Work Plan, we should also prepare well for the international debate on a new global action plan to tackle drugs. ASEAN is committed to a zero-tolerance approach to realise our vision of a Drug-Free ASEAN and prevent harm from drug abuse. We must not let softer approaches that allow the harm from drug use to spread and cause damage to many layers and levels of society and get transmitted to future generations. A children’s hospital in Colorado State in the US for instance found that the incidence of marijuana poisoning cases among children doubled two years after legalising marijuana in that state\textsuperscript{13}. ASEAN countries must work together and with our partners to continue our firm stance against drug traffickers.

\textsuperscript{12} ASEAN Seminar on Asset Seizure at the Sukosol Hotel in Bangkok, \url{https://aseannarco.oncb.go.th/ewt_w3c/ewt_news.php?filename=index_EN&nid=227}

Conclusion

19 Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, to address the regional drug situation, we must enhance upstream efforts for youths to say “no” to drugs and to protect our young from drugs. We should also enhance legislative measures against drugs and drug syndicates, and strengthen regional and international cooperation.

20 As the global debate on drug matters intensifies, what we say as a region will matter. By standing together and working together towards a Drug-Free ASEAN, we have a better chance of protecting our citizens and families from the dangers of drugs, rehabilitating drug abusers, and reintegrating them into society. This will improve lives and create a safe, secure and drug-free society for all of us.

21 I wish all of you a fruitful meeting. Thank you.