

OPENING REMARKS BY MINISTER CHAN CHUN SING AT THE 21st AEM PLUS THREE CONSULTATIONS ON THURSDAY 30 AUG 2018, 2.00PM AT SHANGRI-LA HOTEL SINGAPORE

Your Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. On behalf of my delegation, I would like to once again extend a very warm welcome to Vice Minister Gao Yan, Minister Seko, Minister Kim, and your respective delegations.

2. The ASEAN Plus Three cooperation framework is an important cooperative mechanism, and has contributed to making East Asia an important engine for global economic growth.

a. Since its establishment in 1997, the ASEAN Plus Three cooperation framework has broadened and deepened to cover a wide spectrum of areas, ranging from political and security to economic, and even socio-cultural issues.

i. On the economic front, the ASEAN Plus Three cooperation framework looks at economic issues, finance, tourism, agriculture and forestry, energy and minerals, and the development of small and medium size enterprises.

b. To strengthen economic cooperation among the ASEAN Plus Three countries and to foster closer links among the private sector in this region, the East Asia Business Council (EABC) was established in April 2004.

i. Since then, the EABC has regularly provided private sector feedback in promoting intra-regional trade and investment flows, including the ongoing Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) negotiations.

3. The economic cooperation amongst our countries has delivered tangible benefits to our economies and people.

a. Trade and investments between ASEAN and the Plus Three Countries have continued to grow despite the uncertainties in the global economy.

b. In 2017, total trade between ASEAN and the Plus Three Countries increased by 16.1 per cent to USD807 billion, representing 31.6 per cent of ASEAN's total merchandise trade.¹

¹ **Source:** ASEANStats.

- c. Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) flows from the Plus Three Countries into ASEAN stood at USD29.9 billion in 2017, accounting for 21.8 per cent of total FDI inflows into ASEAN.²

4. The growing tensions in the global economy coupled with the advent of the new technologies and the digital economy has brought about both risks and new opportunities.

5. In this context, it is critical for us to stay committed to deepening and broadening our economic linkages.

- a. ASEAN remains resolute in our pursuit of stronger economic cooperation with the Plus Three Countries.
- b. The ASEAN-China FTA, the ASEAN-Japan Comprehensive Economic Partnership, and the ASEAN-Korea FTA are important mechanisms for us to grow our intra-regional trade and establish more robust supply chains.
 - i. We should continue to enhance and improve on these ASEAN Plus One Agreements so that they remain relevant and user-friendly for our businesses.
- c. We have collectively stepped up efforts to substantively conclude the RCEP negotiations.
 - i. ASEAN looks forward to working constructively and pragmatically with China, Japan and Korea to deliver good outcomes for the RCEP negotiations by the end of this year.
- d. At the same time, amidst the rapidly changing geo-political environment, we should collectively uphold the multilateral trading system and maintain our commitment to free and open trade.

6. It is with this in mind that we will approach our meeting today, in which we will take stock of our progress thus far and will discuss new cooperation activities, as well as an ASEAN Plus Three Economic Cooperation Work Programme for 2019-2020 to guide our cooperation over the next two years.

7. I am confident that our discussions today will further strengthen the ASEAN Plus Three economic cooperation framework, and bring our relations to greater heights.

8. I would now like to invite Vice Minister Gao Yan, followed by Minister Seko, and then Minister Kim to deliver their opening remarks.

Thank you.

² **Source:** ASEANStats.