

## OVERVIEW OF ASEAN-UNITED NATIONS RELATIONS

### I. Background

1. ASEAN's relations with the United Nations (UN) system started in the early 1970s through initial cooperation with the UN Development Programme (UNDP). The ASEAN-UNDP Sub-regional Programme was launched in 1977, aiming to better assist ASEAN with its regional cooperation and integration efforts. Over the years, ASEAN has developed working relations with various UN Agencies on different thematic areas and issues.

2. The inaugural ASEAN-UN Summit was held in Bangkok on 13 February 2000, at the sidelines of the 10<sup>th</sup> Session of the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). The 2<sup>nd</sup> ASEAN-UN Summit, held on 13 September 2005 in New York, appreciated UN's support for ASEAN's goals in realising the ASEAN Community as well as its decision to establish an ASEAN Charter. The UN also welcomed the possibility of ASEAN seeking an observer status at the UN General Assembly (UNGA).

3. ASEAN was granted Observer Status at the UNGA through the adoption of Resolution (A/RES/61/44) on 4 December 2006. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on ASEAN-UN Cooperation signed on 27 September 2007 in New York established a partnership that encompass the full range of cooperation in the areas of political-security, economic and socio-cultural based on mutual benefits.

4. ASEAN-UN cooperation was given further impetus through the adoption of the ASEAN-UN Joint Declaration on Comprehensive Partnership at the 4<sup>th</sup> ASEAN – UN Summit in November 2011 in Bali, Indonesia. The first five-year Plan of Action for the period of 2016- 2020 was adopted in September 2016.

5. The UNGA adopted Resolution on the Commemoration on the Fiftieth Anniversary of ASEAN on 19 July 2017 in New York, the first-ever commemorative resolution by a regional organisation before the UNGA. On 23 November 2020, the biennial resolution on "Cooperation between the UN and ASEAN" was adopted by consensus by the UNGA with 120 co-sponsors, including from ASEAN Member States.

6. The Secretary-General of ASEAN delivered a briefing at the UN Security Council (UNSC) on "*Cooperation between the UN and Regional and Sub-regional Organisations in Maintaining Peace and Security: The Role of ASEAN*" on 30 January 2020 at the UN Headquarters in New York. The UNSC commended ASEAN for its role in promoting peace, stability and prosperity in the region over the last five decades and took note the highlight of the ASEAN-UN relations. Notwithstanding that the aforementioned briefing is a one-off event, it has reinforced the importance of ASEAN's partnership with the UN in addressing transnational regional and global issues. Both sides continue to strengthen ASEAN-UN relations through existing mechanisms as well as other global platforms such as the biennial UN Secretary-General's High-Level Interactive Dialogue with Heads of Regional and other Organisations, which was held via videoconference on 23 November 2020. The Interactive Dialogue aimed to further strengthen collaboration between the UN and

participating organisations, including ASEAN, in addressing the complex challenges related to international peace and security as well as the impacts of the Coronavirus Disease-2019 (COVID-19) pandemic.

### **Political-Security Cooperation**

7. The ASEAN-UN Summit and the ASEAN-UN Ministerial Meeting (AUMM) have been held annually since 2010.<sup>1</sup> The annual AUMM has provided an opportunity for the ASEAN Foreign Ministers, the President of the UNGA and the Secretary-General of the UN to exchange views on areas of mutual interest. The last AUMM and the 11<sup>th</sup> ASEAN-UN Summit were conducted via videoconference on 21 October and 15 November 2020, respectively. The AUMM adopted the new ASEAN-UN Plan of Action (2021-2025), which will continue to guide both sides in further strengthening the ASEAN-UN Comprehensive Partnership for the next five years.

8. Cooperation to promote regional and international peace and security remains a key feature of the ASEAN-UN Comprehensive Partnership, and it continues to be undertaken through various flagship programmes such as the ASEAN-UN Regional Dialogue (AURED) series and the ASEAN-UN Training in Preventive Diplomacy. The second ASEAN-UN Training on Peace-making and Preventive Diplomacy for the Asia Pacific region was organised in March 2018 in Manila. Five AURED workshops have been held thus far, with the latest one held in Ha Noi, Viet Nam in December 2019, with focus on exploring collaboration with the ASEAN-IPR.

9. In 2017, the ASEAN-UN Training Workshop on the Law of the Sea, including UNCLOS as well as the ASEAN-UN Electoral Observation Workshop took place in Indonesia and the Philippines, respectively. The UN supported the ASEAN-IPR Training Series on 'Mainstreaming Peace and Reconciliation in ASEAN' in February 2019. The UN has also been supportive of ASEAN's efforts to advance the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, by supporting the ASEAN Women for Peace Registry (AWPR) and the ASEAN WPS study, including through the WPS Webinar in July 2020 as well as the ASEAN Ministerial Dialogue on Strengthening Women's role for Sustainable Peace and Security at the sidelines of the 53<sup>rd</sup> ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting in September 2020, during which it presented UNSC Resolution 1325 on WPS and its way forward.

10. ASEAN-UN collaboration in peace-keeping and post-conflict peace-building also continues to be strengthened. This includes activities conducted through national focal points of ASEAN Member States and the ASEAN Peacekeeping Centres Network. As a significant contribution to global peace and security, a total of 4,868 military and police peacekeeping personnel from 7 ASEAN Member States, including through the provision of a growing number of women peacekeepers, have been deployed in 10 global UN peace operations. In June 2019, Under-Secretary-General for Department of Peacekeeping Operations met with the Committee of Permanent Representative to ASEAN (CPR) in Jakarta to discuss ways and means to enhance peacekeeping cooperation with Indonesia and ASEAN.

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<sup>1</sup> The annual ASEAN-UN Summit did not take place in 2018 as ASEAN Leaders and the UN Secretary-General had met in Bali at the sidelines of IMF-World Bank Annual Meeting in October 2018.

11. Both sides are intensifying efforts in combatting transnational crime and countering international terrorism. Toward this end, the UN continues to share global practices and technical expertise, including through capacity building initiatives, with various ASEAN sectoral bodies to address transnational crimes, including terrorism, illicit trafficking of wildlife and timber and illicit drugs trafficking. On 28 February 2020, Under-Secretary-General of UN Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT) met with Secretary-General of ASEAN at the ASEAN Secretariat to exchange views on these areas of importance.

12. ASEAN and the UN also continue to explore areas for potential collaboration with the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR), including through sharing best practices. Following the first interface on 15 May 2018, the 'Second AICHR-UN Interface' was held on 19 November 2019 in Bangkok.

### **Economic Cooperation**

13. The UN has been supporting ASEAN's continued efforts to pursue further economic cooperation and integration both within the region and in the global economy as well as efforts to create effective operational and regulatory frameworks for a more competitive ASEAN Economic Community (AEC). Promoting inclusive and sustainable development and economic empowerment of women and youth are also priorities of the ASEAN-UN Comprehensive Partnership.

14. On the trade facilitation front, the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) continues to support the ASEAN Joint Trade Facilitation Consultative Committee on an ad-hoc basis, under the Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-Border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific. This includes the preparation of a report analysing the results of the '2019 UN Global Survey on Trade Facilitation and Paperless Trade Implementation for ASEAN', which was released on 3 September 2019.

15. Cooperation on food security, forestry and agriculture has been further promoted including with the endorsement of the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)'s Technical Cooperation Programme (TCP) on Scaling-up agroforestry in the ASEAN region for food security and environmental benefits, by both FAO and ASEAN.

### **Socio-Cultural Cooperation**

16. Cooperation in disaster risk reduction and management remains a priority for ASEAN as it aims to build a safer and disaster-resilient Community through the implementation of the ASEAN-UN Joint Strategic Plan of Action on Disaster Management 2016-2020 (JSPADM III). The UN continues to assist in enhancing the key role of the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on disaster management (AHA Centre), by supporting its capacity building programmes such as AHA Centre Executive Programmes as well as the ASEAN Emergency Response and Assessment Team (ASEAN-ERAT) trainings, held in November 2018 and April 2019, respectively.

17. Cooperation in addressing climate change and other environmental issues continues to be underpinned through the implementation of the ASEAN-UN Action Plan on Environment and Climate Change (2016-2020). ASEAN has delivered two

joint statements on this front, namely for the *2019 UN Climate Action Summit*, issued in December 2018, as well as for the *2019 UN Climate Change Conference*, which took place in Madrid, Spain in December 2019. Guided by the ASEAN-International Labour Organisation (ILO) Work Programme 2016-2020, both sides have collaborated in many initiatives under the ambit of labour cooperation to promote decent work for all, including migrant workers and gender mainstreaming. The initiatives on this front include 'ILO-ASEAN Training Course on Transition from Informal to Formal Employment' held in January 2019 in Bangkok, Thailand and the collaborative works of the Senior Labour Officials Meeting (SLOM), the ACW, ILO and UN Women on project of 'Gender Mainstreaming into Labour and Employment Policies to Promote Decent Work for All'.

18. In collaboration with UN Women, the ASEAN '*HeForShe*' campaign was launched at the ASEAN Secretariat on 30 November 2017, to engage men and boys as agents of change in espousing gender equality. While with UNICEF, the ASEAN Secretariat prepared a joint report on '*Children in ASEAN: 30 Years of the Convention on the Rights of the Child*', in commemorating the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the adoption of the Convention.

19. In addressing the COVID-19 pandemic, ASEAN and the UN have been collaborating in support of regional efforts in addressing the pandemic through information-sharing on public health emergencies, such as through the briefing made by the Director-General of the World Health Organisation (WHO) at the Special ASEAN Plus Three (APT) Summit on COVID-19 in April 2020. ASEAN also noted the UN Secretary-General's Policy Brief on the Impact of COVID-19 in Southeast Asia issued in July 2020 as well as his appeal for a global ceasefire to promote global peace in the midst of the pandemic.

### **Cross-Sectoral Cooperation**

20. Promoting complementarities between ASEAN Community Vision 2025 and the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (SDGs) remains an important agenda, which has been undertaken through various initiatives, such as:

- Special Session of the ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting Focusing on SDGs and the Special Panel Discussion to Enhance Complementarities between the two Frameworks held at the UN Headquarters in September 2016;
- Joint Report on the progress in implementing the complementarities between the two Frameworks, noted by the 9<sup>th</sup> ASEAN-UN Summit in November 2017;
- Series of symposium on SDGs, organised by ASEAN, UNDP and China since 2016, which serves as a platform for them to share best practices and knowledge on SDGs as well as poverty eradication in the region. The last Symposium was held in Hanoi, Viet Nam on 4-5 September 2019;
- UNGA Side event on "Regional Dimension in Achieving SDGs: From Lessons Learned to Practical Action in the ASEAN Region and Beyond" co-organised by Thailand, ASEC and UNESCAP on 24 September 2019 in UN Headquarters, New York.

- The Complementarities Roadmap (2020-2025), prepared jointly by the ASEAN Member States led by Thailand, ESCAP, and the ASEAN Secretariat, which was launched on 3 November 2019 in Bangkok at the 10<sup>th</sup> ASEAN-UN Summit;
- Meeting between Executive Secretary of ESCAP and Secretary-General of ASEAN in February 2020, during which they discussed priority areas of cooperation between both sides, including complementarities initiatives;
- ASEAN-ESCAP High Level Policy Dialogue on “Building a Resilient AEC in the Aftermath of COVID-19” in May 2020;
- Series of High-Level Brainstorming Dialogues (HLBD) on Enhancing Complementarities between the two Frameworks, which the fourth iteration took place on 4 June 2020; and
- ASEAN Web Forum on Disability-Inclusion and COVID-19 - Engaging Persons with Disabilities for Effective Response and Recovery in August 2020.

21. The 11<sup>th</sup> ASEAN-UN Summit held via videoconference on 15 November 2020 looked forward to the UN's continued support for ASEAN, including the ASEAN Smart Cities Network (ASCN) and the ASEAN Centre for Sustainable Development Studies and Dialogue (ACSDSD).

### **Secretariat-to-Secretariat Cooperation**

22. Cooperation between ASEAN and UN Secretariats continues to be underpinned through more regular engagements, especially the convening of the Secretariat-to-Secretariat (S2S) Meeting in Jakarta since 2016 aside from the annual S2S in New York. The inaugural S2S Meeting took place at the ASEAN Secretariat in March 2011, following the decision of the 3<sup>rd</sup> ASEAN-UN Summit in 2010. In total, fourteen S2S Meetings, including one sectoral S2S in 2012, have taken place.

23. Noting that the S2S collaboration is an important aspect of the ASEAN-UN Comprehensive Partnership, the S2S Meeting in New York in September 2017 agreed to institutionalise this mechanism with two meetings annually, at the ASEAN Secretariat in Jakarta and at the UN Headquarters in New York at the margins of the UNGA. The last S2S Meeting was held via videoconference on 27 October 2020, during which the Meeting adopted the Joint Report on the ASEAN-UN Comprehensive Partnership (September 2019-October 2020) and agreed to further strengthening the ASEAN-UN Comprehensive Partnership through the new Plan of Action (2021-2025). This S2S mechanism monitors and reports the progress implementation of the Joint Declaration on ASEAN-UN Comprehensive Partnership to the AUMM, and through it to the ASEAN-UN Summit.

24. The UN's cooperation with ASEAN has also been strengthened with the deployment to Jakarta of four UN Liaison Officers to ASEAN, focusing on political-security issues, humanitarian affairs, gender equality as well as drug control and crime prevention matters. Additionally, the UNESCAP has appointed its Regional Adviser on ASEAN in October 2015. In September 2016, the UN informed the Secretary-General of ASEAN of the additional responsibilities and designation of the

UN Resident Coordinator in Indonesia to represent the UN with ASEAN in Jakarta. These deployments have contributed to the more effective coordination between the UN and the ASEAN Secretariat as well as with various ASEAN sectoral bodies.

