

**Welcome Remarks by
H.E. Dato Lim Jock Hoi
Secretary-General of ASEAN
On the Occasion of the 53rd ASEAN Day Online Celebration
8 August 2020**

His Excellency Pham Binh Minh, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Socialist Republic of Viet Nam,

Her Excellency Ibu Retno Marsudi, Foreign Minister of the Republic of Indonesia

Friends, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning. This year, due to the global COVID-19 pandemic, the celebration of ASEAN Day, for the first time, is done via online, over our digital and social media platforms. Thank you for tuning in and I take this opportunity to welcome you to the 2020 ASEAN Day celebration.

The last five years have been an exciting expedition for ASEAN. ASEAN realised its transformation from an “association” to a “community” on 31 December 2015. In 2017, on this day, ASEAN celebrated its 50th anniversary “Golden Jubilee”. Last year, the Jakarta-based ASEAN Secretariat moved to its new twin-tower building, located next to its former office, now known as the “Heritage Site”. The two buildings are now in full-operation. In this regard, I would like to thank the Government of Indonesia for the staunch support in strengthening the operation of the ASEAN Secretariat. With the expanded spaces, the ASEAN Secretariat remains highly-committed to support the ASEAN Community building process and regional integration journey.

ASEAN – under Viet Nam’s strong and able Chairmanship – stays focused in undertaking important milestone exercises, as the region demonstrates commitment in its integration journey. One activity - the Mid-Term Review of the implementation of ASEAN Community 2025 Blueprints, is currently being conducted. This is pivotal in assessing the progress, identifying the challenges, and addressing the implementation gaps of the three pillars. Another example is RCEP – Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership – which is the ASEAN-driven trade pact considered to be the largest global trade agreement comprising every key Asian economy.

In spite of the COVID-19 pandemic, the successful convening of the recent 36th ASEAN virtual Summit was a clear illustration of ASEAN’s solidarity manifested in concrete regional

cooperation. Together with the two Special Summits in April 2020, the 36th ASEAN Summit has, among others, reaffirmed the need for a regional recovery plan post-COVID-19. This plan involves collaboration among Member States' government agencies, industries, private sectors and other relevant stakeholders. The ultimate task is for ASEAN to have a robust, holistic and practical recovery framework to minimise the socio-economic effects of this pandemic, while propelling the economic trajectory.

The ASEAN Secretariat too has remained active during the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak. Between 1 March to 31 July 2020, the secretariat continued to be in operation, and hosted and facilitated 300 video-conference online meetings, averaging about 3 virtual meetings per working day.

If there is any lesson to be learned from this COVID-19 pandemic, it is that in an interconnected world, a global crisis requires international cooperation, and no single country can wrestle any crisis alone. Tackling the pandemic and its socio-economic impact demands solidarity and action at all levels across the international community. In the same context, ASEAN will and must continue to keep its market open, ensure the normal flows of trade and supply chain connectivity, particularly for essential products. Such a demonstration of regional commitment is critical, in the absence of a coordinated global response and in light of the pressure to turn inward.

At this juncture, I would like to acknowledge the valued contributions of all ASEAN stakeholders, such as our parliamentarians, ASEAN entities, academia, media, and youth, for their steadfast involvements in the ASEAN Community journey. I would also like to thank the ASEAN Dialogue Partners, Sectoral and Development Partners, as well as all other external partners for their valuable support to the ASEAN Community building. Thank you.

It is now my honour to invite Madam Foreign Minister Ibu Retno Marsudi of Indonesia, to deliver her Keynote Remarks.