

29th ASEAN-Australia Forum

Co-Chairs' Statement

1. The 29th ASEAN-Australia Forum was held in Nay Pyi Taw on 9-10 March 2017. Representatives from all ASEAN Member States, Australia, and the ASEAN Secretariat attended this, the third Forum since the elevation of the ASEAN-Australia relationship to a Strategic Partnership. The Forum was co-chaired by H.E. U Myint Thu, SOM Leader and Director General, ASEAN Affairs Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, and H.E. Mr Gary Quinlan, Deputy Secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Australia.
2. Australia congratulated ASEAN on the 50th Anniversary landmark achievement. Australia acknowledged the importance of ASEAN processes in facilitating dialogue, consultation, and engagement that have underpinned peace, stability and economic growth in the region, and created the conditions necessary for the people of ASEAN and the region to enjoy peace, security and growing prosperity. Australia looked forward to partnering with ASEAN on a range of activities this year to commemorate ASEAN's 50th Anniversary.
3. Australia expressed support for the Philippines' ASEAN chairmanship priorities, particularly its themes around peace and stability in the region, inclusive and innovation-led growth, and maritime security and cooperation.
4. The Meeting recalled the success of the first ASEAN-Australia Biennial Summit in Vientiane on 7 September 2016, an important milestone in ASEAN-Australia relations. They noted the warmth of the engagement between their respective leaders and their commitment to further enhance ASEAN-Australia relations, including through Australia's hosting of the ASEAN-Australia Special Summit in Sydney on 17-18 March 2018.
5. The Meeting welcomed the progress made towards the Special Summit. Both sides agreed to work towards concrete Summit outcomes across ASEAN's three Community Pillars in support of their shared vision for a stable, rules-based, open and inclusive regional order. The Meeting agreed that the forthcoming visit to Australia of the Committee of Permanent Representatives in May-June 2017 would be an important preparatory step. Both sides looked forward to working closely together to achieve a successful and productive Special Summit.
6. The Meeting discussed developments in our region and the importance of close collaboration in addressing the emerging challenges. They stressed the importance of ASEAN centrality in regional architecture. They further stressed the value of working together through regional architecture to reinforce the rules and norms that underpin peace and stability, and respect for international law and peaceful, non-coercive approaches to dispute resolution, including full respect for legal and diplomatic processes.
7. The Meeting discussed ways to enhance ASEAN-Australia cooperation through the East Asia Summit (EAS), ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), Expanded

ASEAN Maritime Forum (EAMF), and the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting Plus (ADMM Plus) mechanism. They also expressed their willingness to work closely together to counter terrorism and violent extremism in the region, including through the implementation of the renewed ASEAN-Australia Joint Declaration for Cooperation to Combat International Terrorism and the ASEAN Senior Officials Meeting on Transnational Crime-Australia Consultations. In this regard, ASEAN appreciated Australia's Co-Chairing of the ARF Workshop on Mainstreaming the Prevention of Violent Extremism in the ARF Region on 15-16 February 2017 in Brussels together with the Philippines and the European Union as well as Australia's hosting of the 11th Meeting of the ARF Experts and Eminent Persons from 28 February to 01 March 2017 in Canberra, Australia. The Meeting looked forward to the forthcoming Counter-Terrorism Conference to be held in the margins of the ASEAN-Australia Special Summit in March 2018.

8. Participants expressed their shared commitment to strengthen the EAS as the region's premier leaders-led strategic forum. Both sides welcomed the recent leaders' statements, including the 2016 EAS Statement on Non-Proliferation, which reaffirmed the region's commitment to non-proliferation norms and the 2015 Statement on Enhancing Regional Maritime Cooperation, as well as the EAS Statement on Countering Violent Extremism. To this end, participants welcomed the outcomes of the EAS Maritime Security Cooperation Seminar in Sydney in November 2016 and the EAS Regional Seminar for Capacity Building to Prevent and Counter Violent Extremism held in Surabaya, Indonesia in December 2016. They looked forward to further strengthening the engagement between EAS Ambassadors in Jakarta.
9. The Meeting reviewed Australia's ongoing cooperation with ASEAN to combat human trafficking and the exploitation of migrant workers, including through regional cooperation in the Bali Process and the Australia-Asia Program to Combat Trafficking in Persons. Australia welcomed the recent entry into force of the ASEAN Convention Against Trafficking In Persons, Especially Women and Children and looked forward to continuing to working with ASEAN Member States.
10. Australia welcomed ASEAN's efforts to promote and protect human rights in the region, including through the work of ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR). Australia expressed a desire to explore ways to enhance cooperation with ASEAN on human rights issues, including through implementation of the ASEAN-Australia Plan of Action. ASEAN participants welcomed Australia's candidacy for a seat on the UN Human Rights Council (2018-2020).
11. The Meeting discussed the importance of gender equality in helping ASEAN economies to reach their full potential for inclusive growth and improved living standards. Australia outlined the work it was doing in the region through its development program to improve economic participation by women. ASEAN Member States welcomed Australia's proposal to co-sponsor the Women's Livelihood Bond project, which aims to empower women to achieve sustainable livelihoods in Cambodia, Philippines and Vietnam, and looked forward to Australia co-hosting, with the Philippines, an ASEAN Women in Business

Forum in August 2017 in Manila as a commemorative event for ASEAN's 50th Anniversary.

12. The Meeting discussed the contributions made by ongoing trade liberalisation and economic reforms to strong economic growth in Southeast Asia and Australia, and stressed the importance of resisting the temptation to revert to protectionism. Participants reflected on the success of the ASEAN-Australia-New Zealand Free Trade Agreement (AANZFTA) in boosting economic ties between ASEAN and Australia and fostering closer economic integration within ASEAN. Participants also welcomed Australia's continued support for the implementation of AANZFTA, through the AANZFTA Economic Cooperation Support Program. Australia and ASEAN looked forward to realising further gains through the ongoing General Review of AANZFTA to ensure the Agreement remains relevant to business.
13. Australia reaffirmed its support for economic integration and the institutional strengthening of the ASEAN Secretariat through the ASEAN-Australia Development Cooperation Program Phase II (AADCP II). The Meeting looked forward to the publication of the Australia-funded report "ASEAN @ 50: A Historic Milestone of FDI and MNEs in ASEAN" as an important contribution to the ASEAN Economic Community. Participants also discussed the importance of ensuring balanced and inclusive economic growth across the ASEAN Community, and acknowledged Australia's support to private sector development, innovation and financial inclusion, through its Mekong Business Initiative and Shaping Inclusive Financial Transformations in ASEAN (SHIFT) programs. The Meeting welcomed the Prime Minister of Thailand's offer to host a workshop among entrepreneurs and SMEs in the field of technology and innovation between ASEAN and Australia later this year and noted that the workshop could be part of a commemorative event for ASEAN's 50th Anniversary.
14. The Meeting welcomed the progress made in the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) negotiations, noting the Agreement's potential to provide a strong boost to economic integration efforts and shared prosperity in one of the world's most dynamic economic regions. Participants noted the importance of ensuring RCEP is a modern, comprehensive and commercially meaningful Agreement, and encouraged RCEP participating countries to work together towards a 'swift conclusion' of the negotiations, as agreed by RCEP Leaders in September 2016.
15. Australia commended ASEAN on its ambitious connectivity agenda, noting the enormous economic opportunities a connected ASEAN would generate for the region and the world. ASEAN participants welcomed Australia's practical support for the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity 2025. They provided an update on the implementation of the Master Plan and ASEAN's progress towards the realisation of an integrated ASEAN Community. ASEAN participants expressed appreciation for Australia's contribution to improving ASEAN connectivity through investments in infrastructure and assistance to facilitate trade and improve transport linkages.

16. On the South China Sea, a number of participants expressed concern over recent developments and activities that have raised tensions and eroded trust and confidence in the region. The Meeting underlined the importance of enhancing maritime security and preserving peace and stability in the South China Sea. Participants reaffirmed their commitment to preserve rights of freedom of navigation and overflight, which are provided for under international law. They urged the states concerned to resolve disputes peacefully, without resorting to the threat or use of force, in accordance with the universally recognised principles of international law, including the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea. They emphasised the need to refrain from activities that may escalate tension, including militarisation and land reclamation, and called on all parties to sustain the momentum of dialogue, including ongoing efforts to complete a framework of the Code of Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (COC) by mid-2017. The Meeting agreed on the importance of the full and effective implementation of the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea in its entirety and the early conclusion of an effective Code of Conduct in the South China Sea.
17. The Meeting expressed grave concern over Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK)'s ballistic missile launches in 2017, which further threatened regional and global peace and stability. The launches constituted yet another clear breach of the relevant United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolutions, following the DPRK's repeated missile launches throughout 2016. They called on the DPRK to abandon its nuclear and ballistic missile programs in a complete, verifiable, and irreversible manner, and uphold its international legal obligations; called for the full implementation of all relevant UNSC resolutions, including the UNSC sanctions regime and the 2005 Joint Statement; and called for the continuation of joint efforts to resume meaningful Six Party Talks at an early date to make substantial progress in the denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula in a peaceful manner.
18. The Meeting discussed their ambitions to improve socio-cultural exchange between ASEAN and Australia. They reviewed the work being undertaken to boost people-to-people links through initiatives such as the Australia Award Scholarships program, the New Colombo Plan, the Australia-ASEAN Emerging Leaders Program. The Meeting noted the value of ongoing exchanges, particularly between young people, in enhancing mutual understanding of contemporary Southeast Asian and Australian societies. The ASEAN Member States welcomed the increase in the number of Australia Awards scholarships offered to recipients from ASEAN Member States. They also encouraged Australia to continue to support the work of AHA Centre in the field of disaster management through a planned civilian deployment.
19. ASEAN participants reaffirmed their commitment to work closely with Australia to address health challenges in the region to prevent the spread of infectious diseases especially drug-resistant malaria. They expressed appreciation for the commitment shown by the Australian Government under the Asia Pacific Leaders Malaria Alliance (APLMA) Malaria Elimination Roadmap and the APLMA Senior Officials Meeting held in Bangkok in May 2016 which helped strengthen the institutional capacity and share lessons learned to achieve the goal of an Asia-Pacific free of malaria by 2030.

20. The Meeting reviewed and reaffirmed the substantive progress and achievements made in the implementation of the ASEAN-Australia Plan of Action (2015-2019) to implement the ASEAN-Australia Strategic Partnership, which was adopted at the ASEAN-Australia Commemorative Summit in Nay Pyi Taw in 2014. They looked forward to the Post Ministerial Conference in the Philippines in August 2017 and the next ASEAN-Australia Forum in Australia in 2018.
