

Co-Chairs' Press Statement
ASEAN-EU Ministerial Video Conference on the Coronavirus Disease 2019

20 March 2020

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the European Union (EU) convened a ministerial-level video conference on Friday, 20 March 2020 to discuss the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19). The video conference was co-chaired by Singapore's Minister for Foreign Affairs Dr Vivian Balakrishnan and Senior Minister of State for Health and Transport Dr Lam Pin Min, and High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission Josep Borrell and European Commissioner for Crisis Management Janez Lenarčič. Singapore is the current coordinator of ASEAN-EU Dialogue Partnership. Vietnam Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Pham Binh Minh in his capacity as ASEAN Chair, Secretary-General of ASEAN Dato Lim Jock Hoi, and other ASEAN Member States officials also participated in the video conference.

“International cooperation and coordination is essential if we are to tackle this pandemic effectively”, said High Representative/Vice-President Josep Borrell. He continued: “Today's discussions are just the beginning; we must all work together to mitigate the social and economic impact on our regions, keep supply chains open and advance relevant scientific research.”

The Minister for Foreign Affairs of Singapore Dr Balakrishnan said that our first priority is for all countries to take urgent action to safeguard the health of our people. In addition, even as we combat the virus, “we have to keep an eye on our economies and our peoples' livelihoods. When the situation stabilises, it is critical that we work together to boost our economies. This means doubling down on trade and investment, and returning to the spirit of openness with our partners. A common criteria or set of guidelines for determining when and how to impose time-limited travel restrictions would be a useful step to think ahead. This would allow us to be more prepared for the long-term existence of COVID-19 globally, as we work to minimise the political, economic and social impact of this devastating pandemic.”

European Commissioner for Crisis Management, Janez Lenarčič, said: “These are unprecedented times requiring a high degree of global solidarity. The EU will continue playing its role – working on all fronts and with all available means to support these efforts at home and abroad. Also by continuing to engage strongly with our international partners, including ASEAN Member States, to support each other in immediate response efforts to this urgency as well as improving preparedness and response capacities on both sides in the future.”

Senior Minister of State for Health and Transport of Singapore Dr Lam highlighted that the virus does not respect borders. With the COVID-19 outbreak now a pandemic, global cooperation is vital as “we see new waves of infection and we must be prepared for the long-haul. Therefore, we must also look ahead to find more sustainable solutions in the long-term to limit the spread of the coronavirus.”

Against the backdrop of the World Health Organisation’s (WHO) declaration on 11 March 2020 that the COVID-19 outbreak is a “pandemic”, ASEAN and the EU exchanged information on the developments in the COVID-19 outbreak in their respective regions and their respective efforts to contain the outbreak. ASEAN and the EU will work together with the WHO and the broader international community to exchange information in a timely manner, strengthen cooperation, share best practices, including those regarding containment, isolation and contact tracing, and mitigate the adverse public health, economic and social impact of COVID-19. ASEAN and the EU will continue to strengthen and utilise regional and international mechanisms for cooperation and coordination in response to this global pandemic.

The EU welcomed ASEAN’s update on its collective response to COVID-19, undertaken in the spirit of a Cohesive and Responsive ASEAN Community, the issuance of an ASEAN Chairman’s Statement on an ASEAN Collective Response to the Outbreak of COVID-19, and the convening of a Special ASEAN Coordinating Council Meeting to advance ASEAN cooperation and collective action against the disease.

ASEAN welcomed the EU’s update on its collective response to the outbreak, as agreed among EU Heads of State and Government at the video conference of 17 March, notably the coordinated European-level border control measures to combat

COVID-19, as well as other control measures to be taken in a manner that avoids serious disruption of supply chains, essential services of general interest and of national economies and the EU economy as a whole.

ASEAN and the EU agreed to step up cooperation within ASEAN-led mechanisms and with external partners to address COVID-19 in a comprehensive and effective manner, taking into account the different levels of development of health systems in the region.

High Representative/Vice-President Borrell and Minister for Foreign Affairs Dr Balakrishnan acknowledged the importance of timely and decisive measures to contain the outbreak, which would strengthen public confidence. They stressed the importance of standing in solidarity and mutual support during this difficult time, and taking decisive, rational, and objective steps based on data and scientific evidence in the fight against COVID-19.

ASEAN and the EU agreed to continue working closely together to mitigate the impact of COVID-19, including on social and economic development. They agreed to enhance exchanges and cooperation moving forward, with a view to further regular exchanges between officials and experts from ASEAN and the EU on dealing with this issue.