ASEAN-Republic of Korea Economic Ministers’ Joint Initiatives on Bolstering the Economic Connectivity between ASEAN-Republic of Korea in response to the COVID-19 Outbreak

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The COVID-19 outbreak has presented a global challenge that requires a coordinated global response. The ASEAN Plus Three Leaders in their special summit held on 14 April 2020, reaffirmed their collective determination to ensure the continued flow of goods, services and personnel as well as maintaining the global supply chains.

Referring to the Joint Statement of the Special ASEAN Plus Three Summit adopted on 14 April 2020, the ASEAN Economic Ministers (AEM) and the Minister of Trade, Industry and Energy of the Republic of Korea identify initiatives on bolstering the economic connectivity of the region by facilitating the flow of essential goods, including food, medicines and medical and other essential supplies and services as well as essential movement of people, which could help alleviate the impact of COVID-19 and work with other countries to develop these actions as follows:

1. Working to ensure the flow of goods in global supply chains

- Expedite release of all essential goods, including food, medicines, and medical and other essential supplies at all entry points (land, sea and air) ports, including adopting or maintaining, where practicable, the procedures on facilitating customs clearance and procedures allowing for the early and digital submission of import documentation and other required information, allowing for the use of electronic means, to the extent allowed by laws and regulations of each country, for purposes of commencing processing prior to the arrival of the products with a view to reducing processing times and related administrative burdens in accordance with national laws and regulations.
  - Encourage more use of electronic means for customs processing, which minimize face-to-face interactions without lengthening processing times.
  - Ensure facilitation of transport and customs clearances of goods, especially essential goods, such as food, critical medical supplies and personal protection equipment.

- Facilitate the timely flow of essential goods, including food, medicines, and medical and other essential supplies by ensuring operation of logistics networks via air, sea, and land freight while assuring the compliances with the regulations of each country on safety standards and quality for those essential goods.
- Work out, and, if appropriate, strengthen and harmonize, bilateral and/or multilateral cooperative arrangements to expedite necessary approval procedures for air crew and to utilise additional aircraft for cargo operations.
- Promote transparency of import and export regulations to facilitate continued movement of goods.

- Refrain from the introduction of export prohibitions or restrictions, tariffs and non-tariff measures on essential goods, including food, pharmaceuticals, and critical medical supplies. This underscores the importance of preserving the ability of countries to import essential medical supplies, pharmaceuticals and food products to meet their domestic needs in consistence with national laws and regulations.
- If such measures are instituted, the measures will be targeted, proportionate, transparent, temporary and notified in accordance with relevant WTO obligations.
- Work towards removing such measures when the situation allows for it.

- Establish a consultation mechanism between the relevant authorities of the AMS and the Republic of Korea to identify and address trade disruptions that affect the trade in essential goods.

2. Facilitating the essential movement of people

- Facilitate the resumption of essential cross-border travel, particularly the essential movement of business people, with mutual assurance of health standards, while ensuring the safeguarding of public health in line with the WHO’s International Health Organization (IHR) 2005 and our efforts to combat the pandemic as well as to minimize the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19.

- Establish guidelines to allow, on an exceptional basis, essential cross-border travel for purposes such as maintaining global regional, and sub-regional supply chains, including essential business travel, in accordance with national laws and regulations, without undermining the efforts to prevent the spread of the virus.

3. Minimizing the negative impacts on trade and investment arising from the Pandemic to facilitate an inclusive, sustainable and resilient economic recovery

- Reiterate and garner strong support for the rules-based multilateral trading, including WTO rules, and work closely with key multilateral economic institutions.

- Maintain trade and investment openness by encouraging ASEAN and Republic of Korea to maximize existing trade and investment mechanisms such as the ASEAN-Korea FTA.
- Provide relevant information to affected countries and to the WTO in a timely manner when adopting a measure with a foreseeable impact on international trade and investment.

- Develop and share best practices including those for ensuring flows of goods and services, stimulating investments at the time of pandemic, minimizing restrictions on people movement, and aiding sectors that are adversely affected by the pandemic.

- Engage actively with the private sector to design and implement measures in a business-friendly manner and to work together for creative solutions to mitigate the effects of COVID-19 pandemic, and facilitate economic recovery.

- Promote digital economy through the use of digital technologies and ecommerce to sustain economic activities and facilitate economic recovery.

- Recognizing their vulnerability caused by the pandemic, undertake multi-stakeholder initiatives to help micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) address supply chain disruptions through various supports such as access to financial assistance, capability and capacity development and linkages to regional and global production networks.

- Enhance coordination and cooperation between relevant stakeholders in ASEAN and Republic of Korea for efficient information sharing, especially on best practices towards economic recovery.

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