

Joint Statement of the ASEAN Ministers Responsible for Information to Minimise the Negative Effects of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)

We, the ASEAN Ministers Responsible for Information (AMRI) share serious concerns about the challenges posed by the outbreak of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) and demonstrate our high determination and commitment through the Joint Statement of the ASEAN Ministers Responsible for Information to Minimise the Negative Effects of Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19), adopted on 25 August 2020;

REAFFIRMING the shared commitment of ASEAN leaders to suppress the spread of the pandemic, protect people's lives and livelihoods, and maintain socio-economic stability while sustaining ASEAN Community building momentum for sustainable development, inclusive growth and leaving no one behind, in line with the Declaration of the Special ASEAN Summit on the Coronavirus Disease 2019 and Joint Statement of the Special ASEAN Plus Three Summit on the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19), on 14 April 2020;

REAFFIRMING FURTHER the Chairman's Statement on the ASEAN Collective Response to the Outbreak of Coronavirus Disease 2019 issued on 14 February 2020 which emphasised the "importance of ASEAN solidarity and the spirit of a Cohesive and Responsive ASEAN Community in facing the outbreak of COVID-19 and similar challenges;

RECOGNISING the Chairman's Statement of the 36th ASEAN Summit on 26 June 2020 which notes that the "spread of fake news and misinformation have created a climate of distrust, intolerance and fear that could undermine effective preparedness, resiliency and responsiveness of our peoples toward addressing the outbreak";

NOTING the importance of strengthening cooperation to ensure that the people in our community are accurately informed on the COVID-19 situation in a timely manner and are not being misled by fake news and disinformation pertaining to COVID-19;

RECALLING the Framework and Joint Declaration to Minimise the Harmful Effects of Fake News and the Core Values on Digital Literacy for ASEAN adopted at the 14th Conference of the ASEAN Ministers Responsible for Information held on 10 May 2018 in Singapore;

ALSO RECALLING the ASEAN Declaration on Culture of Prevention for a Peaceful, Inclusive, Resilient, Healthy and Harmonious Society, adopted by ASEAN Leaders at the 31st ASEAN Summit on 13 November 2017 in the Philippines, which inter alia calls to action for promoting a culture in supporting the values of moderation, including to promote the values of literacy in all aspects to prevent deliberate falsehoods;

ACKNOWLEDGING the recommendation of the first video conference of the ASEAN Coordinating Council Working Group on Public Health Emergencies (ACCWG-PHE) on 31 March 2020, which proposed that ASEAN should enhance effective public communication and cooperation in combating fake news and misinformation;

STRESSING the important role of the media and information sector to enhance effective public communication, to counter fake news and misinformation, and to support the free flow of information during and after COVID-19;

EXPRESSING the urgency and necessity to counter the spread of fake news and misinformation relating to COVID-19, as well as to provide accurate information to all ASEAN citizens;

In this regard, we resolve to:

1. Encourage regular exchange of official updates and information among ASEAN Member States in collaboration with relevant sectoral bodies of ASEAN, about the domestic and regional situation, government policies, public health and safety measures in response to the outbreak of the COVID-19- in a timely and transparent manner to avert misinformation and fake news;
2. Encourage the development of Regional Guidelines and a possible common platform to facilitate timely sharing of information including situation updates, facts and figures, medical practices, government policies and measures, and innovations among ASEAN Member States and with partners, as well as leveraging the existing mechanisms and cooperation for sharing information and exchanging digital content for public awareness;
3. Enhance ASEAN's information mechanism and working groups at all levels, including strengthening existing initiatives and develop appropriate mechanisms that could effectively facilitate accurate and timely information flow while mitigating the proliferation of fake news and misinformation. Also, create and exchange directories of ASEAN's media agencies and professionals that could serve as reliable and authoritative sources of information;
4. Encourage effective and transparent public communication in each ASEAN Member State with adequate, prompt, and accurate information to all groups of people in order to enhance public awareness, collective cooperation and exchange of best practices in preventing and controlling the spread of COVID-19;
5. Promote media ethics and social responsibility among media members and practitioners in ASEAN; sharing accurate information, best practices, and fake news verification methods, as well as avoiding causing fear, distrust and intolerance during the crisis;
6. Encourage ASEAN Member States to enhance media and information literacy (MIL) and digital competencies, as well as to continue promoting the Core Values on Digital Literacy along with the cyberREADI brand to help ASEAN citizens navigate the digital media landscape safely and responsibly;

7. Support the use of digital technologies and multiple forms of media to disseminate information to ensure the rapid flow of communication, as well as convenient and inclusive access for all groups of ASEAN citizens;
8. Encourage ASEAN Member States to develop initiatives and projects concerning risk or crisis communication, in order to share experiences and best practices, and to enhance communication practices and cooperation during unprecedented situations at both the national and regional levels;
9. Strengthen and extend media and information cooperation with other relevant sectoral bodies, various stakeholders, and ASEAN's dialogue partners towards enhancing our collective pandemic preparedness and response, in order to protect and save lives, and promote the well-being of ASEAN and global citizens.

Adopted by AMRI on 25 August 2020