

## **OVERVIEW OF ASEAN-UNITED STATES DIALOGUE RELATIONS**

1. Since its establishment in 1977, the ASEAN-U.S. dialogue relations has evolved from exchange of views on political and security issues to a wide range of cooperation areas across the three Community pillars.
2. At the 3<sup>rd</sup> ASEAN-U.S. Summit in November 2015 in Kuala Lumpur, the Leaders announced the elevation of the ASEAN-U.S. dialogue relations to a strategic level. The goals and vision of this Strategic Partnership are being realised through the implementation of the Plan of Action to Implement the ASEAN-U.S. Strategic Partnership for the period of 2016 to 2020. Following the elevation of the dialogue relations, the U.S. hosted the ASEAN-U.S. Special Leaders' Summit on 15-16 February 2016 in Sunnylands, California, U.S.A.
3. The 5<sup>th</sup> ASEAN-U.S. Summit was held on 13 November 2017 in Manila to commemorate the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the ASEAN-U.S. dialogue relations. A number of activities have been held throughout the year to commemorate this auspicious occasion, including the visit of the U.S. Vice President Mike Pence to the ASEAN Secretariat on 20 April 2017.
4. The ASEAN-U.S. Special Summit, initially scheduled for March 2020 in Las Vegas, Nevada, to commemorate the 43<sup>rd</sup> Anniversary of ASEAN-U.S. Dialogue Relations and the 5<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Strategic Partnership, was postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The latest iteration of high-level engagement between the two sides was through the convening of the 8<sup>th</sup> ASEAN-U.S. Summit on 14 November 2020, which was conducted virtually. At the occasion, the Leaders adopted the ASEAN-U.S. Joint Statement on Human Capital Development, which will pave the way for further collaboration in further advancing human capital development in the region.
5. The ASEAN Post Ministerial Conference Plus One (PMC+1) Session with the U.S. held on 10 September 2020, adopted the new ASEAN-U.S. Plan of Action (2021-2025) that will continue to guide both sides in further strengthening the ASEAN-U.S. Strategic Partnership in the next five years. The Ministers also welcomed the launch of the Mekong-U.S. Partnership, with the convening of its 1<sup>st</sup> Mekong-U.S. Partnership Ministerial Meeting in September 2020 as well as the signing of the Regional Development Cooperation Agreement (RDCA) between ASEAN and the USAID, which encompasses all ongoing USAID's programmes, including the ASEAN-U.S. Inclusive Growth in ASEAN through Innovation, Trade and E-Commerce (IGNITE) and the ASEAN-U.S. Partnership for Regional Optimization within the Political-Security and Socio-Cultural Communities (PROSPECT).

## **POLITICAL-SECURITY COOPERATION**

6. The U.S. continues to engage with ASEAN in the political-security pillar through their active participation in the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus (ADMM-Plus) and the East Asia Summit (EAS). Areas of mutual interest include

maritime security, cyber security, and combatting transnational crime, including terrorism and trafficking in persons (TIP), among others. Most recent initiatives on this front include the first ASEAN-U.S. Maritime Exercise, held on 2 – 6 September 2019 in international waters of Southeast Asia, as well as the Inaugural ASEAN-U.S. Cyber Policy Dialogue, which was held in Singapore on 3 October 2019. The U.S. co-sponsored the *Ha Noi Declaration on the 15th Anniversary of the East Asia Summit* and the *EAS Leaders' Statement on Marine Sustainability*, which were adopted at the 15<sup>th</sup> EAS on 14 November 2020.

7. Cooperation in combatting transnational crime and other non-traditional security issues has been strengthened through the U.S.' engagement with the ASEAN Senior Officials' Meeting on Transnational Crime (SOMTC). To date, twelve Consultations SOMTC+U.S. Consultations have been held, with the last meeting held in July 2019 in Nay Pyi Taw adopted the SOMTC-U.S. Work Plan for Transnational Crime (2019-2021).
8. The U.S. acceded to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC) in July 2009 at the ASEAN PMC+1 Session with the U.S. in Phuket, Thailand, and was among the first Dialogue Partners to appoint its dedicated Ambassador to ASEAN and establish a Mission to ASEAN in 2010.

## ECONOMIC COOPERATION

9. The U.S. remains an important trading partner of ASEAN with the total two-way trade in 2019 reaching US\$ 294.7 billion<sup>1</sup>, making it the second largest trading partner of ASEAN among Dialogue Partners. The U.S. is ASEAN's largest external source of foreign direct investment (FDI) in 2019 with a total inflow amounting to US\$ 24 billion<sup>2</sup>.
10. The ASEAN Economic Ministers-U.S. Trade Representative (AEM-USTR) Consultations and ASEAN Senior Economic Officials-Assistant USTR (SEOMAUSTR) Consultations are held annually to promote trade and investment flows between both sides as well as exchange views on a range of economic issues.
11. Both sides continue to intensify trade and investment ties between the two regions, including through the implementation of the 2020-2021 ASEAN-U.S. Trade and Investment Framework Arrangement (TIFA) and the Expanded Economic Engagement (E3) Work Plan, as endorsed by the ASEAN Economic Ministers and the U.S. Trade Representative Consultations (AEM-USTR Consultations) in August 2020. Within these frameworks, ASEAN and the U.S. have strengthened cooperation in trade facilitation, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) development and the harmonisation of standards and conformance, among others.

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<sup>1</sup> ASEAN Trade Statistics Database as of 31 December 2020

<sup>2</sup> ASEAN FDI Database 31 October 2020

12. ASEAN and the U.S. are working to solidify institutional links between ASEAN sectoral bodies under the AEC pillar and the U.S. counterparts through new Dialogues on Information and Communications Technology (ICT) and Aviation. The U.S. has also committed to support ASEAN Member States in improving the skills of their workforce and enhancing their economic competitiveness through initiatives in education and training, SME development, youth entrepreneurship, and women empowerment.
13. The ASEAN Finance and Central Bank Deputies meet every year with the U.S. Treasury Deputy to exchange views on global and regional macroeconomic policies and outlooks. This consultation mechanism aims at improving mutual understanding and ensuring policy complementarities to maintain resilience and growth for both sides.
14. At the ASEAN-U.S. Special Leaders' Summit, the U.S. announced two initiatives, namely the U.S.-ASEAN Connect and the U.S. Trade Workshop. The U.S.-ASEAN Connect Centres in Jakarta, Bangkok and Singapore have supported the U.S.' economic engagement in the region in connecting entrepreneurs, investors and businesses from both regions. Under this program, the U.S.-ASEAN Internship Programme was launched in 2018 to provide opportunities for ASEAN students to gain work experience in U.S. companies based in ASEAN Member States.
15. The ASEAN Economic Ministers (AEM) Roadshow to the U.S., which was started in 2013, has played an important role in creating partnership opportunities for ASEAN and U.S. businesses. During the Third AEM Roadshow on 17-18 February 2016, the U.S.-ASEAN Business Council (US-ABC) held a Conference to exchange views on the business opportunities.

## **SOCIO-CULTURAL COOPERATION**

16. ASEAN and the U.S. are working on a number of areas, including disaster management, promotion and protection of the rights of women and children, as well as education and youth.
17. The U.S. continues to contribute towards human development in the region as well as in enhancing people-to-people connectivity through initiatives such as the Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative (YSEALI); the Fulbright U.S.-ASEAN Visiting Scholar; the U.S.-Science Prize for Women; as well as the ASEAN Youth Volunteer Program and Connecting the Mekong through Education and Training (COMET), among others.
18. In addressing the COVID-19 pandemic, ASEAN and the U.S. have stepped up their collaboration on this front, through a series of high-level engagements and initiatives. This includes: (i) the convening of a Special ASEAN-U.S. Foreign Ministers' Meeting on COVID-19, the ASEAN-U.S. High Level Interagency Meeting on collaboration on Public Health Emergencies and countering the COVID-19 as well as the Special Videoconference of ASEAN-U.S. Health Ministers held last April; (ii) the U.S.-ASEAN Health Futures Alumni Network; and (iii) the U.S.' plans to establish the U.S.-ASEAN Health Futures initiative as

well as to expand its official engagement in the health sector. At the 8<sup>th</sup> ASEAN-U.S. Summit on 14 November 2020, the U.S.' pledge of over USD 87 million in COVID-19 related assistance to ASEAN Member States was also noted.

## DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

19. Since September 2018, *the U.S. through its IGNITE and PROSPECT* have been supporting the realisation of goals under the three ASEAN Community Pillars, following the completion of the five-year *ASEAN-U.S. Partnership for Good Governance, Equitable and Sustainable Development and Security (PROGRESS)* and *the ASEAN Connectivity through Trade and Investment (ACTI)* programmes in 2018. The two follow-up programmes are expected to be completed in August 2023. IGNITE aims to promote a well-integrated and inclusive ASEAN Economic Community through enhancing the trading relationship between ASEAN and the U.S., while PROSPECT aims to support ASEAN's objective of building a more inclusive, rules-based, and prosperous Southeast Asia through increasing ASEAN's capacity to resolve regional and global challenges and advance an effective, rules-based architecture for cooperation among governments in the region to uphold human dignity and the rule of law.

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