

OVERVIEW OF ASEAN-ECO RELATIONS

1. Relations between ASEAN and the Economic Cooperation Organisation (ECO) began in 1993 when both sides agreed to establish contacts between the ASEAN Secretariat in Jakarta and the ECO Secretariat in Tehran.
2. ASEAN-ECO convened the first meeting of the ASEAN-ECO Foreign Ministers in September 1995 in New York, during which both sides agreed to maintain closer contacts between the two Secretariats, to develop appropriate modalities for sharing of information, joint studies and exchange of visits, and to hold an annual ASEAN-ECO Ministerial Meeting in New York on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly.
3. At the annual ASEAN-ECO Ministerial Meeting in New York in September 2000, ASEAN and ECO agreed to carry out a Joint Study on Strengthening ASEAN-ECO Cooperation in order to develop a work programme to foster cooperation between the two sides in mutually beneficial areas. Following the adoption the Terms of Reference (TOR) for the Joint Study, officials of the two Secretariats undertook study visits to each other's Secretariat to gather information with a view to developing a work programme for ASEAN-ECO cooperation.
4. The 9th ASEAN-ECO Ministerial Meeting in September 2004 in New York agreed that the Secretariats of ASEAN and ECO develop a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for cooperation in four areas, namely trade and investment, narcotics control, small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs), and tourism. Subsequently, the MOU between the two Secretariats was signed by Secretaries-General of ASEAN and the ECO in January 2006. A Work Programme to implement the MOU was also developed to operationalise the MOU in the same year.
5. In 2013, the ECO established their Contact Group (ECO-CG) consisting of Ambassadors of the ECO member countries in Jakarta, with the aim to further facilitate engagement and cooperation between ASEAN and ECO.
6. Thus far, ASEAN and ECO have convened fourteen ASEAN-ECO Ministerial Meetings. At the last ASEAN-ECO Joint Ministerial Meeting in September 2014 in New York, both sides reviewed ASEAN and ECO cooperation, taking into account the MOU signed between the two sides in 2006, recent developments in both regions as well as the possibility of ASEAN – ECO cooperation in the areas of mutual interest, including but not limited to, trade and investment, SMEs development, private sector engagement, drugs and narcotics control, and tourism as well as people-to-people contacts.

7. In September 2016, ASEAN and ECO held Informal Coordination Meeting at the sidelines of the 71st UN General Assembly in New York, USA. The Meeting agreed to review the existing MOU and Work Programme to take into account recent developments and new priorities of both organisations. Both sides also noted the importance of incremental cooperation, starting with projects that are easily implementable. Both sides are working to revitalise ASEAN-SCO collaboration by developing a framework for future cooperation.
