

**OPENING REMARKS BY MINISTER CHAN CHUN SING AT THE 6<sup>TH</sup> RCEP MINISTERIAL MEETING ON THURSDAY 30 AUG 2018, 3.30PM AT SHANGRI-LA HOTEL SINGAPORE**

Your Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. A very warm welcome to all of you, especially those who have just joined us this morning.

2. First, allow me to express my appreciation:

- a. To all the RCEP Ministers for agreeing to put in extra time and effort in the RCEP negotiations – I am aware that we are scheduled to discuss the RCEP until late tonight, and the whole of tomorrow;
- b. I would also like to express my appreciation to Minister Enggartiasto Lukita and the Indonesian delegation for your effective leadership in your role as the RCEP Coordinator, and to Pak Iman Pambagyo for your determination and tireless efforts as the RCEP TNC Chair.
- c. And To all negotiators involved in the RCEP negotiations thus far, thank you for the hard work.

3. We had a fruitful meeting in Tokyo in July, and thank you to Minister Seko for hosting the visit and the meeting in Tokyo, where all the RCEP Ministers demonstrated a strong desire and political will to push for a substantial conclusion of the RCEP by end-2018. I think that was the most significant achievement for our meeting in Tokyo. I could sense the determination of everyone around the table that this is an opportunity that we need to seize.

4. And I am really encouraged that the strong political commitment in Tokyo had a positive spill-over effect in the recent Bangkok Trade Negotiating Committee or (TNC) Negotiating Round in July 2018.

- a. Apart from advancing the textual negotiation across the board, I am pleased to note that we have concluded two more Chapters on Customs Procedures and Trade Facilitation, and Government Procurement.
- b. In line with the RCEP Guiding Principles agreed by our Leaders, the Customs Procedures and Trade Facilitation Chapters have achieved significant improvements beyond the ASEAN+1 FTAs and the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement. In particular, the Chapter includes specific commitments to ensure the predictability, consistency and transparency in the application of customs laws and the regulations in the RCEP region.
- c. The Government Procurement Chapter aims to promote the transparency of laws, regulations, and procedures, as well as

cooperation among the RCEP Participating Countries. This will also be the first time ASEAN will collectively undertake Government Procurement-related commitments in our FTAs.

5. At this meeting in Singapore, we hope to build upon the positive momentum achieved in Tokyo and Bangkok to achieve significant breakthroughs in our negotiations.

- a. This is especially critical given the timing, where there are a few outstanding issues that are ripe for political decisions to be made.
- b. Securing significant breakthroughs at this meeting will pave the way for us to unlock further progress at the TNC Round in Auckland in October 2018, and hopefully that will bring us closer towards the year-end target of substantial conclusion of the RCEP, ready for our leaders' endorsement in November.

6. To achieve good outcomes in Singapore, let me encourage all RCEP Ministers to be prepared for a candid and intense discussion on pragmatic approaches to arrive at landing zones for the key outstanding issues.

- a. This will not be an easy endeavour. It will require all of us to exercise significant political will collectively, consider difficult but pragmatic trade-offs, and, to some extent, recalibrate our longstanding positions on particular issues to arrive at realistic landing zones.

7. In our capacity as the AEM Chair and honest broker for the RCEP negotiations, Singapore will do our best to facilitate this discussion and work with all RCEP Participating Countries to find common ground.

- a. as AEM Chair, I also look to all RCEP Ministers for your support and active participation.
- b. The year-end outcome for RCEP is a shared responsibility, and all of us play an equally important role in collectively steering the RCEP negotiations towards significant outcomes by year-end.

8. The substantial conclusion of RCEP by end-2018 will reaffirm our region's continued support for free trade against the backdrop of rising protectionist sentiments.

- a. This will also send a positive signal to our business stakeholders, and reassure them that the RCEP region remains committed to putting in place a business-friendly regional environment. And I am sure our people in our respective countries will be looking forward to the job opportunities and the income growth that come with the successful conclusion of RCEP.

9. I look forward to the constructive discussions with all my fellow RCEP ministers today, and to achieving fruitful outcomes at the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> RCEP Ministerial Meeting.

Thank you very much.