



**THE 54<sup>th</sup> ASEAN ECONOMIC MINISTERS' (AEM) MEETING  
13 – 15 September 2022, Siem Reap, Cambodia**

**JOINT MEDIA STATEMENT**

1. The Fifty-Fourth ASEAN Economic Ministers (AEM) Meeting was held in Siem Reap, Cambodia on 13 – 15 September 2022. The Meeting, which was chaired by Cambodia under the theme “ASEAN A.C.T.: Addressing Challenges Together” was preceded by a preparatory meeting of the ASEAN Senior Economic Officials (SEOM) and joint meetings with the 36<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) Council, 25<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Investment Area (AIA) Council, and Consultations with the ASEAN Business Advisory Council (ABAC).

**Responding to Regional and Global Developments**

2. The Meeting reaffirmed ASEAN’s unwavering commitment to regional economic integration amidst continued pandemic-related challenges and rising geopolitical tensions. The Meeting was pleased to note that the ASEAN economy expanded by 3.4 percent in 2021 with growth driven by a strong rebound in consumption, investment and trade, supported by the successful rollout of vaccination programs that enabled economies in the region to reopen domestically. The Meeting noted that as of mid-August 2022, the full dose vaccination rate in ASEAN has reached 69.0 percent, while 30.5 percent of the population has received booster shots. The Meeting expressed optimism that the growth momentum would continue to 2022 and 2023, with growth forecast at 5.0 percent and 5.2 percent, respectively.

3. The Meeting also noted the strong rebound in ASEAN’s trade and investments in 2021 as merchandise trade, propelled by electrical products and fuels that grew by 21.5 percent and 52.2 percent, respectively, reached USD 3,340.6 billion in 2021 or a 25.2 percent increase from the previous year. Meanwhile, investments reached USD 174.1 billion or a 42.3 percent increase from the previous year, with robust expansion noted in the manufacturing, financial, and insurance services sectors.

4. The Meeting recognised that the conflict in Ukraine aggravated disruptions in global value chains, further fuelled inflation, and dampened overall economic expectations. In addition, the financial systems of major economies, especially developing economies, experienced heightened vulnerabilities due to capital flow reversals and

currency depreciations, e.g., countries with high foreign currency-denominated debt and low foreign reserves were at risk as fiscal space was already drawn out due to the pandemic.

5. The Meeting acknowledged that while macroeconomic conditions in respective ASEAN Member States remain manageable, continued vigilance was crucial. As part of the transition towards a circular economy, the Meeting underscored that carbon neutrality and the digital economy will be drivers of the region's development in the years to come. ASEAN would thus need to double its efforts on sustainability and digitalisation, which were trends that accelerated during the pandemic.

6. The Meeting was pleased with the progress in reopening borders that was enabled by successful public health measures and steadfast economic recovery in ASEAN. While the economic outlook looks promising, the Meeting highlighted the need to advance work on supply chain resilience and connectivity as well as high quality public health surveillance. This would mitigate the impact of future pandemics or related disruptions and also avoid compounding the negative socio-economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

7. The Meeting noted the significant progress in keeping the markets open for trade and investment through the implementation of the ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework (ACRF), which serves as the region's consolidated exit strategy from the COVID-19 pandemic. The Meeting reaffirmed its commitment to jointly work towards a durable post-pandemic recovery through the five ACRF broad strategies around health systems, human security, economic integration, inclusive digital transformation, and sustainability. As the region gradually transitions from the Reopening to Recovery and Resilience phases, the Meeting welcomed and encouraged collaboration with all stakeholders to address emerging challenges arising from the pandemic. Given the heightened uncertainties emanating from the current global economic environment, the Meeting explored the potential of leveraging on ACRF in addressing and mitigating the impacts of these new challenges while incorporating action lines on enduring challenges as part of the broader AEC post-2025 vision to avoid duplicative work.

### **Addressing Challenges Together: Cambodia's Priority Economic Deliverables (PEDs)**

8. The Meeting welcomed the completion of four PEDs under the purview of the AEM: (a) the launching of the ASEAN Trade in Goods Agreement (ATIGA) Upgrade Negotiation; (b) Work Programme to Support Implementation of the Framework for Circular Economy for the ASEAN Economic Community; (c) Policy Toolkit: Strengthening Women's Entrepreneurship in National MSME Policies and Action Plans; and (d) Launching of the Negotiations for an ASEAN Framework Agreement on Competition.

9. The Meeting noted the progress made in the implementation of the other 2022 PEDs under the purview of the AEM and looked forward to their timely completion in 2022:

(a) the Provision of Outcomes of the Desktop Research on the Feasibility Study of an ASEAN Patent System; (b) Protocol to Amend the ASEAN Agreement on the Movement of Natural Persons; (c) ASEAN E-Commerce Trustmark Framework; (d) ASEAN-Australia-New Zealand Free trade Area (AANZFTA) Upgrade; and (e) Full Entry-Into-Force of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) Agreement by all Parties.

### **Advancing the ASEAN Economic Community**

10. The Meeting reaffirmed ASEAN's commitment to deepening regional economic integration by advancing the AEC Blueprint 2025. The Meeting noted the implementation progress of the Mid-Term Review (MTR) of the AEC Blueprint 2025 recommendations and encouraged sectoral bodies to accelerate and redouble their efforts to consider and implement the recommendations, which the Meeting viewed could also provide meaningful inputs to the region's post-2025 vision. The Meeting also noted the developments in areas falling under the purview of the AEM.

#### **▪ Trade in Goods**

11. The Meeting noted the progress in the ASEAN Trade in Goods Agreement (ATIGA) upgrade negotiations launched in March 2022. The Meeting emphasised that upgrading the ATIGA should ensure that ASEAN remains relevant, modern, forward-looking, and more responsive to regional and global developments. Moreover, the upgraded ATIGA aims to foster intra-ASEAN trade and supply chain resilience through the effective utilisation of ATIGA preferences by businesses to promote regional economic integration.

12. The Meeting welcomed the implementation of the amended ATIGA Operational Certification Procedures (OCP) and Certificate of Origin (CO) Form D from 1 May 2022. The Meeting looked forward to the enhancement of the Rules of Origin (ROO) in the upgraded ATIGA to facilitate trade in the region. The Meeting also welcomed the AFTA Council's endorsement of the draft transposed ATIGA Tariff Reduction Schedule (TRS) in AHTN 2022 of Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Singapore, and Thailand the transposed ATIGA Product Specific Rules (PSRs) and its Attachment of Textile Single List in HS 2022, and the List of Information Technology Agreement (ITA) Products in AHTN 2022.

13. The Meeting acknowledged that four (4) AMS, namely Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, and Viet Nam, have fully issued the electronic CO Form D (e-Form D) while the remaining AMS are expediting such process. In this connection, the Meeting encouraged six remaining AMSs to fully issue e-Form D while the hard copy of CO Form D should only be used in cases of downtime in national single windows or ASEAN Single Window (ASW), to reduce time and administrative cost of applying CO Form D.

#### **▪ Trade Facilitation**

14. The Meeting agreed on the extension of the lifespan of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on the Implementation of Non-Tariff Measures on Essential Goods under the Ha Noi Plan of Action on Strengthening ASEAN Economic Cooperation and Supply Chain Connectivity in Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic until November 2024. The Meeting also noted the progress of the discussion on the extension of the validity of the MOU and the expansion of the list of essential goods with a view to reaching at least 100 tariff lines at the 8-digit HS level.

15. Noting the importance of the Non-Tariff Measures Cost-Effectiveness Toolkit (NTM Toolkit) as a guideline to manage NTMs affecting the flow of goods within the region, the Meeting encouraged two interested AMSs, namely Brunei, and Malaysia, to expedite their domestic processes to implement the NTM Toolkit on a voluntary basis as soon as possible. The Meeting also noted the completion of the “Methodology in Conducting the Ex-Ante Regulatory Review on the Draft NTMs Before They Are Imposed by the ASEAN Member States” and encouraged ASEAN Member States to consider applying it in reviewing any draft NTMs before implementation.

16. The Meeting noted the completion of the “Follow-up Study of the ASEAN Seamless Trade Facilitation Indicators (ASTFI II)” with the support of the Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA) and also noted that its public version will be published in the first quarter of 2023 to raise the public’s awareness of ASEAN’s trade facilitation initiatives.

17. The Meeting expressed concern about the effect that export bans and restrictions recently imposed in ASEAN were causing on regional supply chains. While the Meeting recognised the right of ASEAN Member States to adopt emergency trade measures to tackle domestic concerns during the COVID-19, particularly in relation to food security, the Meeting also underscored the importance of ensuring that these measures are targeted, proportionate, transparent, temporary, and do not create unnecessary barriers to trade and unnecessary disruptions to supply chains. To this end, the Meeting reaffirmed its commitment not to impose export prohibitions or restrictions that are not consistent with the WTO or ATIGA to ensure supply chain resilience, especially when the region is still in the midst of recovering from the pandemic. The Meeting also committed to transparency, including notification obligations in accordance with the ATIGA and the WTO rules.

#### ▪ **ASEAN Customs Integration**

18. The Meeting welcomed the finalisation of the ASEAN Harmonised Tariff Nomenclature (AHTN) 2022 and noted that Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand have implemented the AHTN 2022. The Meeting encouraged the remaining ASEAN Member States to intensify efforts to implement the AHTN 2022 by the end of 2022.

19. The Meeting welcomed the adoption of the Joint Action Plan (JAP) on the Mutual Recognition Arrangement (MRA) of Authorised Economic Operator (AEO) Programme of ASEAN Member States and looked forward to the signing of the ASEAN AEO Mutual Recognition Arrangement (AAMRA) by 2022 with a view to commencing the pathfinder programme among ready AMS in 2023.

20. The Meeting noted a steady increase in recent cargo movements using the ASEAN Customs Transit System (ACTS) among the participating Member States, namely Cambodia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, and Viet Nam. The Meeting agreed to intensify efforts in promoting the use of the ACTS through ongoing initiatives, including the ACTS Private Sector Partnership Building Outreach Events, the Two-Country Transit pilot between Cambodia and Viet Nam, and the feasibility study on Implementing the ACTS along the Borneo Corridor which will involve Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines. The Meeting also looked forward to the ACTS live operation in Myanmar in 2023.

21. The Meeting also welcomed the live exchange of the ASEAN Customs Declaration Document (ACDD) through the ASW among 8 AMSs, namely Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand, and urged the remaining ASEAN Member States to join the live operation by the end of 2022. The Meeting also looked forward to the live operation of the electronic Phytosanitary (e-Phyto) Certificates between Indonesia and Thailand in 2022. The Meeting also noted the progress of discussions with respective Dialogue Partners (DP), namely China, Japan, the Republic of Korea, and the United States, on the exchange of electronic documents.

▪ **Standards and Conformity Assessment**

22. The Meeting welcomed the adoption of the ASEAN Pharmaceutical Regulatory Policy (APRP) by the AEM and ASEAN Health Ministerial Meeting (AHMM) as a cross-sectoral initiative between the economic and health areas in the pharmaceutical sector. The APRP serves as a basis for structuring the regulatory systems in ASEAN to reduce trade barriers, enhance harmonisation of regulatory requirements, strengthen the collaboration among regulators, and ensure timely access to high quality, safe and efficacious pharmaceutical products. Furthermore, the APRP sets the guiding principles on pharmaceutical regulation across the entire life cycle of pharmaceutical products. The Meeting further noted that the finalisation of ASEAN Pharmaceutical Regulatory Framework (APRF) would be expedited to provide common reference in the application of the principles embodied in the APRP.

23. The Meeting also welcomed the finalisation of the ASEAN Agreement on Regulatory Framework for Traditional Medicines and the ASEAN Agreement on Regulatory Framework for Health Supplements and looked forward to the signing of the instruments in due time.

- **Trade in Services**

24. The Meeting welcomed the progress of the transposition of the schedules of commitments under the ASEAN Agreement on Movement of Natural Persons (MNP) and agreed to sign the *Protocol to Amend the ASEAN MNP Agreement* at the earliest opportunity. The Protocol will put into effect updated Schedules of Commitments that adopt a common format which would be easier for stakeholders to understand and use, reflecting ASEAN's commitment to ensure seamless temporary cross-border movement of natural persons involved in the provision of trade in goods, trade in services and investment towards contributing to enhance regional integration.

25. The Meeting noted the progress made in the implementation of the ASEAN Trade in Services Agreement (ATISA) including the discussions on scheduling obligations, as well as the template and work plan for the scheduling of Schedules of Non-Conforming Measures (NCMs) under the Agreement. The Meeting further noted the progress of discussions toward developing an ASEAN Services Facilitation Framework (ASFF) which could work towards addressing the unnecessary regulatory and administrative burdens in trade in services and contribute to reducing the cost of doing business in the services sector. The Meeting also welcomed the progress of the referencing of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) of Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar and Viet Nam to the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework (AQRF) with support from the AQRF Phase V Project under the support of AANZFTA Economic Cooperation Support Programme (AECSP).

- **Investment**

26. The Meeting noted the progress of discussions on the principles and modality for the transition of the ASEAN Comprehensive Investment Agreement (ACIA) reservation list to a two-annex negative list. The Meeting tasked officials to discuss the Fifth Protocol to Amend the ACIA to operationalise the transition, with the goal of finalising it by next year. The transition to a two-annex negative list will provide greater certainty and transparency to investors and will operationalise the Fourth Protocol to Amend the ACIA to further enhance the investment regime in ASEAN.

27. The Meeting launched the ASEAN Investment Report (AIR) 2022. Apart from highlighting the latest developments in the investment environment in ASEAN, this year's Report also features ASEAN's efforts and initiatives in the area of investment facilitation, including implementation of the ASEAN Investment Facilitation Framework (AIFF) adopted last year. The Meeting thanked the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) for its work on this annual publication, with the support of the Government of Australia through the ASEAN-Australia Development Cooperation Program Phase II (AADCP II).

28. The Meeting noted that a Forum on Sustainable Investment in ASEAN was successfully held on 4 – 5 November 2021 in a virtual format, which discussed the information and best practices in promoting sustainable investment. The Meeting looked

forward to the upcoming analytical report on sustainable investment in ASEAN, prepared with support from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

## ▪ **Competition Policy**

29. The Meeting welcomed the Joint Statement on Maintaining Competition Policy in Post-Pandemic Economic Recovery, issued by the ASEAN Heads of Competition Agencies' (AHCA) in April 2022, in support of the region's post-pandemic recovery efforts. The Meeting encouraged the AHCA to adopt actions necessary to maintain and improve competition by focusing on enforcement efforts on strategic markets and industries that are vital for economic recovery, streamlining processes to make them business-friendly, and reaching out to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to enhance their capacity to operate in a competitive environment.

30. The Meeting adopted the Guiding Principles for Negotiating the ASEAN Framework Agreement on Competition (AFAC) and launched the AFAC negotiations, which aims to provide a fair and competitive business environment in ASEAN through cross-border cooperation between competition agencies, internalisation of competition policy into regional and domestic economic policies and other initiatives to deal with competition issues of mutual interest. The AFAC will reflect ASEAN's commitment to advance regional economic integration, maintain and enhance the outcomes under the ASEAN Action Plan on Competition (ACAP) 2025 to contribute to the creation of a competitive, innovative and dynamic ASEAN. The AFAC will be a modern and forward-looking agreement, comprehensive in scope, more responsive to regional and global developments and will have substantial improvements over existing regional FTAs.

31. The Meeting underscored that competition law plays a fundamental role in the digital economy considering the exponential growth of the digital markets in terms of both scope and volume. The Meeting welcomed the development of the ASEAN Investigation Manual on Competition Policy and Law for the Digital Economy, that will assist investigators dealing with anti-competitive activities within the digital markets.

32. The Meeting also noted the progress of the development of the *ASEAN Guidelines for Sharing Merging Cases*, which will serve as reference to develop the ASEAN Portal on Merger Cases in 2023.

33. In line with the strategic objectives of the AEC Blueprint 2025 to harmonise competition laws in ASEAN, the Meeting welcomed the updated *Study on Commonalities and Differences across Competition Legislation in ASEAN and Areas Feasible for Regional Convergence*, which mapped out AMS's existing substantive and procedural laws and provided recommendations on the gradual convergence of these laws.

## ▪ **Consumer Protection**

34. The Meeting welcomed the convening of the 3<sup>rd</sup> ASEAN Consumer Protection Conference: "Building a Fair and Future Ready Market Place for Consumers in ASEAN",

which aims to enhance awareness of emerging consumer protection issues and serves as a discussion platform for key stakeholders in the region.

35. The Meeting noted the launch of the ASEAN Consumer Complaints Function in the ASEAN Consumer Portal that aims to enhance consumers' confidence and trust in e-Commerce and access to redress in ASEAN as it enables consumers to lodge online complaints in relation to a consumer transaction involving the purchase of products from businesses in any AMS. The Meeting welcomed the completion of the ASEAN Online Dispute Resolution (ODR) Guidelines to design national ODR systems in ASEAN to address consumer complaints in a cost-efficient, expedited, and transparent manner.

36. The Meeting noted the launch of the free Learning Management System (LMS) on the ACCP Website, comprising Online Interactive and Distance Learning Tools developed to enhance governments, businesses, and consumers' knowledge about consumer issues. The Meeting also welcomed the development of the ASEAN Sustainable Consumption Toolkit for Consumer Protection to enhance understanding among government officials and relevant stakeholders about sustainable consumption policies and priorities.

37. The Meeting also noted the development of the ASEAN Guidelines on Consumer Associations to advocate consumer movement in ASEAN. The Guidelines contain fundamental principles, considerations, and options to help start, strengthen, and sustain existing and aspiring consumer associations in the AMS. The Meeting also welcomed the development of the ASEAN Framework for the Collection and Assessment of Data on Product-related Injuries to strengthen product safety enforcement and enhance consumer confidence in ASEAN.

#### ▪ **Intellectual Property**

38. The Meeting noted on-going discussion on a possible Guiding Principles for Negotiating the ASEAN Framework Agreement for Intellectual Property Cooperation (AFAIPC), which is expected to be a comprehensive and modern agreement that is relevant to all stakeholders and more responsive to regional and global developments.

39. The Meeting welcomed the completion of the study on the ASEAN Quality Management System (QMS) for Patent Processes. Results of the study may serve as reference for the development of the ASEAN Common Guidelines on Patent Examinations and in the ongoing Feasibility Study for an ASEAN Patent System. The Meeting noted the 3-year extension of the Pilot Program under the Patent Corporation Treaty – ASEAN Patent Examination Cooperation (PCT ASPEC) until 26 August 2025. The Pilot Program allows AMS to use PCT reports/written opinions established by the ASEAN International Searching and/or Preliminary Examining Authority (ISA/IPEA), to promote work sharing between AMS and expedite the patent examination and contribute to the reduction of patent turnaround time.

40. The Meeting noted the publication of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition of ASEAN Common Guidelines on Industrial Design, which incorporated the outcomes of discussion from the Designs Convergence Meetings conducted in the last two years; and the online Guidebook on Regional IP Management for SMEs in ASEAN, focused on raising awareness among these businesses and providing useful and practical information on IP protection, as well as other IP-related issues.

41. The Meeting welcomed the completion of the Comparative study on Genetic Resources, Traditional Knowledge, and Traditional Cultural Expression (GRTKTCE), which provides a comprehensive and comparative study on GRTKTCE system in AANZFTA parties. The Study provides legal and non-legal recommendations, that can be used as a basis to develop other GRTKTCE-related deliverables under the ASEAN IPR Action Plan.

42. The Meeting was pleased to have the first interface meeting with Mr. Daren Tang, Director General of the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO). The Meeting appreciated the instrumental role of WIPO in providing technical assistance to support some of the key deliverables under the ASEAN IPR Action Plan 2016 – 2025 and also in the delivery of the WIPO-ASEAN Regional Technical Cooperation Implementation (RTCIP) 2019-2025. The Meeting looked forward to the WIPO's further support in other key areas such as SMEs and Digital Economy in this region, and to initiate a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on cooperation between ASEAN and WIPO, paving a solid foundation for long-term cooperation between ASEAN and WIPO.

▪ **Electronic Commerce and Digital Economy**

43. The Meeting noted the Terms of Reference of the ASEAN Coordinating Committee on Electronic Commerce (ACCEC) along with its new name as the ASEAN Coordinating Committee on E-Commerce and Digital Economy (ACCED), which has been endorsed by SEOM to enable the ACCEC to play a greater role in overseeing the implementation of the Bandar Seri Begawan Roadmap (BSBR) on ASEAN Digital Transformation Agenda and the Workplan for the ASEAN Agreement on Electronic Commerce.

44. The Meeting noted the Annual Report on the Implementation of the Bandar Seri Begawan Roadmap (BSBR), including the Workplan for the BSBR. Recognizing the accelerating trends of digital transformation in all sectors, the Meeting underscored the urgency of addressing the digital divide to unlock further growth of the ASEAN digital economy. The Meeting reaffirmed ASEAN's vision to embrace digital transformation and establish ASEAN as a leading digital community and economic bloc, powered by secure and transformative digital services, technologies, and ecosystem. In this connection, the Meeting instructed officials to intensify coordination efforts to deliver initiatives as embodied in the BSBR expediently.

45. The Meeting highlighted the importance of expediting the study for the Digital Economy Framework Agreement (DEFA) to examine areas that can be included in a framework to accelerate ASEAN's digital integration towards a regionally integrated

economy. The Meeting agreed to finalise the study as soon as possible with a view to be submitted for consideration at the AEM Retreat.

46. The Meeting welcomed the readiness of certain external partners to support the implementation of several projects, including: (i) ASEAN-USAID IGNITE for the ASEAN Digital Integration Framework Action Plan (DIFAP) Review and the development of ASEAN Digital Integration Index (ADII) Report; (ii) UNESCAP for the Cross-Border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific (CPTA), which covers legal framework, readiness assessment and capacity building activities; and the (iii) ASEAN-Australia Development Cooperation Program Phase II (AADCP II) for the Study for the ASEAN Digital Economy Framework Agreement (DEFA). The Meeting also expressed its appreciation to the US-ASEAN Business Council (US-ABC) for its proposed collaboration with the ACCED on advancing digital transformation and other initiatives related to the digital economy and e-commerce.

- **Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises**

47. In acknowledging the global digitalisation trends, the Meeting welcomed the launch of the ASEAN SME Academy 2.0, an upgraded version of the online learning platform; and ASEAN Access MATCH, an online business matching suite that enables match-making opportunities for ASEAN businesses to connect within and beyond the region. The Meeting appreciated the US-ASEAN Business Council and the US Government, as well as the Federal Republic of Germany, respectively, for supporting the ASEAN SME Academy 2.0 and the ASEAN Access MATCH. The Meeting emphasised the need to adopt region-wide digital unique business identification numbers in ASEAN to promote the participation of MSMEs in cross-border trade and supply chains whilst enhancing their access to finance, and welcomed Australia's support through the AADCP II in this respect. The Meeting endorsed the Policy Toolkit on "Strengthening Women's Entrepreneurship in National MSME Policies and Action Plans", which assists the policy makers in adopting a systematic approach to creating an enabling environment for women entrepreneurship and an inclusive economy, developed in collaboration with ESCAP and with the support of by Canada. The Meeting also welcomed the completion of the "Enhancing the Resilience of MSMEs to Crises and Disasters: Regional Guidelines for ASEAN Governments", developed with the support from Australia, as a guiding principle in coordinating disaster risk reduction management and enhancing the resilience of MSMEs. The Meeting urged AMS to continue reskilling/ upskilling MSMEs to stay competitive and relevant in the global digital economy.

- **Public-Private Sector Engagement**

48. The Meeting underscored the importance of public-private sector collaboration in accelerating recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic in the region and welcomed the active participation of the private sector to contribute their expertise to aid the recovery process. The Meeting expressed its appreciation to the ASEAN Business Advisory Council (ASEAN-BAC) and other members of the Joint Business Councils (JBCs) for their continuous commitment to supporting the ASEAN Economic Community and the

mitigation efforts to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly in digital trade connectivity, sustainable development, supply chain resilience and human capital development. The Meeting encouraged relevant sectoral bodies to intensify their efforts in coordinating with the ASEAN-BAC and JBCs in those priority areas.

▪ **ASEAN Community Statistical System (ACSS)**

49. The Meeting recognized the ASEAN Community Statistical System's continued efforts related to the harmonisation of key statistical areas relevant to the monitoring of ASEAN economic integration. The Meeting welcomed the progress of ACSS' initiatives, including: (i) the implementation of the Pilot Project on Utilising Big Data for Official Statistics; (ii) the development of a Methodological Guide for Statistics of International Trade in Services; and (iii) the development of a Statistical Dashboard to enhance the dissemination of ASEAN statistics. The Meeting noted that these initiatives will contribute towards improving ASEAN's statistical capacity and enhancing the availability and quality of ASEAN statistics which will lead to better relevance and accuracy of AEC integration monitoring.

**Working towards a Global ASEAN**

50. The Meeting welcomed the entry into force of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) Agreement on 1 January 2022, which sets into motion the creation of the world's largest free trade area that encompasses a third of the global market, generating 30 percent of global GDP, a quarter of trade in goods and services, and 31 percent of global FDI inflows.

51. The Meeting welcomed the progress made in the negotiations for the ASEAN-Canada FTA, which would further reinforce ASEAN's commitment to open markets and rules-based trade and investment and looked forward to its timely conclusion. The Meeting also noted on-going efforts to upgrade the various ASEAN Plus One FTAs, emphasising the need to modernise these FTAs in order to remain relevant and able to contribute to post-pandemic recovery efforts as well as future economic resilience by making the FTAs more responsive to regional and global challenges. In particular, the Meeting welcomed the progress towards the substantial conclusion of the AANZFTA upgrade negotiations, which is one of Cambodia's Chairmanship's Priority Economic Deliverables.

52. The Meeting expressed its appreciation to ASEAN's dialogue partners, who through their respective economic cooperation programmes vis-a-vis ASEAN, contribute to furthering ASEAN's community-building process and integration of their respective economies with ASEAN's.

## **Multilateral Trading System**

53. The Meeting welcomed the successful outcomes of the Twelfth World Trade Organization (WTO) Ministerial Conference (MC12), namely, the Geneva Package, held from 12-17 June 2022 in Geneva, Switzerland. The Meeting acknowledged the critical role of the WTO in international trade, especially at this time when the world needs to address the global challenges, including the COVID-19 pandemic, food supply disruptions, and environmental issues. The Meeting reaffirmed its support for a predictable, transparent, non-discriminatory, rules-based, fair, inclusive, equitable and open multilateral trading system centered on the WTO. In this connection, the Meeting committed to working with other WTO Members towards the necessary reform of the WTO to improve its functions and be more responsive to global trade developments.

## **Narrowing the Development Gap**

54. The Meeting reaffirmed ASEAN's commitment to a more inclusive AEC by narrowing the development gap within ASEAN and between ASEAN and the rest of the world and enhancing ASEAN's competitiveness as a region. The Meeting noted the progress in the implementation of the IAI Work Plan IV (2021-2025), with 12 out of 24 actions (50%) being addressed through 46 projects in the five strategic areas and three (3) out of four (4) enabling actions. The Meeting commended the development of a project proposal to conduct final assessment of the outcome metrics of the IAI Work Plan III (2016-2020), as well as the finalisation of the Concept Note to conduct the follow-up study on the *Development of Indicators/Thresholds to Achieve Decent Living Standard in ASEAN* as part of the Priority Economic Deliverables 2022 on "*Follow-Up Monitor of the ASEAN Frameworks for Equitable Economic Development (AFEED)*". The Meeting expressed appreciation to the AMS, ASEAN Partners and other stakeholders for their continued support, assistance and cooperation provided to the CLMV. The Meeting noted with compliments the successful conduct of the Joint Consultative Meeting between the ASEAN Secretariat and the Secretariats of the Brunei Darussalam-Indonesia-Malaysia-Philippines East ASEAN Growth Area (BIMP-EAGA), the Indonesia-Malaysia-Thailand Growth Triangle (IMT-GT), and the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS).

## **Collaborating with Development Partners**

55. **Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA).** The Meeting expressed appreciation to ERIA for its continued support to the ASEAN economic integration and AEC-building efforts, particularly in delivering the Priority Economic Deliverables under the Cambodia Chairmanship in 2022, which include: (i) the Work Programme to Support the Implementation of the Framework for Circular Economy for the ASEAN Economic Community; (ii) the Development of the ASEAN Guidelines on Sustainable Agriculture; (iii) the Launch of ASEAN Trade in Goods Agreement (ATIGA) Upgrade Negotiations; (iv) the Development of the Work Plan for the Implementation of the ASEAN Framework for Equitable Economic Development (AFEED); (v) the

Framework on Sustainable Tourism Development in ASEAN in Post COVID-19 Era; and (vi) the Comprehensive Study on the Implementation of Mutual Recognition Arrangements for Tourism Professional (MRA-TP): Enhanced Mechanism for Tourism Professionals.

56. The Meeting also acknowledged ERIA's research activities and studies to contribute to the implementation of many ASEAN initiatives in various areas of regional economic integration, including: (i) the completion of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Study on ASEAN Seamless Trade Facilitation Indicators (ASTFI II); (ii) the Implementation Plan of Framework for Circular Economy (FCE) for the AEC; (iii) the publication of the ASEAN Handbook on Good Regulatory Practices; (iv) the study on the supply and demand of professional services in ASEAN which includes how to enhance the level of interaction and mobility of ASEAN professional services due to the evolving services trade landscape; (v) transposition of the schedules of commitments from the positive listing approach into the negative listing approach under the ATISA; and (vi) the development of a training programme for ASEAN professionals (e.g., engineers, architects, accountants, and surveyors) to integrate the knowledge on the 4IR based on ASEAN Consolidated Strategy on 4IR, in the way they supply their services. The Meeting further acknowledged ERIA's capacity-building programme and expressed its appreciation for the assistance given to CLM particularly with regard to implementing their RCEP commitments, e.g., rules of origin and transposition of tariff reduction schedules.

57. **Technical Assistance and Capacity-Building.** The Meeting expressed ASEAN's appreciation to its dialogue and development partners, in particular, the ASEAN-Australia Development Cooperation Program (AADCP) II, Partnership for Infrastructure (P4I), the AANZFTA Economic Cooperation Support Programme (AECSP), the ASEAN Regional Integration Support from the EU (EU-ARISE) Plus, the Enhanced Regional EU-ASEAN Dialogue Instrument (E-READI), the ASEAN-China Cooperation Fund (ACCF), the AEM-METI Economic and Industrial Cooperation Committee (AMEICC), the Japan-ASEAN Integration Fund (JAIF), the ASEAN-Korea Economic Cooperation (AKEC) Fund, the Technical Advice and Solutions from Korea (TASK) Programme, the ASEAN-USAID Inclusive Growth in ASEAN through Innovation, Trade, and E-Commerce (IGNITE), and the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development BZ projects as implemented by the GIZ GmbH and Physikalisch-Technische Bundesanstalt (PTB), for the technical assistance they continue to provide to ASEAN's Community-building efforts. The Meeting looked forward to their continued support and cooperation as ASEAN moves towards a stronger and more resilient ASEAN Economic Community.

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