



**THE FOURTH AEM-UK CONSULTATION  
19 September 2024, Vientiane, Lao PDR**

**JOINT MEDIA STATEMENT**

1. The Fourth ASEAN Economic Ministers (AEM) – the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (UK) Consultation was held on the 19<sup>th</sup> September 2024. The Consultation was co-chaired by H.E. Malaithong KOMMASITH, Minister of Industry and Commerce of Lao PDR, and the Rt Hon Douglas Alexander MP Minister of State for the Department for Business and Trade of the UK. The Meeting also welcomed the participation of H.E. Filipus Nino Pereira, Minister of Commerce and Industry, the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste as an observer.
2. The Meeting was pleased to note that according to ASEAN's preliminary statistics, two-way merchandise trade between ASEAN and the UK reached USD 35 billion in 2023, while foreign direct investment (FDI) from UK to ASEAN amounted to USD 2.1 billion. The Meeting also recognised that the UK was ASEAN's 12<sup>th</sup> largest trading partner for merchandise trade and the 11<sup>th</sup> largest source of FDI inflow to ASEAN in 2023.
3. The Meeting exchanged views on regional and global economic challenges that could likely impact supply chain resiliency in the region, such as climate change, industrial policies, inflationary pressures and heightened geopolitical tensions, among others. The Meeting reaffirmed their commitment to further enhance economic integration and cooperation, particularly in the areas of digital transformation and sustainability, to navigate these challenges and strengthen the supply chain resiliency.
4. The Meeting welcomed the UK's significant support to the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) specifically in the areas of high-level policy dialogue, supply chain resilience, regulatory excellence, digital innovation, Micro Small Medium Enterprises (MSME) development, public-private sector partnership, financial services, sustainable growth, infrastructure, skills and education, and women's economic empowerment, all recorded in the ASEAN-UK Work Plan to Implement the Joint Ministerial Declaration for Future Economic Cooperation (Work Plan). The Meeting noted that a total of 69 activities, across 11 priority areas involving 28 ASEAN Sectoral Bodies, were carried out since last year, with an additional 77 activities planned for the succeeding years.
5. The Meeting underscored the growing importance of economic cooperation in key priority areas referenced in the Work Plan due to the implementation of the ASEAN-UK Economic Integration Programme (EIP), officially launched in Jakarta on 24 April 2024. The Meeting looked forward to the contribution of the Programme to ASEAN economic integration agenda and to stronger ASEAN-UK economic ties.

6. The Meeting acknowledged the successful conclusion of the Thirteenth World Trade Organization (WTO) Ministerial Conference (MC13) held on 26 February – 2 March 2024 in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates. The Meeting noted the outcomes of the MC13 including WTO Members' resolve to preserve and strengthen the ability of the multilateral trading system, with the WTO at its core, to provide meaningful impetus to respond to current trade challenges, take advantage of available opportunities, and ensure the WTO's proper functioning. The Meeting, in particular, welcomed the Ministerial Decision on the Accession of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste to the WTO Agreement. The Meeting acknowledged that Timor-Leste's accession to the WTO is an important stepping stone for Timor-Leste's accession to ASEAN. The Meeting was also pleased to note specific outcomes of the WTO MC13 that reiterated the centrality of the development dimension in the work of the WTO.

7. The Meeting further noted the EIP's intention to bring UK's expertise to ASEAN in response to ASEAN's economic priorities across the three pillars of regulatory reform, financial services and open trade. The regulatory reform pillar aims to improve regulatory environment and the ease of doing business by increasing transparency and harmonising standards and technical regulations, including on consumer protection, competition policy and intellectual property rights. The financial services pillar aims to support financial services market development to promote financial inclusion in the region. The open trade pillar aims to reduce barriers to trade, enhancing digital and sustainable trade facilitation, and simplifying customs procedures to enhance the free flow of goods and services across borders. This programme will also support ASEAN's initiative for digital integration.

8. The Meeting further noted the UK's Trade Digitalisation Technical Assistance Project, supporting officials across ASEAN Member States on policy issues relevant to the ASEAN Digital Economy Framework Agreement (DEFA) negotiations. The Meeting looked forward to future cooperation between ASEAN and the UK on legal reform to enable trade digitalisation, to be delivered through the EIP.

9. The Meeting noted that connectivity and resilience are fundamental to our shared vision of a prosperous and sustainable future as set out by Lao PDR through the theme "Enhancing Connectivity and Resilience", underpinned by the recently endorsed ASEAN-UK Joint Ministerial Statement: Enhancing Connectivity for a Prosperous and Sustainable Future. The Meeting noted the UK's cooperation on supply chain resilience in ASEAN, welcoming the UK's work to identify future opportunities and challenges facing ASEAN supply chains, including regional value chains, to aid the design of future ASEAN strategies on global value chains.

10. The Meeting welcomed the UK's continued support to develop the Framework of the ASEAN Industrial Project Based Initiative, designed to boost cross-border investment in ASEAN. The Meeting welcomed the UK's continued support to develop the Framework of the ASEAN Industrial Project Based Initiative and ASEAN global value chain resilience, designed to boost cross-border investment in ASEAN. The Meeting further noted the British Investment Partnerships toolkit and welcomed the successful conclusion of the ASEAN Sustainable Leadership in Infrastructure Programme in 2024 and looked forward to the 2025 edition.

11. The Meeting noted the importance of COP29 in November 2024 in addressing the urgent challenge of keeping global average temperature rise below 1.5°C, and developing and implementing solutions to the climate, energy and biodiversity crises. The Meeting shared the view that addressing the most severe impacts of climate change is essential to ensure ASEAN's long-term sustainable growth. The UK would continue to explore opportunities for collaboration at COP29, building on the successful ASEAN-UK event hosted at the UK Pavilion last year.

12. The Meeting underlined the importance of public-private sector partnership and noted the briefing by the UK-ASEAN Business Council (UKABC) which highlighted how cooperating on digital trade, energy transition, sustainable infrastructure and regulatory harmonisation will be key to further unlocking trade between ASEAN and the UK by strengthening the business environment for domestic and international companies. The Meeting welcomed UKABC's engagements with ASEAN, such as support for the ASEAN Business and Investment Summit (ABIS) and ASEAN Indo-Pacific Forum in 2023 and the successful UK-ASEAN Business Forum, held in London in March 2024. The Meeting expressed appreciation to UKABC for their continuous support and invaluable contribution to strengthening trade and investment relations between ASEAN and the UK and looked forward to their participation at ABIS 2024, leading discussions on digital trade.

13. The Meeting noted the progress in the implementation of the Roadmap for Timor-Leste's Full Membership in ASEAN adopted at the 42<sup>nd</sup> ASEAN Summit. Encouraged by Timor-Leste's commitment, the Meeting reaffirmed its support to continue providing capacity building and technical assistance to facilitate Timor-Leste's integration into the mainstream of ASEAN-UK economic relations. The Meeting also encouraged the Timor-Leste government to intensify efforts towards its accession to ASEAN. The Meeting also welcomed the UK's capacity building for Timor-Leste to build a rules of origin regime in order to accede to rules of origin provisions in ASEAN trade agreements, including the ASEAN Trade in Goods Agreement, in support of the Roadmap for Timor-Leste's Accession to ASEAN.

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