



ASEAN LEADERS' DECLARATION ON STRENGTHENING REGIONAL BIOSAFETY, AND BIOSECURITY

WE, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), namely Brunei Darussalam, the Kingdom of Cambodia, the Republic of Indonesia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, the Republic of the Philippines, the Republic of Singapore, the Kingdom of Thailand, and the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam, on the occasion of the 44th and 45th ASEAN Summits in Vientiane, Lao PDR on 9 October 2024;

NOTING that the world is increasingly vulnerable to public health and emerging infectious disease threats due to factors such as climate change, urbanization, ecological shifts, potential bioterrorism, toxins and other high-risk pathogens with pandemic potential, such as SARS-CoV-2, MERS and MPOX which had brought about unprecedented challenges globally especially to countries of diverse settings;

RECOGNIZING that the response to many biological threats, including effective and timely prevention and control measures of the pandemic, were anchored on early laboratory diagnosis, leading to the rapid establishment of laboratories with varying degrees of biosafety and biosecurity standards and practices, as well as human resource capabilities and training. The lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic underscore the critical importance of these measures. Moreover, the accelerated development of vaccines and drugs highlighted gaps in protocols, procedures, regulations and legal frameworks;

REALISING that these potential weaknesses in biosafety and biosecurity can give rise to accidental or deliberate pathogen release and misuse in securing, handling, and manipulating high-risk pathogens and associated data, especially in our region where member states have varying levels of capacities and legal instruments in monitoring and ensuring the minimum requirements of laboratory standards;

COMMENDING that the ASEAN Health sector has been implementing the Mitigation of Biological Threats Programme where one of the strategies is focused on biosafety and biosecurity especially in the field of biological containment including inventory of high-risk pathogens and the networking among ASEAN Member States, partners and relevant stakeholders to promote knowledge sharing, best laboratory practices and cooperation among member states when faced with challenges in the laboratory environment;

ACKNOWLEDGING that further enhancing these efforts through the development of an instrument or framework covering the safe and secure handling of high-risk pathogens in diverse settings is crucial to build robust regional capacity against biosafety and biosecurity threats, including collaborations outside the health sector.

Do hereby agree to strengthen biosafety and biosecurity in the region by declaring our commitments to:

1. **STRENGTHEN** the multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder coordination and cooperation on biosafety and biosecurity at the national level;
2. **ESTABLISH** the ASEAN Biosafety and Biosecurity Network to enhance functions, roles, and responsibilities in facilitating knowledge sharing, coordination, and cooperation among ASEAN Member States, partners and relevant stakeholders;
3. **ESTABLISH or STRENGTHEN** the national legal framework for biosafety and biosecurity. Further explore the setting-up of minimum standards to regulate biosafety and biosecurity at national or regional levels, as appropriate;
4. **UPHOLD** the commitment around responsible and ethical research using high-risk pathogens and toxins and related data to prevent issues related to Dual Use Research of Concern (DURC);
5. **ENHANCE** protocols and procedures for the storage and transport of samples with high-risk pathogens and toxins to ensure adherence to international and domestic regulations;
6. **ENSURE** the provision of necessary human resources for biosafety and biosecurity in a sustainable manner through training, education and certification for all relevant personnel. Further explore regional engagement through bilateral and multilateral cooperation among ASEAN Member States, partners and relevant stakeholders, with ASEAN as the driving force;
7. **SUPPORT** efforts to develop sustainable laboratory infrastructure for operation and maintenance in diverse settings, that address national needs and ensure biosafety and biosecurity within available resource levels;
8. **TASK** the ASEAN Health Ministers to cooperate with relevant ministries with support from the Senior Officials Meeting on Health Development (SOMHD), in collaboration with subsidiary bodies, and other relevant stakeholders, to commence consultation, coordinate and monitor the efforts to accomplish the deliverables of this declaration.

Adopted on this Ninth Day of October in the Year Two Thousand and Twenty-Four in a single original copy in the English language.