

OVERVIEW OF ASEAN-GCC RELATIONS

1. The first formal contact between ASEAN and the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf or the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) took place in 1990 when the Foreign Minister of Oman, in his capacity as Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the GCC, expressed GCC's desire to establish formal relations with ASEAN.
2. In the same year, the ASEAN Foreign Ministers met with their counterparts from the GCC for the first time at the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in New York. Both sides agreed to meet annually in New York and encouraged the Secretariats of ASEAN in Jakarta and the GCC in Riyadh to develop cooperation.
3. In April 2007, the then Secretary-General of ASEAN, H.E. Ong Keng Yong, made an official visit to the GCC Secretariat and met with his GCC counterpart, H.E. Abdulrahman H Al Attiyah. Both sides agreed to prepare a document to formalise the relations between the two organisations.
4. At the ASEAN-GCC Foreign Ministers' Meeting at the sidelines of the UNGA in September 2007, the Ministers agreed to hold a fully-constituted ASEAN-GCC Ministerial Meeting to provide an impetus for strengthening ASEAN-GCC relations. As a result, the First ASEAN-GCC Ministerial Meeting was convened in June 2009 in Manama, Bahrain, which adopted the ASEAN-GCC Joint Vision, in which both sides agreed to undertake a study and make recommendations on the future of ASEAN-GCC relations in (i) a free trade area, (ii) economic cooperation and development, and (iii) culture, education and information. The Ministers also witnessed the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the ASEAN Secretariat and the GCC Secretariat.
5. Pursuant to the outcome of the First ASEAN-GCC Ministerial Meeting, an ASEAN-GCC Two-Year Action Plan (2010-2012) was developed to intensify cooperation between ASEAN and GCC and, subsequently, adopted at the Second ASEAN-GCC Ministerial Meeting in June 2010 in Singapore.
6. In following up to the outcome of the Second ASEAN-GCC Ministerial Meeting, four ASEAN-GCC joint working-level meetings had been convened, namely: (a) ASEAN-GCC Consultative Meeting on Education in November 2010 in Bangkok; (b) ASEAN-GCC Working Group Meeting on Food Security and Agricultural Investment in May 2011 in Doha; (c) ASEAN-GCC Tourism Consultation in June 2011 in Luang Prabang; and (d) ASEAN-GCC Senior Economic Officials Meeting in July 2011 in Salalah, Oman.

7. There are growing interests by the GCC Member States in further intensifying cooperation with ASEAN, as showcased by the conferment of the status of Sectoral Dialogue Partnership with ASEAN to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in 2022, and the accession of all GCC Member States to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC). Currently all GCC Member States (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE) have accredited their Ambassadors to ASEAN. Similarly, ASEAN also has established its Committees in all capitals of the GCC Member States, namely in Manama, Kuwait City, Muscat, Doha, Riyadh and Abu Dhabi.

8. As a follow-up to the outcome of the Third ASEAN-GCC Ministerial Meeting held in November 2013 in Manama, Kingdom of Bahrain, the First ASEAN-GCC Workshop was held in June 2014 in Singapore with the aim to discuss ways and means to give momentum ASEAN-GCC relations. Attended by Government officials, researchers, businesses and representatives from the Member States of ASEAN and GCC, the workshop also focused the discussions on concrete steps and measures to move forward and to further promote the ASEAN-GCC relations and revitalise cooperation between the two regions.

9. On 20 October 2023, ASEAN and the GCC convened the Summit of ASEAN and GCC in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. During the Summit, Leaders of ASEAN and GCC Member States adopted the Joint Statement of the Summit of ASEAN and GCC, which lays out foundation for ASEAN and GCC to upgrade and develop their partnership, to take advantage of the growth opportunities that can be utilised through cooperation between the two dynamic regions based on their shared visions for the future of their partnership and the values embodied in the United Nations (UN) Charter. The Leaders also welcomed the ASEAN-GCC Framework of Cooperation (FOC) (2024-2028), which outlines measures and cooperation activities to be jointly undertaken by ASEAN and the GCC in the areas of common interest and for mutual benefit. It also takes into account the progress made in the implementation of the previous ASEAN-GCC Two-Year Action Plan (2010-2012). Through the effective implementation of the Joint Statement and the FOC, ASEAN and the GCC would further strengthen and elevate their cooperative relationship to a greater height and to realise the immense potential for the partnership.

10. Following the Riyadh Summit, the GCC Member States has demonstrated willingness and commitment to enhance and formalise their cooperation with ASEAN and strengthen their engagements with ASEAN mechanisms. The GCC Police and ASEANAPOL have established communication and are currently exchanging information on the modalities for potential cooperation between both sides. On the economic front, ASEAN and GCC continue to foster economic cooperation identified under the FOC, which focused on trade and investment, agriculture and food security, energy, and tourism. At the sidelines of the World Economic Forum (WEF)'s Special Meeting on

Global Collaboration, Growth and Energy for Development, in Riyadh on 28-29 April 2024, Saudi Arabia organised a session on “ASEAN-GCC Joint Regional Strategy Dialogue”, which was attended by the Secretary-General of ASEAN. The session served as a platform for governments and business leaders to exchange views on the key dimensions for collaboration between ASEAN and the GCC, including trade and investment, climate and energy transition, as well as digital economy.

11. The First Meeting between the Committee of Permanent Representatives to ASEAN (CPR) and the GCC Ambassadors’ Council in Jakarta, held on 20 November 2024 at the ASEAN Headquarters/ASEAN Secretariat, was critical in taking stock of progress in the implementation of the FOC and provided an avenue to further explore areas of tangible cooperation between ASEAN and the GCC.

12. Under the active leadership of the Secretary-General of ASEAN, H.E. Kao Kim Hourn and the Secretary-General of the GCC, H.E. Jasem Mohamed Albudaiwi, both Secretariats to facilitate contacts and coordination between both sides in the implementation of the FOC, including by identifying potential areas of tangible cooperation, holding annual meetings and visits between the Secretariats and exchanging information and experiences in related areas of the FOC, as appropriate.

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