



Joint Communiqué

THE NINETEENTH ASEAN LABOUR MINISTERS MEETING

5 MAY 2006, SINGAPORE

1. The 19th ASEAN Labour Ministers Meeting (ALMM) was convened on 5 May 2006 in Singapore. It was preceded by a preparatory Senior Officials Meeting on 3 May 2006. The 19th ALMM had the theme of Occupational Safety and Health (OSH).

2. The 19th ALMM was opened by H.E. Mr Lee Hsien Loong, Prime Minister of the Republic of Singapore. In his Opening Address, H.E. Mr Lee Hsien Loong remarked that to support and sustain regional growth, the labour markets within the ASEAN Community must be dynamic, productive and flexible. The meetings of ASEAN Labour Ministers and Senior Officials provide a useful platform to establish labour practices and common policies to attract global investments and businesses to the region.

3. H.E. Mr Lee Hsien Loong suggested three ways in which ASEAN could secure a better future for its 200 million workers. First, workers should be life-long learners, equipped with new skills that would provide employment opportunities for life. Second, the push for greater flexibility and competitiveness should never be done at the expense of workers' safety. Third, stable and harmonious industrial relations are crucial to sustaining growth and ensuring a favourable investment climate for companies to invest and do business in the region.

Occupational Safety and Health – Protecting the Safety, Health and Welfare of Workers in the Region

4. Recognising that OSH is an integral part of a country's development, the Ministers acknowledged the progress made by Member Countries in OSH policies and programmes. They also expressed their continued support for the work of the ASEAN Occupational Safety and Health Network (ASEAN-OSHNET). The ASEAN-OSHNET¹ has carried out and is continuing collaborative activities on information-sharing, standards, inspection, training and research among the ASEAN Member Countries.

5. The Ministers recognised that OSH policies and programmes should be an important element of ASEAN labour cooperation. To signal ASEAN's strong commitment to ensure OSH protection of workers and to address workplace changes arising from globalisation, the Ministers agreed that their Work Programme should include an additional priority area on "Strengthening of OSH Capacities and Standards in ASEAN". This new priority area would encompass i) preventive and promotional activities on OSH; ii) developing integrated national OSH work plans; iii) developing OSH human resources; and iv) advocating OSH as a priority in national and regional labour agendas.

6. To complement and further the progress of ASEAN-OSHNET, the Ministers agreed to convene an "ASEAN Policy Dialogue on National OSH Frameworks and Management Systems." Singapore will work with the ASEAN-OSHNET to bring together ASEAN Member Countries to discuss pertinent OSH challenges and developments. Consultations would be undertaken with workers, employers, academia and international experts.

The Future of Labour within the ASEAN Community

7. The Ministers renewed their commitment to realising the ASEAN Community by 2020. The Ministers noted that

¹The ASEAN-OSHNET was established in 2000

the accelerated pace of regional economic integration, together with the advancement of information-communications technology, had brought about many new challenges. The Ministers acknowledged the importance of ASEAN labour cooperation in turning these challenges into opportunities for the ASEAN workforce.

8. In this context, the Ministers noted with satisfaction the continued progress made in addressing the priorities of their Vision and Mission Statement, which undertook to prepare ASEAN's workforce for regional economic integration. Since the Ministers last met in 2004, the Senior Labour Officials have engaged in dialogue on priorities such as social security and protection; facilitating labour mobility in ASEAN; addressing the impact of economic integration on employment; and enhancing tripartite partnerships in industrial relations and workforce employability. A Regional Industrial Relations website had also been launched on 4 May 2006 as a joint initiative of Singapore and Japan. The Ministers welcomed the launch of the website, as a useful platform to share information among ASEAN Member Countries.

9. The Ministers expressed appreciation to ASEAN's Dialogue Partners for their collaboration with Member Countries in implementing initiatives such as i) Enhancing Skills Recognition Systems in ASEAN; ii) ASEAN-Japan Programme on Industrial Relations, iii) Strengthening Social Protection Systems in ASEAN; iv) ASEAN-ROK Human Resource Development Programmes for ASEAN Officials; and v) ASEAN-China High-Level Seminars on Social Security. These initiatives had assisted Member Countries to address their regional labour priorities. The Ministers looked forward to future opportunities for continued collaboration.

10. Recognising that ASEAN labour cooperation is an integral component of the economic and socio-cultural pillars of the ASEAN Community, the Ministers agreed to form an Ad Hoc Working Group on Progressive Labour Practices to Enhance Competitiveness of ASEAN as soon as possible.

This would allow ASEAN's labour policy-makers to share experiences and discuss policies to promote ASEAN as a choice destination for global investments and businesses. Led by Singapore, the Working Group shall report to the Ministers in 2008, with an interim report to the Senior Labour Officials in 2007.

11. The Ministers noted that their Senior Labour Officials would continue efforts on human resource planning and labour market monitoring, as well as skills development and training to support economic integration. These efforts would complement the industry-linked human resource development activities under the ASEAN Economic Community. The Ministers also requested the ASEAN Secretariat to regularly monitor and review labour projects under the ASEAN Labour Ministers Work Programme to ensure their effectiveness and continued relevance.

ASEAN-ILO Cooperation

12. The Ministers noted the ILO's briefing to ASEAN Senior Labour Officials on its Global OSH Strategy. They supported the principles of prevention and protection embodied in the Strategy, and acknowledged that the principles provided a useful basis for national policies and programmes. The new ILO instruments proposed under the Strategy would be helpful in enhancing OSH standards for safer, healthier and more productive workplaces. The Ministers expressed appreciation for ILO's offer of support and assistance in strengthening OSH capacities and programmes in ASEAN, and urged ILO to provide more resources to help raise OSH standards in ASEAN.

13. The Ministers also noted that their Senior Labour Officials had a constructive exchange of views with ILO on the Global Report on Child Labour, ILO Director-General's Report on Employment Relationship, ASEAN-ILO Joint Study on HIV and AIDS in the workplace and the completion and dissemination of the ASEAN-ILO Joint Study on Labour and Employment Implications of AFTA. The Ministers noted

the launch of the Global Report on Child Labour, and the references to the progress made in a number of South East Asian countries in tackling child labour.

14. The Ministers noted the completion of the ASEAN-ILO Joint Study on Initiatives on HIV and AIDS and the World of Work in the ASEAN Region, and identified the following for continued joint work, with interested partners:

- Tripartite collaboration in awareness-raising and reduction of stigma and discrimination; and
- Coordination by the ASEAN-OSHNET in convening a Regional Conference on HIV and the World of Work.

15. The Ministers also asked their Senior Officials to identify focal points within ASEAN Ministries of Labour to share and exchange information on initiatives carried out in the workplace on HIV prevention and control.

16. The Ministers noted the progress of ASEAN-ILO cooperation since 2003, and the potential for longer-term activities in the future years.

17. The Ministers referred to the ASEAN Statement delivered at the 295th Session of the ILO Governing Body held in Geneva on 30 March 2006 (attached as Annex A), and reiterated the necessity to reconcile differences and to cooperate in dealing with workers' needs.

20th ASEAN Labour Ministers Meeting

18. The Ministers agreed that the 20th ASEAN Labour Ministers Meeting would be held in Thailand in 2008.

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**List of ASEAN Labour Ministers or Their Representatives
attending the Nineteenth ASEAN Labour Ministers Meeting, 5 May
2006, Singapore**

1. **H.E. Pehin Dato Adanan Yusof**
Minister of Home Affairs
Brunei Darussalam
2. **H.E. Sok San**
Secretary of State of Labour and Vocational Training
Cambodia
3. **H.E. Erman Suparno**
Minister of Manpower and Transmigration
Indonesia
4. **H.E. Le Kakanya**
Acting Minister of Labour and Social Welfare
Lao PDR
5. **H.E. Datuk Seri Dr. Fong Chan Onn**
Minister of Human Resources
Malaysia
6. **H.E. Brigadier General Win Sein**
Minister of Labour
Myanmar
7. **H.E. Patricia A. Sto. Tomas**
Secretary of Department of Labour and Employment
The Philippines
8. **H.E. Dr. Ng Eng Hen**
Minister for Manpower and Second Minister for Defence
Singapore
9. **H.E. Chalernpol Thanchitt**
Thai Ambassador to Singapore
Thailand
10. **H.E. Le Bach Hong**
Vice Minister of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs
Viet Nam

Annex A

**Statement By
the Representatives of the Republic of the Philippines
on behalf of the ASEAN Member States of the ILO
at the 295th ILO Governing Body
Geneva, 30 March 2006**

Mr. Chairman,

1. On behalf of the ASEAN member States of the ILO, I would like to thank the Secretariat for the document prepared for this meeting.

2. I also wish to express our profound appreciation to the Director-General for his continuing support and cooperation with the Government of Myanmar to eradicate the practice of forced labour in the country.

3. We acknowledge the importance of the ILO presence in Myanmar and appreciate the efforts of Mr. Richard Horsey, Acting ILO Liaison Officer, in assisting the Myanmar authorities in the observance of ILO Convention 29.

4. We are opposed to the practice of forced labour and we welcome the commitment of the Myanmar Government to observe ILO Convention 29 and to eradicate the practice of forced labour in the country. In this regard, we continue to encourage and support any discussion between the Government of Myanmar and the ILO to address the issue.

Mr. Chairman,

5. We take note of the intensive dialogue in Geneva between the Office and the Government of Myanmar since the last Governing Body session in November 2005 as well as the ILO mission that visited Myanmar from 12 to 13 March 2006. There were frank and open discussions between the ILO mission and the Minister for Labour with a view to resolving the outstanding issues between the two sides.

6. Realizing that the Government of Myanmar and the ILO have fundamental differences on the establishment of a mechanism to address the issue of forced labour, we urge both sides to continue the process of dialogue and cooperation with a view to finding a mutually acceptable solution. In this regard, we request both sides to harmonise their respective positions so that a compromise result could be achieved at the soonest time possible. ASEAN member states should be kept posted of the progress of the ongoing dialogues.

Mr. Chairman,

7. We believe that it is imperative for both sides to intensify their cooperation and dialogue with mutual trust and confidence at various levels, including the senior leadership, until the issue is completely resolved. It is important that this process continues rather than to adopt alternative measures.

I thank you, Mr Chairman.