

INTERVENTION

36TH ASEAN SUMMIT

**YAB Tan Sri Dato' Hj Muhyiddin bin Yassin
Prime Minister of Malaysia**

Putrajaya, 26 June 2020

Your Excellency Nguyen Xuan Phuc,
Prime Minister of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam,

Your Majesty, Excellencies,

1. Malaysia appreciates this initiative taken by Vietnam, as ASEAN Chair, in convening today's Summit via video-conference against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic. This truly is a historical moment for us in ASEAN. Our deliberations today bear testament to the ASEAN resolve in building a cohesive and responsive community, in line with the theme of Vietnam's chairmanship.

2. As of yesterday, more than 138 thousand cases of COVID-19 have been reported in ASEAN, with over 4 thousand deaths. As we endeavour to protect our populations against the serious threat of COVID-19, a vaccine is sorely needed. While progress on the development of a vaccine and anti-viral medicine has been encouraging, we must ensure that when the time comes – the vaccine must be affordable, accessible and equitably shared for all.

Your Majesty, Excellencies,

3. Moving beyond efforts to contain the novel coronavirus in our region, as leaders we must inculcate a similar sense of urgency to also push for economic recovery. The public health crisis has had profound impacts on the economy and rebooting our regional economy must be our utmost priority to mitigate disruptions to trade and strengthen the resilience of our regional supply chains. Malaysia feels very strongly

that our Governments must materialise cohesive plans to quickly implement measures or “travel bubbles” between ‘green’ ASEAN Member States to shore up investments and create job opportunities for our people. Possibly in the near future, we can also open up our borders for intra-ASEAN tourism to flourish and deliver the much-needed financial boost into our national economies.

4. On that note, Malaysia also supports and shares the view of His Majesty the Sultan of Brunei Darussalam and the President of Indonesia that ASEAN Officials should begin work on the establishment of an ASEAN travel bubble. As a first step, we can explore the possibility of sectoral exemptions for travel restrictions such as medical tourism, or high-value economic visits.

5. As Malaysia proposed in April, ASEAN must formulate a Regional Economic Recovery Plan but time is not on our side and regionally, we are fighting for our economic survival. If we don’t protect our regional economy, wider disparity in growth among the ASEAN countries may harm our objective of greater economic integration. We must act swiftly and decisively in coordinating a regional level response in revitalizing our economies. A well-coordinated response will ensure we emerge from this crisis stronger together, much like how we have weathered previous crises.

6. Together with our ASEAN colleagues, Malaysia will also work towards the conclusion and signing of the **Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)** this year. Malaysia stands ready to engage with India on the latter’s continued participation in the RCEP, which we believe would contribute to regional prosperity.

Your Majesty, Excellencies,

7. In the face of global instability and renewed rivalry between major powers, it is essential for us to maintain ASEAN centrality and unity. Solidarity among ASEAN Member States will remain integral in keeping the region neutral and free of external interference. As I have said before, we must not allow ASEAN to revert to our comfort zone – but make ASEAN emerge as a new powerhouse for the world.

8. Further to the Special ASEAN Plus Three (APT) Summit on COVID-19 held last April, it also fares well for us as a regional bloc that many of our Dialogue Partners have actively sought ad hoc meetings with our Ministers and officials, with a focus on response to, and recovery from, the pandemic. This underscores ASEAN's relevancy and 'convening power' in terms of substantive engagement with a broad array of partners. It also shows that ASEAN's initiatives to combat COVID-19 are recognised by the international community.

Your Majesty, Excellencies,

9. With regards to the **Rakhine State** crisis, the spill over effects have impacted us regionally and as such, the implications must be addressed comprehensively. Malaysia continues to bear the brunt of this prolonged crisis, which still appears to have no foreseeable end. We can no longer take more as our resources and capacity are already stretched, compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet, Malaysia is unfairly expected to do more to accommodate incoming refugees.

10. Despite Malaysia not being Party to the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, we have provided humanitarian assistance to the Rohingya refugees, and other refugees from Myanmar. But this situation cannot continue forever. Therefore, we call on the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to work closely with us in ASEAN to expedite the resettlement process of UNHCR Cardholders to third countries.

11. However, we have consistently advocated for a durable solution to the dire plight of the Rohingyas in the Rakhine State, who are increasingly susceptible to exploitation. The refugees in the camps are vulnerable to become likely targets for cross border crimes such as smuggling, human trafficking and slavery, among others. Their deprivation and frustration could also lead to potential recruitments by terrorists and extremists who have remained silent during the pandemic. Your Excellencies, their silence must never be misconstrued as inactivity as they still pose a serious security threat to us as a region.

12. We must seriously prevent, suppress and punish trafficking in persons, where human trafficking syndicates exploit the vulnerability of others in facilitating and

profiting from the onward movement of those refugees to third countries. ASEAN must adopt a comprehensive approach to combat and contain the irregular movement of people. Without enhanced collaboration, these transnational issues will only pose increased threats to security resulting in a destabilised region which is of no benefit to us all.

13. This crisis has plagued us for long enough and it is not going to solve itself. The international community is watching us – *What are we in ASEAN doing to help each other in finding an effective solution for the Rakhine State?* ASEAN must do more to help Myanmar, and Myanmar must also do more to help itself for this crisis to be put behind us, and development can take place in a meaningful way.

Your Majesty, Excellencies,

14. Regarding the **South China Sea**, Malaysia's position has been clear and consistent. Recognising the complexity and sensitivity of the issue, all parties must continue to work together to maintain peace, security and stability in the South China Sea. In these times of adversity, it is imperative that we intensify efforts to build, maintain and enhance mutual trust and confidence for the benefit of our region and peoples.

15. Malaysia holds the view that the South China Sea should remain a sea of peace and trade. Thus, matters relating to the South China Sea must be resolved peacefully based on universally recognised principles of international law, including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) 1982.

Your Majesty, Excellencies,

16. Malaysia is deeply concerned over the **fate of the Palestinians** amidst the continued volatility in the Middle East. Malaysia strongly condemns and rejects Israel's recent announcement to implement its plan to annex parts of the Occupied Palestinian Territory in the West Bank. The illegal and unilateral action by Israel clearly calls into question its sincerity towards a peaceful and lasting solution to the long-standing Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It also further diminishes the prospect of a two-State solution, which is supported by the international community. Malaysia will continue to

stand in strong solidarity with the people of Palestine in the wake of Israeli aggression, and we call upon the international community, in particular the United Nations Security Council to condemn and reject the Israeli annexation plan. The international community must also ensure the plan will never be implemented.

Your Majesty, Excellencies,

17. Since its inception over a half-century ago, ASEAN has enabled our region to grow, prosper and engage with the world. Malaysia is confident that under the able leadership of Vietnam, ASEAN will be able to achieve significant outcomes this year, notwithstanding the unprecedented circumstances surrounding COVID-19. It is now, more than ever, we need to show the world which is full of hate and divide, full of tears and suffering, that the ASEAN Way – which is far more than just leaders holding hands in photos – does work.

18. As we look ahead together, we must be proud of our achievements and how far we have gotten. Considering recent developments, we must show to the world that as a regional bloc we can rise to the occasion and take leadership. All our trials and tribulations can eventually be surmounted so long as mutual trust, respect and transparency remains. Let us strengthen our resolve in fulfilling our collective responsibilities. Rest assured, Malaysia's unwavering commitment to advancing our shared interests through a people-oriented and people-centred ASEAN Community will be our utmost priority in forging a joint destiny we can all be proud of.

Thank you.