

INTERVENTION

37th ASEAN SUMMIT

**YAB TAN SRI DATO' HJ MUHYIDDIN BIN YASSIN
PRIME MINISTER OF MALAYSIA**

PUTRAJAYA, 12 NOVEMBER 2020 (THURSDAY)

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

Your Majesty, Excellencies,

1. At the outset, let me extend Malaysia's appreciation to Vietnam for steering a cohesive and responsive ASEAN, as the ASEAN Chair for 2020.
2. As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to plague the world, countries are in the midst of dealing with second and third waves of infections which threatens to undo all the progress we have made thus far to contain the virus. The resurgence of cases globally has forced many countries to resort to restrictive measures to once again protect our citizens while we endeavour to restart our economies.

Your Majesty, Excellencies,

3. Malaysia firmly believes that ASEAN continues to play a critical role in addressing challenges brought by the pandemic through the implementation of the many initiatives discussed through the various ASEAN-led mechanisms. What is required now is ensuring these initiatives serve as the platform for ASEAN to work collectively, with external partners and other interested parties in alleviating and countering the impacts of COVID-19 in the region.

4. This is especially true when it comes to the development and access to COVID-19 vaccine. ASEAN must work hand-in-hand with relevant international organizations such as the World Health Organization and countries to ensure the vaccine, once it has been approved, is affordable, accessible and equitably shared by all. We welcome our external partners that are also willing to share their discovery and expertise in this matter.
5. As a regional bloc comprising mainly of developing states, it is imperative for us to focus on the ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework. I am happy to see that my initial proposal earlier this year has become a reality which we will endorse today. ASEAN should strategize its approach in reviving the economy, trade and investment by embracing the new norm of conducting our economic engagement including through technology such as digital platforms.
6. To this end, the movement of goods and services including critical infrastructure such as our ports and airports, including logistical networks, remain accessible and tailored to suit the new norm in order to maintain and sustain economic growth in these challenging times.
7. In addition, enabling movement of people in the region will also help drive economic growth. In this regard, essential movement through Travel Corridors must be given priority, such as a coordinated set of procedures and requirements between Member States. It is crucial for ASEAN's economic recovery plan to encompass not only financial considerations, but also address the need to forge an integrated, robust and sturdy regional partnership to preserve the rich social fabric which underpins the ASEAN Community
8. If COVID-19 pandemic has taught us a lesson, it is that ASEAN must be self-reliant in the face of unprecedented crisis, be it for now, or future. As a region blessed with rich natural resources, it is the time for us to look into possible ways to strengthen food security in the region. With the global supply chain greatly

disrupted, ASEAN should seize this opportunity to fortify the agro-foundation we have.

Your Majesty, Excellencies,

9. On the issue of security and stability, the crisis in the Rakhine State requires in-depth and forthright discourse among the ASEAN Member States. We must address the root cause of this crisis as we have been witnessing its spill-over effects - the internally displaced people (IDPs) and irregular movement of people from the Rakhine State and their influx into neighbouring countries seeking refuge— with Malaysia being the major recipient country in Southeast Asia.
10. The issue of irregular movement of persons, including its connection with smuggling and human trafficking in our region, requires all relevant parties to identify and address the root causes and other contributory factors, whether at origin, during transit or destination as well as the involvement of relevant stakeholders based on the principle of shared responsibility as well as a balanced approach between law enforcement and humanitarian response to tackle the challenges.
11. We have consistently advocated for a durable solution to the dire plight of the Rohingya, who are increasingly vulnerable to exploitation. Malaysia reaffirms the need for proportionate burden and responsibility sharing, and calls for the signatory countries of the 1951 Convention to uphold and stand committed to their international legal obligations to receive more refugees for resettlement or relocation. Malaysia supports a repatriation process, which is voluntary, safe and dignified, of displaced persons from Rakhine State.

Your Majesty, Excellencies,

12. Malaysia stands firm with its stand that matters relating to the South China Sea must be resolved peacefully and constructively, in accordance with the universally recognized principles of international law, including UNCLOS 1982. Malaysia is of the view that all parties need to work together to ensure that the South China Sea remains a sea of peace, stability and trade. As a coastal state, it is a matter of great significance that our maritime area is safe for international trade to prosper. Malaysia reiterates its view that while international law guarantees the freedom of navigation, the presence of warships and vessels in the South China Sea has the potential to increase tension that may, in turn, result in miscalculations which may affect peace, security and stability in the region.
13. Malaysia also wishes to seize this opportunity to advocate for the Palestinian cause. Malaysia remains in strong solidarity with the people of Palestine and support concrete, honest efforts to find a just and lasting solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict based on international law and relevant United Nations resolutions through negotiations involving the parties concerned. The only viable solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict is through the two-State solution, based on the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as the Capital of Palestine.
14. Malaysia strongly condemns the actions by irresponsible individuals or groups who cloak themselves in the name of religion to justify their heinous acts of terrorism.
15. Although essential to democracy, freedom of speech is a tool that must be expressed with responsibility, and should not be utilised to justify harm, stoke hatred and propagate Islamophobia.

Your Majesty, Excellencies,

16. United we stand, divided we fall – ASEAN will remain a strategic player as a bloc in the ever-changing geopolitical landscape. This can only be achieved when we continue to communicate and work as a united bloc. The reality is that as small

nations, we must coalesce with those who share similar values that would be able to defend and promote ASEAN Centrality, the region's interest and with external parties.

17. Malaysia hopes that with the many deliberations which ASEAN has worked on, our collective efforts may pave the way to the realization of our aim to be the one ASEAN community that we all wanted - an entity that shares the one vision and aspiration in propelling our ASEAN Community to a greater height and strategic position which would contribute greatly to international peace, stability, security and prosperity.
18. Finally, as the Country Coordinator for ASEAN-Australia Dialogue Relations, I wish to address the proposal by Australia to meet with us at the Summit level annually. I have been informed that our Foreign Ministers' have given their endorsement of Australia's proposal for an annual ASEAN-Australia Leaders' summits beginning from 2021, which was announced at the ASEAN Post-Ministerial Meeting Plus One with Australia recently. Cognisant of this, I now propose we endorse the proposal and for me to raise it during the ASEAN-Australia Summit.

Thank you.