

**CHAIRMAN'S STATEMENT OF THE 27th ASEAN REGIONAL FORUM
HA NOI, 12 SEPTEMBER 2020**

1. The Twenty-Seventh Meeting of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) was held via video conference on 12 September 2020. The Meeting was chaired by H.E. Mr Pham Binh Minh, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam.
2. The Meeting was attended by the Foreign Ministers and Representatives of all ARF Participants. The Secretary-General of ASEAN was also in attendance. The list of delegates appears as **ANNEX 1**.
3. The Ministers recognised the severe challenges and disruptions caused by the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic to the well-being of the peoples of the region, and the pandemic's multi-faceted impacts on societies and economies, as well as on the stability, prosperity and security of the region and the world at large. They emphasised the importance of enhancing regional and international solidarity and cooperation towards a collective and effective response to the COVID-19 pandemic. In this regard, they acknowledged the progress made this year in the ARF given the context of the pandemic.

OVERVIEW OF THE ARF PROCESS

4. The Ministers were pleased to note the continued progress of the ARF and commended the progress in the implementation of the Hanoi Plan of Action to Implement the ARF Vision Statement (HPOA), to move the ARF towards, among others, becoming a more 'action-oriented' forum since its adoption in 2010. They further noted with satisfaction that ten years since its adoption, the majority of action lines encompassed in the HPOA have been successfully implemented. The Ministers noted the Matrix of the Status of Implementation of the HPOA which appears as **ANNEX 2** prepared by the ARF Unit and expressed their appreciation for the work of the ARF Unit in monitoring the implementation of the HPOA.
5. The Ministers were pleased to acknowledge that the ARF Senior Officials' Meeting (SOM) has finalised the Ha Noi Plan of Action II (2020-2025) as tasked by the 26th ARF. Reiterating the visions, principles, and objectives of the ARF as well as reaffirming ASEAN centrality and ASEAN's role as the driving force of the ARF, the HPOA II outlines the plan for cooperation through the ARF in the next five years. The Ministers noted that the HPOA II encompassed seven areas of cooperation: (i) disaster relief; (ii) counter-terrorism and transnational crime; (iii) maritime security; (iv) non-proliferation and disarmament; (v) security of and in the use of information and communications technologies (ICTs security); (vi) defence cooperation; and (vii) peacekeeping operations, and contains action lines to strengthen cooperation on confidence building measures and preventive diplomacy as well as institutional enhancement of the ARF. To this end, the Ministers adopted the HPOA II (2020-2025) and looked forward to its full and effective implementation by 2025. The HPOA II (2020-2025) appears as **ANNEX 3**.

6. The Ministers reiterated the importance of the ARF as a primary forum to foster constructive dialogue and cooperation on political and security issues of common interest and concern in the region, as well as to identify potential areas of cooperation among ARF Participants. In this respect, the Ministers expressed satisfaction on the progress of the ARF in achieving its objectives and encouraged ARF Participants to exert greater effort to advance the ARF process from confidence building measures towards preventive diplomacy, with the ultimate stage of elaboration of approaches to conflict resolution. The Ministers decided to strengthen efforts to address common regional challenges in a holistic manner, particularly in the areas of disaster relief, counter-terrorism and transnational crime, maritime security, non-proliferation and disarmament, peacekeeping operations, defence cooperation, and ICTs security. In this regard, the Ministers emphasised the importance of strengthening the implementation of the ARF Work Plan on Preventive Diplomacy and other ARF Work Plans in a consistent and comprehensive manner.
7. The Ministers reaffirmed the role of ASEAN as the main driving force of the ARF, including in ensuring the ARF continues its crucial role in the evolving regional security architecture. The Ministers further reaffirmed the importance of upholding the ARF's principles of decision-making by consensus, non-interference and moving at a pace comfortable to all ARF Participants.

HIGHLIGHTS OF DISCUSSIONS ON REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL ISSUES

8. The Ministers reaffirmed their commitment to work together to prevent and respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and other infectious disease outbreaks as well as to mitigate and subsequently eliminate the adverse and multi-faceted impacts in the spirit of solidarity, unity, cooperation and mutual assistance. In this regard, the Ministers reiterated the need to work to facilitate timely, universal and equitable access to safe, quality, effective and affordable vaccines to all countries, including the ARF Participants, including through the multilateral forums and initiatives. The Ministers emphasised the importance of strengthening cooperation in bilateral, regional and multilateral fora, including through the United Nations system, including the WHO and other international organisations as relevant. The Ministers welcomed the adoption of the World Health Assembly Resolution WHA73.1 on the COVID-19 as well as the recent formation of the Independent Panel for Pandemic Preparedness and Response. The Ministers reaffirmed the importance of keeping markets open, and preserving supply chain connectivity in order to maintain food security and prevent disruption of global and regional supply chains as well as sustainable economic activities in the context of major infectious diseases outbreaks.
9. The Ministers stressed the importance of sustained and peaceful dialogue amongst all concerned parties in order to realise complete denuclearisation and establishment of permanent peace on the Korean Peninsula. The Ministers recognised the efforts and achievements made by all the parties concerned for advancing the peace process on the Korean Peninsula over the last two years and urged all concerned parties to resume peaceful dialogue and continue working constructively towards the achievement of lasting peace and stability in the Korean Peninsula, including through the full and expeditious implementation of the Panmunjom Declaration and the Pyongyang Joint Declaration between the Republic of Korea (ROK) and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea

(DPRK), and the Joint Statement by the Leaders of the United States and the DPRK. They also urged the DPRK to fulfil its stated commitment to complete denuclearisation and its pledge to refrain from further nuclear and missile tests. The Ministers underscored the significance of maintaining peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula and noted the ROK's proposals to advance Inter-Korean relations. The Ministers reiterated their commitment to the full implementation of all relevant United Nations Security Council Resolutions and noted the international efforts to bring about the complete denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula, which will contribute to peace and stability of the region. The Ministers reiterated readiness to play a constructive role, including through utilising ASEAN-led platforms such as the ARF in promoting a conducive atmosphere to peaceful dialogue amongst the concerned parties. Some Ministers emphasised the importance of addressing issues of humanitarian concerns of the international community, including the early resolution of the abductions issue.

10. The Ministers reaffirmed the importance of maintaining and promoting peace, security, stability, safety, and freedom of navigation in and overflight above the South China Sea and recognised the benefits of having the South China Sea as a sea of peace, stability, and prosperity. The Ministers underscored the importance of the full and effective implementation of the 2002 Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC) in its entirety. The Ministers warmly welcomed the continuously improving cooperation between ASEAN and China, and were encouraged by the progress of the substantive negotiations towards the early conclusion of an effective and substantive Code of Conduct in the South China Sea (COC) consistent with international law, including the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), within a mutually-agreed timeline. The Ministers appreciated efforts undertaken to continue the second reading of the Single Draft COC Negotiating Text in spite of the evolving pandemic situation. The Ministers emphasised the need to maintain and promote an environment conducive to the COC negotiations, and thus welcomed practical measures that could reduce tensions and the risk of accidents, misunderstandings and miscalculation. The Ministers stressed the importance of undertaking confidence building and preventive measures to enhance, among others, trust and confidence amongst parties; and the Ministers reaffirmed the importance of upholding international law, including the 1982 UNCLOS.
11. The Ministers discussed the situation in the South China Sea, during which concerns were expressed by some Ministers on the land reclamations, activities, and serious incidents in the area, which have eroded trust and confidence, increased tensions, and may undermine peace, security, and stability in the region. The Ministers reaffirmed the need to enhance mutual trust and confidence, exercise self-restraint in the conduct of activities that would complicate or escalate disputes and affect peace and stability and avoid actions that may further complicate the situation. The Ministers further reaffirmed the need to pursue peaceful resolution of disputes in accordance with the universally recognised principles of international law, including the 1982 UNCLOS. The Ministers emphasised the importance of non-militarisation and self-restraint in the conduct of all activities by claimants and all other states, including those mentioned in the DOC that could further complicate the situation and escalate tensions in the South China Sea.
12. The Ministers recognised the important role and contribution of sub-regional cooperation framework, including in the Mekong area, to the peace and stability of the region. In this regard, they welcomed the recent ASEAN Forum on Sub-

Regional Development: Converging Mekong sub-regional cooperation with ASEAN goals, which promoted equitable and sustainable development across the ASEAN Community by aligning sub-regional growth with the comprehensive development of ASEAN. They emphasised the importance of ASEAN Centrality in promoting ASEAN's sub-regional development with the view to ensuring sustainable, equitable development, and narrowing the development gap within ASEAN.

13. The Ministers commended the region's continued commitment in addressing the complex challenges posed by terrorism, violent extremism conducive to terrorism (VECT), and transnational crime against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, including through cross-sectoral and cross-pillar cooperation in border management and combating terrorism, illegal weapons smuggling, trafficking in persons, and illicit drugs. The Ministers also condemned the acts of terrorism, including the recent attacks in Jolo, Sulu, Philippines. In this connection, the Ministers were encouraged by the efforts of all ARF Participants in supporting the implementation of the ARF Work Plan on Counter-Terrorism and Transnational Crime. The Ministers took note of the adoption of the Work Plan of the ASEAN Plan of Action to Prevent and Counter the Rise of Radicalisation and Violent Extremism (PoA PCRVE) 2019-2025 (to be referred to as Bali Work Plan) at the 13th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Transnational Crime (AMMTC) in November 2019. Meanwhile, the Ministers also took note of the ongoing work under the ambit of the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM) in facilitating strategic information exchanges on VECT, radicalisation, and terrorism, and in strengthening regional counter-terrorism preparedness and cooperation against Chemical, Biological and Radiological (CBR) threats by bringing together regional CBR defence experts, as well as the practical cooperation on the ADMM-Plus Experts' Working Group on Counter Terrorism. The Ministers encouraged engagement with local communities and, when appropriate, non-governmental actors in developing strategies to counter terrorist and VECT narrative, including by empowering youth, women, religious, cultural and education leaders, and other concerned groups of civil society and adopt tailored approaches to countering recruitment and promoting social inclusion.
14. The Ministers recognised the increasing importance of security of and in the use of ICTs to economic growth and growing regional and global challenges arising from the rapidly changing ICTs environment as well as the growing dependence on ICTs to mitigate the impacts of COVID-19. In this regard, the Ministers welcomed and encouraged initiatives carried out to further promote confidence building and trust, information sharing, capacity building and voluntary and non-binding norms of responsible State behaviour in the ARF through the ARF Inter-Sessional Meeting on Security of and in the Use of ICTs (ISM on ICTs Security) and, where appropriate, other relevant ASEAN-led mechanisms. The Ministers underlined the need to strengthen cross-sectoral cooperation in ensuring ICTs security, given its cross-sectoral nature. In this regard, the Ministers noted the initiative taken by the ASEAN Digital Ministers Meeting (ADGMIN) to facilitate the establishment of the ASEAN Cybersecurity Coordinating Committee (Cyber-CC), and looked forward to the finalisation and adoption of the Committee's Terms of Reference at its inaugural meeting. The Ministers also took note of the work of the ADMM-Plus Experts Working Group on Cyber Security which focused on forging a common understanding of the importance of cybersecurity and capacity building in crisis management capabilities in cyber threat situations. The Meeting was briefed on the Global Initiative on Data Security proposed by China. The Meeting noted that the ASEAN Smart Cities Network (ASCN), a collaborative

platform to facilitate the development of smart and sustainable urban development, has identified the safety and security of our networked infrastructure as one of its six focus areas. The Ministers endeavoured to promote ICTs security through cooperating in areas such as incident response, raising awareness on threats-related to the security of and in the use of ICTs, and sharing best practices which are relevant for maintaining ICTs security and can contribute to the maintenance of regional peace and stability.

15. The Ministers took note of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) Resolution A/RES/74/19 emphasising, in the Preamble, the universal and unified character of the 1982 UNCLOS, and reaffirming that the Convention sets out the legal framework within which all activities in the oceans and seas must be carried out and is of strategic importance as the basis for national, regional and global action and cooperation in the marine sector. The Ministers exchanged views on various challenges relating to maritime domain, including concern over the degradation of marine ecosystem and bio-diversity caused by the increasing marine pollution, especially plastic pollution. In this regard, they encouraged all ARF Participants to enhance dialogue and cooperation on maritime security-related issues through, inter alia, the ARF Inter-Sessional Meeting on Maritime Security (ISM on MS), including the implementation of its Work Plan. The Ministers reiterated the need to enhance coordination and synergy on maritime issues between the ARF and other ASEAN led-mechanisms such as the Expanded ASEAN Maritime Forum (EAMF), the ADMM-Plus and the East Asia Summit (EAS). The Ministers noted the practice of the Code of Unplanned Encounters at Sea at the 2019 ADMM-Plus Experts' Working Group on Maritime Security Field Training Exercise. The Ministers noted the ongoing deliberation among ASEAN navies in view of operationalising the Guidelines for Maritime Interaction and the efforts to strengthen cooperation in the area of sea piracy under the ambit of the AMMTC and other similar arrangements such as the Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery Against Ship in Asia (ReCAAP). The Ministers also reiterated the need to enhance cooperation in addressing illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing, environmental degradation, and marine debris in the region.
16. The Ministers noted the need to further strengthen cooperation on disaster management, taking into account the region's vulnerability to natural disasters, climate change and rising sea levels. The Ministers underlined the importance of enhancing capabilities and capacities of humanitarian assistance and disaster relief efforts in the region through the sharing of information and exchange of best practices under the ambit of the ARF Inter-Sessional Meeting on Disaster Relief (ISM on DR) and the ADMM-Plus Experts' Working Group on Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief. They also noted that under the ambit of the ADMM, work is ongoing to facilitate expeditious and coordination by the deployed ASEAN militaries, in times of disaster.
17. The Ministers reiterated the importance of strengthening international and regional cooperative efforts in nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament, as well as ensuring the elimination, and non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, as well as promoting the peaceful uses of nuclear technology. The Ministers were pleased to note that the ARF Inter-Sessional Meeting on Non-Proliferation and Disarmament (ISM on NPD) continues to provide a platform for dialogue and exchange of views on non-proliferation and disarmament issues. The Ministers noted with appreciation, and encouraged the continued implementation of the Practical Arrangements (PA) between ASEAN and the

International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) on Cooperation in the Areas of Nuclear Science and Technology and Applications, Nuclear Safety, Security and Safeguards, which was signed in September 2019.

18. The Ministers expressed their continued support for Myanmar's commitment to promote safety and security for all communities in Rakhine State as effectively as possible and facilitate the voluntary return of displaced persons in a safe, secure, and dignified manner. The Ministers looked forward and stood ready to support and facilitate the full implementation of the Arrangement on Return of Displaced Persons from Rakhine State between the Government of Myanmar and the Government of Bangladesh signed in 2017 and the renewed MoU between the Government of Myanmar, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) until June 2021. They looked forward the continued implementation of the remaining recommendations of the final report of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State. They noted that the Independent Commission of Enquiry (ICOE) submitted its Final Report to the Government of Myanmar in January 2020 and reiterated the need to find a comprehensive and durable solution to address the root causes of the conflict and to create a conducive environment so that the affected communities can rebuild their lives. The Ministers appreciated the efforts of the Secretary-General of ASEAN in leading the implementation of the recommendations of the Preliminary Needs Assessment (PNA). They welcomed the endorsement of the finalised projects at the 3rd High-Level Coordination Meeting, held on 27 July 2020 via video conference. The Ministers also welcomed the operationalisation of the Ad-Hoc Support Team of the ASEAN Secretariat to further facilitate the implementation of the recommendations of the PNA and looked forward to conducting the Comprehensive Needs Assessment (CNA). They appreciated the contribution from ASEAN Member States and some external partners, in supporting ASEAN activities, including the prioritised projects in Rakhine State to facilitate the repatriation process and to promote sustainable development.
19. The Ministers took note of the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP), including its principles of strengthening ASEAN centrality, openness, transparency, inclusivity, a rules-based framework, good governance, respect for sovereignty, equality, mutual respect, mutual trust, mutual benefit and respect for international law, such as UN Charter and the 1982 UNCLOS. They looked forward to discussion on the need for concrete cooperation in accordance with the principles contained in the Outlook, on the identified key areas, namely maritime cooperation, connectivity, 2030 UN Sustainable Development Goals, and economic and other possible areas of cooperation.

REVIEW OF ACTIVITIES OF THE CURRENT INTER-SESSIONAL YEAR (2019-2020)

20. The Ministers were encouraged by the determination of ARF Participants in ensuring the continuation of the operation of the ARF amidst the unprecedented challenges and severe disruption posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. In this respect, the Ministers expressed appreciation to Viet Nam as the ARF Chair for its effective leadership and implementation of provisional measures, including the implementation of an expedited approval process as stipulated in the Improving ARF Working Methods paper adopted in 2009. The Ministers were of the view

that such approach in the face of sudden and unforeseen challenges reflected the ARF's resilience and commitment to continued cooperation through the ARF. The Ministers commended the ARF Unit for the effective and continued assistance rendered to the ARF Chair and Co-Chairs of ARF ISMs throughout the year.

21. The Ministers commended the work of the ARF SOM held on 21 July 2020 and the ARF Inter-Sessional Support Group on Confidence Building Measures and Preventive Diplomacy (ARF ISG on CBMs and PD) co-chaired by Viet Nam and the United States on 2 July 2020. The Ministers were pleased to note that despite the unprecedented challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, both meetings were convened through video conference and participated in by the majority of ARF Participants. The Ministers were of the view that this high level of participation reflected the commitment of ARF Participants in moving ARF processes forward. The Ministers endorsed the recommendations of the ARF SOM and the ARF ISG on CBMs and PD.
22. The Ministers appreciated the valuable contributions made by ARF defence officials and emphasised the importance of greater interaction of the defence track in the ARF process. The Ministers noted the ongoing discussion on the proposals on enhancing information sharing, strengthening linkages, interaction and coordination of activities between the ARF and other ASEAN-led mechanisms such as the ADMM-Plus and looked forward to recommendations for future consideration. The Ministers noted the reports of the ARF Defence Officials' Dialogue (DOD) held on 1 July 2020 and the 17th ARF Security Policy Conference (ASPC) held on 8 July 2020, which appears as **ANNEXES 4 and 5**.
23. Noting that the COVID-19 pandemic has greatly affected the operations of the ARF, the Ministers commended the Co-Chairs of the ARF ISMs on Maritime Security, Non-Proliferation and Disarmament, Counter-Terrorism and Transnational Crime, Disaster Relief, ICTs Security and other ARF annually-held meetings for their hard work in implementing the provisional measures proposed by the ARF Chair to promote the continued progress of cooperation in the respective areas. In this connection, the Ministers noted the respective reports of the Co-Chairs of the ISMs which appear as **ANNEXES 6 to 10**.
24. The Ministers noted the successful conduct of the following ARF meetings and activities held in the Inter-Sessional Year 2019-2020:
 - i. 23rd ARF Heads of Defence Universities/Colleges/Institutions Meeting (HDUCIM), Singapore, 11-14 November 2019;
 - ii. 3rd ARF Workshop on Ferry Safety, Guangzhou, China, 12-13 November 2019;
 - iii. 2nd ARF Workshop on Implementing UNCLOS and other International Instruments to Address Emerging Maritime Issues, Ha Noi, Viet Nam, 13-14 November 2019;
 - iv. Workshop on Global Multi-Hazard Early Warning Capacity Development in Asian Region, Haikou, China, 18-19 November 2019;
 - v. ARF High-Level Symposium on Nuclear Security Capability Building, Beijing, China, 20-22 November 2019;
 - vi. ARF Enhancement Training on USAR Capacity Building and Comprehensive USAR Drill, Beijing and Shanghai, China, 6-14 January 2020;

- vii. The First Workshop of Awareness-Raising and Information Sharing on Emergency Responses to Security Incidents in the Use of ICTs, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 14 January 2020;
 - viii. 5th ARF Open-Ended Study Group on Confidence Building Measures to Reduce the Risk of Conflict Stemming from the Use of ICTs (OESG), Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 15-16 January 2020;
 - ix. 2nd ARF Workshop on Maritime Domain Awareness, Tokyo, Japan, 20 February 2020; and
 - x. ARF Workshop on Dispute Resolution and Law of the Sea, Dili, Timor Leste, 27-28 February 2020
25. The Ministers noted with understanding that due to the COVID-19 pandemic, 17 activities intended to be convened in the Inter-Sessional Year 2019-2020 were postponed and are to be carried forward to the Inter-Sessional Year 2020-2021. They also noted that Malaysia and the EU had withdrawn their proposal to host the ARF Workshop on Maritime Law Enforcement Promoting Comprehensive Approach to Address Maritime Crimes, which was scheduled for the Inter-Sessional Year 2019-2020. The list of 17 activities to be carried forward is as follows:
- i. 12th ARF Inter-Sessional Meeting on Maritime Security, Co-Chaired by Viet Nam, Australia and the EU;
 - ii. 12th ARF Inter-Sessional Meeting on Non-Proliferation and Disarmament, Co-Chaired by Indonesia, Japan and ROK;
 - iii. 17th ARF Inter-Sessional Meeting on Counter-Terrorism and Transnational Crime, Co-Chaired by Malaysia, the EU and New Zealand;
 - iv. 19th ARF Inter-Sessional Meeting on Disaster Relief, Co-Chaired by Lao PDR, Canada and China;
 - v. 3rd ARF Inter-Sessional Meeting on Security of and in the Use of ICTs, Co-Chaired by Malaysia, Singapore and Japan;
 - vi. 14th ARF Experts and Eminent Persons' Meeting, Co-Chaired by Myanmar and China;
 - vii. 8th ARF Peacekeeping Experts' Meeting, Co-Chaired by Indonesia and Japan;
 - viii. 6th ARF Open-Ended Study Group on Confidence Building Measures to Reduce the Risk of Conflict Stemming from the Use of ICTs, Co-Chaired by Malaysia, Singapore and Japan;
 - ix. 3rd ARF Workshop on Enhancing Regional Maritime Law Enforcement Cooperation, Co-Chaired by Viet Nam, Australia and the EU;
 - x. ARF International Ship and Port Facility Security Code Training Series and Manual, Co-Chaired by the Philippines, India, Papua New Guinea, and the United States;
 - xi. 3rd ARF Workshop on Urban Emergency Rescue, Co-Chaired by Lao PDR, Malaysia and China;
 - xii. ARF Table-Top Exercise on Response Capabilities to Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear (CBRN) Incidents, Co-Chaired by the Philippines, ROK and the United States;

- xiii. ARF Workshop series on Preventive Diplomacy and Conflict Mitigation, Co-Chaired by Indonesia, New Zealand and the United States;
- xiv. ARF Workshop on Preventing Terrorist Use of the Internet, Co-Chaired by Indonesia, Malaysia and New Zealand;
- xv. 2nd ARF Workshop on Aviation Security and Information Sharing, Co-Chaired by the Philippines, Australia and the United States;
- xvi. ARF Workshop on Women, Peace and Security, Co-Chaired by Indonesia, Thailand and Canada; and
- xvii. Protection of ICT-Enabled Critical Infrastructures, Co-Chaired by Singapore and the EU.

PROGRAMME OF WORK FOR THE NEXT INTER-SESSIONAL YEAR (2020-2021)

- 26. The Ministers were pleased to welcome the following Chair and Co-Chairs:
 - i. Brunei Darussalam as Chair of the 28th ARF, ARF SOM and 18th ASPC;
 - ii. Brunei Darussalam and Australia as Co-Chairs of the ARF ISG on CBMs and PD and ARF DOD for the Inter-Sessional Year 2020-2021; and
 - iii. Malaysia and Pakistan as Co-Chairs of the 24th ARF HDUCIM tentatively scheduled in either September or October 2021.
- 27. Taking into account the disruptive effects of the COVID-19 pandemic to the work of the ARF and in view of promoting the effective implementation of the respective ARF Work Plans in each area of cooperation, the Ministers welcomed the proposal for extension of Co-Chairmanship of the ARF ISMs, which represent Co-Chairs' strong commitment to the ARF. In this regard, the Ministers endorsed the recommendation for Viet Nam, Australia and the EU to continue its ARF ISM on MS co-chairmanship until 2021; Indonesia, Japan and ROK as Co-Chairs of the ARF ISM on NPD until 2021; and Malaysia, Singapore and Japan as Co-Chairs of the ISM on ICTs Security until 2021. The Ministers took note of the proposals to extend the Co-chairmanship of the ISM on CTTC and the ISM on DR as well as the interest expressed by some ARF Participants to take up co-chairmanship of the ISM on MS and the ISM on ICTs Security in the next cycle.
- 28. The Ministers reaffirmed that all proposed ARF activities, initiatives, work plans, concept papers and statements should first be discussed at the ISG/ISM level and endorsed at the ARF SOM before being submitted for consideration by ARF Ministers. In view of promoting continuity of cooperation in the ARF, the Ministers noted that in the event of unprecedented and unforeseen challenges to the region, an expedited approval process could be applied in line with the 2009 Improving ARF Working Methods paper. The Ministers also encouraged the Co-Chairs of activities to manage the schedule of their respective activities prior to the ARF SOM and preferably the ARF ISG.
- 29. The Ministers further reiterated that all proposals and statements should abide by the principle of co-chairmanship/co-sponsorship by at least one ASEAN Member State and at least one non-ASEAN ARF Participant. Once approved, the List of ARF Track 1 Activities is not expected to be modified, including revisions to the concept paper of the activity, without the consent of all ARF Participants. All ARF Participants and the ARF Unit should be notified of any inclusion of additional co-

chairs to the activities. In this regard, the Ministers approved the List of ARF Track 1 Activities for the Inter-Sessional Year 2020-2021 which appears as **ANNEX 11**.

30. In an effort to further contribute to the strengthening of cooperation to address the continuously evolving regional security challenges, the Ministers adopted the following:
 - i. ARF Statement on Enhancing Cooperation to Prevent and Respond to Infectious Disease Outbreaks;
 - ii. ARF Statement on the Treatment of Children Recruited by or Associated with Terrorist Groups; and
 - iii. ARF Statement on Cooperation in the Field of Security of and in the Use of ICTs in the Context of International Security.

The Statements appear as **ANNEX 12 - 14**, respectively.

FUTURE DIRECTION OF THE ARF PROCESS

31. The Ministers highlighted the key role of the HPOA II in paving the way forward for the ARF to become a more 'action-oriented' forum at a pace comfortable to all. In view of strengthening the work of the ARF and taking into consideration the period of implementation, the Ministers encouraged stronger commitment of ARF Participants to implement the action lines of the HPOA II. They noted that the implementation of the HPOA II should be reported annually to the Ministers through the ARF SOM for evaluation and review. To this end, the Ministers tasked the ARF Unit of the ASEAN Secretariat to assist the ARF Chair in recording the implementation of the HPOA II and developing progress report based on inputs received from all ARF Participants. Taking into account the increasing activities and work of the ARF, the Ministers called for greater support for the work of the ARF Unit and reiterated the need to strengthen the ARF Unit with necessary resources and manpower.
32. With a view to improving the ARF's effectiveness and efficiency as well as to standardising ARF processes and procedures, the Ministers noted the Guide to ARF Processes, Procedures, Practices and Protocol, which had been approved by the 53rd ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting (AMM). The Guide, developed from prevailing practices in the ARF and based on previously adopted documents, appears as **ANNEX 15**.
33. Recognising the cross-cutting and transboundary nature of regional security challenges, and emerging threats, the Ministers highlighted the importance of promoting complementarities, and coherence and avoiding unnecessary duplication of efforts. In this respect, the Ministers acknowledged the importance of promoting cross-sectoral and cross-pillar coordination and encouraged ARF Participants to further strengthen and enhance sharing of information with other ASEAN-led mechanisms including the ADMM-Plus and the EAS.
34. Noting that the 14th ARF Experts and Eminent Persons (EEPs) Meeting scheduled in 2020 was postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ministers looked forward to the convening of the 14th ARF EEPs Meeting in the next Inter-Sessional Year (2020-2021), and encouraged the ARF EEPs to continue

providing recommendations, as deemed appropriate by their respective governments.

35. The Ministers welcomed the publication of the 2020 ARF Annual Security Outlook (ASO) presented by Viet Nam, and underlined the importance of the ARF ASO as an integral document to further promote transparency and confidence among ARF Participants.
