

ASEAN-China Economic Ministers' Joint Statement on Combating the Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) and Enhancing ACFTA Cooperation

29 May 2020

1. The ASEAN Economic Ministers (AEM) and the Minister of Commerce of the People's Republic of China recognize the tireless efforts and significant contributions made by organizations and individuals in response to the Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) pandemic and reaffirm their commitment to work closely in the fight against this pandemic and its adverse impact on the trade and economy of their respective countries and the world at large. They call for joint efforts in mitigating the impact of the pandemic on global and regional trade and investment, restoring economic and trade confidence, as well as pursuing and securing sustainable and long-term growth of international trade and investment.

2. The Ministers are deeply saddened by the loss of many lives and the suffering caused by the pandemic. COVID-19 pandemic is a global issue that requires a coordinated global response; thus, as a regional response, ASEAN and China are partnering to enhance coordination in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

3. The Ministers reaffirm their commitments under the Joint Statement of the Special ASEAN Plus Three Summit on Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) adopted on 14 April 2020 via videoconference.

4. The unprecedented challenges posed by COVID-19 have affected the region and the world. China appreciates the sympathy, support and assistance rendered by the ASEAN Member States, including their private sectors, during the COVID-19 outbreak in China. The generosity and strong support of its ASEAN partners, both in cash and in kind, have supported China in its fight against the pandemic. ASEAN conveys its appreciation to China for the timely assistance not only to ASEAN Member Countries affected by the COVID-19 pandemic but also to the ASEAN Secretariat, comprising dispatches of urgently-needed medical teams and medical supplies.

5. ASEAN and China commit to share anti-pandemic information and experiences in a prompt and efficient manner, as well as deepen cooperation on prevention and control of COVID-19. China further reaffirms its commitment to continue working closely with ASEAN to overcome the challenges brought about by the COVID-19 outbreak.

6. The Ministers commit to further strengthen collaboration at all levels across the region and countries on the prevention and control of COVID-19,

including through regular, timely and transparent exchange of information and sharing of knowledge, experience and best practices, as well as on facilitating production and access to medicines and vaccines used for the treatment of COVID-19. They express their commitment to ensure that technical information exchange and knowledge-sharing is transparent and efficient. This will ensure that the knowledge and experience of each country translate into best practices for the region, support to mitigate the negative impacts on healthcare, manufacturing, trade, investment and tourism, and to demonstrate the spirit enshrined in the ASEAN-China Strategic Partnership for Peace and Prosperity.

7. The Ministers commit to contribute to the regional and global healthcare security by enhancing cooperation on research and development, and the production of and access to medicines, vaccines, and essential medical supplies to demonstrate the spirit of ASEAN-China partnership. They call for united efforts between ASEAN and China for mitigating the adverse impact of COVID-19 on the economy.

8. The Ministers reiterate their firm support to every country in the region, particularly the least-developed countries, and commit to provide aid in the form of professionals, technologies and supplies, as appropriate, to help fight the pandemic and protect the lives and health of the local people, especially the vulnerable ones. The Ministers will emphasize more development

considerations in the trade and investment recovery measures to ensure that inclusive policy instruments are in place to fast-track economic recovery and benefit all people in the region.

9. The Ministers reaffirm the importance of the ASEAN–China Free Trade Agreement (ACFTA) in boosting trade and investment and in ensuring stable and inclusive growth of the region. Since its establishment, the ACFTA has contributed in improving two-way trade and investment that brought about rapid growth. According to data available at the ASEAN Secretariat, bilateral trade grew from US\$ 235.5 billion in 2010 to US\$ 497.0 billion in 2019 - a substantial increase of 111.0%. Based on China’s statistics, its bilateral trade with ASEAN increased by 119.1%, that is, from US\$ 292.8 billion in 2010 to US\$ 641.5 billion in 2019. Even under the current economic challenges, trade between ASEAN and China remains positive and presents significant opportunity in the economic recovery of the region. This achievement and trend demonstrates the strength of ASEAN-China trade relations, which could be critical in maintaining confidence in the regional economy.

10. The Ministers recognize that the smooth implementation of the ACFTA is vital in facilitating and promoting the free flow of goods and services, enhancing two-way investment, as well as maintaining the integrity of supply chains. They express their determination to continue exerting efforts to better

implement the ACFTA which includes full implementation of the ACFTA Upgrading Protocol recognizing its potential contribution to a post-pandemic economic recovery. To this end, the Ministers recognize the need to explore the possibility of improving market access, i.e. addressing non-tariff barriers to trade, and by deepening and broadening economic cooperation in other areas under the ACFTA, such as non-tariff measures and electronic commerce thereby deepening regional economic integration.

11. The Ministers commit to keeping the markets open and further facilitating trade and investment in order to maintain the regional and global supply chains. Priority will be given to facilitating customs clearance to ensure continued and smooth cross-border flow of food, agricultural products, commodities, medicines and medical supplies, and other essential goods and services.

12. The Ministers agree to continue addressing tariff and non-tariff barriers, including those that impede the smooth flow of goods and services in supply chains. They further agree to refrain from imposing unnecessary trade measures with the view to minimizing the adverse impact on regional supply chains and thereby contributing towards an early economic recovery of the region. They acknowledge that any emergency trade measures deemed necessary to tackle COVID-19 shall be targeted, proportionate, transparent and temporary, and shall

not create unnecessary barriers to trade and shall take into account the standards and recommendations of the World Customs Organization (WCO) and be consistent with the rights and obligations of each Party under the World Trade Organization (WTO) covered agreements. The Ministers encourage prompt notification to the WTO of trade-related measures implemented in response to COVID-19 in line with existing WTO rules and the World Health Organization's International Health Regulations (IHR) 2005.

13. The Ministers acknowledge the growing need for remote interactions to address the movement restrictions amid the pandemic. They commit to take measures to boost market confidence and improve stability of the regional economy as well as engage and assist stakeholders especially the private sectors, business start-ups and the micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) to continue business operation by leveraging on technology and digital trade, while adhering to responsible business practices.

14. The Ministers remain committed to a free, open, transparent and non-discriminatory, predictable and stable trade and investment environment, and supportive of a rules-based Multilateral Trading System centered on the WTO. They will continue to work closely at both multilateral and regional economic and trade platforms, to create synergies among those frameworks, and to leverage opportunities for a post-crisis revitalization. They encourage the

development of post-pandemic recovery plan to share experience, lessons learned and best practices in stimulating economic development towards achieving tangible outcomes and contribute to the prosperity and stability of global economy.
