

Statement by  
His Excellency General Prayut Chan-o-cha  
Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Thailand  
at the Special ASEAN Summit on COVID-2019  
via Video Conference  
Tuesday, 14 April 2020, 08.00 – 10.00 hours

Mr. Chairman, Your Majesty, Excellencies,

At the outset, I would like to thank His Excellency Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc for convening today's video conference to discuss the COVID-19 outbreak. I also wish to commend Viet Nam as the current ASEAN Chair for its leading role in strengthening ASEAN's solidarity in our collective response to COVID-19 in a timely and effective manner. Additionally, I wish to welcome the His Excellency Tan Sri Dato' Haji Muhyiddin bin Haji Mohd. Yassin, Prime Minister of Malaysia to our ASEAN family.

The COVID-19 situation has been intensifying globally, with **nearly 2 million infected persons and more than 100,000 deaths**. This crisis before all of us has not only resulted in loss of life and the undermining of the health of our people, but has also had far reaching socio-economic impacts. Leading private research and consultancy institutions such as McKinsey estimate that **global GDP growth in 2020 may contract by 1.5% and, if the situation persists, by up to 4.7%**. Meanwhile, the UNDP has concluded that **developing countries** will be the most affected, and may face possible income losses of **over USD 200 billion**. We are therefore at a critical moment, where we must work together to **control the spread of the virus and flatten the curve** to a manageable level in line with the capacities of our public health systems so as to prevent ASEAN from becoming another epicentre of COVID-19. We also need to work together to find comprehensive solutions to mitigate COVID-19's impact on our economies and societies.

As for the situation in Thailand, **there are 2,579 confirmed cases, with 40 deaths and 1,288 patients discharged from hospitals.** The majority of patients have a record of overseas travel or participating in large public gatherings.

Given the situation, I therefore declared a nationwide **state of emergency** effective from 26 March to 30 April 2020, and set-up the **Centre for COVID-19 Situation Administration** under my direct supervision. The measures undertaken by Thailand are in line with the WHO International Health Regulations 2005 and focus on comprehensively addressing the outbreak through upstream, midstream and downstream measures.

On upstream measures, we focused on travel controls and the screening of those entering the country at airports and border checkpoints on land and by sea as well as natural border entry points as part of our preventive and precautionary efforts.

On midstream measures, the government launched a **“Stay Home, Stop the Virus, For the Country”** campaign, promoted social distancing, prepared state and local quarantine facilities for 14-day monitoring, used mobile applications to track and monitor quarantined individuals, closed high risk contagion areas, disseminated accurate information in a transparent manner and countered fake news as well as promoted community engagement through the work of more than one million village-level public health volunteers who have provided advice and assistance directly to many households. We have also suspended the celebration of Thai New Year or Songkran Festival and religious gatherings.

As for downstream measures, the key here is to treat patients and alleviate the economic impacts of COVID-19. Last week, the Government approved an economic stimulus package of over 1.9 trillion Baht (approximately USD 60 billion) or 10% of our national GDP to help people and businesses affected by COVID-19. This includes the provision of income compensation for those who have had to stop working at this time, a reduction in utility fees as well as tax and financial measures to increase liquidity for businesses, especially MSMEs. Furthermore, the

Government has supported proactive research into the development and procurement of medical equipment, a COVID-19 vaccine and supporting systems based on information technology.

### **Your Majesty, Excellencies**

The COVID-19 crisis has clearly demonstrated that no country can win the fight alone. Therefore, ASEAN needs to synergise and enhance more cohesive cooperation amongst ourselves and with our external partners in various areas. In this regard, I wish to propose the following:

**First**, ASEAN needs to **mobilise the energies and efforts of all sectors to jointly address this challenge in a holistic manner**. This includes the exchange of real-time information and best practices in preventive measures, contact tracing, medical treatment, mitigation of socio-economic impacts, and assisting ASEAN nationals in ASEAN Member States and third countries.

Moreover, doctors, nurses and public health personnel are our frontline warriors in the fight against COVID-19 and need urgent protection. I therefore propose that ASEAN and the ASEAN Plus Three Countries jointly **establish a COVID-19 ASEAN**

**Response Fund** by reprioritising **10%** of existing funds from the ASEAN

Development Fund and Cooperation Funds with China, Japan, the ROK and ASEAN Plus Three (which would total approximately USD 13.3 million) or another agreed upon rate. The Fund shall be used to procure test kits, personal protective equipment and medical tools as well as support research and development in medicines and vaccines to help ASEAN become more self-reliant.

To showcase ASEAN's concrete cooperation in the fight against COVID-19 and as a symbol of ASEAN's increased self-reliance from our respective research and development and our future collective cooperation in this regard, Thailand is pleased to offer 10,000 RT-PCR test kits to each ASEAN Member State. These test kits are locally produced in Thailand through the cooperation between the

Government, the private sector and universities, and meet international standards.

**Second**, ASEAN should build understanding and empathy **in our cooperation to facilitate the transport of goods and logistics**, customs clearance, and border trade. This will ensure that our consumers will have access to a sufficient supply of medical tools and equipment, medicines and essential goods in a timely manner during this crisis. It will also help to reduce barriers to trade.

**Third**, the COVID-19 crisis will change the world, our way of life and our ways of working and doing business. It has also highlighted the role of technology in providing innovative solutions to tackle challenges. This needs to be further promoted and we should support the wider use of digital economy, innovative technology and e-commerce in the region, especially in helping MSMEs, which account for a significant portion of all employment, to take advantage of online platforms. Presently, the Thai Government provides guidance and knowledge to entrepreneurs on production and trade via online platforms. We are conducting trade negotiations between Thai businesses and foreign importers via teleconferencing, and organising virtual trade fairs as well as promoting electronic payments. Therefore, I wish to propose ASEAN Member States to expedite our **Digital Payment Connectivity and the use of Interoperable QR Code** to further facilitate our regional trade and commerce.

**Fourth**, ASEAN should draw upon **the lessons and experiences from this fight against COVID-19** to help build self-immunity to economic impacts from future public health emergencies or environmental challenges. In this regard, the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy is an alternative approach which has guided Thailand, and demonstrated that it can promote sustainable socio-economic development and enhance internal strengths with an emphasis on self-reliance. ASEAN may wish to consider this approach in preparing for future challenges that may threaten our countries and citizens.

**Fifth**, we should **strengthen the role of the ASEAN Secretary-General**, in his

capacity as ASEAN's coordinator for humanitarian assistance, to also cover cooperation in the case of emergency situations such as epidemics. This will ensure that ASEAN's collective response to future emergencies will be systematic, decisive, timely and comprehensive. Moreover, we should consider how the existing ASEAN Centres, such as the **ASEAN Center of Military Medicine and the AHA Centre**, as well as other sectors including the private sector and civil society, can work together to bolster **ASEAN's public-private-people partnership** in addressing future crises.

I wish to stress that the COVID-19 crisis should not lead to the **retreat of globalisation or regional economic integration**. ASEAN should instead use this opportunity to strengthen regionalism and multilateralism by enhancing multi-stakeholder cooperation within ASEAN and with external partners to address global challenges with unity under the banner of **"Team ASEAN"**. Today, we shall survive. Tomorrow, we shall be even stronger.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the ASEAN Secretary-General for helping to arrange discussions between Thailand and the relevant ASEAN Member States to collectively address forest fires and transboundary haze. I hope that ASEAN will continue to prioritise enhancing cooperation to resolve these challenges that directly affect the well-being of our peoples.

I thank you.