



ASEM13 - PHNOM PENH, 2020

**ASIA-EUROPE MEETING (ASEM) STATEMENT ON CORONAVIRUS DISEASE (COVID-19) BY THE FOREIGN MINISTERS OF CAMBODIA AS HOST NATION OF THE 13<sup>th</sup> ASEM SUMMIT, THE EU AND GERMANY AS REGIONAL COORDINATORS OF THE EUROPEAN GROUP, SINGAPORE AS THE REGIONAL COORDINATOR OF THE ASEAN GROUP, AND RUSSIA AS THE REGIONAL COORDINATOR OF THE NORTHEAST AND SOUTH ASIA GROUP<sup>1</sup>**

1 We, the Foreign Ministers of the Host of the 13<sup>th</sup> Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) Summit and the ASEM Regional Coordinators, in consultation with ASEM partners<sup>2</sup>, express deep concern over the COVID-19 pandemic, which is an unparalleled global health crisis that has caused grave disruptions to the global economy, trade and travel, led to unprecedented job losses as well as impacted heavily on the lives of people and economies of ASEM partners.

2 We are saddened by the loss of life and suffering caused by the pandemic and express our heartfelt gratitude to and support for medical professionals, healthcare workers, and other frontline personnel, including volunteers, fighting the pandemic.

3 The transboundary nature of the pandemic has underscored the interconnectedness of Asia and Europe. The virus does not distinguish between continents, borders, nationalities or ethnicities. We welcome the UN Security Council's Resolution 2532 and emphasise that the UN Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire should be respected. We must not allow stigmatization and discrimination, or for the pandemic to worsen existing inequality. Those in vulnerable situations must be protected, including tackling violence against women and children. We underline the primary responsibility of governments to adopt and implement responses to the COVID-19 pandemic that are specific to

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<sup>1</sup> Due to the extraordinary crisis created by COVID-19 which required a timely response by ASEM, ASEM Partners agreed to adopt the Statement using such format as an exception.

<sup>2</sup> The 53 ASEM partners are: Australia, Austria, Bangladesh, Belgium, Brunei Darussalam, Bulgaria, Cambodia, China, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Kazakhstan, Republic of Korea, Lao PDR, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Malta, Mongolia, Myanmar, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Pakistan, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russian Federation, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Thailand, United Kingdom, Viet Nam, the ASEAN Secretariat and the European Union.

their national context. We call upon ASEM partners in this regard to implement national action plans by putting in place, according to their specific contexts, comprehensive, proportionate, time-bound, age-, gender- and disability-sensitive measures across governmental sectors against COVID-19, and strengthen actions to involve women's participation in all stages of decision-making processes. No one should be left behind in the response to the pandemic.

4 We note with appreciation the UN Secretary-General's report "COVID-19 and Human Rights". Measures adopted by governments in response to the pandemic should protect and not undermine human rights while focusing on saving lives and assuring the safety, well-being and livelihood of citizens. They should be necessary, proportionate, and non-discriminatory, in compliance with international human rights obligations and national laws and kept in place only for as long as they are strictly required. They should not be used as a pretext to limit democratic, civic space, human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as the respect of the rule of law. We condemn the act of spreading fake news and harmful, manipulated misinformation which mislead the public, and present danger to public health and a threat to the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health.

5 Rather than turning inward, we recognise that combating the COVID-19 pandemic will require concerted international cooperation, effective actions by multilateral organizations, and support for multilateralism by ASEM partners, based on UN principles and values.

6 In the midst of widespread travel disruptions caused by the pandemic, we appreciate the good cooperation amongst ASEM partners in facilitating the swift and safe repatriation of stranded citizens and their access to essential services to those remaining in ASEM countries.

### ***International Cooperation and Support***

7 We reaffirm our commitment to working together and sharing experiences, best practices and information in a free, responsible, transparent and timely manner in order to decisively and effectively control the spread of the pandemic. This should be done while minimising its adverse impacts on our societies and economies, meeting the specific need of persons in vulnerable populations, safeguarding the well-being, privacy and security of all people, and maintaining socio-economic stability. Recognizing that the restriction of information leads to devastating consequences for people, we confirm that access to transparent, timely, reliable and fact-based information is crucial for an effective global response to the pandemic and underscore the importance of sharing information about potential global health risks, including the sharing of

public health information through the International Health Regulations (IHR) Network, and health strategies related to COVID-19.

8 We understand that the COVID-19 pandemic is causing unprecedented economic challenges that disproportionately affect developing countries. We urge partnership among developed and developing countries, along with global financial institutions, to build resilience through domestic and international economic support measures as captured in SDG 17 in order to successfully achieve sustainable development goals.

9 We support the United Nations' call for shared responsibility, global solidarity and strengthened multilateral cooperation in response to the multidimensional impacts of COVID-19, especially the importance of the World Health Organization (WHO) in coordinating the health response to the pandemic. We welcome the adoption of the 73rd World Health Assembly Resolution on COVID-19 in its entirety including the Assembly's call for actions by WHO Members States, International Organizations and relevant stakeholders and the WHO Director-General.<sup>3</sup>

10 We commit ourselves to continue to work closely with all relevant international and regional organizations and financial institutions to collaborate further towards enhancing our pandemic preparedness, resilience and response.

11 Tackling the pandemic requires international cooperation to accelerate the development and delivery of quality, accessible and affordable vaccines, diagnostics and treatments. In this regard, we fully support the implementation of existing multilateral mechanisms set up to accelerate the development, equitable and universal access of diagnostics, vaccines and treatments, including the Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT) Accelerator, while strengthening health systems. We recognise the role of extensive immunizations against COVID-19 as a global public good for health.

12 We are determined to share actively and leverage digital technologies and innovation in an ethical way to promote a science-based response to combat COVID-19 and address its socio-economic impacts. We commit to facilitate open scientific research, innovation and technical cooperation among ASEM partners and to encourage their engagement in this field with the private sector and other relevant stakeholders including civil society in terms of research, development, manufacturing and the equitable distribution of quality-assured diagnostics, anti-viral medicines, vaccines, and other medical supplies, based on the principles of quality, efficacy, safety, equity, accessibility, and affordability.

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<sup>3</sup> [https://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf\\_files/WHA73/A73\\_R1-en.pdf](https://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/WHA73/A73_R1-en.pdf)

13 We welcome ASEM partners' pledging commitments towards the €15.9 billion outcome for the Coronavirus Global Response and towards the USD 8.8 billion outcome for the Global Vaccines Summit.

14 In order to further expand cooperation on prevention and response to infectious diseases, including COVID-19, we support efforts of laboratory capacity building of countries in need through joint research and training.

15 We underline the importance of having sufficient resources and encourage cooperation among ASEM partners to facilitate our collective action against COVID-19, including ensuring the uninterrupted provision of healthcare through our health systems.

16 Recalling the High-Level Meeting on Universal Health Coverage, held in New York on 23 September 2019, and reaffirming its political declaration, entitled "Universal health coverage: moving together to build a healthier world" we encourage countries to maintain essential public health services and strengthen public health systems while concurrently addressing the COVID-19 pandemic. This includes ongoing support to critical immunisation programs for vaccine-preventable diseases such as polio, diphtheria and measles.

17 In addition to the challenges to public health systems and the global economy, we are concerned by the damage caused by the spreading of misinformation as well as false or manipulated information and narratives about the pandemic, particularly in the digital sphere, that undermine the public health response. We will seek to ensure that people are rightly and thoroughly informed and confirm our resolve to counter misinformation and disinformation.

18 We welcome extensive efforts by ASEM partners at the regional level in collaborating with external partners and the international community in the fight against COVID-19, including in driving global resourcing for the development of new vaccines, treatments and tests at the speed and scale required, which demonstrates commitment to respond collectively to the pandemic. We also encourage ongoing efforts by ASEM to strengthen pandemic preparedness. We reaffirm the centrality of ASEAN and the ASEAN-led architecture in coordinating the regional response to COVID-19, noting ASEAN's critical role in underpinning stability, security and prosperity in the region and beyond.

### ***Maintaining Resilient, Open and Connected Supply Chains***

19 Even as ASEM partners implement extraordinary measures to prevent, detect, control and respond to the spread of COVID-19, we remain committed to working towards an open, free, fair and non-discriminatory environment that

provides a level playing-field, transparency, and mutual benefit for trade and investment. More resilient and diversified supply chains are needed to guard against future shocks. We will continue to ensure the uninterrupted flow of essential goods and services across borders, as well as their appropriate global distribution. We will work closely to resolve any disruptions of support needed for the health and well-being of all people. We encourage maintaining necessary interconnectedness in the region by facilitating the essential movement of people and goods for humanitarian, scientific and essential business activities to the extent that each country's disease control efforts will not be undermined.

20 We will also continue working together to maintain and facilitate international trade, including through the WTO, and coordinate responses in ways that ensure international traffic and critical transportation infrastructure, such as air and seaports, remain operational, and the flow of cargo and goods continue, while observing public health and safety considerations. Emergency measures designed to tackle COVID-19, including travel restrictions, if deemed necessary, must be targeted, proportionate, transparent, and temporary. They should not create unnecessary barriers to trade or disruption to global supply chains and should be consistent with WTO rules. Travel restrictions should also be notified to the WHO in accordance with the International Health Regulations (2005).

21 We recognise the important role played by micro-, small-, and medium-size enterprises, or MSMEs, in the economic activity of our countries. We encourage the implementation of appropriate measures to boost confidence and improve economic stability, including through policy stimulus, assist people and businesses suffering from the impact of COVID-19, especially MSMEs, the poor and the most vulnerable people.

22 We also recognise the importance of regional economic integration based on open markets, rules and cooperation, with restrictions rolled back following the crisis, to support regional economic recovery.

### ***Working Together in the Post-Pandemic Phase***

23 As we look forward to the post-pandemic phase, we commit to continue working together to accelerate post-COVID-19 sustainable socio-economic recovery, stimulate economic development and financial resilience, and minimise the potential of global economic recession by restoring growth, investments, sustainable connectivity, business travel and tourism, and maintaining market stability. We, therefore, welcome the initiative of Cambodia as the ASEM13 Host to have a standalone Statement on COVID-19 and the Post-Pandemic Socio-Economic Recovery as one of the outcome documents of the ASEM13. For some countries, international support, including debt relief, may significantly increase

the chances of success in combating COVID-19. In this regard, we welcome ASEM partners' support in all forms to other countries in need of assistance.

24 We commit to continue striving together for a sustainable inclusive post-COVID-19 recovery. We will work together to step up global actions for the pandemic socioeconomic recovery based on the Paris Agreement and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development objectives. We will cooperate closely together ahead of United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change's COP26.

25 We also commit to sharing information and best practices, including on travel and trade measures with the appropriate safeguards, taking into account public health, safety, human rights, labour rights, corporate social responsibility, social protection and other socio-economic considerations. The opportunity must be seized to build more inclusive, fair and resilient societies where economic recovery goes hand in hand with social justice and decent work.

26 As we gradually ease restrictions, we encourage all ASEM partners to collaborate in strengthening disease outbreak and pandemic early warning systems. We will also seek to improve and expand information and communication with each other for the implementation of concerted outbreak and pandemic preparedness and response measures.

27 We reaffirm our commitment to maintain the momentum of ASEM to strengthen multilateralism for socio-economic resilience. The virus will not weaken our resolve to stand together in solidarity and our mutual support during this difficult time. Through our concerted efforts and close cooperation, ASEM partners will emerge from this unprecedented global challenge stronger and more resilient.

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