

**CDF’S REMARKS AT THE 13<sup>th</sup> ASEAN CHIEFS OF DEFENCE FORCES**

**INFORMAL MEETING ON 14 MAR IN VIENTIANE, LAO PDR**

***“PROMOTING DEFENCE COOPERATION FOR A  
DYNAMIC ASEAN COMMUNITY”***

MG Souvonne Luangbounmy (*pronounced Soo-Von Liang-Boon-Mee*),

Chief of the General Staff Department of Lao People’s Army,

Distinguished fellow Chiefs of Defence Forces,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning.

1. [Slide 1] It gives me great pleasure to be here at the 13<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Chiefs of Defence Forces Informal Meeting (ACDFIM). Before I begin, let me first thank General Souvonne and the Lao People’s Army for hosting the conference and the excellent hospitality accorded to me and my delegation. I would also like to take the opportunity to convey my best regards to my fellow ASEAN Chiefs of Defence Forces.

2. In my presentation today, I will outline two key developments that might impact our peace and security, and highlight how we can foster greater cooperation to strengthen our ASEAN community.

## KEY DEVELOPMENTS IN EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT

3. [Slide 2] Last year, the formation of the ASEAN Community was announced at the ASEAN Summit. This is a significant development. Our combined GDP stands at US\$2.5 trillion and is expected to grow further. This closer integration would undoubtedly bring about much benefit to our countries. But, we can only realise these potential benefits provided there is continued peace and stability in the region.

4. However, two key trends may impact our regional peace and security.

a. [Slide 3] **First**, violent extremism and jihadi terrorism remains a clear and present threat. Today, terrorism threatens our region. The Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (or ISIS) has inspired terror attacks across the world – in Europe, the Middle East as well as our region in Jakarta. Over 27 radical groups in the region have pledged their support to ISIS. ISIS has also inducted more recruits from the region in the last three years than Al-Qaeda did in a decade. It is critical for all of us to actively contribute to make our region safe. To this end, Singapore will continue to contribute our Imagery Analysis Team and KC-135 tanker aircraft to the US-led coalition against ISIS this year.

b. [Slide 4] **Second**, we may witness the resurgence of great power competition. The United States is the world's leading military power and will remain so in the near future. Its presence in the region has contributed to the security and stability for ASEAN to develop over the last decades. However, the American century is increasingly replaced by a century that would be characterised by Asia's rise. Indeed, China's economic size has given it a major role in international affairs. Today, China is amongst the top trading partners for most ASEAN countries.

[Slide 5] The US-China relationship will have a significant impact on the growth of our region. Today, more than half of the world's trade, including ASEAN-US and ASEAN-China trade, passes through the South China Sea. And almost a third of global crude oil also passes through the same waterways. This underscores the importance of stability within the South China Sea. It will benefit the region and beyond for these two great powers to manage their differences peacefully in accordance with international law, and strengthen cooperation on issues of common interest.

## **FOSTERING GREATER COOPERATION**

5. [Slide 6] Our external environment is changing and becoming more complex. Many of the security challenges will not have easy solutions. As such,

this year's theme of *Promoting Defence Cooperation for a Dynamic ASEAN Community* is apt and timely. Only through working together can we better navigate these uncertainties. We must remain united, and cooperate with one another to preserve our regional peace and stability.

6. When ASEAN was first established in 1967, it was not a given that the organisation would survive. The failure of two previous attempts at creating a Southeast Asian organisation suggested that ASEAN's prospects were poor. Furthermore, we are a culturally diverse group of nations. Against the odds, we have become a successful regional organisation.

7. Indeed, ASEAN mechanisms have become central for us to advance our common interests through practical cooperation. On the defence front, we have institutionalised platforms such as the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting (or ADMM), the ADMM-Plus and our ASEAN Chiefs of Defence of Forces Informal Meeting.

8. Indeed, ACDFIM was established in 2001 to enhance interactions amongst ASEAN Defence Chiefs. In our more conservative ASEAN culture, the "informal" nature of ACDFIM has been useful in providing the space and flexibility for us to discuss and share our ideas freely. The "informal" nature of ACDFIM has not impeded nor hindered us from engaging and making progress in useful cooperation activities.

9. [Slide 7] Indeed, many of our collaborations have reaped good dividends. We have seen positive outcomes arising from successful cooperation. For example, the previous ASEAN Militaries' HADR Exercise under ACDFIM in 2010 has laid the foundation for today's practical cooperation in the ADMM-Plus Experts' Working Groups.

10. Not only have we worked well together, and developed practical solutions for ourselves within ASEAN, but we have also expanded our reach to engage extra-regional militaries. We have seen unprecedented cooperation and confidence building with other dialogue partners, including the US and China, that has been forged through the ADMM-Plus Experts' Working Groups.

11. This year, we celebrate the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of ADMM and we will see four ADMM-Plus Field Training Exercises, involving all six Experts' Working Groups, take place. In May, Singapore and Brunei, together with Australia and New Zealand will co-host the Maritime Security and Counter Terrorism Exercise. The Final Planning Conference was completed last week and I would like to thank everyone for their strong support and contributions. Thus far, **all** countries have pledged contributions which include **18** ships and **more than 20** Counter Terrorism and Special Forces teams. This exercise would be an excellent opportunity for us to further build on ASEAN's capacity to deal with maritime security and terrorism threats in partnership with extra-regional countries.

12. [Slide 8] Beyond building confidence, we should examine how we can reap practical benefits from participating in these multilateral exercises. To achieve peace and security for our region, we need to ensure the effective implementation of the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea. A positive step towards this is the adoption of the Code for Unplanned Encounters at Sea (or CUES) as a reference for the upcoming Maritime Security and Counter Terrorism Exercise. Beyond the military, we could consider the extension of CUES to coast guards, other maritime agencies, or even white shipping, as unplanned encounters can take place between military and non-military vessels. We could also consider a similar protocol to regulate unplanned encounters between aircraft as well.

13. [Slide 9] In addition to exercises and protocols, information sharing is a key enabler to tackle trans-boundary security threats. The Information Fusion Centre is an example of how extensive linkages and information sharing amongst relevant stakeholders can be harnessed practically. Information sharing can also help build our collective ability to understand terror groups, and track their activities. In doing so, we enhance our ability to mount swift and effective responses to pre-empt their plans. Today, the IFC has expanded to include International Liaison Officers from 16 nations, with linkages to more than 60 Operations Centres spanning 36 countries. We are grateful to our partners who have joined us, and look forward to your continued support.

## CONCLUSION

14. [Slide 10] Friends and colleagues, ASEAN has come a long way and our prospects are bright. We have a good track record of working together and we must continue this spirit of cooperation. It is important for our armed forces to build upon the trust and understanding that has been developed over the years, as we forge towards *“Promoting Defence Cooperation for a Dynamic ASEAN Community”*.

15. Thank you.

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