

NEAT MEMORANDUM No. 17

NETWORK OF EAST ASIAN THINK TANKS (NEAT)

I. INTRODUCTION

The Network of East Asia Think Tanks (NEAT) is track two of the ASEAN Plus Three (APT) that supports the goal of community building in East Asia. East Asian countries seek to promote the welfare and well-being of its peoples by realizing the East Asian Vision of Peace, Prosperity and Progress. To advance peace and prosperity in the region, the East Asia community building process is to be based on universal values, including good governance, the rule of law, democracy, human rights, international law and norms. East Asian countries should promote these values as common goals.

Due to the Pandemic Covid-19, NEAT had to reschedule some activities for 2020 and found out alternative mechanisms in organizing NEAT activities. Amidst the pandemic, NEAT maintained its core activities:

1. by undertaking regular country coordinator meeting. NEAT Indonesia hosted the 32nd NEAT Country Coordinators Meeting (CCM) on 18 November 2020 through an online meeting organized from Jakarta, Indonesia. This is an agreeable mechanism to circumvent the limitation of transnational mobility during the pandemic. NEAT Indonesia wishes to express gratitude to NEAT members, the ASEAN Secretariat and all meeting delegates for their generous supports and cooperation;
2. by conducting one Working Group (WG) meeting on East Asian Cooperation on Enhancing Inclusive, Resilient and Sustainable Connectivity beyond COVID-19 by NEAT Japan. The detail of the WG's policy recommendations appears in Annex 1. NEAT wishes to appreciate the respective members of NEAT Japan and participants of the WG for their highly-valued efforts and contributions.

II. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the activities in 2020, NEAT respectfully submits recommendations in the following two areas for consideration of the APT leaders:

1. On East Asian Cooperation on Enhancing Inclusive, Resilient and Sustainable Connectivity beyond COVID-19: to strengthen APT cooperation for physical, institutional and people-to-people connectivity to not only overcome the negative socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 but also rebuild the economy forward to a more resilient, sustainable and inclusive growth path from the perspective of enhancing human security. Detailed recommendations appear in Annex I.
2. On Pandemic and Public Health Emergencies: to support the establishment of the ASEAN Center for Public Health Emergencies and Emerging Diseases (ACPHEED) and the ASEAN Plus Three Reserve of Medical Supplies for Public Health Emergencies. The roles of these centers should cover the development of APT pandemic early warning system and the provision of affordable vaccines and medical supply among all APT countries on equitable basis.

III. CONCLUSION

NEAT greatly appreciates serious consideration by the APT SOM, Ministers, and Leaders of the recommendations in this Memorandum. We reiterate our continued support to build a smarter and environmentally friendlier East Asian community.

ANNEX I

1. Increase the resilience of connectivity to economic, natural, health and other adversity from an integrated physical, institutional and social point of view. Address disparities within and across countries to ensure that physical resilience of connectivity to various types of adversity leads to social resilience and inclusiveness. Strengthen institutional resilience to promote the uninterrupted sharing of knowledge and information.
2. Strengthen APT cooperation to respond effectively to the COVID-19 pandemic and public health emergencies in line with the “Special ASEAN Plus Three Summit on Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19).” More specifically, support ASEAN's initiatives on COVID-19 such as the ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework and the COVID-19 ASEAN Response Fund and initiate an East Asia cooperation framework for Infectious Disease Control and Public Health to not only overcome COVID-19 but also prepare for future pandemics including the establishment of early warning systems. Harmonize rules for the accessibility and affordability of safe and effective vaccines approved by national authorities and recognized by the international health community.
3. Enhance connectivity by investing in infrastructure with emphasis on quality, particularly inclusiveness, resilience and sustainability, and in light of the nature of public services. Maximize the positive economic, environmental, social and developmental impact by pursuing quality infrastructure investment in line with the “G20 Principles for Quality Infrastructure Investment” to ensure an efficient and effective allocation of a limited amount of financial resources in advancing the post-pandemic recovery going forward, as the pandemic challenges may lead to a smaller size of infrastructure investment.
4. Promote institutional connectivity by deepening economic integration in East Asia through further trade and investment liberalization and by strengthening the resilience and sustainability of supply chains to ensure the smooth movement of essential goods (particularly food, medical supplies and pharmaceuticals), services, capital, and people (particularly business persons and students) and information for a post-pandemic economic recovery. Embark on air travel bubble arrangements within and beyond the APT region in a safe and controlled manner and harmonize rules for cross-border travel. Pursue unilateral approaches to promote connectivity to complement or reinforce the principles of globalization and the multilateral trading order.
5. Enhance APT cooperation to further trade facilitation with a view to reducing trade cost and time by accelerating the implementation of the existing initiatives. In addition, eliminate NTMs, improve logistics services, harmonize standards and strengthen customs cooperation to contribute to greater flows of goods and more resilient supply chain connectivity.
6. Accelerate the digitalization of trade-related procedures for customs clearance, as it is an effective measure to prevent the spread of the pandemic by minimizing physical contact and to enhance competitiveness and efficiency by lessening transactions costs through speedier customs clearance and release of goods. Adopt Digital Economy Agreements (DEAs) between two or more economies in the APT region to establish enhanced digital trade rules and standards, promote digital economy cooperation and complement the existing network of free trade agreements and other digital cooperation initiatives. Fully

implement and expand the existing regional mechanisms such as ASEAN Single Window.

7. Provide capacity-building support for customs officials of CLMV to narrow the logistic gap and enable equitable development within ASEAN. Create Co-Special Economic Zones (C-SEZs) for the CLMV as a priority pilot project and embrace the CLMV in the global and regional supply chains through the linkage of the C-SEZs.
8. Reinforce sustainability as a guiding principle in fostering a blue economy (which includes sustainable fisheries and onshore/offshore aquaculture, elimination of illegal, unreported and unregulated [IUU] fishing, blue tourism, renewable energy development, low carbon maritime transport, and marine plastic elimination) and supporting a blue recovery amid and beyond COVID-19 in East Asia, as a sustainable blue economy that is also inclusive and resilient is one of the vehicles to support economic growth and enhance the well-being of people in the region. Conserve ocean and marine resources and use ecosystems sustainably for all, including the present and future generations.
9. Build institutional networks of research institutes, universities and think tanks for East Asia to promote a sustainable, resilient and inclusive socio-economy through innovation, partnership, and multi-stakeholder involvement. Utilize such networks to identify ways to improve the functions of the existing economic, social, environmental, health, and natural disaster management systems and advance human resource development and human-centered policy-making. Adopt cross-sectoral, trans-spatial, interdisciplinary, and science-based approaches to overcome sectoral boundaries and focus on capacity building support for less advanced ASEAN member countries such as CLMV.