



**THE TWENTY-SIXTH AEM-CER CONSULTATIONS  
15 September 2021, Video Conference Meeting**

**JOINT MEDIA STATEMENT**

1. ASEAN Member States (AMS), Australia and New Zealand virtually met on 15 September 2021 for the 26<sup>th</sup> AEM-Closer Economic Relations (CER) Consultations. The Consultations were co-chaired by H.E. Dato Dr. Amin Liew Abdullah, Minister at the Prime Minister's Office and Minister of Finance and Economy II, Brunei Darussalam; H.E. Dan Tehan MP, Minister for Trade, Tourism and Investment, Australia; and Hon. Phil Twyford, Minister of State for Trade and Export Growth, New Zealand.

2. The Meeting noted that due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the total two-way trade between ASEAN and Australia has contracted by 17.7 percent in 2020, from USD 84.8 billion in 2019 to USD 69.8 billion in 2020, based on Australia's data. The Meeting also noted that the total two-way trade between New Zealand and ASEAN has contracted by 10.68 percent from USD 12.6 billion in 2019 to USD 11.3 billion in 2020, based on New Zealand's data. According to Australia's and New Zealand's data, Australia's Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) outflow to ASEAN in 2020 accounted at USD 1.82 billion, while New Zealand's FDI outflow to ASEAN for the same year was valued at USD 371.8 million.

3. The Meeting expressed deep concern over the adverse impacts of COVID-19 pandemic, which affected the global economy, caused health crises, disrupted supply chains and financial markets, and impacted the livelihood of people around the world. The Meeting reaffirmed the commitment to mitigate the impacts of the pandemic and address global economic recovery by accelerating COVID-19 vaccination, leveraging on digital trade and sustainable development, and keeping markets open for trade and investment. Recognising the role of extensive COVID-19 immunisation as an important measure to support economic recovery process, the Meeting urged for the acceleration of the production and distribution of affordable, safe, effective, quality medicines, and COVID-19 vaccines, and expediting a stronger economic recovery from the pandemic.

4. The Meeting reaffirmed its commitment to an open, free, inclusive, transparent, rules-based, and non-discriminatory multilateral trading system centered on the World Trade Organization (WTO). The Meeting underscored its support to uphold and abide by international rules and obligations, and its commitment to keeping markets open for trade and investment. To this end, the Meeting expressed determination to

cooperate to ensure the success of the 12<sup>th</sup> WTO Ministerial Conference (MC12), to be held in Geneva in the latter part of 2021, and that it delivers tangible results for all.

5. The Meeting welcomed the progress on the AANZFTA Upgrade negotiations, with the objective of concluding the negotiations within a two-year timeframe by September 2022. The Meeting reiterated the importance of ensuring the smooth implementation of the Agreement while working towards concluding the Second Protocol to Amend the AANZFTA negotiations expeditiously to ensure it remains an ambitious and modern agreement. The Meeting emphasised the importance of modernising the Agreement to take account of changing global business and trade practices and the evolving regional economic architecture, including to incorporate and implement provisions to facilitate trade and investment and remove unnecessary barriers to accelerate post-pandemic recovery.

6. The Meeting noted that the AANZFTA Upgrade focuses on Rules of Origin, Customs Procedures and Trade Facilitation, Trade in Services, Investment, Electronic Commerce, Competition and Consumer Protection, and Government Procurement, and takes into account other related developments, including the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) Agreement. The Meeting tasked officials to explore cross-sectoral areas of cooperation, such as, Trade and Sustainable Development (TSD) and Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) as well as taking into account critical areas for post-pandemic recovery, such as supply chain connectivity amongst others.

7. The Meeting commended the outcomes of the *“AECSP Symposium: Results, Lessons Learned and Future Directions of the AANZFTA Economic Cooperation”*, which provided well-rounded insights into AECSP’s achievements and implementation approaches since its establishment. The Meeting noted that the findings can contribute to identifying potential priority areas for the AECSP Successor Programme. The Meeting welcomed the AECSP’s progress as illustrated in the AECSP Communication Package and looked forward to the continued contributions to further the objectives of the AANZFTA beyond 2021.

8. The Meeting welcomed Chile’s interest to join the AANZFTA and its commitment to implement the obligations therein, including the outcomes of the upgrade negotiations. The Meeting expressed the importance of Chile’s presence in AANZFTA, which will broaden the FTA’s consumer base of 692 million people to 711.8 million people and from a combined GDP of USD 4.65 trillion to USD 4.90 trillion, based on the ASEAN’s data. The Meeting positively considered Chile’s request to join the Agreement and tasked relevant officials to undertake the necessary follow-up actions.

9. The Meeting looked forward to the implementation of the 9<sup>th</sup> ASEAN-CER Integration Partnership Forum (IPF) under the theme of “Trade and Sustainable Development” as the theme for this year.

10. The Meeting reaffirmed its support for ASEAN centrality and the ASEAN-centred regional architecture, including the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific. The Meeting also welcomed the signing of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) Agreement and looked forward to its timely entry into force and

implementation in early January 2022, as targeted. The Meeting noted that the RCEP Agreement sends a strong signal of the region's commitment to an open, free, inclusive, rules-based and non-discriminatory multilateral trading system that will enable the region to achieve post-pandemic economic recovery.