

**OPENING REMARKS OF THE MINISTER OF HEALTH
BRUNEI DARUSSALAM AT THE 13TH ASEAN HEALTH
MINISTERS MEETING**

BY

THE MINISTER OF HEALTH
BRUNEI DARUSSALAM

Delivered during the

6th September 2017, Bandar Seri Begawan



- Your Excellencies, Fellow Ministers and Heads of Delegates from ASEAN Member States
- Your Excellency Mr Vongthep Arthakaivavatee, Deputy Secretary General, ASEAN Secretariat
- Dr Takeshi Kasai, WHO Director of Programme Management in the Western Pacific Region
- Delegates from ASEAN Member States
- Ladies and Gentlemen

السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته

and Good Morning to all of you

1. Selamat Datang and Welcome! On behalf of the Ministry of Health Brunei Darussalam, I would like to take this opportunity to express our warm welcome to everyone present. I wish all those joining us for this 13th ASEAN Health Ministers Meeting a pleasant stay in Brunei Darussalam.

2. While some of us met ‘virtually’ by videoconference in September last year, I am aware that this is our first formal face-to-face meeting since Brunei Darussalam assumed the chairmanship of the AHMM. It is therefore fitting that I should express my congratulations to the Ministry of Health, Vietnam for a successful chairmanship term from 2014 to 2016. Your leadership of the ASEAN Health Ministers Meeting during the transition towards the ASEAN Post-2015 Health Development Agenda is very much appreciated.

1.

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

3. 50 years ago, our leaders from across this region came together to lead us on a journey towards what some at that time had termed ‘mission impossible.’ This was the journey towards *One Vision, One Identity and One ASEAN Community*. It was this aspiration and strong determination in pursuit of this vision that has enabled our community to thrive and develop into one of the world’s most successful partnerships today.

4. Through decade long process of community building, our collective efforts have had far reaching implications for the health and well-being of our people. Relative peace and security has been maintained. The proportion of people living below the national poverty lines has halved over the past two decades. ASEAN infant mortality ratio today is only a third of what it was in 1990. In the area of communicable diseases, our efforts have seen us make remarkable progress in combating diseases like polio, measles, malaria, and even HIV and AIDS. Underpinning our achievements is our shared commitment towards universal health coverage and ongoing investments in the health sector.

5. There is, however, no room for complacency. Some of us have started to face the challenge of aging populations. All of us face the challenges of increasing rates of non-communicable diseases and the need to meet the ever-greater demand for healthcare sustainably when financial resources are stretched and the funding pool becomes more limited. Confronted by these challenges today, some may say that ASEAN Health Ministers now face our own 'mission impossible.' However, just as the challenges of building one community 50 years ago were met by our leaders, we too will face our emerging challenges with perseverance, partnership and collective action.

6. As a group, we have been taking stock of our progress, and through the Post-2015 Health Development Agenda, we have identified a way forward for us to meet these new challenges. In 2014 in Vietnam, we endorsed the ASEAN Post-2015 Health Development Agenda together with the four Health Clusters namely (1) Promoting Healthy Lifestyle (2) Responding to All Hazards and Emerging Threats (3) Strengthening Health Systems and Access to Care, and (4) Ensuring Food Safety. Since then, the clusters have developed and are now implementing their work programmes. Today, we have the responsibility of reviewing this work, ensuring alignment with our overall health vision for the region, and give strategic direction to our senior officials.

7. In fulfilling our task, we must not forget that disease is not a simple physical condition of ill-health. For our work to be effective, we must look beyond the immediate determinants of disease towards the social, economic and environmental determinants of health and wellbeing. We have to dig deep and focus not just on the causes, but *the causes of the causes*. The starting point is to realise that population health is an outcome of policy choices. The biggest problems we face, like non-communicable diseases, the health impacts of climate change, and the management of severe outbreaks are not amenable to technical solutions alone. They require action across sectors, engaging our societies, and greater solidarity among countries.

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

8. I hope that over the course of our meeting today, we can discuss and confront these issues in an open and honest manner and that concrete proposals which secure health and improve lives will emerge. This period is a critical one for our region. With our partnership, I believe that when they celebrate the next 50 years, future generations of ASEAN will say that we have delivered for them the right launch pad for healthy, productive lives. On this note I have the honour of declaring the 13th ASEAN Health Ministers Meeting officially open.

Thank you.