

Welcoming Remarks

**ASIA - PACIFIC ECONOMIC COOPERATION (APEC)
VIRTUAL EXTRAORDINARY SENIOR OFFICIALS' MEETING (SOM) ON
COVID-19
27 May 2020**

**Good morning/ good afternoon/ good evening Senior Officials
Executive Director of APEC Secretariat
ABAC Chair
Official Observers**

Ladies and Gentlemen;

1. A very warm welcome to you and your team to this virtual meeting. Thank you for joining us from a variety of cities and time-zones. Thank you also for working well beyond your normal working hours to participate in today's VESOM.
2. Today, we are truly setting a precedent. This is the first fully remote meeting of the APEC Senior Officials.
3. I also wish to introduce new additions to the APEC family. Ms. Elizabeth Ward from Australia and Ambassador Lee Seong-ho from Korea.
4. I am afraid I have to begin with very sad news. Our esteemed colleague, US Ambassador Matthew J. Matthews, passed away last week. Matt was one of APEC's champions. Our work was deeply important to him, as was the APEC region itself. He spent much of his esteemed career in the region, as the US Ambassador to APEC and as Senior Official, and in postings to China, Hong Kong, China; Chinese Taipei, Australia, New Zealand, and Brunei Darussalam. We knew him well here in Malaysia, as well. From 2007 to 2010, he was the counselor for Economic Affairs at the US embassy in Kuala Lumpur, where he

worked with us on multilateral trade agreements. He was a wonderful man and he will truly be missed.

5. Colleagues, the last time all of us met was in Putrajaya for the Senior Officials' Meeting and Related Meetings in February. It was a very productive start to 2020. At that juncture, the world was already coming to terms with the potential impact of the COVID-19. This was something that Malaysia did not anticipate at the time, but we managed to put measures in place to mitigate the situation. The health, safety and wellbeing of our people and APEC delegates were given utmost priority and various precautionary measures were put in place.
6. In addition, we were able to make available remote participation facilities for delegates to participate from various cities which were then already affected by the virus. All of these were learning experiences which we've taken stock to ensure that our work, which is more crucial now during times of crisis, continues.
7. The situation around the world has drastically changed since February. About five million people have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Unfortunately, this has come with hundreds of thousands of human losses. Necessary lockdowns and social distancing have been or are still in place region-wide to keep the pandemic from spreading, but the resulting economic slowdown has the potential to cause long-term harm to the lives and livelihoods of millions more.
8. Earlier this month, APEC Ministers Responsible for Trade issued a joint statement on the COVID-19 pandemic. They have acknowledged that while halting the virus's spread remains the top priority of each economy, remedying the economic challenges must also be accorded a specific focus.
9. Our ministers have reaffirmed the utmost importance of collaboration at all levels and of keeping markets open. They have committed to ensure that the flow of essential goods and services across the region remains undisrupted.
10. Ministers have also directed us, the APEC Senior Officials, to develop a coordinated approach to collect and share information on policies and measures, including stimulus packages for the immediate responses to the economic crisis and long-term recovery packages. We have also been directed to take into account the recommendations of the APEC Business Advisory Council, in our work.

11. This brings us to our meeting today, to heed our Ministers' call to action, to exchange views, review our response to the crisis and formulate a possible coordinated approach to collecting and sharing information on policies and measures regarding COVID-19 and its economic effects.
12. There are five (5) proposals today, for all of us to reflect upon and consider further. These are on a possible platform for information exchange, operationalising the MRT statement vis-à-vis facilitating the flow of essential goods, and a checklist of instructions for APEC committees and sub-fora. In deliberating these proposals, let us be pragmatic, open-minded and reasonable. Let us give due consideration to each of this proposal, and consider it based on its own merits.
13. In my opening remarks last February, I said that Malaysia will be doing things differently this year. This has turned out to be an understatement. We are facing an unprecedented challenge and we must adapt to the changes brought about by this crisis. Despite the trying times that we presently face, the work in APEC must go on, by means of virtual meetings such as this one, or through other inter-sessional mechanisms. APEC's broader work in other areas such as trade and investment, business mobility, tourism, food security, sustainable development, customs procedures, standards setting and intellectual property rights will play a crucial role in our region's recovery.
14. If we continue to strengthen the spirit of cooperation between our economies, we will come out of this crisis better and more resilient. To paraphrase our ministers: at the end of the day, I hope the lessons and experiences of each economy will translate into the strength of the region as a whole.
15. I look forward to an interactive engagement between all the economies, ABAC and observers throughout today's meeting.

Thank you.