

Hisham: Asean-US must focus on reigniting economies impacted by Covid-19

Malaysiakini

14 July 2021

Bernama

Asean and the United States (US) must focus on reigniting their economies and reversing the damages brought by Covid-19, said Senior Minister of Foreign Affairs Hishammuddin Hussein.

Speaking at the Asean-US Foreign Ministers' Meeting held virtually today, Hishammuddin said both sides should use this opportunity to further enhance their cooperation where two-way trade between the US and Asean countries total over US\$260 billion.

“Malaysia is also one of the top five Asean import suppliers for the US at US\$39.4 billion. These are huge figures, and it is pertinent for both sides to remain committed to preserving and maintaining our open and connected supply chains,” he said. His speech text was made available to the media by the Foreign Ministry.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken also present in the meeting.

Hishammuddin said Asean-US must be mindful that millions of lives depend on unimpeded trade to continue between Asean and the US and both sides have to work closely together to identify and address any trade disruptions, especially those with ramifications on the flow of necessities.

Malaysia also called upon the US to support Asean in addressing the issue of mental health which is a crucial focus area in addressing the socio-economic impacts of the pandemic.

Hishammuddin noted that Malaysia as country coordinator is working closely with Australia and Brunei Darussalam as Asean Chair 2021 on this matter which is a key priority for Brunei's chairmanship this year.

"We have expressed our readiness to co-sponsor a Leaders' Statement on Mental Health at the 16th East Asia Summit and hope the US can support the issuance of this statement," he added.

Other areas where Asean and the US can further strengthen cooperation include cybersecurity, digital development, and transnational crime, he said.

On Malaysia's Foreign Ministry's part in addressing the alarming situation brought by the Covid-19 pandemic, Hishammuddin pointed out that his ministry is looking at four factors: first, 'circuit breaker' best practices from other nations to advise the health authorities; second, obtaining testing expertise and capabilities to further complement the current testing infrastructure; and third, leveraging on its ties with vaccine-producing and/or exporting partners to increase vaccine supply.

"The fourth, equally important is the mutual recognition of vaccination certification to facilitate cross-border travel for our nationals in the future," Hishammuddin added.

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Source: <https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/583031>