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Title : STATEMENT AT THE CLOSING CEREMONY OF THE 38TH ASEAN MINISTERIAL MEETING

Your Royal Highness,

Your Excellency Mr. Somsavat Lengsavad,

Fellow ASEAN colleagues,

Distinguished delegates,

Ladies and gentlemen,

At the outset, I wish to express our deepest gratitude to Your Excellency Mr. Somsavat Lengsavad, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Lao People's Democratic Republic for the warm welcome and gracious hospitality, accorded to me and members of the Malaysian delegation.

2. As the incoming Chairman of the 39th ASEAN Standing Committee (ASC), allow me to convey our heartiest congratulations to Your Excellency, and through you, to the Government and people of Lao PDR, for successfully completing your country's term as Chairman of the ASC. Under Lao PDR's able stewardship over the past one year, ASEAN has achieved one step further in regional cooperation. Lao PDR has indeed set a high standard for Malaysia to follow.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

3. I wish to take this opportunity to record our appreciation for the tireless efforts made by your dedicated team of officials and staff. Our sincere appreciation also goes to His Excellency Mr. Ong Keng Yong, ASEAN Secretary General, and his team at the ASEAN Secretariat, for their diligence and professionalism in providing the necessary support for the success of the ASC.

4. The signing of the Vientiane Action Programme (VAP) by our Leaders at the 10th ASEAN Summit in Vientiane last November was indeed a significant move. With the adoption of the Plans of Action for the ASEAN Security Community and the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community on the same occasion, we now have our own roadmap to achieve the three pillars of the ASEAN Community. Malaysia hopes to build on the

momentum achieved to collectively implement the Action Plans for the benefit of all ASEAN member countries.

5. A historic decision was also made at the last ASEAN Summit to convene the First East Asia Summit (EAS), back-to-back with the 11th ASEAN Summit and Related Summits in Kuala Lumpur in December this year. This First EAS in Kuala Lumpur represents a new chapter in ASEAN's long journey to forge a wider level of regional understanding and cooperation. With the cooperation of ASEAN member countries, Malaysia hopes that we will be able to set the parameters and the direction for the development of the EAS in the years ahead.

6. Malaysia is pleased to note that ASEAN has also broadened and deepened cooperation with its Dialogue Partners and other regional and international organizations. In this regard, we look forward to hosting the inaugural ASEAN-Russia Summit in Kuala Lumpur. We are also happy to see two more Dialogue Partners, the Republic of Korea and the Russian Federation, acceding to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC) last November in Vientiane. Likewise, we welcome the accession of New Zealand and Mongolia to the TAC in a couple of days, thus completing Laos' chairmanship on a high note.

7. In moving ahead, we need to further strengthen ASEAN, effecting changes, where necessary, in the ASEAN institutional framework. In this regard, we are happy to note that the process is already underway to establish an ASEAN Charter, a goal we strongly believe would rejuvenate ASEAN and reaffirm our commitment to the ideals upon which it was founded. Malaysia believes that it is important that we refocus our attention on ASEAN's strengths, collectively developed over the last 38 years. We need to nurture our sense of solidarity and cooperation, our aspiration to achieve our common vision, and most importantly, our commitment to maintain the relevance of ASEAN for member countries.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

8. Malaysia last chaired the ASC some eight years ago, when we adopted the ASEAN Vision 2020. During the intervening years, ASEAN went through the regional financial crisis, life-threatening SARS and the Avian flu epidemics and the 2004 tsunami. Despite all these, ASEAN had emerged stronger. More of course need to be done. And more of course could be done with the support and cooperation of all ASEAN member countries.

9. In assuming our Chairmanship, Malaysia believes that it is important that priority be given to developing a more people-centred agenda. Efforts to create ASEAN awareness among our peoples should be conscientiously carried out. This is extremely crucial in promoting the development of an ASEAN identity and building an ASEAN community. In this connection, Malaysia looks forward to celebrating ASEAN

Day this year in a manner that befits ASEAN's growing stature as a matured organisation.

10. Malaysia also recognises the importance of narrowing the development gap and deepening regional integration among ASEAN member countries. As a reflection of our deep commitment, I am happy to announce that Malaysia will make a contribution of USD 500,000 to the ASEAN Development Fund (ADF). This will be in addition to the agreed contribution of USD 100,000 per member country. It is our sincere hope that the ADF will be put to good use to effectively implement the VAP.

11. In conclusion, Malaysia looks forward to working closely with all ASEAN member countries in pursuing our common objectives during its chairmanship. May I also take this opportunity to extend a warm welcome to all of you to the 11th ASEAN Summit and Related Summits in Kuala Lumpur.

Thank you.