**(III) PRESS STATEMENT BY YB DEFENCE MINISTER**

**ENHANCED SECURITY TRILATERAL PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN AUSTRALIA, UNITED KINGDOM, AND THE UNITED STATES (AUKUS)**

1. YAB Prime Minister of Malaysia received a phone call from his Australian counterpart on Friday, 17 September 2021, informing Malaysia on the newly-formed trilateral partnership between Australia - United Kingdom - United States known as AUKUS. One of the initiatives under this partnership is the acquisition of nuclear-powered submarines by Australia.

2. I share YAB Prime Minister’s concerns regarding this new development as the addition of nuclear-powered submarines and warships especially in the South China Sea could disrupt the peace and stability in the Southeast Asia region. **All parties must refrain from using military actions deemed provocative that could potentially escalate tension and spark conflict in the area.**

3. **As a member of ASEAN, Malaysia will always stand with our principle to maintain the Southeast Asia region as a Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOPFAN). Malaysia also reiterates its unwavering position with the Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapons Free Zone Treaty (SEANWFZ).**

4. The Ministry of Defence would like to stress that **nations must respect Malaysia’s position and comply with Malaysian laws with regards to nuclear-powered submarines and warships entering Malaysian territorial waters,** in line with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea 1982 (UNCLOS).

5. My position on the South China Sea has been consistent since my previous term as Malaysia’s Defence Minister – we must avoid any unplanned encounters, miscalculations and unintended incidents in these important waterways; and all matters must be resolved peacefully and constructively.

6. I am scheduled to speak with His Excellency Peter Dutton, Australia’s Defence Minister tomorrow via a phone call. During this call, I will reaffirm Malaysia's position and convey the views of YAB Prime Minister on this matter.

7. At the same time, both Malaysia and Australia will continue the strong defence cooperation, especially under the Malaysia-Australia Joint Defence Program (MAJDP) as well as the High-Level Committee (HLC) expected to be held in 2022.

8. Malaysia and Australia also cooperate under the Five Power Defence Arrangements (FPDA) of which the United Kingdom, New Zealand and Singapore are also members. Malaysia will host the 50th Anniversary of the FPDA and the 11th FPDA Defence Ministers' Meeting (11th FDMM) at the Royal Malaysian Air Force Base in Subang on 21st October 2021.

**YB DATO’ SERI HISHAMMUDDIN TUN HUSSEIN**

**SENIOR MINISTER OF DEFENCE**

**19 SEPTEMBER 2021**