# Concept Paper

**Mainstreaming Four Priority Areas of the ASEAN Outlook on**

**the Indo-Pacific within ASEAN-led Mechanisms**

## Background

1. The ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP), adopted by the ASEAN Leaders at the 34th ASEAN Summit in June 2019 held in Bangkok, Thailand and formulated against the background of evolving dynamics in the region, serves as ASEAN's guidelines for engagement with its partners to promote peace, security, stability and prosperity for the peoples in the Southeast Asia and the wider Asia Pacific and Indian Ocean regions or the Indo-Pacific.
2. After its adoption in 2019, ASEAN is now undertaking concrete steps to realize the goal of the AOIP through existing priority areas in Maritime Cooperation, Connectivity, UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030, and Economic and Other Areas of Cooperation, as well as exploring other priority areas of cooperation.

1. The AOIP safeguards and preserves ASEAN Centrality, as the underlying principle for promoting cooperation, including strengthening a rules-based framework, openness, transparency, inclusivity, respect for sovereignty, non-intervention as well as complementarity with existing cooperation frameworks and guides ASEAN's engagement with its partners in ASEAN-led mechanisms. Progress is being made in the ASEAN Plus One mechanism, and a positive sign have also appeared in the ASEAN Defence Ministers’ Meeting Plus (ADMM Plus), namely through the issuance of the Bandar Seri Begawan Declaration by the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting (ADMM)-Plus in Commemoration of the 15th Anniversary of the ADMM on Promoting a Future-Ready, Peaceful and Prosperous ASEAN in 2021.

1. Based on progress being made, ASEAN can further develop the AOIP's Four Priority Areas of Cooperation in the ASEAN-led mechanisms, such as the ASEAN Plus One mechanism, the ASEAN Plus Three (APT), the East Asia Summit (EAS), the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), and the ADMM-Plus, which are the region's inclusive platforms for dialogue and cooperation. ASEAN, through AOIP, must continue to build on this momentum towards strengthening the existing and prospective ASEAN-led mechanisms in addressing challenges and in seizing opportunities amidst the evolving regional architecture. Practical cooperation in this regard can be pursued without prejudice to ongoing discussions on regional architecture and terminology.
2. Current global and regional dynamics driven by the relations among the major powers, increased unilateralism, climate change, advancement in technology and digital innovation, increasing complexity in international economic governance, and traditional and non-traditional security issues with multidimensional impacts have reaffirmed the need for ASEAN to continue playing its central role in the implementation of the four priority areas to add value to the existing ASEAN-centred regional architecture. ASEAN's drive for practical endeavours can help address these challenges, establish measures for the effective development, as well as directly and indirectly contribute to the stability and resilience of the wider Indo-Pacific region. By developing mutually beneficial activities, ASEAN can promote and strengthen the practice of cooperation and collaboration through ASEAN-led activities and mechanisms.

## Methods

1. The four priority areas of AOIP should be explored and implemented through linkages, synergies and cooperation for mutual benefit within the modalities of the framework of ASEAN-led mechanisms, as well as in accordance with the guidelines in each sectoral body. A document in point is the Manila Plan of Action to Advance the Phnom Penh Declaration on the East Asia Summit Development Initiative (2018-2022). It defines the areas of cooperation as, including but not limited to: environment and energy, education, finance, global health issues and pandemic diseases, natural disaster management, ASEAN connectivity, trade and economic, food security, and maritime cooperation. The implementation of the four priority areas of the AOIP and urgent concerns such as public health emergencies, should, therefore, be conducted through the prevailing modalities of ASEAN mechanisms as this will help drive the work on economic integration and regional connectivity by building on existing initiatives while ensuring that ASEAN efforts are aligned and not redundant.

1. Convergence of four priority areas of AOIP and priorities within ASEAN-led mechanisms should guide the formulation of future practical cooperative activities and cooperation and the development of targeted action plans, not only for the successor document such as the Manila Plan of Action to Advance the Phnom Penh Declaration on the EAS Development Initiative (2018-2022) when it is renewed in 2022, but also in other mechanisms such as the ASEAN Plus Three Work Plan, ASEAN Plus One Plan of Action, and others.

1. ASEAN Dialogue Partners have supported the principles of AOIP while several Dialogue Partners have committed to support particular priority issues. Some ASEAN Dialogue Partners have also published their own outlooks and strategies on the Indo-Pacific. ASEAN remains confident that its Outlook will win further support from external partners in order to explore and pursue practical and closer cooperation activities which would harmonize or synergize cooperation for mutual benefits in the implementation of the priority areas.
2. Once this approach garners the support of ASEAN Member States (AMS) for implementation, ASEAN can collectively start identifying (a) priority projects/activities/initiatives under the AOIP areas of cooperation, and later invite, encourage, and engage Dialogue Partners as well as other external partners, where appropriate, in an open and inclusive manner based on AMS consensus.
3. This exercise is inclusive in its approach, involving all ASEAN Member States, as well as taking into account the priorities of ASEAN Sectoral Bodies. ASEAN will collectively identify (a) lead driver(s) from AMS to implement (a) project(s)/activity(ies)/initiative(s). The arrangement for AMS that intends to be the driver(s) will not replace the arrangement in existing ASEAN-led mechanisms and processes with external partners. The role of the AMS lead driver(s) will be in the implementation of the agreed programs/activities/initiatives and the contribution of ideas, time, and resources, as appropriate. With this understanding, the implementation of projects/activities/initiatives are aimed to involve all AMS, and do not limit other interested ASEAN Member States and relevant external partners to co-lead the implementation of project(s)/activity(ies)/initiative(s) through the existing ASEAN-led mechanisms.
4. The timeline of the practical implementation of the AOIP priority areas shall be in line with the timeline of the implementation of ASEAN-led mechanisms’ Work Plan/Plan of Action.

1. This endeavour should seek to avoid redundancies, where possible, with other regional and inter-regional undertakings, such as the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC). Rather, it should seek to synergize and build upon other regional endeavours to promote and strengthen a culture of cooperation and collaboration.

## Mechanism

1. The Concept Paper shall serve as a living reference for ASEAN in mainstreaming and enhancing the practical implementation of the four priority areas of the AOIP with its partners, without necessarily diminishing focus on other areas that may be of interest to ASEAN and its partners.

1. The engagement of track 1.5 such as the Expanded ASEAN Maritime Forum (EAMF) and track 2 diplomacy could be encouraged to garner innovative ideas and provide sound recommendations on the implementation of the AOIP.

1. The Committee of Permanent Representatives to ASEAN (CPR) is to follow up on the adopted concept paper, including but not limited to: collectively identifying projects/activities/initiatives of common interest under the four AOIP areas of cooperation. Once finalized, the CPR might want to identify (a) lead driver(s) from AMS to implement (a) project(s)/activitie(s)/ initiative(s) as well as to invite, encourage, engage potential Dialogue Partners, as well as other external partners, and devising a mechanism to conduct regular reviews of the process.

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