Statement by the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Thailand at the Opening Ceremony of the 34th ASEAN Summit
Sunday, 23 June 2019, at 09.00-09.45 hrs.
Crystal Hall, The Athenee Hotel, Bangkok.

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Your Majesty,
Excellencies,
Honoured Guests,

1. I wish to welcome all of you to the Kingdom of Thailand, the birthplace of ASEAN. May I now speak in Thai, please put on your headphones.

**ASEAN: we dare to dream, we care to share.**

2. “We dare to dream, we care to share.” These lyrics from The ASEAN Way, the Anthem we all just heard, portray most fittingly the journey that ASEAN has taken in the past five decades.

3. Fifty-two years ago, the Foreign Ministers of five Southeast Asian countries signed the Bangkok Declaration at Saranrom Palace, giving birth to ASEAN. At that time, few could have imagined, or dared to dream, that the small Association of five nations would eventually become a tight-knit Community of ten. But because from one generation to the next we dared to dream, we built a united Community of peace and security, a rules-based Community, and now the 6th largest economy in the world. We have become a Community of cooperation, with the people at the heart.

4. We have been through thick and thin together, overcoming challenges from the Cold War to the present. When the financial and economic crisis hit Asia, ASEAN joined hands with each other and its friends, becoming a key force in the region’s rapid recovery. And when natural disasters struck, whether earthquakes, tsunamis or cyclones, we in ASEAN never turned our backs on one another, but instead always lent each other a helping hand out of a sense of unity in ASEAN Community, One Community. Today, our region remains peaceful, with no war and conflict, because in ASEAN we are consistently reminded to respect difference and diversity and aspire to live together in peace and harmony.
5. Today, we the ASEAN Leaders will witness the launching of the ASEAN Satellite Warehouse in Chainat Province under the Disaster Emergency Logistics System for ASEAN, or DELSA, and the inclusion of the ASEAN Center of Military Medicine, or the ACMM, as a subsidiary body in Annex 1 of the ASEAN Charter. These two Centres will enhance ASEAN’s disaster response and management capabilities.

6. In the wider world at present, there is intensifying economic and international political competition; increasing terrorism and transnational crime; disruptive technology affecting daily life; and climate change and other environmental concerns degrading ecosystems. If ASEAN did not exist, how would we tackle these challenges? How much would each country acting alone be able to handle in the face of such challenges? I believe in the power of our strong and united ASEAN as the key to overcoming these challenges and laying down a solid foundation for succeeding generations.

7. The theme for Thailand’s ASEAN Chairmanship is “Advancing Partnership for Sustainability”. It reflects our dreams of creating a people-centred ASEAN Community that leaves no one behind, builds on the good work that ASEAN has already done, and looks to the future for the benefit of succeeding generations so that they can continue to live in a region of sustainable peace, stability and prosperity.

8. Under this theme, therefore, we first aspire to see an “Advancing ASEAN” that looks to the future, always moving forward. This would be an ASEAN that is able to take advantage of the Fourth Industrial Revolution to enhance its competitiveness and build immunity to the negative effects of disruptive technologies so as to advance towards a “Digital and Green ASEAN”.

9. Second, we aspire to strengthen “Partnership” through deepening closer cooperation both within ASEAN and with our External Partners so as to reinforce ASEAN Centrality in the region and enhance ASEAN’s role in addressing important regional and global issues. Strengthening partnership also includes the promotion of connectivity in all dimensions, from digital infrastructure, rules and regulations to people-to-people links, so as to become a “Seamless ASEAN” linked to the global community through the “connecting the connectivities” approach.

10. And lastly, we aspire to be a “Sustainable ASEAN” in all dimensions, from security to the economy, the environment and human security. From now on, the “Sustainability of Things”, or SOT, concept should inform every decision ASEAN takes and should become ASEAN DNA to pass on to future generations. Indeed, a sustainable ASEAN Community will help increase ASEAN’s strategic value-added in the long run and will serve as a protective shield for our peoples in the face of regional and global changes and uncertainties.
Your Majesty, Excellencies, Honourable Guests,

11. As Chair of ASEAN this year, Thailand will take forward the good work and initiatives of previous Chairs in the endeavour to realize the dreams that we all have set out and to ensure that the peoples of ASEAN, present and future, can deal with the challenges that come and truly benefit from ASEAN in three important areas, namely:

12. One is greater security. We will be able to manage rapid change more effectively. For example, in the area of cybersecurity, the establishment of the ASEAN-Japan Cybersecurity Capacity-Building Centre in Thailand will help to enhance the region’s capacity to address cybersecurity threats. In the area of transnational crime, which is on the rise particularly in the border areas, ASEAN can develop an ASEAN-wide border management arrangement to help safeguard our Community from transnational crime and facilitate secure regional trade and investment as well as people mobility across borders. And in the area of disaster management, we are working to enhance the region’s resilience and effectiveness in the face of natural disasters. Going forward, we can take comfort in the fact that the establishment of the Disaster Emergency Logistics System for ASEAN, or DELSA, Satellite Warehouse in Chatinan Province will boost ASEAN’s disaster response efforts by increasing the efficiency and timeliness of the deployment of relief items to disaster-affected areas in the region.

13. The second benefit for our peoples is greater prosperity. The winds of protectionism that are battering the multilateral trading system remind us that we must hang on even stronger to one another. So we must reaffirm our determination to conclude the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, or RCEP, negotiations this year. RCEP will be the largest free trade area in the world, and can cushion any impacts from the on-going trade conflict between some of ASEAN’s key trading partners. Greater prosperity will also come from creating an ASEAN digital economy, which is expected to increase ASEAN’s GDP by some $100 billion US Dollars by 2025. The digital economy will come from being able to take advantage of 4IR technology and innovation as well as creating new economic opportunities for our MSMEs, skilled labour, entrepreneurs and professionals, and the agricultural sector. It is especially important that we work to increase the value-added throughout the agricultural supply chain so as to reduce disparities and narrow the development gap. We should also make use of the Eastern Economic Corridor (EEC) and the "connecting the connectivities" approach in the ACMECS sub-region and the Asia-Pacific and Indo-Pacific regions.

14. The third benefit for our peoples is greater sustainability. ASEAN will drive forward the sustainable development agenda. Key to this effort will be the establishment of the ASEAN Centre for Sustainable Development Studies
and Dialogue in Thailand later this year. In the area of human security, ASEAN will work to build the capacity of all peoples no matter their age or gender, with special attention given to preparing for an ageing society. For this, we will be setting up an ASEAN Centre for Active Ageing and Innovation in Thailand to train and build the skills of the elderly. In the area of sustainable people-to-people links, we will continue to learn more about each other and our cultures through the many activities of the ASEAN Cultural Year 2019 and the operations of the ASEAN Cultural Centre in Thailand. In the area of the environment, ASEAN has issued its first Framework of Action on Marine Debris and will be working to promote sustainable fisheries to protect our marine environment. And lastly, in the area of sustainable city development, the ASEAN Smart Cities Network will serve as a model of modern city development that prioritizes both technology and innovation as well as the need to reduce disparities and enhance people-to-people links for the benefit of all ASEAN peoples into the future.

Your Majesty, Excellencies, Honoured Guests,

15. Now is the time for our generation to drive forward our dreams and aspirations of ASEAN’s Founding Fathers over five decades ago to build a region of peace, progress and prosperity for all ASEAN peoples and to lay down a solid foundation for future generations in the next half century.

16. A people-centred Community can only be realized through partnership and cooperation among all sectors in the ASEAN Member States, public, private, civil society and most importantly, the heart of our Community, our peoples in every generation. May I therefore take this opportunity to invite all of you, the people of ASEAN, present here today and all around the region, to awaken your sense of belonging in the ASEAN Community (your “ASEAN DNA”) and join hands and hearts in our common effort to go forward together towards a people-centred Community that leaves no one behind, looks to the future and truly prioritizes sustainability in all dimensions.

17. Once again, a warm welcome to Thailand. Thank you very much.

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