RECOMMENDATIONS BY

ASEAN-U.S. EMINENT PERSONS GROUP

Executive Summary

The ASEAN-U.S. Eminent Persons Group (EPG) has been tasked by the Leaders of ASEAN and the United States to take stock of ASEAN-U.S. dialogue relations over the past 35 years and explore ways to deepen and widen existing cooperation between ASEAN and the United States, as well as to recommend measures for elevating the ASEAN-U.S. relationship to a strategic partnership. These recommendations are to be submitted to the 4th ASEAN-U.S. Leaders’ Meeting on 19th November 2012 in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

These recommendations are designed to have impact, set a vision and specify attainable, near-term goals for governments and the private sector with the aim of elevating ASEAN-U.S. relations from enhanced to strategic partnership.

Key Recommendations

The ASEAN-U.S. EPG envisions a mutually supportive ASEAN-U.S. relationship focusing on areas of mutual interest and on strengthening ASEAN. In advancing ASEAN-U.S. relations, ASEAN centrality and its role as the driving force in the region should be key guiding principles in achieving regional peace, security, prosperity, and stability. These recommendations build on the already strong and vibrant ASEAN-U.S. relationship and are also guided by the long-established process of cooperation between ASEAN and the United States, including the Plan of Action to Implement the ASEAN-U.S. Enhanced Partnership for Enduring Peace and Prosperity 2011-2015.

To enhance ties, deepen economic and cultural cooperation, and elevate the existing relationship, the EPG recommends that the Leaders of ASEAN and the United States announce their intention to form a strategic partnership by 2015 and declare the following goals in the three community pillars, namely the political-security, economic, and socio-cultural communities, at the 4th ASEAN-U.S. Leaders’ Meeting in Phnom Penh in November 2012.

Political-Security
ASEAN and the United States should upgrade their political-security relationship through the following steps, to promote peace, stability and prosperity in the region and beyond.

- **Institutionalize the ASEAN-U.S. Summit.** The annual meeting between the Leaders of ASEAN and the United States is fundamentally important and should be institutionalized from an ASEAN-U.S. Leaders’ Meeting to a regular ASEAN-U.S. Summit. This Summit should take place within ASEAN territory, except for on special occasions when a commemorative summit can be convened outside of ASEAN.

- **Support ASEAN Centrality.** United States support for ASEAN centrality in the evolving regional architecture is critically important to promoting ASEAN’s role as a driving force to maintain peace, security, stability and prosperity in the region.

- **Support the Development of a Code of Conduct (COC) in the South China Sea.** All countries recognize the need for ASEAN solidarity and a code of conduct to manage disputes in the South China Sea. The ASEAN countries and China agreed in 2002 in the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties (DOC) in the South China Sea to establish a COC. This agreement is important for the region, as it is fundamental to preserving peace and stability and allowing for the expansion of trade and investment. The Leaders should agree to call for a code based on international law and agreements, including the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC). Leaders also agreed on the need for the peaceful settlement of disputes in the South China Sea.

- **United States to Ratify the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).** It is vital for the credibility of the United States in the Asia Pacific region for the U.S. Senate to ratify the 1982 UNCLOS as soon as possible.

- **ASEAN-U.S. Maritime Cooperation.** The Leaders should enhance ASEAN-U.S. cooperation on maritime issues, including maritime security, safety, and search and rescue in the region through the promotion of capacity building, information sharing and technology cooperation.
Expand Security Cooperation through Regional Security Architecture. Building on existing strong bilateral and regional security cooperation efforts, ASEAN and the United States should expand security cooperation and align this initiative with efforts already underway in ASEAN Regional Forum and ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting Plus frameworks. Other efforts should include increasing the number of ASEAN officers receiving international military education and training (IMET), attending U.S. military academies, and participating in the Asia Pacific Center for Security Studies (APCSS); and expanding joint exercises in the region.

Commission a Study on ASEAN-U.S. Political Security Relations in 2020. The Leaders should commission a study in coordination between U.S.-based and ASEAN-based research institutions through available resources with a view to defining a vision for the ASEAN-U.S. relationship by the year 2020. The study should focus in particular on political and security relations, and include a detailed implementation strategy. The study should be completed and delivered by September 30, 2013 if possible so that Leaders can consider the findings and recommendations ahead of the 1st ASEAN-U.S. Summit.

Encourage an Active ASEAN-U.S. Track 2 Process. The Leaders should encourage leading think tanks in ASEAN and the United States to stimulate thought leadership for the relationship by inviting them to provide an annual report for consideration by the ASEAN-U.S. Summit.

Develop a Joint ASEAN-U.S. Vision on Nuclear Disarmament and Non-proliferation. In support of the goal of a world without nuclear weapons and recognition of the threat of proliferation to regional and global security, Leaders remain committed to the South East Asia Nuclear Weapons Free Zone (SEANWFZ) Treaty and should identify concrete steps to promote technical cooperation with a view to preserving Southeast Asia as a Zone free of nuclear weapons and all weapons of mass destruction, enhancing relevant safeguard mechanisms in the region and promoting national implementation of the relevant IAEA instruments.

Strengthen the ASEAN Secretariat. The Leaders should reaffirm their commitment to strengthen the ASEAN Secretariat in Jakarta, particularly its capacity to better assist and facilitate ASEAN-U.S. cooperation and
more effectively coordinate within ASEAN as well as between ASEAN and its external partners.

- **Encourage Relevant Ministries and Departments to Broaden ASEAN-U.S. Cooperation in Fighting Transnational Crimes** namely counter terrorism, trafficking in persons, illicit drug trafficking, arms smuggling, money laundering, cyber crime, environmental crime, international economic crime, and sea piracy.

- **Expand Humanitarian and Disaster Relief (HADR) Cooperation.** The Leaders should expand training and cooperation and invite private sector engagement in the area of HADR. Moreover, it is important to ensure that there is an increase in joint activities under the ASEAN Committee on Disaster Management (ACDM) framework and in accordance with the ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response (AADMER) Work Programme 2010-2015, as well as to provide support to the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on Disaster Management (AHA) Centre, ASEAN’s primary centre for disaster management and emergency response.

**Economic**

The Leaders should set a goal to double ASEAN-U.S. trade within five years and increase investment in one another’s economies by three times.

- **Announce an ASEAN-U.S. Economic Partnership Initiative (EPI).** ASEAN and the United States should commit to working toward a goal of substantially free and fair trade and investment. The ASEAN-U.S. EPI is therefore intended to (a) provide technical and other expertise in connection with the eventual assumption of high-standard trade obligations, and (b) prioritize the negotiation of an ASEAN-U.S. Trade Facilitation Agreement, an ASEAN-U.S. Bilateral Investment Treaty, and an ASEAN-U.S. Agreement on Information and Communications Technology (ICT) principles, that can, in addition to their more immediate commercial significance, serve as chapters of a high-standard trade agreement. Additional priority areas for negotiation will be agreed to on an ongoing basis, to be next announced at year end 2013.

- **Support all ASEAN Member States Joining APEC.** If APEC agrees to accept new members, ASEAN and U.S. governments should support the candidacy of Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar to become members.
➢ **Institutionalize an ASEAN-U.S. Business Summit.** The Leaders should create a regular ASEAN-U.S. Business Summit and agree to bring CEO delegations to that Summit and related meetings. The ASEAN-U.S. Business Council and ASEAN private sector should organize the Business Summit in consultation with national governments. The Business Summit will underline the Leaders’ commitment to public-private partnerships and infuse the private sector’s leadership, creativity and vigor into the dialogue.

➢ **Support ASEAN Connectivity through Establishing a U.S. Taskforce to Work Closely with the ASEAN Coordinating Committee on Connectivity (ACCC).** ASEAN and the United States have a common interest in connecting their economies and creating jobs through enhancing both hard and soft infrastructure and encouraging government agencies and private companies to focus on building infrastructure. The United States should announce the establishment of a U.S. Taskforce on Connectivity to act as a counterpart to the ASEAN Coordinating Committee on Connectivity (ACCC) to assist in the implementation of the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity (MPAC) and recommend new and innovative ways to enhance ASEAN connectivity.

➢ **Explore Elements for an ASEAN-U.S. Plan for Local Level Engagement.** The Leaders should invite a group of leading officials to explore elements for an ASEAN-U.S. Plan for local level engagement. This plan should further work towards increasing awareness of ASEAN and its growing economic significance within the United States.

➢ **Facilitate Investment and Job Creation.** The Leaders should promote an environment conducive for businesses to invest and expand their operations. The Leaders should encourage relevant authorities to draw upon best-practices throughout the region; push efforts to establish a standardized set of tools and resources for businesses seeking to make new or expanded investments; as well as establish “One-Stop-Shop” centers where businesses can obtain permits, licenses, survey data and other needed resources efficiently. In addition, focus should be placed on small and medium size business enterprises (SMEs).

➢ **Launch the ASEAN-U.S. Trade and Environment Dialogue** to improve continuing cooperation on trade facilitation, development of the digital
economy, and cooperation on priority areas for ASEAN integration, including the role of small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs).

- **Deepen Cooperation in the Fields of Energy and Food Security** to maximize the revenue and improve the livelihoods of people, which can contribute to narrowing the development gap in the region. Such cooperation should focus on areas such as alternative sources of energy and green technologies as well as developing mechanisms to facilitate technology transfer.

**Socio-Cultural**

The Leaders should recognize the power of people-to-people ties by changing the paradigm for broader contact and cooperation between ASEAN and the United States and double the number of ASEAN and U.S. students studying in one another’s countries by 2015, as well as increase exchanges of researchers and lecturers.

- **Announce an ASEAN-U.S. Integration and Training Initiative in Support of Narrowing the Development Gap.** ASEAN and the United States should announce a training initiative designed to train over 10,000 officials and high-potential leaders from different sectors in less-developed ASEAN countries within the next two years with a view to narrowing the disparities between ASEAN countries. The initiative should complement the Initiative for ASEAN Integration (IAI), the Lower Mekong Initiative (LMI), and other relevant regional technical assistance initiatives. The initiative should be led by a joint ASEAN-U.S. Steering Group consisting of government and private sector representatives. Other donor agencies and countries should be encouraged to partner with ASEAN and the United States to achieve the goal. Training and funding will come from a mixture of government and business sources in ASEAN and the United States.

- **Announce a Visa Initiative for ASEAN-U.S. Students and Business Executives.** The Leaders should announce an initiative to substantially simplify visa procedures for ASEAN-U.S. students and business executives to travel to, study and work in ASEAN and the United States.

- **Explore Creation of an ASEAN-U.S. Young Leaders’ Forum (YLF).** The Leaders should establish an ASEAN-U.S. Young Leaders’ Forum.
Nominees should represent various sectors and be between the ages of 25 and 45 from each country. The YLF should be coordinated through relevant ASEAN youth bodies and appropriate U.S. bodies, and funded through public and private contributions. A delegation of YLF leaders should also be invited to participate in the ASEAN-U.S. Business Summit, when appropriate. The YLF should also address the innovations, obstacles and challenges in advocating and tackling youth issues, as well as best practices and lessons learned of youth movements in respective countries.

- **Launch an ASEAN-U.S. Education Initiative.** The Leaders should invite educational institution leaders at the university and secondary level to propose an ASEAN-U.S. education initiative aimed at doubling the number of students studying in one another’s countries by 2015. The effort should include school-to-school and student mentoring programs.

- **Promote Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women.** The Leaders should outline a strong commitment to strive for gender equality and empowerment of women in ASEAN and the United States. Women’s empowerment groups should be encouraged to develop ASEAN-U.S. initiatives, including exchange programs, educational efforts, and mentoring programs. ASEAN and the United States also should commit to share best practices in ensuring gender equality and women’s empowerment.

- **Launch ASEAN-U.S. Youth Games.** Recognizing the power of sport to foster understanding and build goodwill, the Leaders should launch an ASEAN Youth Games to encourage interaction of ASEAN-U.S. youth through sports and games such as basketball, swimming, and badminton, as well as traditional sports in ASEAN countries, such as pencak silat, sepak takraw, and Thai boxing. The ASEAN-U.S. Youth Games could be held regularly in ASEAN countries and the United States alternately. This sports initiative should also include training of athletes, coaches and referees, as well as cooperation in sport sciences and medicine.

- **Create an ASEAN-U.S. Center in Washington D.C.** The center would be a nexus for ASEAN-U.S. tourism, investment, cultural cooperation and education, enhancing exposure, familiarity and engagement with ASEAN and U.S. cultures.
Develop an ASEAN-U.S. Health Initiative. The Leaders should launch an ASEAN-U.S. Health Initiative to foster cooperation in areas including science and technology, the exchange of researchers, doctor specialization, treatment and prevention of diseases and other health disorders. This initiative should engage leading non-government organizations, national and regional health organizations, the private sector and doctor and patient groups.

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