

**SPEECH BY MR TAN CHUAN-JIN
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AT THE FIRST PLENARY SESSION OF
THE 41ST ASEAN INTER-PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY
(AIPA) GENERAL ASSEMBLY
8 SEPTEMBER 2020
VIA VIDEO-CONFERENCE**

Her Excellency Nguyen Thi Kim Ngan,

President of the National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of
Vietnam

Distinguished Colleagues

Your Excellencies

Ladies and Gentlemen

1 Allow me to extend my warmest greetings to my friends and colleagues here. I hope that this meeting finds all of you in good health. On behalf of the Singapore delegation, I would also like to take the opportunity to express my appreciation and gratitude to Her Excellency Nguyen Thi Kim Ngan, President of the National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam for hosting the 41st General Assembly of the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly. It is my pleasure to join my distinguished colleagues and fellow Parliamentarians today, albeit virtually. Before we start, I would also like to congratulate Vietnam on its able chairmanship of ASEAN this year, amidst these challenging times.

2 2020 has been an extraordinary year. The COVID-19 pandemic will be a challenge like no other and will likely be the defining event of our generation. The virus has spread to every corner of the globe, and affected all of our countries and peoples. The effects of COVID-19 extend beyond the health domain, with profound economic and social implications.

3 The onset of the pandemic has brought about extensive disruptions to the way we live, work and travel in ASEAN and the world. It is heartening that even as governments worldwide imposed containment measures and travel restrictions to stem the spread of the pandemic, ASEAN Member States quickly rose to the occasion to support one another in the repatriation and provision of consular assistance to one another's citizens.

4 ASEAN's response to the evolving pandemic will define our organisation in the decades to follow. The regional nature of such challenges calls for a coordinated and well-calibrated approach. In this connection, Vietnam's ASEAN Chairmanship theme of "Cohesive and Responsive ASEAN" is especially relevant and underscores how ASEAN needs to work in concert and respond to the pandemic outbreak in an effective and timely manner. It also stresses the importance of having an integrated regional response to the outbreak and strengthening existing regional cooperation mechanisms, going

beyond the health sector and considering the extensive implications on our economies and the livelihoods of our people.

5 Through the years, ASEAN has weathered numerous setbacks and challenges by remaining united and addressing our problems together. This commitment has been demonstrated in our response to the pandemic as well, where we have worked to establish a COVID-19 ASEAN Response Fund and are working to set up a Regional Reserve of Medical Supplies. We are also in the process of formulating an ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework, to chart a path forward into the new normal. These developments are testament to the effectiveness of regional dialogue, and to the importance of multilateralism.

6 It is against this backdrop that we meet for the 41st AIPA General Assembly today. As Parliamentarians, we play an important role in representing the needs of our citizens and supporting our respective countries' responses to the pandemic. We are also in a strong and unique position to promote understanding and awareness of ASEAN amongst our constituents and communicate the continued importance of the ASEAN Community. This is ever more important, as regional and international cooperation will be critical in restoring transnational travel, supply chain connectivity and economic activity in the wake of the pandemic. It remains our duty to remain connected to

our constituents, give voice to the challenges they face, and endeavour to reduce the impact of COVID-19 on their lives and livelihoods.

7 We will need to work closely together and with our external partners, including through the sharing of information and best practices, to remain responsive and safeguard the well-being of our peoples. More than ever, it is pertinent that we continue to use ASEAN platforms such as AIPA to foster greater cooperation amongst ASEAN Member States and build mutual understanding, trust and confidence, so that together, ASEAN can weather this storm.

8 Even as we focus on mitigating and recovering from COVID-19, we need to prepare ourselves for the post-COVID-19 normal. In this regard, we should not lose sight of the need to cooperate in areas of enduring common interest. Some are relatively recent, such as cybersecurity and the development of smart cities. Some are longer-standing, including regional economic integration and transboundary challenges such as climate change, transboundary haze pollution and transboundary crime. This will ensure that ASEAN remains resilient and relevant in the decades to come.

9 With that, I would like to thank my friends and fellow Parliamentarians. I hope that our discussions will be both productive and enjoyable. Thank you.

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