

Joint statement on UK – ASEAN Economic Dialogue

News story

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The first UK-ASEAN Economic Dialogue was held on 26 August 2020 to strengthen economic cooperation between the UK and ASEAN and bolster economic recovery efforts amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

Liz Truss, Secretary of State for International Trade, co-chaired the UK-ASEAN Economic Dialogue with the 2020 Chair of the ASEAN Economic Community Minister Tran Tuan Anh of Vietnam. The virtual economic dialogue was attended by economic ministers and officials from the ten ASEAN member states as well as the ASEAN Secretary General Dato Lim Jock Hoi.

1. We share deep concern over the COVID-19 pandemic, which has affected the lives of people as well as economies around the world. Our thoughts are with all those who have lost loved ones and are suffering from the long-term effects of the pandemic. We recognise the heroic efforts of healthcare and essential workers around the world.
2. The pandemic has triggered an unprecedented global health and economic crisis. Mitigating its economic impact requires solidarity and collaboration. We are committed to working together to: (i) sustain and deepen the close economic ties between ASEAN and the UK; (ii) mitigate the economic impact of COVID-19; (iii) strengthen economic resilience; and (iv) pursue sustainable economic growth that keeps markets open and transparent.
3. We welcome the longstanding economic relationship between ASEAN and the UK. Since the inception of ASEAN over half a century ago, our economic relationship has grown deeper and broader. Bilateral trade in goods and

services stands close to £42bn. We are determined to build on this partnership and explore opportunities for collaboration that support job creation and connectivity.

4. We reaffirm our commitment to free trade within the international rules-based system, noting that this is vital to economic recovery and future growth. We share the desire to ensure that the WTO is forward looking, reformed, and fit to tackle 21st century trade challenges. We look forward to working together to make progress on these matters ahead of the 12th WTO Ministerial Conference.
5. The pandemic has exposed the vulnerability of supply chains, particularly for essential goods, including food, medicines, medical devices and equipment, and other related products. As recognised by the Hanoi Plan of Action on Strengthening ASEAN Economic Cooperation and Supply Chain Connectivity in Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic, strengthening supply chain connectivity, including diversification, is key to a resilient economic recovery that safeguards against future shocks. We will work together to strengthen ASEAN-UK supply chains by assessing the resilience of trade between ASEAN and UK firms and identifying ways to further strengthen these supply chains.
6. We are committed to ensuring that digital innovation is a central pillar of our recovery from COVID-19. As recognised by ASEAN Leaders during the 36th ASEAN Summit, digital innovation is key to mitigating the economic impact of COVID-19. The UK will deepen its digital partnership with ASEAN through its Digital Trade Network and by funding a new UK-ASEAN Digital Business Challenge, exploring how tech Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) can deliver solutions to tough business challenges.
7. We underline the significant contribution of public-private sector partnership, both in responding to COVID-19 and driving future growth. We recognise the important work of the ASEAN Business Advisory Council (ABAC), supported by the Joint Business Councils, including the UK-ASEAN Business Council. The UK will continue to work closely with ABAC to design a private sector-led regional digital trade connectivity roadmap, complementing the ASEAN Single Window programme and other ASEAN trade facilitation programmes which can lead to a more facilitative trade within ASEAN and beyond.
8. We agree that the current economic climate presents an opportunity to build a greener and more sustainable global economy, in line with the objectives of the Paris Agreement in advance of COP26 next year. The UK is committed to supporting ASEAN with a science-based clean recovery that will create employment in the industries of the future while addressing public health challenges. This includes providing technical assistance to develop green financial systems and energy efficiency across the region through the £15m Prosperity Fund ASEAN Low Carbon

Energy Programme and £12m global Green Recovery Challenge Fund.

9. We emphasise that the Masterplan on ASEAN Connectivity 2025 provides the ASEAN-led framework for much of our cooperation. To this end, the £19m UK Prosperity Fund ASEAN Economic Reform Programme, launched with Secretary General Dato Lim Jock Hoi in London in January 2019, has a number of strands in line with the objectives in the Masterplan on ASEAN Connectivity 2025, particularly on digital innovation, seamless logistics and regulatory excellence. The UK will collaborate with ASEAN to deliver resilient and complex infrastructure projects that boost connectivity in the region.

10. We look forward to continued cooperation to ensure that the ASEAN and UK support each other as we recover from this pandemic.

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