

**Presidential Communications Operations Office  
Presidential News Desk**

**INTERVENTION OF PRESIDENT RODRIGO ROA DUTERTE AT THE SPECIAL ASEAN  
SUMMIT ON COVID-19**  
[14 April 2020]

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Your Majesty, Excellencies,

I also extend my warm welcome to His Excellency Muhyiddin Yassin, the Prime Minister of Malaysia.

We are in the middle of an unfolding catastrophe – unprecedented in scale and devastating in impact for all.

We face a new and different kind of enemy. In the most visceral way, COVID-19 is upending the totality of our way of life. And this virus threatens to exact the highest tolls - on our peoples and our economies.

We are forced to impose drastic measures to address this pandemic. We asked our people to distance from each other and stay home. We reduced socio-economic activities to the barest minimum. And we closed our borders, creating barriers for mobility and trade.

These immediate responses, while necessary, could drive our societies and the larger international community further apart. And yet, an effective, strategic response requires that we come together and cooperate even more.

Retreating from the regional and global connections cannot be the answer. To effectively overcome the challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic, ASEAN must collaborate and coordinate within our region and beyond.

Let me therefore discuss four main areas where we can act collectively and support each other.

First, our healthcare systems are under increasing stress as the number of infections rise. We face a shortage of vital medicines and medical equipment and supplies. We need to boost production and facilitate intra-ASEAN trade of these life-saving necessities.

Second, we are particularly concerned with food security in this period of lockdowns. Our most urgent priority is ensuring sufficient supply of rice for our people.

ASEAN must remain open for trade. Crisis or no crisis, as no country can stand alone. Let us, therefore ensure the supply chain connectivity and the smooth flow of goods within our region.

Food security is key in maintaining socio-economic and political stability, especially at a time of great difficulty for our people. We can ignore this only at our own risk.

These measures address “here and now” issues. They are really important, but they are not enough. We have to look ahead. And this brings me to the third point.

Without a vaccine or a cure, we can only delay the spread of the disease. But containment, in whatever form and degree, will have staggering socio-economic implications for all of us.

It is therefore imperative that we support vaccine and research and development initiatives. We should fast-track cooperation with our Dialogue Partners in this area. For its part, the Philippines is ready to join solidarity with clinical trials for COVID-19 treatment.

Fourth and finally, COVID-19 will not be the last pandemic the world will face. We have to be ready for future outbreaks. We therefore have to improve and expand existing ASEAN’s mechanisms to cover public health emergencies.

Specifically, we should establish an early warning system for pandemics in the region. This is something vital and concrete that we can do in a collective manner.

In this context, we welcome Thailand’s proposal to establish a COVID-19 ASEAN Response Fund.

Your Majesty, Excellencies,

This emergency has triggered a crisis of solidarity in the other parts of the world. As we always have in times of great challenges – ASEAN stands in unity, mutual assistance, and confidence in our collective unity.

We thank Viet Nam for its leadership in crafting and coordinating ASEAN’s response from the early stages of the outbreak.

We appreciate the generosity and support of our brothers and sisters in ASEAN, particularly Brunei Darussalam and Singapore for the timely assistance. I take this opportunity to convey our deepest gratitude of the Filipino nation.

Our present challenge transcends borders and exempts no one. Regardless of how we handle the crisis within our own respective territories, we can only be truly safe if we defeat this virus everywhere.

Let us therefore strengthen our networks of solidarity and cooperation. Let us surmount this crisis together.

Thank you.

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