

**SPEECH BY MR LOH NGAI SENG,
PERMANENT SECRETARY, MINISTRY OF TRANSPORT,
AT THE OPENING CEREMONY OF THE 35TH
ASEAN MARITIME TRANSPORT WORKING GROUP MEETING
ON 27 FEBRUARY 2018, 0930 HRS,
AT PARK ROYAL ON BEACH ROAD**

MTWG Leaders,

ASEAN Secretariat,

Distinguished delegates,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning. To our friends who have come from abroad, a very warm welcome to Singapore. It gives me great pleasure to open the 35th ASEAN Maritime Transport Working Group Meeting.

Maritime Transport as the Key Catalyst for ASEAN's Economic Growth

2. Since the late 1970s, GDP growth per capita in ASEAN has dramatically outpaced the rest of the world. Following this trend, experts estimate that ASEAN could become the fourth largest single market in the world by 2030, after the US, EU and China, with a combined GDP of US\$10 trillion.

3. Maritime transport has been and will continue to be a key catalyst responsible for ASEAN's economic growth. Our Leaders have recognised the importance of maritime transport and continue to emphasise the need to broaden our maritime cooperation, and enhance our maritime linkages and connectivity.

4. The MTWG is the key ASEAN forum looking at maritime issues concerning our region, and has achieved much over the years. The Memorandum of Understanding on ASEAN Cooperation Mechanism for Joint Oil Spill Preparedness and Response signed in 2014, for instance, has helped to promote mutual assistance in preparing for and combating oil spill incidents in the region. Another example is the successful launch of the Davao-General Santos-Bitung roll-on/roll-off

(ro-ro) route in April 2017, which has significantly reduced the shipping time between Indonesia and Philippines, and created many possibilities for businesses operating in both countries.

5. I would, therefore, like to take the opportunity to commend the ASEAN Secretariat and the MTWG for all the good work done thus far.

Working Together for a Better ASEAN

6. We must press on with such efforts and I would like to encourage the MTWG to continue focusing on the three following areas.

7. First, further integrating our maritime sectors. Efforts to realise the ASEAN Single Shipping Market, or ASSM, and ASEAN Ro-Ro Shipping Network will boost the competitiveness of member states and ASEAN as a whole. The ASSM, for example, will facilitate the flow of goods and shipping services among the ASEAN member states. Shipping service suppliers will find it easier to establish companies and operate across national borders within the region.

8. I understand that the MTWG is in the midst of considering proposals for the pilot project to implement the ASSM. I urge member states to contribute actively to make the ASSM a reality for the benefit of our people.

9. Second, we should continue to work closely to minimise the compliance burden for our companies and those operating in this region. One good example is the MTWG's intention to establish a Same Risk Area in ASEAN, in response to the Ballast Water Management Convention. If implemented effectively, it will allow us to reduce compliance costs for ships engaged in short-sea shipping in the region and at the same time, fulfil the Convention's objective of preventing the transfer of potentially harmful invasive species.

10. A third area where we must work closely together is safety at sea. To this end, I understand that the MTWG is in the midst of finalising the MOU on the Improvement of Safety Standards and Ship Inspection for Non-Convention Ships. I look forward to the adoption of the MOU at the upcoming 45th ASEAN Senior Transport Officials' Meeting in Thailand.

11. Underpinning all three areas of focus is the advent of digitalisation and autonomous technology. These developments will change the face of maritime transport as we know it today. We must therefore embrace these new technologies, or risk being left behind. The MTWG is the appropriate platform to discuss how we can ride on this technological wave to bring our maritime sectors to a new height.

Working with our Dialogue Partners

12. Even as we move towards a more inter-connected ASEAN, we should continue to strengthen our maritime links with our key dialogue partners – China, Japan and the Republic of Korea. Together, they account for over US\$700 billion, or 30%, of the total ASEAN trade, and this is likely to grow in the years to come.

13. On this note, I would also like to thank all our Dialogue Partners, for their support for the various maritime transport-related initiatives at the ASEAN MTWG. Your contributions have helped spur the development of the maritime sector in ASEAN.

Conclusion

14. To conclude, ASEAN is well positioned to capture the many opportunities as sea trade grows. The MTWG plays a critical role in translating that ambition into reality.

15. I now declare the 35th ASEAN MTWG meeting open. I wish you fruitful and productive discussions.

16. Thank you.

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