



**Asia-Pacific
Economic Cooperation**

2022/MRT/JMS

Statement of the Chair - Ministers Responsible for Trade Meeting 2022



**Ministers Responsible for Trade Meeting
Bangkok, Thailand
21-22 May 2022**

STATEMENT OF THE CHAIR

(Bangkok, Thailand, 22 May 2022)

The Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Ministers Responsible for Trade (MRT) met in Bangkok, Thailand, from 21-22 May 2022, under the chairmanship of H.E. Mr. Jurin Laksanawisit, Thailand's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Commerce. The Statement of the Chair reflects the Chair's assessment of the prevailing views of all APEC member economies as expressed during the course of the two-day meeting.

The meeting welcomed the participation of the Director-General of the World Trade Organization (WTO), the Chair of the APEC Business Advisory Council (ABAC), the Pacific Economic Cooperation Council (PECC), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) Secretariat.

Varying views were expressed on the prevailing situation. The meeting expressed its concern over the still fragile-recovery from Covid-19 on our region, including global supply chain disruptions, inflation, food and energy crisis on this nascent economic recovery, as well as the achievement of APEC's vision for an open, dynamic, resilient and peaceful Asia-Pacific community. Views were expressed on the need to ensure peace and stability in our region as well as upholding international law, recognizing that these are preconditions for the inclusive and sustainable economic growth for which APEC strives.

Cognizant of the role of trade as an integral part of the solution to the increasingly complex, cross-cutting challenges faced by our economies today, the meeting strongly supported the need for meaningful actions - organised around the themes of "Open. Connect. Balance." - to achieve the Putrajaya Vision 2040 as follows:

Open to ALL Opportunities

We welcome the presentation made by the Director-General of the WTO at our MRT meeting and note the compounding challenges facing the WTO, including in the lead-up to Twelfth WTO Ministerial Conference (MC12). We reaffirm the importance of the rules-based multilateral trading system, with the WTO at its core. We are determined to safeguard a free, fair, open, non-discriminatory, transparent, inclusive and predictable trade and investment environment. We will also continue to work to ensure a level-playing field. We continue to support necessary reforms in the WTO to improve the effectiveness of its monitoring, negotiating and dispute settlement functions. APEC member participants in the Joint Initiative on Services Domestic Regulation welcome the conclusion of its negotiations. We acknowledge substantial progress in the negotiations and discussion on e-commerce and investment facilitation for development. Recognising the important role that trade plays in advancing sustainability and inclusivity, we also welcome efforts to intensify work at the WTO on trade and environment, micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, and trade and gender.

We recognise that MC12 is an important opportunity for members to advance and position the WTO for meaningful work that will contribute to the strengthening and improving of the rules-based multilateral trading system. In this regard, we support efforts to deliver timely, pragmatic, effective and forward-looking multilateral outcomes at MC12, promoting the efficient and equitable distribution of safe, effective, quality-assured, and affordable COVID-19 vaccines, therapeutics, diagnostics and other essential medical goods, as well as other areas relevant to trade and health. Acknowledging the role trade rules played in supporting members during the COVID-19 pandemic, and lessons-learned about the challenges that

members experienced, we look to build resiliency during this pandemic and future shocks. We will continue to work to ensure that the TRIPS Agreement supports efforts to research, develop, invest in, manufacture, and distribute more COVID-19 vaccines, and to seek a concrete and meaningful outcome on a temporary waiver of certain intellectual property protections on COVID-19 vaccines and in trade and health discussions at the WTO. We encourage all economies to work together to achieve this outcome. Moreover, it is crucial that APEC economies continue to ramp up trade facilitation efforts, and do not create unnecessary barriers to trade, in accordance with WTO rules. We will continue to support our businesses to build and maintain open, secure, and resilient supply chains to facilitate seamless connectivity in the region.

Conserving and sustainably using marine resources is vital, and we view that concrete progress can be secured through the conclusion of fisheries subsidies negotiations in line with the WTO Ministerial Decision of 13 December 2017 on Fisheries Subsidies. We therefore reiterate our previous call for an agreement to a comprehensive and meaningful outcome on fisheries subsidies no later than MC12.

We are concerned about the increase in food insecurity and hunger globally. We reiterate our shared commitment in the APEC Food Security Roadmap Towards 2030 to help each other achieve food security, recognising that a well-functioning food system is critical to our people's health and well-being and to the success of our economies. We believe that there are many factors that affect food security, however, a free, open, fair, non-discriminatory, transparent and predictable trade and investment environment can help support increased food security. Despite its importance for ensuring global food security and sustainable economic development, agriculture is one of the most protected sectors in global trade. We recognise the need for a meaningful outcome on agriculture at the WTO, reflecting our collective interests and sensitivities, with a view towards achieving substantial progressive reductions in support and protection, as envisaged in the continuation of the reform process provided in Article 20 of the WTO Agreement on Agriculture and existing mandates. In addition, we reiterate our support for the World Food Programme's (WFP) efforts in combatting hunger and malnutrition. It is critical that the WTO urgently find a way to meaningfully support those efforts.

We underscore the importance of continuous efforts in implementing the APEC Services Competitiveness Roadmap (ASCR) to achieve its targets by 2025, taking into account the recommendations in the Summary Report of the ASCR Mid-Term Review (MTR).

Considering the vital role of trade facilitation in supporting the efficient flow of essential goods including COVID-19 vaccines, diagnostics, therapeutics, and other related essential medical products during the COVID-19 pandemic, we encourage member economies to continue robustly implementing the Declaration on Facilitating the Movement of Essential Goods, the Statement on COVID-19 Vaccine Supply Chains and the Statement on Services to Support the Movement of Essential Goods. Following our directive in 2021 to identify unnecessary barriers to trade in any relevant services that may hinder expediting and facilitating the movement of essential goods, we recognise the integral role of logistics-related services in the production, distribution and sale of vaccines and medical supplies. We welcome APEC's definition of "logistics-related services" (Annex A). We also reiterate our commitment to accelerate the implementation of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement, particularly of provisions relevant to the timely and efficient release of essential goods, including expedited shipments; pre-arrival processing of electronic declarations; border agency cooperation; electronic documents, electronic certification, and electronic payments; as well as the accelerated use of digitalisation for border processes. We support efforts to

minimise the disruption to trade and global supply chains, and enhance their openness, security, predictability, resilience and connectivity by urging for a new iteration of the Supply Chain Framework Action Plan that includes targeted and measurable benchmarks.

In an effort to step up our endeavour to tackle the cross-border movement of illicit goods related to COVID-19, we welcome the Best Practices Guidelines on Customs Control for COVID-19 Related Goods, which will serve as an operational and practical guide to prevent the import and export of illicit COVID-19 vaccines and related goods in an effective and efficient manner.

We realise that our region's long-term economic prosperity, its capacity for innovation and its resilience to future crises all hinge on the implementing of structural reforms to reduce behind-the-border barriers, foster an enabling business environment and promote strong, balanced, inclusive, innovative and sustainable growth. Consequently, we encourage member economies to foster an enabling environment supported by digital economy and innovation and pursue structural reforms in line with the Enhanced APEC Agenda for Structural Reform (EAASR) while fostering the updated modes of implementing the Third APEC Ease of Doing Business Action Plan. We welcome the submission of members' individual action plans and encourage capacity building to implement the EAASR.

In support of advancing the APEC Putrajaya Vision 2040 and the Aotearoa Plan of Action, we are pleased to have engaged with ABAC at the Public Private Dialogue on the Free Trade Area of the Asia-Pacific (FTAAP), the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond, held in conjunction with the MRT meeting. Noting current challenges to the prosperity of the region, we welcome ABAC's efforts to promote a sustainable recovery and economic development. We take note of the ABAC statement on FTAAP that underscores ABAC's proposal for APEC to develop a multi-year work plan/work programme across the FTAAP agenda on digitalisation, inclusion, sustainability, trade and investment and trade response to pandemic. We recognise the useful contributions of the Lima Declaration and the Beijing Roadmap on progressing the FTAAP agenda. Determined to bring new momentum to the FTAAP agenda in line with the Putrajaya Vision, we task officials to develop a multi-year work plan to continue dialogue and capacity building programs, with a view to progress the FTAAP agenda, including both traditional and next generation trade and investment issues, and report to us by the APEC Ministerial Meeting in November.

Connect in ALL Dimensions

We recognise the urgency of resuming safe and seamless cross-border travel without undermining efforts to prevent the spread of COVID-19. To foster and increase inclusive economic activity and growth, and particularly to revitalise the travel, tourism, maritime and other sectors that were severely impacted by cross-border mobility restrictions, we welcome the establishment of the Safe Passage Taskforce, a temporary group which will coordinate APEC's efforts towards contributing to tangible and practical solutions for restoring the region's connectivity through the resumption of safe and seamless travel. We welcome the Voluntary Principles for the Interoperability of Vaccination Certificates in the APEC Region (Annex B). We look forward to the development of an APEC information portal for safe passage and the sharing of technical specifications for the interoperability of vaccination certificates. We also note the progress in other ongoing work supporting safe passage covering various aspects from air and maritime crew travel facilitation, and health technologies to continue conversation on a more inclusive APEC Business Travel Card (ABTC).

With a view to a seamless and comprehensively connected and integrated Asia-Pacific, we encourage the advancement of the implementation of the APEC Connectivity Blueprint to further improve physical, institutional and people-to-people connectivity. We will continue to support our businesses to build and maintain open, secure and resilient supply chains to facilitate seamless connectivity in the region. We recognise the importance of promoting regional, sub-regional and remote area connectivity through quality infrastructure development and investment. We also believe that the application of digital technology has an increasingly important role to play in achieving regional, sub-regional and remote area connectivity.

We reiterate the necessity of digitalization and the adoption of digital solutions to boost economic growth. In this light, we commend the efforts of the Digital Economy Steering Group and the Telecommunications and Information Working Group on promoting the region's digital transformation and connectivity with the aim to promote the interoperability and standardization of e-commerce/digital transactions. At the same time, APEC should continue to support the narrowing of the digital divide by strengthening digital infrastructure, facilitating access to information and communication technologies and supporting development of digital skills and literacy to ensure that no one is left behind. Moreover, we will cooperate on facilitating the flow of information and data, and strengthening business and consumer trust in digital transaction. We urge officials to accelerate progress in implementation of the APEC Internet and Digital Economy Roadmap to create an enabling, inclusive and non-discriminatory digital economy.

Balance in ALL Aspects

We take note of ongoing APEC efforts, including the development of a standalone statement for Leaders' consideration, to support the Bio-Circular-Green (BCG) Economy as an approach for achieving an inclusive, balanced and sustainable recovery from COVID-19, long-term resilient economic growth, and environmental and climate objectives. In this connection, we highlight that the attainment of APEC-wide goals would require synergy across multiple policy areas. We appreciate the economic growth potential of bio, circular and green economy approaches, and support investment, research, and strengthening economic and technical cooperation and capacity building in this area.

Seized by the urgency of tackling environmental challenges including climate change, biodiversity loss and plastic pollution, we recognise the need to promote economic policies that enable ambitious and concrete actions aligned with the global efforts, such as the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the goals of the Paris Agreement. We recognise the need to provide international support including capacity building, technological and financial support, which are key enablers in this regard.

Recent volatility in energy markets has placed a burden on consumers at a critical moment of economic recovery. In light of this, we recognise the importance of stable and sustainable global energy supplies, and underscore the need to promote energy resilience, access and security in the region, including through appropriate options to diversify the energy mix with a wide variety of energy sources and technologies consistent with global climate objectives, reflecting different circumstances in each economy, and noting that the achievement of the sustainable economic growth and climate objectives both significantly rely on clean energy transitions that are sustainable and inclusive.

Recognising the need to build a resilient and reliable low-emission economy, we reaffirm our commitments to rationalise and phase out inefficient fossil fuel subsidies that encourage wasteful consumption. We take note of APEC's ongoing work to this end, and will continue our efforts in an accelerated manner. We call for member economies to advance discussions in 2022 to facilitate future implementation in this area, including on last year's commitment, for those economies that are in a position to do so, to explore options to pursue a potential voluntary standstill on inefficient fossil fuel subsidies. We appreciate the efforts of APEC members that have already completed voluntary peer reviews and urge others to participate in this process. At the same time, we recognise the importance of providing those in need with essential energy services, especially in light of the current global energy situation, and reiterate our support for capacity building initiatives relating to this work.

Given our firm commitment to promoting environmental sustainability through economic cooperation and trade, we welcome the progress made in connection with the 2012 APEC List of Environmental Goods, and updating the list to Harmonised System 2022 for reference purposes and look forward to further updates at our November 2022 meeting. Furthermore, we note the progress in discussions to develop recommendations for potentially producing a voluntary, non-binding reference list of emerging environmental goods that would inform our future discussions on addressing climate change and promoting sustainability through economic policy, including trade and investment. We also recognise the importance of further discussions on the impact of non-tariff measures on trade in environmental goods.

We stress the importance of advancing work on enhancing trade in environmental services, given the role that these services can play in contributing to the long-term environmental sustainability of our region. We welcome the progress of the discussions on how to increase trade in environmental and environmentally related services and instruct officials to continue this work.

We recognise the urgency of advancing economic inclusion through trade and investment policies, capacity building, and supporting the objective of ensuring that commercial activities benefit the well-being of people from all communities. We acknowledge the need to encourage the transition of economic actors from the informal to the formal economy, advance employment and decent work and promote business opportunities to create a conducive environment for the economic inclusion of MSMEs, women and others with untapped economic potential, including through their participation in global value chains. To this end, we note recent work in APEC to support the economic empowerment of Indigenous Peoples and those in rural and remote areas, among others. We take note of current initiatives and encourage further work towards this goal. We remain committed to advancing gender equality and the economic empowerment of women of diverse backgrounds particularly accelerating the full implementation of the La Serena Roadmap for Women and Inclusive Growth to catalyse policy actions across APEC to enable women to reach their full economic potential, including access to finance and financial literacy and participation and leadership in global trade.

Furthermore, to strengthen the ability of MSMEs in the transition towards a green, sustainable and innovative MSMEs including access to reliable and clean energy, we highlight the importance of promoting innovation and the voluntary uptake of green and innovative technologies as outlined in the APEC Strategy for Green, Sustainable and Innovative MSMEs such that no one is left behind in the transition to a green economy. We welcome initiatives that could provide guidance to MSMEs such as the APEC Symposium on MSMEs and BCG Economy. We support economies to share additional practices on encouraging MSMEs to seek green and sustainable growth and digital transformation, and we will collaborate to

improve opportunities for MSMEs to be competitive, specialised, innovative and expand into international markets. We also encourage the empowerment of MSMEs and women with digital and financial literacy tools, including through the exchange of best practices and information-sharing on technical assistance and capacity-building across APEC activities.

We will strive to ensure our recovery efforts are free from the serious threats of corruption, fraud, waste and abuse. We are committed to effective, practical and timely cooperation between competent authorities. We will promote transparency, accountability and integrity as a basis for preventing and combatting corruption.

With the Putrajaya Vision 2040, which will guide our work for the next twenty years, and the Aotearoa Plan of Action, which will be key to implementing this vision, we call on all economies to press forward with efforts to accelerate the Asia-Pacific region's recovery from the pandemic and realize an open, dynamic, resilient and peaceful Asia-Pacific community by 2040. To this end, we urge officials to pursue the robust and meaningful implementation of the Putrajaya Vision 2040, including through the Aotearoa Plan of Action, for the prosperity of all our people and future generations.