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Speech

YB Dato' Seri Hishammuddin Tun Hussein
Minister of Defence and Minister with Special Functions, Malaysia

'Allied Against Terrorism' – Meeting of Ministers of Defence of the States of the Islamic Military Counter Terrorism Coalition (IMCTC)

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[SALUTATIONS]

1. Let me start by extending my special thanks to HM King Salman Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud, the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques; HRH Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman; and the government of Saudi Arabia for initiating this historic inaugural Islamic Military Counter Terrorism Coalition (IMCTC) Ministerial Meeting.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

2. Today's gathering in Riyadh could not be more crucial. We need to remind the world that the Muslim nations present today completely condemn terrorism and violent extremism. The world should have no doubt that we stand collectively with the international community in the fight to eradicate this global menace.

3. All of us are more than aware of the threat of terrorism, and the carnage these groups are spreading not only regionally, but globally. We in ASEAN have been monitoring closely from afar developments in this region with regards to the Islamic State and other radical terrorist groups. Malaysia is aware that there is a widespread belief here that Iran has contributed to the instability in the region. On that note, we have always been consistent in our position that anyone should avoid any further action that could be detrimental to the stability of this region.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

4. Just two years ago, as the chair of the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM), I consciously persuaded and convinced all 10 ASEAN

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Defence Ministers to jointly declare our strong condemnation against the Islamic State. However, my fellow colleagues, it seems our biggest fear have become a reality. It pains me to say that this threat has now reached our shores in Southeast Asia.

5. As the Islamic State gets squeezed out of the Middle East, the prospect of Southeast Asia becoming more of a target has increased significantly. Earlier in May, the Philippines faced the onslaught of the Islamic State, a phenomenon we once thought was exclusive only to the Middle East; and only after 5 harrowing months did the Philippines declare the end of the siege in Marawi City.

6. Furthermore, the coalition's successes against the Islamic State in the Middle East has led to the return of foreign fighters to our region. Regional groups such as the Abu Sayyaf (ASG), Jemaah Islamiyah and the Mujahideen have already publicly pledged their allegiance to the Islamic State. These groups serve as a *'home away from home'* for those running away from Mosul, Aleppo and Raqqa – and they have gone further to even declare an Islamic State caliphate called the *'East Asia Wilayah'*. Their self-declared caliphate spans Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippines, Southern Thailand and Myanmar as they continue to lose territory in Iraq and Syria. Make no mistake, this development will not hamper our efforts, we will fight them on all fronts.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

7. As a Founding Member of the IMCTC, Malaysia has never wavered in our efforts to combat the spread of terrorism. Firstly, Malaysia together with Indonesia and the Philippines, pushed through a security agenda never before seen in the region called the **Trilateral Cooperative Arrangement (TCA)**, an arrangement which combines Maritime Patrols, Air Patrols and Command Centres, jointly led by the Armed Forces of the three nations to address threats in the Sulu Seas, a maritime area just south of Marawi City.

8. Just a few days ago, Prime Minister Najib Razak met with President Joko Widodo of Indonesia and jointly endorsed to further expand the number of joint border posts on both sides of our borders. Malaysia and Indonesia also agreed to pursue land efforts through both our Armies under our trilateral arrangement which is currently focused only on maritime and air patrols. Moreover, Prime Minister Najib Razak and I also had subsequent meetings with His Majesty

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Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah of Brunei Darussalam where His Majesty not only welcomed our trilateral efforts, but also agreed for Brunei Darussalam to continue in the arrangement as an observer.

9. This brings me then secondly to the **King Salman Centre for International Peace (KSCIP)**, which I am proud to announce is currently operational – a landmark collaboration between Malaysia and Saudi Arabia in our fight against terrorism and extremism which is co-chaired by myself and HRH Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman, with HM King Salman and Prime Minister Najib Razak as patrons. The centre aims at countering the narratives and ideologies that underpins terrorism and radicalism in Islam.

10. We are now focusing on sharing counter-narratives, combined with implementing a soft power approach, where we address the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism and seek to undo the radicalization process. This essentially is a war over the *'hearts and minds'* of our people. To do this, a credible narrative needs to be told, in which Islam and modernity are compatible; material progress and religious devotion go hand in hand; and religious knowledge and scientific inquiry mutually reinforce one another.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

11. We also cannot deny that instability surrounding the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia will only serve as an avenue for terrorist groups to flourish. This is why I have instructed the Malaysian Armed Forces to remain in the Kingdom, for three reasons :-

- a. if necessary, to be in a position to provide assistance and facilitate the evacuations of Malaysians in the region;
- b. to provide humanitarian assistance and possibly contribute to rebuilding efforts in Yemen if required;
- c. and to signify Malaysia's steadfast and resolute stand with Saudi Arabia in preserving the security and sanctity of the two Holy Cities of Makkah and Madinah.

12. Malaysia stands ready to share our expertise, just as we have long worked with partners around the world, but where do we go from here? What can we learn from the IMCTC? For one, we have embraced the fact that

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understanding and cooperation remains our utmost priority as the best guarantee against conflict.

13. We have to admit that there may be a lot of differences between us but what divides us pales in comparison to what unites us. It would be disastrous if we approach everything from a zero-sum game. We would get nothing done. The key is for us to be able to accept our differences, find common ground on the problems we face and go forward together.

14. I believe one thing we can all agree on today is that we have a common enemy, and this has united us in more ways than one. For example in ASEAN, issues such as the South China Sea, the Rohingya refugee crisis, and North Korea has resulted in a difference of opinions from ASEAN states, but one thing remains – ASEAN's united stand against the Islamic State as I alluded to earlier.

15. As Muslim nations, it is our responsibility as leaders to address this problem which has tarnished the face of our religion. Today's meeting is important because if not for us, who else can we rely upon to take the helm in this war against terror? As fellow Muslims and brothers in the Ummah, it is us after all who will bear the greatest burden if the cause of peace fails. We not only have to answer to the generations after us, but also to Allah SWT if we fail to rise to the occasion today.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

16. I am proud to be a member of this historic initiative and our presence here truly shows our commitment as brothers in the mission to uphold the safety and security of the Ummah. Today will send a strong signal to the community of nations that Muslim countries are united in our desire to eradicate terrorism.

17. Admittedly, there will be many difficulties and set-backs ahead. But this much I do know : there can be no turning back. It will be a great tragedy if we let the progress we have made slip away from our grasp, as what we do today will not only determine the fate of our Ummah, but also the future of Islam which we have built together.

Thank you.