THE UNITED STATES AND ASEAN LAUNCH A NEW PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY COORDINATION SYSTEM

Through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the U.S. government has long supported the Association of Southeast Asian Nations’ (ASEAN) member states to strengthen regional health security. For more than a decade, USAID and U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC) programs have expanded regional and bilateral partners’ capacity to prevent, detect, and respond to emerging outbreaks and infectious diseases.

The United States continues to build upon this support to assist ASEAN partners to combat COVID-19. Since the onset of the pandemic, the U.S. government has provided more than $112 million to ASEAN countries in emergency health and humanitarian assistance to help response efforts. Through USAID’s Partnership for Regional Optimization within the Political- Security and Socio-Cultural Communities (PROSPECT) project, the United States has agreed to support ASEAN to establish an ASEAN Public Health Emergency Coordination System to strengthen a unified regional response to future pandemics.

PANDEMIC PREPAREDNESS AND PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY RESPONSE

Rapid development, environmental degradation, and increasing cross-border travel and trade in recent decades has made Southeast Asia a global ‘hotspot’ for potential outbreaks of infectious diseases. Although ASEAN already boasts regional health initiatives and platforms for responding to hazards and emerging threats, including preparing for and responding to public health emergencies, these measures would be more effective with strengthened political mandates, formal commitments, and established protocols for a collective response to public health emergencies. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted these vulnerabilities and presents unprecedented opportunities for global health security cooperation to mobilize resources for preparedness and response.

1 In the past decade, ASEAN member states have contended with outbreaks of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) in 2002, Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza in 2004, H1N1 in 2010, as well as faced threats from Ebola in 2014, MERS-CoV in 2015, and the Zika Virus in 2016.
To achieve this, USAID, through the PROSPECT project, will support the Senior Officials’ Meeting on Health Development to help ASEAN institute a formal multi-country plan to better prepare and respond to public health emergencies.

**ESTABLISHING AN ASEAN PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY COORDINATION SYSTEM (APHECS)**

USAID will support ASEAN’s work on the development of a framework for APHECS to integrate existing but disparate coordination mechanisms in the region. Under one cohesive institutional platform through APHECS, ASEAN member states will be better positioned to coordinate across relevant stakeholders and mount a swift and collective response to public health emergencies in the region. APHECS will be implemented through four distinct phases: assessment, framework design, development of Standard Operating Procedures, and Monitoring and Evaluation.

**COLLABORATION**

APHECS will be implemented under the guidance and leadership of ASEAN. Stakeholders such as the World Organization for Animal Health, the Food and Agriculture Organization, relevant national institutions, along with the United States and other ASEAN dialogue partners will be part of a broad and inclusive consultation process. ASEAN consensus on a coordination framework will provide a political mandate for member state collaboration in response to future public health emergencies and complement the planned ASEAN Centre for Public Health Emergencies and Emerging Diseases, an ASEAN-Japan initiative which Australia has also agreed to support.

**EXPECTED RESULTS**

With a robust, integrated intra-regional coordination system, backed by a legally binding instrument, ASEAN will demonstrate its global health security leadership and take a more proactive approach to outbreak preparedness and public health emergency response to prevent and mitigate the impact of future pandemics.

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2 E.g. ASEAN Emergency Operations Centre Network for public health emergencies (ASEAN EOC Network), ASEAN Joint Multi-Sectoral Outbreak Investigation and Response System, and the ASEAN-Plus Three Field Epidemiology Training Network.