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# **ASEAN-China cooperation in time of COVID-19 pandemic**

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The year had just begun when news of the coronavirus outbreak shook the world. The World Health Organization declared it a pandemic when the new virus, named COVID-19, crossed international borders and spread rapidly into many countries of different continents.

Over two months later, another bombshell hit the already shaken world: a drastic drop in oil prices as a result of strong disagreements between Saudi Arabia and Russia. These two developments created global scale crises that threaten the global economy and political stability, especially in the absence of a global leadership.

In the past, it was the United States as the hegemon and leader of the global system since the Atlantic Charter of 1944, which showed leadership in time of global crisis.

Then the G-20 was created as an institution to face and solve global crises, especially the acute ones. The first case in point was the global financial crisis in 2008. The first two meetings of the G-20, held in Washington, DC and London, respectively, were the most successful because both managed to decide on rules and actions to overcome the crises.

Since then, however, the G-20 has become a more bureaucratic entity where leaders and officials are

again doing business as usual, and, therefore, it can hardly contribute anything when the coronavirus became a pandemic; and which together with the collapse of oil prices have created a global economic crisis that can create instability all over the place.

In facing the pandemic in East Asia and the world, we can depend on the ASEAN-China cooperation designed during the special ASEAN-China Foreign Ministers' Meeting on the Coronavirus Disease in Vientiane on Feb. 20. ASEAN and China, both of which have had ample cases of the coronavirus, were the first to help East Asia, including Japan, India, South Korea, Australia, Russia and New Zealand in the context of the East ASEAN Summit, and later assisted and supported efforts in the world. For that purpose, the EAS can become an institution to initiate efforts and the support needed for the world.

The EAS, which has support elements, can be the ideal institution to do so since others have not come forward to show real concern to assist and support the World Health Organization as a United Nations element to carry out technical assistance but which politically cannot do much. If that is difficult and time is of the essence then the ASEAN+3 (China, Japan and South Korea) institution could start the efforts.

We all know that the best way to overcome the crisis is through joint cooperation and the one that is more prepared than others is the ASEAN-China Cooperation enlarged through the East Asian Summit mechanism, where everyone in the Asia Pacific are members of and have ample experiences of cooperation. After assistance to East Asia and the Pacific, the EAS can do more for other parts of the globe.

Some salient points in the statement of the Vientiane special ASEAN-China Foreign Ministers' Meeting on the Coronavirus Disease 2019 that can be the basis for EAS cooperation, among others are:

1. Step up cooperation in the region against COVID-19 by sharing information and best practices in a timely manner, including

exchanging available epidemiological information, technical guidelines and solutions for epidemic prevention and control, diagnosis, treatment and surveillance with a view to enhancing capacity in emerging preparedness and response.

2. Strengthen cooperation within ASEAN-led mechanisms and with external partners to address COVID-19 in a comprehensive and effective manner, taking into account the different levels of development of health systems in the region.
3. Strengthen cooperation in risk communication and community engagement readiness and response to ensure that people are rightly and thoroughly informed on COVID-19 and are not being misled by misinformation and fake news pertaining to COVID-19.
4. Strengthen policy dialogue and exchanges on the latest developments of the COVID-19, including its control and treatment, and its related studies and research through existing mechanisms, such as the ASEAN-China Health Ministers' Meeting and the ASEAN-China Senior Officials' Meeting on Health Development to fully implement the ASEAN-China Memorandum of Understanding on Health Cooperation and support more mutually agreed cooperation projects.
5. Commit to reducing the impact of the epidemic on the economic and social development of all affected countries, jointly maintaining people-to-people exchanges, trade and investment activities in the region, and, based on the progress of the prevention and control of the epidemic, resume and enhance exchange and cooperation.

With those points for cooperation, the EAS cooperation initiated by ASEAN and China can design an important effort to do something together to overcome the coronavirus crises in the Asia-Pacific region and the world.

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