

30<sup>th</sup> March 2020

To all ASEAN Economic Ministers, Finance Ministers and Health Ministers

Your Excellencies,

### THE NEED FOR MAINTAINING SUPPLY CHAINS DURING THE COVID-19 CRISIS

The EU-ASEAN Business Council and the ASEAN Business Advisory Council, as the voices for European and ASEAN businesses across the ASEAN region, and their members stand united with the governments of the region in their fight against the spread of COVID-19. These are extraordinary times, and extraordinary action is needed to help stem increases in infection rates and protect citizens. Many of our members are proactively working with authorities across ASEAN to assist in tackling COVID-19, and providing relief to customers, employees and the communities in which we work.

Many parts of ASEAN are now in varying states of “lockdown”. The deployment of extraordinary measures is prudent given the risk of widespread infection. In some locations this has included directives from government leaders to limit non-essential business activity including the operation of bars, entertainment venues, restaurants, service providers and retail establishments. While certain limitations are in the best interest of public health, it is essential that key industries and sectors, such as those supporting healthcare and suppliers of food, beverages and personal care products, are able to maintain operations throughout this challenging time and also to help minimise impacts on the broader economy and livelihoods.

**It is key, therefore, that supply chains for medicines, medical equipment and devices, food and beverages and personal care products are allowed to continue to operate as much as possible.** These supply chains are complex and, rely on many parts and players to function - from the production and transportation of raw ingredients and components, through to packaging supplies, and the operation of logistics services. It is important, therefore, that **authorities take a broad view** on what is necessary to support such areas when considering the implementation of policies aimed containing the spread of COVID-19. This has to include **access to critical supplies and transportation systems** so that industry can continue to produce and deliver essential products.

It is also vital that small businesses in the hospitality and convenience store sectors currently being closed as a containment measure be supported and allowed to operate where possible and under the right conditions. For instance, by enabling delivery of health, food, beverage or personal care products to consumers from such establishments, governments can take progressive measures to enable small businesses to sell their products and safely deliver them to customers, all while strictly adhering to necessary social distancing protocols. This helps ensure people have access to such essential products, and also reduces the risk of the consumption of illicit products which could create additional public health burdens at a time when healthcare systems are already under immense stress.

We would urge governments and authorities to **consult closely with a broad range of industries and trade associations on this matter before implementing such policies** in order to minimise disruption, protect jobs, and ensure that economies are in a better place to recover quickly once the current emergency is over. In the annex to this letter we have set out some ideas which we hope the governments of the region will take into consideration as they work to on measures to tackle COVID-19.

We would be more than happy to organise virtual meetings with government officials across the region and key members of the business community to discuss this matter further and collaborate to keep our communities safe.

In the meantime, we wish everyone good health. Keep safe.

Kind regards,



Donald Kanak  
Chairman  
EU-ASEAN Business Council



Dr Doan Duy Khuong  
Chairman  
ASEAN Business Advisory Council

E: [donald.kanak@eu-asean.eu](mailto:donald.kanak@eu-asean.eu)

E: [khuongdd@vcci.com.vn](mailto:khuongdd@vcci.com.vn)

## ANNEX

There are some key learnings and best practice that we feel Governments across the region should be considering adopting going forward as a matter of urgency:

- **Fast-track development and delivery of test kits, face masks and other Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).** Fast-track approval process for COVID testing kits, and ensure accelerated importation and / or local manufacturing of approved testing kits, face masks and PPEs
- **Ensure stock-up of essential medicine, healthcare supplies and anti-retro virals needed for COVID treatment.** Work proactively with pharmaceutical companies, medical device companies and distributors to ensure adequate supply
- **Stringent community quarantine, lockdown measures and social distancing.** Social distancing and community quarantine have been proven to “flatten the curve” of the spread of COVID. During lockdown and community quarantine, deploy the following:
  - **Clear implementation rules and guidelines** that are appropriately communicated to the general public, all branches of government and various industries / sectors / corporations with appropriate permits and exemption certificates provided and communicated effectively
  - **Exemption** for key industries to continue operations including healthcare (hospitals, clinics, pharmacies), supply chain and logistic providers for essential products, banks, etc. If public transport will be suspended, ensure adequate transportation and appropriate safety protocols for exempted workers
  - Close **coordination** between **national and local government** with measures being complimentary rather than conflicting
  - Frequent **dialogue with the private sector** to leverage expertise / contributions wherever possible and appropriate
  - Constant and **clear communications** with the general public
- Minimise disruption and **protect supply chains** for essential products including food, beverages, medicine and healthcare products, agricultural commodities and personal care products. Ensure enough **land, sea and air transportation capacity** for such products and **fast-access lanes** where applicable.
- Put measures in place against **profiteering and illicit trade in goods, including keeping as many shops open as possible and permitting home delivery of goods.**
- **Leverage digital technology.** Leverage digital technology for information dissemination (social media), enforcing and monitoring quarantine, identifying COVID hot spots, triaging and initial diagnosis, telemedicine, e-prescriptions, e-commerce for essential goods, e-learning for students, etc.