

STATEMENT
MENARDO I. GUEVARRA
Secretary
Department of Justice
Head of the Philippine Delegation

11th ASEAN LAW MINISTERS MEETING
27 October 2021
via video conference

His Excellency Dato' Sri Dr. Haji Wan Junaidi bin Tuanku Jaafar,

*Minister in the Prime Minister's Department (Parliament and Law),
Malaysia*

His Excellency Tran Duc Binh,

*Deputy Secretary-General of the ASEAN for Community and
Corporate Affairs*

Distinguished Ministers,

Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen:

On behalf of the Philippine Delegation, I would like to express our sincere gratitude to our gracious hosts, the Prime Minister's Office of Malaysia and the Attorney General's Chambers of Malaysia, their officials, the 11th ASEAN Law Ministers Meeting Secretariat, together with the ASEAN Secretariat, and the people of Malaysia for hosting this Meeting through videoconference.

The pandemic has created physical distance among all of us. While technology has bridged communication, thereby preserving our tasks and timelines, virtual meetings can never replace the

advantages and benefits of personal interactions. We are missing out on the warm personal hospitality of the Malaysian people, and the ASEAN trademark of pleasant conversations among colleagues and friends. During breaks between meetings, we get the chance to reconnect with and meet new friends, and discuss less serious topics. Nonetheless, we continue to move forward and work together.

We recognize and appreciate concerted efforts to supply anti-covid-19 vaccines throughout all ASEAN Member States under the auspices of the ASEAN COVID-19 Recovery Fund. Surely, when this is all done, we will be sitting together face to face at the meeting table, and having our usual pleasant conversations.

I am pleased to be at this Meeting among colleagues who share the objective of strengthening legal cooperation within the ASEAN region.

The first meeting of the ASEAN Senior Law Officials Working Group on the ASEAN Extradition Treaty has been productive. I commend the working group for being focused on its task. It has agreed on its terms of reference for the drafting of the ASEAN Extradition Treaty, has undertaken to finish the final draft of the treaty within two (2) years, and has started discussions on the working document. This gives me high hope that with the ASEAN Extradition Treaty in place, we shall send the clear message that there is no welcome mat for fugitives in our region. We are committed to finish this task, and the Philippines will gladly host a meeting of the Working Group on the ASEAN Extradition Treaty, at a mutually convenient time.

Equally important is the proposal of the Philippines to develop an ASEAN-wide Convention on Transfer of Sentenced Persons (TSP).

The proposed Convention manifests our guiding principle that serving justice is compatible with giving humanitarian consideration to convicted and sentenced persons. Allowing foreign prisoners to serve their sentence in their own countries will facilitate their rehabilitation and reintegration into mainstream society.

Since its proposal at the 15th ASEAN Senior Law Officials Meeting (ASLOM), there have been two successful ASEAN Law Fora, conducted in line with the proposed Convention on TSP.

During the 20th ASLOM, the Philippines presented a proposal for the creation of a Technical Working Group (TWG) on TSP. We were encouraged by the feedback, as most ASEAN Member States positively responded to our proposal for the creation of such Working Group.

It is with great satisfaction that I note the elevation of the existing Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty in Criminal Matters into an ASEAN Treaty, and the integration of the Senior Officials' Meeting of the Central Authorities on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters and the ASEAN Ministers/Attorneys-General Meeting of the Central Authorities on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters as an ASEAN Sectoral Ministerial Body. This would certainly intensify the legal cooperation among ASEAN Member States, for the common goal of curbing crimes.

Our engagement with other ASEAN sectoral bodies to address cross-cutting challenges and issues should continue and should be further strengthened. The ASEAN Community Vision 2025 could best be realized through effective cross-pillar and cross-sectoral collaboration and coordination.

I also welcome engagements with our external partners. This will pave the way toward greater areas of cooperation and collaboration.

We certainly have much on our plates, but with the increased frequency of our meetings and interactions, we shall be able to meet our ever-expanding tasks.

Notwithstanding the limitations of videoconferencing, I anticipate a friendly and candid discussion of the topics and issues before us, and I look forward to a fruitful collaboration with all of you.

Lastly, it is with utmost pleasure and honor for the Philippines to host the 21st ASEAN Senior Law Officials' Meeting in 2022. We Filipinos enjoy the company of guests; more so, the company of our dear ASEAN brothers and sisters. As early as now, I say welcome to the Philippines.

Thank you and Mabuhay!