

15 September 2020

Dato' Sri Dr. Adham bin Baba

Chair, 10th APEC High-Level Meeting on Health and the Economy
Minister of Health
Malaysia

Honorable Minister:

On behalf of the APEC Business Advisory Council (ABAC), I would like to express our strong support for APEC's work to improve people's health and well-being, through the promotion of trade, innovation, inclusive growth and development in the APEC region. We need to ensure that we can sustain our communities and economies now and in the future.

The global economy is reeling from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, a health and economic crisis of unprecedented proportions. The correlation between the health of our populations and the strength of our economies is now irrefutable. The crisis has severely impacted economies across the globe, costing many lives and significantly jeopardizing the livelihoods of individuals, the viability of businesses, and economic growth.

As we work towards laying the groundwork for rapid economic recovery, we need to make sure our health systems are even more effective and resilient to meet the demands of projected increases in non-communicable diseases, aging populations and future pandemics. Responding effectively to the pandemic in the immediate and long term requires regional cooperation and leadership, including public-private collaboration. In this regard, ABAC believes that an important initial step demonstrating this commitment to cooperation would be for APEC (led by the Health Working Group and Chief Medical Officers) to facilitate urgent development of health procedures and protocols that can lay the foundations for the earliest possible restoration of trusted travel across the region for health professionals, businesses and tourists.

Our priority recommendations are as follows:

Ensure the free flow of the goods and services required to combat the pandemic

Medical supplies needed to fight the pandemic, including medical equipment, medicines, vaccines and personal protective equipment, must flow freely. We have called on APEC Ministers Responsible for Trade to remove all unjustified export restrictions and bans on an agreed list of essential medical supplies and to commit to a standstill followed by elimination of tariffs and non-tariff barriers on an agreed list of essential medical supplies and basic hygiene products.

Complementing this effort, economies should facilitate trade by simplifying, codifying and expediting border procedures, particularly in relation to the logistics and handling of critical medical supplies such as vaccines, medicines and medical equipment. Cooperation and facilitation are needed to enable essential workers, such as medical professionals, to move freely across borders to assist communities in emergent need. Close collaboration between health, trade and other relevant ministers will be critical in realizing this recommendation.

Facilitating innovative healthcare financing

The economic case for increasing investment in health has never been stronger. Investments from governments, civil society and industry have proven vital in rapidly responding to the pandemic. It will be important to continue those investments after the pandemic has subsided so that health systems are more resilient to future shocks and pending increases in disease due to aging populations. ABAC, through the Asia-Pacific Financial Forum continues to collaborate with the Life Sciences Innovation Forum to increase access to healthcare by expanding the role of the private sector and exploring the use of innovative and alternative financing models. We welcome the virtual engagements planned for this year on innovative financing mechanisms, encouraging economies to expand use of the [*APEC Checklist of Enablers for Alternative Health Financing*](#) and urge additional collaboration between health and finance ministries to adopt financing policies that strengthen health system resilience, health security and expand universal health coverage.

Accelerating Regulatory Convergence

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the urgent need for streamlined market approval processes to enhance access and availability of new safe and effective medicines, including future COVID-19 vaccines and treatments. Where appropriate, regulatory agency use of Emergency Use Provisions and other reliance mechanisms, increasing regulatory flexibility around production, suppliers, import testing and product labeling, may facilitate rapid market authorization approvals of COVID-19 treatments and secure medical product supply critical for APEC economies to combat COVID-19.

Encouraging Digital Trade for R&D toward Treatments and Vaccines

Digital technology enables the cross-border sharing of emerging knowledge, expertise and best practices. COVID-19 has brought to the forefront the importance of sharing health data across borders between academia, governments, civil society and the private sector to monitor, understand, mitigate and respond to the pandemic. Thanks to economies sharing the genetic code of the virus that causes COVID-19, scientists, public health officials and healthcare providers can accurately diagnose infections and pool expertise to develop safe and effective treatments and vaccines. Notably, most of the clinical trials underway for potential COVID-19 treatment and vaccine candidates are taking place in the APEC region.

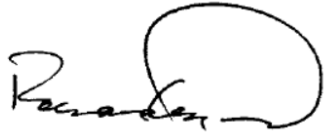
The use of digital tools, like telehealth, has only grown in importance in a time of social distancing so that patients may receive the care they need while remaining safely at home. We support the advancement of digital health through ICT technical innovations that aggregate big data for machine learning and AI to realize precision medicine and personalized healthcare service. We welcome the recommendation of updating the regulations allowing and enabling the expanded use of telehealth to maintain a continuum of care during this time and in the future. We also encourage additional collaboration between health and privacy officials to promote interoperability between privacy regimes and avoid unneeded barriers to cross-border data flows in order to enable secure sharing of health data, vaccine trials or data from contact tracing applications as appropriate. We urge the continuation of enhanced APEC cooperation on

combating COVID-19, including advancing research and contributions to its accessibility and affordability in developing economies.

In closing, it is clear to us that even – and indeed, *especially* – in the face of the pandemic, APEC must remain true to its fundamental beliefs of regional cooperation, open markets, and economic integration. Working together we will build resilient health systems and economies in order to overcome this challenge and prepare for the next one.

We stand ready to work with you to that end.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rohana', with a large, stylized circular flourish to the right.

Dato' Rohana Tan Sri Mahmood
ABAC Chair 2020