191. We discussed extensively the matters relating to the South China Sea and took note of the concerns expressed by some Ministers on the land reclamations and activities in the area, which have eroded trust and confidence, increased tensions and may undermine peace, security and stability in the region.

192. We reaffirmed the importance of maintaining and promoting peace, security, stability, safety and freedom of navigation in and over - flight above the South China Sea.

193. We further reaffirmed the need to enhance mutual trust and confidence, exercise self-restraint in the conduct of activities and avoid actions that may further complicate the situation, and pursue peaceful resolution of disputes in accordance with international law, including the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

194. We emphasised the importance of non-militarisation and self-restraint in the conduct of all activities by claimants and all other states, including those mentioned in the DOC that could further complicate the situation and escalate tensions in the South China Sea.

195. We underscored the importance of the full and effective implementation of the DOC in its entirety. We warmly welcomed the improving cooperation between ASEAN and China and are encouraged by the conclusion and adoption of the framework of a Code of Conduct in the South China Sea, which will facilitate the work for the conclusion of an effective COC on a mutually-agreed timeline. In view of this positive momentum, we reaffirmed our readiness to begin the substantive negotiation on the COC and tasked our Senior Officials to start the negotiation on the COC with China. We recognized the benefits that would be gained from having the South China Sea as a sea of peace, stability and prosperity.

196. Pursuant to the full and effective implementation of the DOC in its entirety, and pending the early adoption of an effective COC, we stressed the importance of undertaking confidence building and preventive measures to enhance, among others, trust and confidence amongst parties.

197. We welcomed the successful testing of the MFA-to-MFA hotline to manage maritime emergencies in the South China Sea. We looked forward to the operationalisation of the joint statement on the observance of the Code for Unplanned Encounters at Sea (CUES) in the South China Sea. In our view, these are practical measures that could reduce tensions, and the risks of accidents, misunderstandings and miscalculation.