137. We discussed the matters relating to the South China Sea and took note of the improving relations between ASEAN and China and, in this regard, are encouraged by the adoption of the framework of the Code of Conduct for the South China Sea (COC), which will facilitate the work and negotiation for the conclusion of a substantive and effective COC. In view of this positive momentum, we looked forward to the announcement of the start of substantive negotiations on the COC with China at the 20th ASEAN-China Summit and the subsequent convening of the 23rd ASEAN-China Joint Working Group Meeting on the Implementation of the DOC in Viet Nam in early 2018.

138. We reaffirmed our commitment to the full and effective implementation of the DOC in its entirety, and the importance of undertaking confidence building and preventive measures to enhance, among others, trust and confidence amongst parties. In this regard, we welcomed the successful testing of the MFA-to-MFA Hotline to Manage Maritime Emergencies in the South China Sea, and looked forward to the operationalization 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.

139. We likewise reaffirmed the importance of maintaining and promoting peace, security, stability, maritime safety and security, rules-based order and freedom of navigation in and overflight above the South China Sea. In this regard, we further reaffirmed the need to enhance mutual trust and confidence, emphasized the importance of non-militarization 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, and stressed the need to adhere to the peaceful resolution of disputes, in accordance with universally recognised principles of international law and the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).