



STATEMENT

**YANG BERHORMAT DATO SERI SETIA AWANG HAJI HAMZAH BIN HAJI SULAIMAN
MINISTER OF EDUCATION
BRUNEI DARUSSALAM**

**SEAMEO MINISTERIAL POLICY E-FORUM
THEME: EDUCATION IN A POST-COVID19 WORLD
18 June 2020**

Your Excellency, Dr. Mohd Radzi bin Mohd Jidin, Senior Minister of Education Malaysia and SEAMEO Council President;

Your Excellency, Mr. Ong Ye Kung, Minister of Education Singapore and SEAMEO Council Vice-President;

Excellencies, Ministers of Education of SEAMEO;

Distinguished Dr. Ethel Agnes Pascua Valenzuela, Director of SEAMEO Secretariat;

Distinguished Colleagues from SEAMEO Associates and Affiliates;

Esteemed Directors of SEAMEO Centres;

Distinguished guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Assalamualaikum Warrahmatullahi Wabarakatuh and a Very Good Morning.

Firstly, I thank the Ministers of Education of Malaysia and Singapore for their insightful presentations.

Also, thank you Dr. Ethel Valenzuela, Director of SEAMEO Secretariat and to everyone involved in convening our first online forum especially during this challenging time.

I am honoured to be able to join this forum with my fellow Ministers of Education and our distinguished guests in addressing **education** issues during this **COVID-19 pandemic**. I hope matters and issues discussed today will have a positive impact and become useful references to all.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. When the COVID-19 infection became apparent in Brunei back in March 2020, it demanded us to quickly respond and embark on new approaches to teaching and learning.
2. In ensuring the welfare, safety and well-being of our children and community, the Ministry of Education initiated a number of coping policies for our schools and their community. Our first action was to bring forward our Term 1 School Holidays to ensure the health and safety of our students.
3. When Term 2 commenced on the 30th March 2020, schools reopened with a blend of online learning, home-based learning as well as remote learning. COVID-19 inevitably accelerated us to exploit and utilize educational technology, in line with the 4th Industrial Revolution (4IR). We shifted and centred all teaching and learning at primary and secondary schools, sixth form centres, TVET and Higher Education Institutions to online, Home-Based Learning (HBL) and other remote learning programmes including Educational TV. In addition, schools also provide Home Learning Packs to marginalised and vulnerable students. Since 2nd June we've re-opened our schools for the next stage, currently with 50% of our students in schools.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

4. In responding to the COVID-19 disruption, our ministry has embarked on a number of initiatives of which some are still ongoing. Our responses focus on **four (4)** main target groups, which are: (i) **Teachers & School Leaders**; (ii) **Students**; (iii) **Parents**; and (iv) other **Stakeholders**.
 - i) In supporting our **Teachers and School Leaders**, we have provided a number of guidelines:
 - First, **Business Continuity Plan (BCP) Guidelines**.
 - Second, **Online and Home-Based Learning (HBL) Guidelines**.
 - Third, **Social Distancing & Hygiene Guidelines**.
 - Fourth, the **curriculum** where we look at subjects for all school levels, modifying and prioritizing topics and outcomes; and making teachers' resources easily available. Lessons are also broadcast on national television. This is to ensure continuity and minimum interruption to primary school studies.
 - Fifth is **Capacity Building** where we continue to provide professional development programs for our teachers and school leaders.
 - In terms of **Technical Support**, sufficient supply of materials are provided such as copiers and paper in school for the Home Learning Packs.
 - The move towards online teaching and learning has been rapid. Some teachers find it challenging, resulting in anxiety among other issues. A hotline and helpdesk as motivational messages through posters, and etc. were created for this.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

ii) **Students** are most affected by this pandemic. Learning in this new way is affecting students in various ways and could be overwhelming.

- As shared earlier, we prioritize the **curriculum** based on subject and topic.
- In terms of **Technical Support**, students are provided with comprehensive guidelines to help them transit to the new norm of learning. In addressing this issue, collaboration has been made with relevant government and non-government agencies to donate computers, tabs and laptops, to be loaned out to students who lack access to devices and internet connectivity. On connectivity, we are working closely with telecommunications service providers to accommodate students as well as teachers for online learning.
- Our immediate policy is to ensure that our **marginalised children** continue to receive education and keep their education deficit to an absolute minimum. We also want to ensure they still have access to good nutrition, reduce risks of psychological harm and ensure continuing provision of care. Our mitigating measures include:
 - i. Collaborating with local telecommunication companies, NGOs and government agencies to provide underprivileged students with: (a) free data for white-listed apps; (b) EduPack Data package for students and teachers; and (c) loaning out technological devices.
 - ii. Schools prepare and deliver Home Learning Packs direct to their homes especially those unable to collect them from school. In addition, underprivileged children continue to be provided with free meals at schools via drive through pick-up centres.
 - iii. **Special Needs Students**, meanwhile, are provided with an Individual Education Plan (IEP) as well as customised learning resources and materials.
- Being away from school and friends, confined at home, social distancing and coping with new ways of learning increase student anxiety and stress. For marginalised students, this also means less or no access to psychological and counselling support. Schools are extending their support through hotlines monitored by school counsellors in boosting student morale and motivating the students.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

iii) The new norm of teaching and learning has also impacted **parents**. The ministry has provided them with guidelines with work given to their children. Assistance from schools

for information tips and webinars are also available. Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) on online teaching and learning have also been created for parents' easy references. Open communication between teachers and parents offering support and recommendations through informal chats and discussions are also encouraged to help ease parents' concerns, apprehension and difficulties.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

- iv) Within the education sector, students and teachers are not the only disrupted groups affected by COVID-19. It also threatens and affects other education-related stakeholders. School closures are also affecting school canteen operators. The ministry has exempted these operators from their monthly rental. Additionally, contracted school buses that normally transport students to and from destinations, are re-assigned to assist in delivering the Home Learning Packs to the students' home. In our effort to provide our children with nutritional support, we engage the services of vendors to supply food to our marginalised/underprivileged children.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

- 5. In conclusion, COVID-19 accentuates major efforts on some of the best practices that we have appreciated. We understand these measures are unique to each country. For Brunei Darussalam, we have seen collaborative efforts through the whole-of-nation approach with stakeholders, government and non-government agencies, that has helped ease the transition to the new way of teaching and learning. Our immediate response in providing necessary guidelines and professional development for teachers and school leaders in catering for online teaching and learning proved to be very useful. Finally, we also strive to ensure our marginalised children continue to receive their education, have access to good nutrition, reduce risks of psychological harm and to continue to provide care to all children in need.

Thank you for listening and stay safe everyone.