



**Joint Media Statement of the 5th RCEP Ministers' Meeting
21 September 2026, Manila, Philippines**

1. ASEAN alongside Australia, China, Japan, New Zealand, and the Republic of Korea gathered in Manila on 21 September 2026 for the Fifth RCEP Ministers' Meeting. The Meeting was co-chaired by H.E. Diah Roro Esti Widya Putri, Vice Minister of Trade of the Republic of Indonesia and the Honourable Dr. Shane Reti, MP, Member of the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee, New Zealand Parliament.
2. The Meeting exchanged views on the current global and regional economic developments and their implications for trade, investment, and economic integration. The Meeting underscored the importance of strengthening the implementation of the RCEP Agreement, deepening trade and investment relations, and building economic resilience amidst an evolving global economic landscape. The Meeting reaffirmed its commitment to actively promote the RCEP Agreement so that it can be effectively utilised by businesses, including Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in the region.
3. The Meeting remained committed to refrain from taking any measures inconsistent with the obligations under the RCEP Agreement, and reinforced its commitment to an open, free, fair, and rules-based multilateral trading system, with the World Trade Organization (WTO) at its core, to remove unnecessary barriers to trade and strengthen investment facilitation for all. The Meeting also reinforced its commitment to WTO reform. The Meeting further reaffirmed that closer cooperation among RCEP Participating Countries (RPCs) is essential, including through constructive dialogue with a view to ensuring regional economic integration that is mutually beneficial and forward-looking.
4. The Meeting encouraged the RCEP Joint Committee (RJC) and its Subsidiary Bodies (SBs) with the support from the RCEP Support Unit (RSU) to continue advancing the transparent and effective implementation of the RCEP Agreement. The Meeting welcomed the launch of the official RCEP Website (accessible at <https://rcepsec.org/>), which serves as a central platform for disseminating public information related to the RCEP Agreement.
5. The Meeting reaffirmed that the RCEP Agreement remains an open and inclusive Agreement. In this regard, the Meeting welcomed the progress made in the accession agenda and approved the recommendation of the RJC to establish an *ad hoc* Accession Working Group to advance the accession process for Bangladesh; Chile; Hong Kong, China; and Sri Lanka, in line with the "Next Steps for RCEP Accession Process" adopted by the RJC. The Meeting also noted the interest expressed by Uruguay in February 2026 to accede to the Agreement, which will be given due consideration as appropriate.

6. The Meeting welcomed the commencement of work for the 2027 General Review of the RCEP Agreement (i.e., RCEP Upgrade), including initial discussions on the possible key elements and areas of the review. Recognising the importance of ensuring a level playing field and promoting strong and resilient domestic and regional growth, including by progressing the built-in agenda and expanding the benefits of RCEP by, among others, considering options to incorporate provisions on modern and emerging issues, the Meeting tasked the RJC to commence work on the Joint Scoping Paper to inform the RCEP Upgrade. The Meeting looked forward to endorsing the Joint Scoping Paper and announcing the launch of the RCEP Upgrade at the RCEP Ministers' Meeting in 2027, which is an important milestone towards ensuring the Agreement remains relevant, responsive, and fit for purpose in response to global developments.

7. The Meeting underscored the importance of meaningful stakeholder engagement, particularly with the private sector as the primary users of the Agreement. In this regard, the Meeting welcomed the continued engagement between the RCEP Business Advisory Council (RBAC) and officials in providing strategic inputs and practical recommendations to support the effective implementation of the RCEP Agreement.

8. The Meeting also acknowledged with appreciation the contributions of academia, experts, and the private sector through the Track 1.5 Dialogues and Research Conference on Assessing the Impact and Future Directions of RCEP organised by the Asia Competitiveness Institute (ACI) in enriching discussions and supporting preparations for the upcoming General Review of the RCEP Agreement. In addition, the Meeting expressed appreciation for the valuable analytical and technical support provided by experts from the Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA) to ASEAN Member States in the RCEP process. The Meeting looked forward to continued engagement with relevant stakeholders to ensure that the implementation and future development of the RCEP Agreement remain responsive to emerging opportunities and challenges, enhance utilisation by businesses, and strengthen its relevance to the evolving regional and global economic landscape.

9. The Meeting expressed appreciation to Australia, China, Japan, New Zealand, and the Republic of Korea for their Economic and Technical Cooperation (ECOTECH) initiatives, which were implemented to promote the RCEP Agreement and to support ASEAN in its efforts to deepen regional economic integration. The Meeting reiterated the importance of ECOTECH cooperation in supporting the inclusive and robust implementation and utilisation of the RCEP Agreement. The Meeting encouraged RPCs to continue to engage in more ECOTECH cooperation activities to promote and narrow the gap in the implementation of the RCEP Agreement as well as to address common challenges and emerging issues.