

Sustainable Security: Peace and Stability from Within

Sustaining security, defined as just and lasting peace, is about making long-term investments in government capacities, internal socio-political stability, and international cooperation. Sustainable security is about strengthening the foundations of a free and prosperous society where chances of conflict and risks of instability are managed, if not totally eliminated. In order for ASEAN to effectively promote sustainable regional stability, member countries, individually and collectively, must make long-term investments in achieving domestic political stability and maritime border security. At the domestic level, drivers that lead to sustainable security includes battle for the hearts of minds of the people, peaceful negotiations and meaningful autonomy, government presence in previously ungoverned spaces, and economic opportunities based on traditional trade. At the international level, institutionalized maritime border cooperation is also a driver for sustainable security.

As a way forward, ASEAN in general and ADMM in particular must look into cooperation on local governance and maritime border patrol. Strengthening local governance, which also involves the civil society and private sector, is one of the effective ways in establishing government presence in previously ungoverned spaces. ASEAN or ADMM can serve as platform or catalyst for consultation in this regard. With support from the ASEAN community, basic social services, law and order, a vibrant economy may result from improving local governance, especially in rural and remote areas. Maritime border cooperation can also elevate law-enforcement presence in maritime areas, thereby minimizing chances of transnational crimes. ADMM can help facilitate closer interactions between and among local governments, small- and medium-scale enterprises, local economies, traditional trading communities, law enforcement agencies, and military units assigned in sensitive rural and maritime areas. Particular issue areas of concern include customs and immigration, proliferation of small arms and light weapons, trade of strategic goods, and trade of illicit goods. ASEAN in general and ADMM in particular should explore more creative and region-wide ways in countering violent extremist ideology, involving mainstream and social media, and ensuring that thought leaders, opinion-makers, and cultural figures are onboard. If terrorists operate as one network across the region, it makes sense if countries in that same region coordinate both contents and approaches in countering violent extremism. The region must address distortions of historical facts, the counterproductive nature of violence, the commonalities among cultures, and the sinister objectives of violent extremists. Particular target of peace and deradicalization efforts should be the youth, both within and outside formal schooling. Social media accounts and online platforms that are believed to be facilitating violent ideology should also be monitored closely, and regional intelligence cooperation on this matter should be intensified.