
FPCI Special Virtual Public Discussion
Indonesia's Foreign Policy in Addressing the Threat of COVID-19
Friday, 8th May 2020
15:00-16:00 WIB

Speaker :

1. **H.E. Retno L.P. Marsudi**
Indonesian Minister of Foreign Affairs

Moderator :

1. **Dr. Dino Patti Djalal**
Founder, Foreign Policy Community of Indonesia

MODERATOR OPENING REMARKS**Dr. Dino Patti Djalal:**

- Good afternoon everybody. Last year when we had our big conference where our Foreign Minister spoke, some of us predicted what would happen in the year 2020. We spoke about other things and now we are surprised because today, the world's focus, attention and energy are directed to one big issue: "How to beat COVID-19". This is happening all around the world and it is the number one preoccupation for Indonesia's foreign policy to address the threat of COVID-19 and we have the best possible speaker for it today, my good friend and Indonesia's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Retno Marsudi.
- According to you, what is Indonesia's foreign policy towards the COVID-19 crisis? How does diplomacy serve the national interest to protect our people from the threat of COVID-19? How does Indonesia see the international dynamics, where we expect to see more cooperation but unfortunately, we still see a lot of competitive rivalries? And also, how does Indonesia see the COVID-19 crisis playing out internationally? These are the questions that will be addressed during the presentation by Minister Retno Marsudi.

PRESENTATION

H.E. Retno L.P Marsudi:

- We are in the midst of an unprecedented time in history where an infectious disease has provenly changed the way we live. Social distancing, wearing masks in public, frequent hand washing, working from home like most of us here, virtual meetings like what we are having right now - these are only a glimpse of our new reality. But how does this new reality affect our foreign policy?
- I would like to highlight three key issues, the first is the magnitude of COVID-19 challenges, the second is diplomacy in time of COVID-19 and the third is observation on the post-COVID-19 world. Let me give some updates to all of you: the number of confirmed cases worldwide by yesterday has exceeded 3.9 million resulting in more than 270.000 deaths - roughly 75% of the cases were reported in Europe and the United States. The World Health Organization (WHO) said an average of 80.000 new cases are reported everyday since the beginning of April 2020. In Western Europe, the epidemic appears to be stable and declining but the worst is far from over in other parts of the world such as in Africa, Latin America and some countries in Asia.
- In the meantime, the effect of COVID-19 continues to spread. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) mentioned that it is anticipating the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression with global growth that is expected to decline by 3%. The Asian Development Bank also mentioned that Southeast Asian growth could drop to 1%. Last Tuesday, the Indonesia Statistic Agency announced that Indonesia's economy grew 2,97% in the first quarter of 2020. It is the weakest since 2001 but if I compare it to other countries, we can still see the positive growth in Indonesia's economy but we should not be surprised if the world growth will worsen in the second quarter of this year. The International Labor Organization (ILO) also mentioned that almost 1,6 billion informal economy workers have suffered massive damage to their capacity to earn a living.

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- I would also like to quote the UN Secretary General's statement that "poverty could rise by 500 million people, the first increase in three decades". This was his statement on the 30th of April 2020.
 - On the other hand, the World Food Programme (WFP) mentioned that the disruption of the economic order and measures taken to face COVID-19 could send an additional 130 million people on the brink of starvation by the end of this year.
 - Now, what does this number mean? Some have been saying that the COVID-19 is the great equalizer and to some extent, it is true. But if we see beyond that, COVID-19 also exposes the deep inequality between countries and hits hardest among others to the poorest. As it has always been the case, developing countries and least developed countries are facing greater risk.
 - COVID-19 is also creating questions of globalization and interconnectedness, many countries resorting to isolationism and protectionism from sealing their borders and expelling foreign nationals to limiting their medical equipment export. We, Asian people, are being stigmatized in many places as the one bringing the virus - foreigners and returning citizens are also targeted. At the same time, global political rivalry exemplifies the great powers are playing the blaming game on the virus. As you can see, these developments are certainly not conducive at the time when global solidarity and collaboration are imperative.
 - COVID-19 knows no border and no country is immune from it no matter how powerful or prosperous. This is what makes international cooperation a challenge right now - Indonesia believes that no country is strong enough to tackle COVID-19 on its own, only by synergizing our strength and keeping international cooperation alive can we win this battle and our time and energy must only be focused on what is important.
 - There is no better place to begin this solidarity than the United Nations (UN). In the first week of April along with five other countries - Ghana, Liechtenstein, Norway, Singapore and Switzerland, Indonesia co-initiated a UN General Assembly resolution on global solidarity to fight against COVID-19 and 188

countries sponsored the resolution. This is testament of universal support of the problem.

- On top of our 4+1 Diplomacy, our immediate priorities right now are: addressing COVID-19 by ensuring availability and access to medical equipment, medicine and vaccines and strengthening the protection to Indonesian citizens abroad. Indonesia must ensure that all countries have what it takes to defeat COVID-19. We have no other option but to strengthen cooperation among countries in the provision of medical supplies. Experience from countries being hit earlier has taught us that the availability of medical supplies could make a difference in terms of lives we could save. So, cooperation and supporting each other is a must. Our diplomatic machinery must work creatively on a bilateral level to fill shortages and make use of comparative advantage, raw materials, technology and labor resources.
- On the bilateral level, Indonesia tries to fill in the shortages by blending comparative advantages with countries who post raw materials, technologies and labor resources. As an example, we have established joint production of medical equipment such as Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and surgical gowns with Japan and Republic of Korea. In the midst of disrupted global trade and supply chain, Indonesia urges all countries to facilitate smooth movement of essential goods such as medical equipment and medicines and refrain from imposing trade barriers. Almost half of the countries in the world are still imposing export restrictions on essential medical goods.
- In line with our commitment to solidarity, Indonesia also seeks to be at the providing end of international support. We sent some to Wuhan in early January and now we are exploring the possibility of providing financial and in kind assistance to countries in our neighboring region and the Pacific through the involvement of our state owned enterprises. This is not the time for us to be selfish, we need each other, we would welcome help to tackle shortages and medical supplies but we are also ready to help others.

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- On the Multilateral front, we took part in the WHO Solidarity Trial to find an effective treatment for COVID-19 and we were the first country in the WHO Southeast Asia Region to begin the WHO Solidarity Trial. There are 22 Indonesian Hospitals participating in this endeavor.
 - There is no denying that innovation in vaccine development must be protected and rewarded, but once the vaccine is found then it must be accessible and affordable to all countries, particularly least developed countries and developing countries. Vaccine will be a game changer to this pandemic, this is also one of the main messages from my President conveyed in the Non-Aligned Movement Summit last Monday. I have also communicated this message in the ASEAN-US Ministerial Meeting and COVID-19 International Coordination Group Meeting. Indeed, we must ensure that the system benefits all of us and not only benefits certain groups.
 - The pandemic has taught us a lesson, that the global health system and governance must be able to facilitate equitable access to equality and effective medical products such as vaccines and technology.
 - The second priority of the Indonesian diplomacy right now is strengthening protection of Indonesian citizens abroad and this includes facilitating repatriation and assisting their well-being. Such protection becomes more important in a crisis situation like this. Many are affected due to the lockdown by many countries.
 - Let me first explain about repatriation - from Malaysia, as of yesterday, 71.659 Indonesians had returned home. The government also supports the wellbeing of Indonesians in Malaysia who are badly affected by the Movement Control Order (MCO). As of yesterday, 315.168 packages of basic needs have been distributed to Indonesians in Malaysia. As for Indonesian vessel crew, 13.542 have returned home. On top of that, 3.243 Indonesians have returned home from 23 countries.
 - For sure, repatriation is not an easy task, there are health protocols that must be observed prior to their departure and after their arrival. This is very important to prevent the spread of COVID-19 within Indonesia. We strive to ensure those who

are repatriated can safely return to their intended destination in Indonesia. As for Indonesians living abroad, as of yesterday there are 723 confirmed cases, 347 remain under-treatment, 338 have recovered, and 38 have unfortunately passed away. We consistently monitor their situation and ensure they receive the necessary medical services in line with the host countries' regulation.

- Foreigners living in Indonesia are also part of the Ministry's responsibility as well, and we have so far facilitated the repatriation of over 7000 foreigners to their home countries. Most of them are travelers, families of experts, diplomatic corps, and the process was carried out in accordance with the National Health protocol in line with WHO standard. These are only a few examples of Indonesia diplomacy to address immediate needs arising from COVID-19.
- In the meantime, we continue to support both national and global efforts to mitigate the ripple effect of COVID-19. The G20 Extraordinary Leaders' Summit last March, resulted in a commitment to inject USD 5 trillion into the global economy to cushion the impact of COVID-19. Last month, in ASEAN and ASEAN+3 Summit, we identified proposals to establish COVID-19 Response Fund, ASEAN+3 Task Force and ASEAN+3 Reserve of Essential Medical Supplies. Moreover, the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) Summit this week decided to establish a task force to develop a database of medical and humanitarian needs of NAM countries.
- Now I will come to my third point and final issue, that is the post-COVID-19 world. The responsibility is now on us to reflect and build on our experience in COVID-19 because COVID-19 might not be the last pandemic in our lifetime.
- First and foremost, we need to strengthen our pandemic preparedness strategy and our capacity to act early against any future pandemic. At the national level, this would mean investing in resilience, self-reliance, and an affordable health system. The number and capacity of medical workers and intensive care units must be able to match any pandemic threat. This also means strengthening the capacity of the relevant domestic industry particularly the health industry. Therefore, building an "inventory buffer" could be considered to anticipate

surging medical needs in the future. More investment on research and development of medicine, vaccines, and medical equipment are also important.

- We need to accelerate know-how transfer from developed countries to developing countries and to least developed countries. It also means that we need to provide a positive environment for foreign investment in health industries.
- On the global level, we must strengthen global health governance, the WHO, to better prevent and respond to pandemic. Developing countries must have a say in this. Ensuring patent regime flexibilities to benefit developing and least developed countries is also very important. It must trigger innovation and at the same time it must also serve social function.
- In the economic sphere, countries will need to diversify their economies to avoid over dependence on commodity exports. We should leverage more the use of technology and digital economy. Countries may need to strengthen a long term supply chain resilience. There will be a shift in how globalization is perceived especially if we look at the growing number and effectiveness of regionalism.
- Regionalism will continue to rise as a building block for globalization, COVID-19 is an important test for globalization and it will be a defining moment for its relevance in the future. Therefore, cooperation under ASEAN and ASEAN+3 will remain the anchor in Indonesian foreign policy and Indonesia will continue for sure to reward the spirit of multilateralism and regionalism.
- To conclude, this pandemic is far from over. Many of us are anxious and asking when will this get back to normal. I do not have the answer for that. Life might not be the same after COVID-19 there are so many unknowns and uncertainties right now. However, few things are certain, that is international cooperation and solidarity are key to address COVID-19. Our diplomacy will contribute to these ideals, on top of that, multilateralism will remain important.

MODERATED DISCUSSION

Dr. Dino Patti Djalal:

- I will go without my own questions and go straight to the discussion. The first 4 questions will go to the Ambassador of China, Xiao Qian, Ambassador of Republic of Korea, Kim Chang-Beom, Ambassador of Japan, Masafumi Ishii, and Ambassador of Iran, Mohammad Azad. The Foreign Minister will answer it then we move on to the next batch of questions.

Amb. Xiao Qian (China):

- Allow me to say that China supports the Indonesian government under President Joko Widodo in taking measures to contain COVID-19 and these measures are based on the national characteristic of Indonesia. China wishes and believes that Indonesia will win the battle as soon as possible.
- Madam Minister, I would like to appreciate the many points you made particularly that the virus respects no border, no country alone can win the war, we need to synergize our efforts to win the battle, we need global solidarity and that is the key.
- My question to you is how do you look at the role of international organizations, especially the UN bodies like the WHO since the start of the pandemic?

Amb. Kim Chang-Beom (Republic of Korea):

- Korea and Indonesia are showcasing a remarkable level of solidarity and close cooperation in combating COVID-19 in the spirit of so called special strategic partnership.
- We are quite proud to see that both countries' industries are coordinating each other to supply and produce Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), and other necessary medical equipment.

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- My question is still in the midst of this global pandemic, a rising trend of economic nationalism and isolation is threatening to undermine the foundation of multilateralism and global collaboration.
 - What is really lacking in our joint endeavors and what should we do together in promoting and strengthening the spirit of multilateralism especially in the maintenance of necessary interconnectedness such as allowing and ensuring essential business travels, sustainable supply of medical items?

Amb. Masafumi Ishii (Japan):

- How will Indonesia use the leadership to strengthen solidarity and centrality of ASEAN, impacting not only the COVID-19 situation but also other ongoing challenges in the region?
- Of course COVID-19 is a global challenge that requires a regional approach, so the solidarity of ASEAN is more crucial than ever. With this in mind, Japan is happy to support ASEAN initiatives such as establishing its own center for infectious diseases but there are challenges. The situation is different from country to country, and every country tends to isolate itself from others to prevent the virus from spreading, which makes a united approach difficult.
- We are also overcome by the unprecedented magnitude of the situation created by the virus but there are other on-going challenges in the region such as North Korea and the South China Sea, which needs continuous attention. The leadership of such countries as Indonesia, which is also a member of the UN Security Council, is required more than ever.

Amb. Mohammad Azad (Iran):

- During this pandemic, regarding the message of the UN Secretary General to stop any war in the world. Is it correct to impose unilateral sanctions and maximum pressure on countries and not pay attention to multilateralism, cooperation for peace, security and prosperity?

H.E. Retno L.P Marsudi:

- Again, I would like to underline the importance of some principles: cooperation, synergy, and multilateralism. Indonesia will always be on the forefront to support multilateralism. Because if everything is based on bilateral relations, that would be very difficult for the poorest countries to deal with the big countries. But by having multilateralism, it means that everybody gets the same protection from the system itself. Although in the implementation, the idea is not exactly what we want it to be, but at least there is a system that can protect countries regardless of whether they are poor or rich, powerful or less powerful.
- As diplomats, we know exactly how the UN system works. It is surprising to us also that after its establishment of 75 years, the UN and its agencies and bodies are not capable enough to respond to the unprecedented pandemic. The pandemic serves as a wakeup call to look at the structure that we have built for 75 years and try to make it better and stronger. So as not to weaken them but to make them stronger and better, serving not to a number of specific member countries.
- It goes without saying that it also applies to the WHO. We have to strengthen our cooperation to make the WHO better and stronger. We have the task to synergize our efforts in making so.
- During the initial outbreak in Indonesia in March, I was among the Cabinet members who tried to think on how to create an innovative cooperation with other countries.
- South Korea has the raw materials for the PPEs, and is investing in the foreign companies in Indonesia while Indonesia has the technology and the labor resources. The conversation at that time was why did we not combine these capacities together and establish an innovative cooperation that we have never thought before? Both countries are now able to produce more PPEs to serve the needs of ROK as well as Indonesia. Of course when the capacity is maximized we could also share with other countries.

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- The same mechanism we take to other cooperation, such as with Japan. Amb. Ishii texted me even late at night to discuss cooperation. With Japan, we are also able to create innovative cooperation and we are producing more surgical gowns to fulfill the needs of Japan and Indonesia. We would like to have similar cooperation with other countries.
 - This is why, in the International Coordination Group, a group of more than 20 Foreign Ministers hosted by the Canadian Foreign Minister, Indonesia proposed a pooling of capacity. Then we try to connect it with capacities from other countries and how this capacity can interconnect each other, to produce more on what the world needs right now. Hopefully, based on that proposal we will have many more innovative cooperation to fight against this coronavirus.
 - About the ASEAN issue, to be very honest, I can say that it is very beneficial for us to have ASEAN, it is good to have ASEAN. Since early January, ASEAN has consolidated themselves to respond to the outbreak of COVID-19. We had a meeting in February in Laos, and we also had a special meeting with the Foreign Minister of China, but the health ministers of ASEAN had started their work in January.
 - Indonesia was among those who proposed to have the ASEAN Virtual Summit Meeting and the ASEAN+3 Virtual Summit Meeting. The discussions were not only repeating the political statements, but the leaders of both ASEAN and ASEAN+3 were able to discuss concrete cooperation. For example, we were discussing the reallocation of some ASEAN funds to be in the ASEAN Response Fund for COVID-19, and the +3 countries supported the proposal.
 - Furthermore, Amb. Ishii mentioned the idea of establishing a regional CDC in Southeast Asia. Thus, many concrete cooperation are being discussed among ASEAN and ASEAN+3 members. I truly believe that regionalism will be very important in the future of our lives and it will be a building block to make globalization work better in the future.

- As for my answer to Amb. Azad, I would like to underline again that synergy, cooperation is badly needed in this difficult situation. Because by only having that, then we will be able to fight this pandemic together. We have to fight this battle together and win it together.