
ASEAN NATIONS AGREE TO SHARE INTELLIGENCE TO FIGHT TERRORISM

- 23.10.2018

Independent (22 October 2018)

The defense minister of Singapore, Ng Eng Hen, announced on Saturday, October 20, that the ten members of ASEAN (the Association of Southeast Asian Nations) have agreed to share intelligence in order to fight a real and present militant threat in the region.

Mr. Ng hosted a meeting of defense ministers from South East Asian nations, as well as important partners from different parts of the globe, whom, he said, were united in agreement in seeing terrorism as a real and present threat. Jim Mattis, the defense secretary of the United States, as well as representatives from China, India, Russia, Australia and other nations attended the meeting.

Over a year ago, fighters connected with the Islamic State captured Marawi, a city in the southern region of the Philippines. Since then, the threat of terrorism has still loomed large over South East Asia.

Mr. Ng warned, Unfortunately even as the situation in Iraq and Syria improves, we are expecting more foreign fighters to come this way.

At the meeting, the ministers from ASEAN countries have joined together in a platform called Our Eyes. The platform was developed for information-sharing and is designed for real-time information to be disseminated and therefore acted upon quickly.

Countries in the region came to the conclusion that they had failed to take the threat of terrorism seriously enough before the attack on Marawi.

Our Eyes is a program initiated by Indonesia and is based on a similar alliance set up for information-sharing participated in by the United Kingdom, the United States and three other nations post World War II, in the effort to keep an eye on the movements of what was then the Soviet Union.

Attendees at the meeting believe that incidents such as the capture of Marawi in 2017 must never happen again to any city within ASEAN, according to Mr. Ng.

The city was attacked by armed militants backed by foreign IS fighters who took control of it in order to set up a base in the region. Malaysian and Indonesian militants, as well as those from other nations in the region, also took part in the assault. The Philippine army, aided by the US, were able to regain control after five months of heavy fighting.

Millions of people were displaced, and more than 1,000 killed in the encounter. It will cost US \$1 billion to rebuild the city.

<http://theindependent.sg/asean-nations-agree-to-share-intelligence-to-fight-terrorism/>

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