



ACSC / APF 2021

ASEAN Civil Society Conference (ACSC)/ ASEAN Peoples' Forum (APF) 2021 October 15-17, 2021

Press Release - 001

On the occasion of the forthcoming 37th ASEAN Summit, the ACSC/APF committee is organizing a virtual ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ ASEAN Peoples Forum 2021 to provide a platform for discussion among the civil society to move forward in addressing the rising inequality and militarization in the region.

Within the ASEAN region as elsewhere in the world, the COVID-19 pandemic has created and continues to create a genuine health emergency, prompting governments to take extraordinary, unprecedented measures in an effort to curb its lethal progress. Barriers in accessing health care have become abundantly clear, as ASEAN governments failed to mitigate the spread of the virus, revealing inability of the governments to guarantee the basic right to healthcare, human security and safety. Simultaneously, several ASEAN Member States have nefariously the pandemic as a smokescreen to clamp down on human rights defenders, peaceful political and social dissent, and have deepened discrimination and violence against vulnerable groups including Indigenous Peoples, person with disabilities, youth and women, migrant, stateless, internal displace persons and social workers, in a region already suffering from increasing authoritarianism, human rights violations and a narrowing civic space. In the case of Myanmar, the military Junta is taking advantage of the pandemic for political gain by weaponising the COVID-19 pandemic. This basic right to health as well as many other rights is not well respected and implemented yet since the adoption of ASEAN Declaration on Human Rights signed on November 18, 2012, in Phnom Penh. Although there is no binding legal obligation to this Declaration, there must be a consideration of morality, state responsibility and social contract with citizens to uphold the principles of the Declaration.

Yet, what happened in Myanmar is not the only impact of burgeoning militarism and authoritarianism in Southeast Asia. Escalating extrajudicial killings, torture, and arbitrary arrests swept over the region and has burdened human rights defenders. State agents, such as military, police, and vigilante groups have orchestrated attacks and perpetrated harassment on prominent human rights defenders and opposition leaders in the Philippines, Malaysia, Cambodia, Indonesia, and Thailand.

There has been an alarming paradigm of ASEAN countries utilising colonial-era laws to suppress critical voices and exacerbate social inequalities during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, Thailand's draconian lese-majeste law (Article 112 of Thailand's Criminal Code) is being used to arrest, detain, and sentence pro-democracy movement leaders, students, and members of the opposition. Meanwhile, the Philippines has imposed the Anti-Terrorism Act of 2020 and Cybercrime Prevention Act of 2012 to arrest critics of the government and tag political activists and human rights defenders the country's leftist movement as terrorists. Indonesia, a Muslim majority country, has its notorious blasphemy laws — a law that ostracises non-Muslims and enables radical Muslims to spread hatred towards religious minorities. Southeast Asian countries' tightening grip on civil liberties has been eminent this year.

ASEAN governments have continued to use the 'non-interference' principle' as justification for continued impunity within the region. The Myanmar crisis crystallises all the pressing issues we are confronting in the region today.

Continuingly, ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ ASEAN Peoples Forum started the process since 2005 provided the venue for people-to-people interaction and exchange for social good. The annual events also provided a great opportunity for the peoples in Southeast Asia including Timor Leste to discuss about their common concern, faith, painful difficulties and strengthen their transborder solidarity in realization of the meaningful “Caring and Sharing Community”, peaceful society based on participatory democracy, justice, human rights and dignity as well as holistic development.

Under the theme of this year ACSC/ APF 2021 - ***Authoritarianism, Militarism and COVID-19: Challenge for Collective Actions to Address Rising Inequality and Shrinking Civic Space in Southeast Asia***, the forum aims to sustain an intersectional and cross-boundary community building among ASEAN civil society organizations; Consolidate ASEAN civil society's analysis on the intersectional impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and government's response, the rise of state repression, and attacks on democracy towards civil society organizations and marginalized groups in Southeast Asia; and to formulate recommendations and submit to respective ASEAN member states and ASEAN Summit.

Amidst the ongoing pandemic crisis of COVID-19, ACSC/ APF 2021 take this opportunity to convene a virtual conference and forum while ensure the meaningful participation of the broad based civil society throughout the region on October 15-17, 2021 (particularly in the afternoon session). There will be 3 main plenary sessions and 12 convergence workshops altogether. Program will be started at 1.00 p.m. of each day.

Plenary Session 1

Failed Promises: A CSO Assessment on ASEAN's Response to the Militarisation and Authoritarianism in Southeast Asia

15 October 2021, 1:15 to 2:15 pm (BKK/JKT Time)

Plenary Session 2

Culture of Impunity – A Threat to the Collective Humanity:

Justice Must be Served for Peoples of Myanmar

16 October 2021, 1:15 to 2:15 pm (BKK/JKT Time)

Plenary Session 3

The Impacts of COVID-19 on Human Rights and the Economy:

Moving Towards Inclusive and Transformative ASEAN Rebuilding

17 October 2021, 1:15 to 2:15 pm (BKK/JKT Time)



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13 October 2021

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More information on facebook: [acscapf2021](#)