

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ ASEAN Peoples' Forum 2022

“Defending and Asserting Southeast Asian Peoples Civic Space, Democracy, and Human Rights towards an Equitable and Just Society”

The political situation in Southeast Asia as a result of power shifts of elite governments and regime changes under rising authoritarian governance, has exacerbated the multiple crises under ASEAN's neoliberal economic integration model. This has even pushed ASEAN to further exclude civil society and neglect peoples' voices as demonstrated in the shrinking democratic space for civil society to dissent and demand government accountability.

more than 500 participants with gender balance, from a diversity of civil society, ethnic minorities and groups, Indigenous Peoples, LGBTQIA+, Women, Persons with Disabilities, elderly, Buddhist monks, faith-based, migrant workers, informal workers, trade unions, farmers and fisherfolks, youths, human rights defenders, victims of land conflicts, victims of human right violations and people's organizations of South East Asia gathered together in Phnom Penh, Cambodia from 3-5 November 2022. The inauguration started with a powerful drum performance by all-female cultural group from the host country calling for unity and solidarity among peoples of Southeast Asia, amplifying the voices of grassroots and marginalized communities, the spirit that has been carried on in the last 17 years.

The ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ASEAN Peoples' Forum (ACSC/APF) aims to provide a safe space for peoples' voices and strengthen an intersectional and cross-movement and cross-border solidarity among ASEAN civil society and peoples' movements to generate sharing and learning and build solidarity towards an alternative regionalism amidst the rise of authoritarianism and backsliding democracy; and to urge ASEAN Member States to better address human rights issues stemming from the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the Myanmar crisis, climate crisis, and other threats to human rights and regional stability, and to prioritize an inclusive and sustainable recovery for all peoples in South East Asia.

Regionally, ASEAN States is now still facing many challenges. Among these, Food security crisis emerged over the last 3 decades with the global spread of corporate agribusiness and the promotion of global supply chain. Food self-sufficiency has been discouraged by the global policy, and the WB and IMF; destabilizing of food in the global south.

- **Electoral democracy** can be a threat if democracy is not delivered substantially. However, it failed to reduce local poverty while the neo-liberal policy pushed for destabilized agriculture, job lose, and forced migration. Substantive participatory democracy needs to be in place to ensure the broad base people participation in all decision making. Democratic governance should be strengthened.
- **South China Sea issue**, somehow, contribute to the dispute among ASEAN member States while the issues had been used to tighten the national security measure, arms race and even nuclearization in the regions. Meanwhile, Deployment of Military – China strategically defensive while the US define military of China is the central aspect of US policy and military engagement.
- **ASEAN is boosting the economic development and growth.** Nevertheless, destruction of natural resource, pressure on local and existing armed conflict and violence, force disappearance, involuntary migration in country/region. Transnationals Corporations and big businesses, at some certain extent, affected the livelihoods of millions of lives.
- **Moving to digitalization while placing restriction and cyber attack** - affecting the freedom of expression, civil and political rights of active citizen intended to take active part in their concern matters.

All challenges bring about the increasing of human insecurity in the ASEAN region. This 3-day ASEAN Peoples' Forum provides platform for exchange, dialogues and debates on a broad range of concern issues on various areas:

- **Defending Civic Space from Militarism & Authoritarianism** – Rather than speeding up the hopeful picture while inking their signature on domestic and international human rights instruments and treaties, ASEAN Member States have seriously failed to adhere to their obligation to respect, protect and fulfil human rights, causing suffering on their human fellows across the region, so far as to the level of militarization and authoritarianism. Member States have to uphold human rights and level up their effort on the promotion and protection on human rights in all fronts.
- **Combating Neoliberalism for Economic Justice, Climate Justice, and Food Sovereignty** – While putting a lot of efforts to boost economy via all forms of Free Trade Agreements, and believing that macro-economic growth is the only means to race to the top, ASEAN and its Member States are discounting the people to the secondary. In rectifying this mistake, human rights due diligence should be carried out in the first place, Free, Prior, and

Informed Consent (FPIC) must be the basis of any business operations that are to be implemented in IP territories and other local communities and should be the basis of any policy dialogue.

- **Life with Dignity: Social Protection, Decent Work, and Healthcare for All in the Post COVID-19 Recovery** – COVID-19 pandemics have exposed inadequate structures and infrastructures to meet people's need and this should have humbled the ASEAN and its Member States including Timor Leste. It is high time Universal Social Protection, including Healthcare for all come into existence as a state's obligation, by developing its response capacity.
- **Peace and Human Security** - Peace in the absence of war alone has seemed to become the current leaders' narratives, while human security protection in the form of bolstering military muscles have seemed to become the norm. While the former creates ignorance to peace in mind and in nature; the latter failed to pay attention on non-traditional and emerging threats of human security. There is thus a need to take necessary steps to reduce military spending and transfer money to social needs including transparency in the accounting of arms sales; promote the ratification of the Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Asia and increase the spending on non-traditional threats to human security.
- **Southeast Asian Peoples' Alternative Regionalism** – After more than 50 years of forming the ASEAN as a regional body, annual auspicious gatherings in the forms of various Senior Ministers and Leader Summit make false belief that the government is the only entity to bring the region forwards. It has been proved once and again, especially during disasters, both natural and man-made, or the recent COVID-19 pandemics, that it is people-to-people solidarity that prevail. Political reforms should be undertaken with the inclusion of CSOs. Labour laws must guarantee workers' rights including migrant workers, domestic workers and informal workers.

ASEAN has adopted for the first time in its history, the term "Human Rights" in its official document ASEAN Charter 2007 especially article 14 concerning the establishment of ASEAN Human Rights Body - given the space for further development. In October 2009, AICHR was established but so far still not being able to function well. Later, ASEAN Human Rights Declaration (AHRD) and Phnom Penh Declaration were adopted in 2012 without binding obligation for the states to put into practice. AICHR Term of Reference should be reviewed accordingly as part of the ASEAN new Human Rights architecture.

CSOs of Southeast Asia are committed to work together and in cooperation with our partners both local, regional and international to meaningful social transformation based on justice, equality, well-beings, and peaceful livelihood of all peoples throughout the region.

CSOs of Southeast Asia call on ASEAN Member States and Timor Leste to uphold Human Rights and the rights-based regional architecture and ASEAN people-led mechanism for human peace, security, and human rights.

CSOs of Southeast Asia call on ASEAN and its Member States to heed the basic principles and uphold Human Rights in accordance with the ASEAN Charter 2007 and universally accepted international laws. Pressing the military junta to hand off power and return the country to democracy in Myanmar is an important effort to safeguard millions of lives who are at stake

CSOs of Southeast Asia call on ASEAN and its Member States to hold such meaningful dialogues and engaging the state representatives, SOM, AMM, ASEAN Community Pillars, AICHR, ACWC, ACMW and the ASEAN Secretariat to ensure the people-centered ASEAN.

CSOs of Southeast Asia look forwards to substantive progress of ASEAN State Leaders in implementing the ASEAN 2025 vision, ASEAN Human Rights Declaration and other relevant international Human Rights obligations. Political wills and seriousness are important to ensure the accountability of those who are holding such policy making and administrative power.

CSOs of Southeast Asia needs to join hands, regionally and globally, to strengthen international and regional solidarity to challenge militarism, and authoritarianism, to challenge state repression across the world. An innovation channel to be developed.

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