



ASEAN Civil Society
Conference/ASEAN Peoples'
Forum 2022

PRESS RELEASE

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Phnom Penh, November 5 2022—the civil society from Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Timor Leste and Vietnam held the ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ASEAN Peoples' Forum (ACSC/APF) 2022 with the theme of ***“Defending and Asserting Southeast Asian Peoples Civic Space, Democracy and Human Rights towards an Equitable and Just Society”***.

The forum aims to strengthen an intersectional and cross-movement solidarity among ASEAN civil society; provide a safe space for grassroots and marginalized peoples' voices and to urge ASEAN and ASEAN Member States to better address human rights issues stemming from the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the Myanmar crisis, other threats to human rights, regional stability, and to prioritize an inclusive and sustainable post-COVID-19 peoples' recovery that also addresses challenges of the post-pandemic development landscape.

This year's forum was hosted by the civil society in Cambodia. Reasey Seng, the chair of Regional Steering Committee of ACSC/APF 2022 said in her opening speech *‘I hope during these 3 days together at ACSC/APF 2022, we will critically fruitfully discuss, share an honest conversation among each other. This forum should benefit ASEAN and its member states and the stakeholders to nurture meaningful dialogue and not threats to the government as this year's ASEAN Summit theme is ‘Addressing Challenging Together-ACT’*. And remember that *“PEOPLE UNITED WE WILL NEVER BE DEFEATED”* she added

The forum was attended by more than 500 participants from diverse backgrounds and identities across the region online and in person. 4 plenaries, 5 Convergence Spaces and 20 workshops have been discussing the political situation in Southeast Asia that is under rising authoritarian governance and exacerbated by multiple crises such as the climate crisis, human rights violations, lack of social protection as a result of neoliberal economic model integration. This has even pushed ASEAN to further exclude civil society and neglect peoples' voices as demonstrated in the shrinking democratic space to dissent and demand government accountability. ASEAN has pushed its peoples to the margins, while allowing capitalistic growth under the increasing number of bilateral free trade agreements. Small-scale farmers, workers, laborers, fisherfolks, indigenous people, being the drivers of important food production and

preservation and protection of the environment and natural resources, are key stakeholders in the fight against climate change. Yet they do not seem to have a place in the very society they live in.

There is a trend where the ASEAN member states are using their laws to silence the peoples' voices and the peoples' movements. Dr. Walden Bello from the Philippines highlights in his plenary speech, *'(the) Weaponization of the law, the passage of legislation that allows the government to use its power of will against civil society actors such as the Anti Terrorism Law passed by the Duterte administration'*.

The ASEAN and its member states also have continuously pushed the LGBTQIA+ into a corner even to the extent of criminalizing them. *'Their resistance towards the issues on human rights of LGBTQIA+ persons are mainly due to the following factors: LGBTQIA+ persons are foreign to ASEAN; LGBTQIA+ identities are inconsistent with religion and public morality; LGBTQIA+ identities are a threat to state defined national development and security in some ASEAN countries'* Lini Zurlia from the ASEAN SOGIE Caucus, member of NOC Indonesia said.

The forum also served as a solidarity space held by the Southeast Asian peoples for the people of Myanmar. Inspired by specific workshops on the situation in Myanmar, the participants also delivered the solidarity action with the message quoted: *"Myanmar Military junta may have the guns and the uniform, but you are an illegitimate power in the eyes of the Southeast Asian people. The Myanmar military junta consists of criminals guilty of genocide, war crimes and crime against humanity."*

The forum finally urges and calls on the ASEAN and its member states and Timor Leste to center the people in their development agenda. No one among the Southeast Asian peoples deserves militarism, injustice and unfair treatment. The people long to see democratic space and freedom, an equal society where human rights, as well as peoples' wellbeing and welfare are valued. ASEAN must end violence, repression, discrimination and all human rights abuses.

For media inquiry please contact the committee at aseanpeopleforum@gmail.com