

**The ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ASEAN Peoples' Forum 2017 (ACSC/APF 2017)**  
**Philippines National Organizing Committee (NOC)**  
c/o Freedom from Debt Coalition, 11 Matimpiin St., Brgy. Pinyahan, Diliman, Quezon City, Tel. 9211985

**PRESS RELEASE**

14 February 2017

**Philippine CSOs to the ASEAN Economic Community: "People First Over Profits;  
Prioritize Peoples' Rights and Demands in ASEAN!"**

**MAKATI CITY, Philippines**— On Valentine's Day, around 100 red-clad members of the ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ASEAN Peoples' Forum 2017 (ACSC/APF 2017) Philippines National Organizing Committee (NOC), marched to the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) to deliver the Philippine CSOs' position and demand on the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC). The NOC, led by its co-conveners Freedom from Debt Coalition (FDC) and PhilWomen on ASEAN, asked that its statement be tackled also at the 31<sup>st</sup> meeting of the High Level Task Force on ASEAN Economic Integration (HLTF-EI) the following day. A number of the groups that have been engaging DTI on trade and investment issues and free trade agreement (FTA) negotiations are also part of the ACSC/APF 2017 NOC.

A big Valentine's card containing the CSOs' statement was handed over to the Philippine representative to the HLTF-EI, DTI Undersecretary and official-in-charge of trade policies Ceferino Rodolfo who later invited the CSOs to a dialogue in a big meeting room at the Board of Investments. "The ACSC/APF 2017 Philippines NOC sees the Philippines Chairship of ASEAN for 2017 as a good opportunity to advance the peoples' critique of the AEC and the current direction espoused by ASEAN's economic integration agenda. The statement underscored, among others, the following issues: 1) Increasing inequalities and the continuing dominance of corporate power, 2) Informalization of the labor market and increasing migration concerns, 3) environmental degradation and the climate crisis, 4) peace and human security, 5) human rights and access to justice, 6) and life with dignity. On the occasion of ASEAN's 50<sup>th</sup> year, it is high time for our government to integrate the people's vision in the regional integration" declared FDC president Dr. Eduardo Tadem.

Under the AEC blueprint, ASEAN economies are expected to become a single production and market base that seeks to facilitate the free flow of goods and skilled labor. Mark Pascual, Program Officer of Asia Pacific Research Network, highlighted that the current thrust of the AEC and the wider ASEAN integration process itself is influenced by neoliberal interests affirmed by free trade agreements wherein big businesses and transnational corporations remain its main drivers and beneficiaries, thus markets and profits are prioritized over the needs and rights of the people

During the 2-hour dialogue with DTI Usec Rodolfo, the Philippine NOC tackled a wide range of issues and pressed that these urgent issues will be integrated in the discussions of the HLTF-EI. "The government should review all existing trade and investment agreements, and if necessary terminate those that do not serve the peoples' interests," voiced Joseph Purugganan, Coordinator of Focus on the Global South – Philippines. He explained that the rise of mega-regional trade deals such as the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) and bilateral new generation FTAs is also a growing cause for concern owing to its impending impacts – on the country's agricultural sector, labor rights including those of migrant workers, women, marginalized sectors, access to cheap and life-saving medicines, and on national sovereignty. AEC's labour mobility should benefit all workers including migrant workers and not only highly skilled professionals.

"The ASEAN Regional Integration is feared to fail lest it takes into account the systemic and intersectional dimension of discrimination, oppression and exclusion," said Chang Jordan, Program Director of Women's Legal Bureau. To illustrate her point, Jordan who also represents PhilWomen on ASEAN raised that the AEC's focus on creating market conditions does not translate to women's equal opportunity in economic and labor markets, as it refuses to acknowledge differences resulting from gender stereotyping in labor roles—the negative effects are especially intensified in poorer developing countries.

Maris Dela Cruz, coordinator of the Network for Transformative Social Protection, expressed that market liberalization, deregulation and privatization programs pursued by ASEAN have led to the loss of traditional livelihoods and means of survival, and further exploitation of workers. The perspectives of ordinary people especially the vulnerable and marginalized aspiring for a life of dignity have not been integrated in the AEC. The challenge to our governments is to take up the notion of a Social ASEAN, not only focus on Economic ASEAN. “The Philippine Government must guarantee social protection for all and reverse the privatization of public services especially healthcare and education and instead, forge public-public partnership—state partnerships with non-profit groups like peoples’ cooperatives or social enterprises,” added Ana Vitacion, coordinator of the alliance Buhay na may Dignidad para sa Lahat (DIGNIDAD).

Raquel Castillo, Lead Convener of Sustainability and Participation through Education and Lifelong Learning (SPELL) opined, “instead of human capacity and capabilities development being geared towards addressing individual and community needs as a priority, they will increasingly be boxed in and reduced to catering to the imperatives of the regional integrating economy and big business.”

The AEC has also put considerable pressures on local and regional biodiversity and natural ecosystems resulting in rapid degradation of land, water, and forest resources. “The obsession to sustain the neoliberal economic growth model has taken its toll on the environment, widening resource inequalities and has aggravated the climate crisis in the region,” added Cipriano Fampulme of Aksyon para sa Kahandaan sa Kalamidad at Klima (AKKMA).

Chants of “Nothing about us without us!”, “ASEAN by the people, not only by the States!”, and “People over Profit!” filled the air at DTI. Civil society organizations representing various sectors in the Philippines united under the NOC of the ACSC/APF2017 aim to amplify grassroots people’s voices in asserting human rights, democratization, and economic, social and ecological justice towards a just, humane, and equitable Philippines and Southeast Asia.

To complete the Valentine’s Day spirit, the NOC members also gave sampaguita garlands and heart-shaped balloons carrying their demands to the DTI representatives. In addition, the CSOs also handed over *tubaws* to the DTI officials. Both CSOs and the DTI officials agreed to have a continuing dialogue, before and after the ASEAN Summit.###

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**ACSC/APF2017 Philippines National Organizing Committee (NOC) Co-conveners:** PhilWomen on ASEAN Network ● Freedom from Debt Coalition | **Members:** Aksyon para sa Kahandaan sa Kalamidad at Klima ● Alab Katipunan ● Almanan ● Asian Peoples Movement on Debt and Development ● Alliance of Philippine Partners in Enterprise Development ● ASEAN SOGIE Caucus ● Asia Pacific Network on Food Sovereignty ● SEAN Youth Leaders Association – Philippines ● Asian Federation Against Involuntary Disappearances ● Asian Partnership for the Development of Human Resources in Rural Asia ● Asia Pacific Research Network ● Arya Progresibo ● Asian Solidarity Economy Council – Philippines ● Association for the Rights of Children in Southeast Asia ● Ateneo Human Rights Center ● ASEAN Youth Forum ● Bagong Alyansa Nagkakaisang Gabaysa Kalamidad at Klima ● Buhay na may Dignidad para sa Lahat (DIGNIDAD) ● Buklod ng Manggagawasa Radio Communication of the Philippines, Inc. – National Federation of Labor ● Bulig Visayas ● Center for Environmental Concerns ● Center for Energy, Ecology and Development ● Center for Migrant Advocacy ● Center for Women’s Resources ● Child Rights Coalition-Asia ● Civil Society Coalition on the Convention on the Rights of the Child ● Coalition of the Services of the Elderly ● Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era ● Empower ● Fair Trade Foundation Panay ● Foundation for Media Alternatives ● Foundation for a Sustainable Society ● Focus on the Global South – Philippines ● Gender Watch Against Violence and Exploitation ● Hope for the Youth ● Initiatives for International Dialogue ● Integrated Rural Development Foundation ● International Youth United ● Kanlungan Center Foundation ● Kilusan Para sa Pambansang Demokrasya ● Magsasaka at Siyentipiko para sa Pag-unlad ng Agrikultura ● Migrant Forum in Asia ● Mindanao Migrants Center for Empowering Actions ● National Movement for Food Sovereignty ● Network for Transformative Social Protection ● National Federation of Labor ● Pangisda ● Progresibong Alyansa ng mga Mangangisda ● Partnership of Philippine Support Service Agencies ● Peoples Alternative Study Center for Research and Education in Social Development ● Pambansang Kalipunan ng mga Manggagawang Impormal sa Pilipinas ● Philippine Alliance of Human Rights Advocates ● Philippine Network of Food Security Programmes ● Philippine Movement for Climate Justice ● Rural-Urban Peoples’ Linkages ● Sanlakas ● Kasarian-Kalayaan ● Save the Children – Philippines ● Sustainability and Participation through Education and Lifelong Learning ● Strengthening Alliance of Victims for Empowerment from Disaster (SAVED) RIZAL ● Sentro ng mga Nagkakaisa at Progresibong Manggagawa ● Tebtebba ● Unang Hakbang Foundation ● Woman Health Philippines ● World Council for Curriculum and Instruction ● Women’s Legal and Human Rights Bureau