



PRESS RELEASE

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Civil Society to ASEAN Leaders: “Address Human Rights and Security Issues Seriously”

Manila, Philippines – As Heads of States of ten member countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) meet today at the 30th ASEAN Summit, representatives of civil society organizations across the region raised their issues and demanded from ASEAN leaders to tackle peoples’ concerns seriously. “ASEAN governments should be held accountable to the alarmingly rampant human rights violations, human insecurity and increasing threats to lives and livelihoods in the region.”

Earlier today at 8am to 9am at Diamond Hotel in Manila, some fifty representatives of the ASEAN Civil Society Conference / ASEAN People’s Forum 2017 (ACSC/APF 2017) engaged in a dialogue the ASEAN Foreign Ministers led by the Department of Foreign Affairs Acting Secretary Enrique Manalo on behalf of the ASEAN Chair this year – the Government of the Philippines.

In their statement delivered to the ASEAN ministers, the CSOs sought leaders to take a clear stand and decisive steps in addressing issues of growing injustice in the region. They cited disturbingly high incidence of extra-judicial killings (EJKs), labor contractualization, poverty-level incomes, exploitation and threats to lives of migrant workers, genocide of Rohingya Muslims, perpetuation of violence against people of diverse sexual orientation and gender identity and expression (SOGIE), and the continuing lack of access of people to essential services like healthcare, water and housing. They also expressed alarm over growing tension between and among countries arising from maritime disputes. Lastly, they highlighted the unjust free trade agreements including the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership that prioritize profits over the well-being of people and the preservation of the environment in the region.

“To make ASEAN truly people-oriented and people-centered, governments have to put a social dimension in the regional integration, respect and promote human rights, and ensure peace and security through peaceful resolutions.”

Further, the CSOs enumerated the following major calls and demands addressed to the ASEAN leaders:

1. Stop corporate greed and power; prioritize people’s rights. Governments must adhere to international standards of human rights as its primary guide posts as they consider entering various trade agreements or new development policies. They should work towards fiscal justice, greater transparency, and redistribution of wealth in national tax systems to stop and reverse growing inequality, poverty, guarantee public services and sustainable development, and address climate change.

2. Just and Lasting Peace and Human Security. The increased militarization of Southeast Asian countries and the South China Sea/West Philippine Sea/Vietnam East Sea due to overlapping territorial disputes does not bode well for peace and human security in the region. The disputed territory should be demilitarized, and the Code of Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (COC) founded on the human security of the communities affected by the conflict be finalized. Further, China, US and North Korea must recognize and sign the ASEAN Nuclear-Free Zone Treaty. Lastly, conduct an independent and impartial investigation under the auspices of ASEAN on the various reported human rights violations in Rakhine, Kachin and Northern Shan states.

3. Promote Human Rights and Access to Justice. Poor and innocent people and leaders of groups challenging government policies become targets of extra judicial killings and forced disappearances in most countries in Southeast Asia. The cases of Jonas Burgos, Sherlyn Cadapan, Karen Empeno, and Gloria Capitan from the Philippines, Sombath Somphone from Laos, Thailand’s Somchai Neelaphaijit and Porlajee “Billy” Rakchongchaoren, Malaysia’s Raymond Koh, and Myanmar’s U Ko Ni among hundreds of other cases of enforced disappearances and extra-judicial killings in Southeast Asia remain unresolved showing how impunity still prevails

in the region. ASEAN leaders have to halt the current *war on drugs* that is taking place in the region, especially in the Philippines, and to open dialogues for evidence-based drug policy reforms and consider humane and effective approaches in curbing the drug problem.

4. Decent Work, Living Wage, Human Capacity Development, Essential Services, and Social Protection for All.

About 65% of workers in the region are in vulnerable jobs and situation. They are fighting for regular jobs, living wages, better working conditions, and social security. Worse, privatization including through public-private partnerships (PPPs) has made essential services inaccessible to millions of people in the region, and vulnerable groups could not depend much on social protection programs of the governments. An average of only about 3% of GDP of countries in ASEAN goes to social protection -- only half of the ILO-recommended 6% of GDP social protection expenditure. In 4 of the ASEAN countries, the social protection expenditure is even lower -- below 2%. Governments must guarantee decent work, food, essential services, and social protection for all, and reverse the privatization of public services especially healthcare, education, water and energy.

5. Protect Migrants' Rights abroad, Address the roots of Forced Migration at Home.

While the ASEAN integration will provide greater mobility for workers, it fails to recognize that the majority of migrant workers are in low-skilled sectors and in informal economy, many of whom are women who are more vulnerable to greater risks. Protection of migrant workers' rights remains inadequate, subjecting them to low wages, long hours and dangerous work, and have led to the endangerment of their lives. Governments must take measures to protect all aspects of migrant workers' rights abroad; address the cases of migrant workers on death row such as Mary Jane Veloso in Indonesia, Jennifer Dalquez in UAE; protect them from exploitation and modern-day slavery; and resolve the issue of widespread unemployment in the region. ASEAN government should also forge bi-lateral and multi-lateral social security agreements within the region that would cover migrant workers.

Aside from engaging the ASEAN leaders through dialogue, members of the ACSC/APF2017 also took their calls and demands to the streets. From different assembly points in Manila, about 200 members of the National Movement on Food Sovereignty and 200 from the PhilWomen on ASEAN marched and converged at Plaza Rajah Sulayman in Malate where the ACSC/APF2017 action v.v. the 30th ASEAN Summit culminated.

The CSOs vowed to continue hounding the leaders to take seriously the peoples' issues and address them urgently. The ACSC/APF2017 to be attended by at least 2,000 representatives from civil society will be held on July 29-August 1. The CSOs will continue to engage the leaders at the national and regional meetings of ASEAN including during the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting in August and the ASEAN Summit with Korea, Japan, China and US in November this year.

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