

PRESS RELEASE

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**Southeast Asian civil society to ASEAN: 50 years of exclusion is enough!
Alternative people's regionalism now!**

More than 1,000 fishers, farmers, environment, peace and human rights activists, and other members of the ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ASEAN People's Forum (ACSC/APF2017) marched towards the Philippine International Convention Center where leaders of ASEAN and its dialogue partners are meeting this week to celebrate the 50th founding year of ASEAN. The civil society network reiterated its demands for ASEAN leaders to act on people's aspirations and recommendations towards building a truly people-centered Southeast Asia based on the principles of social justice, equity, and human rights.

The groups showed strong disappointment over the governments' inaction on their plight and demands over the last five decades of ASEAN's inception. The 500 fishers led by Pagkakaisa ng mga Mangingisdasa Pilipinas (Pangisda-Pilipinas) were indignant that they have been excluded in the development targets of ASEAN. For them, the 50th anniversary of ASEAN only means 50 years of stunted growth of fishers and the fishing industry. "How shall we live if our governments drive us out of the water?" asked Pangisda president Pablo Rosales. "ASEAN should end its pro-trade liberalization policies that have only harmed us, and that it must buck reclamation and illegal fishing and dumpsite."

The National Movement on Food Sovereignty (NMFS) leading the 500 farmers likewise denounced the lack of decisive action by the ASEAN states to address food insecurity in the region. "For the past 50 years, we have not seen food sovereignty in the country," said NMFS cluster head Trinidad Domingo. For the farmers, the 50 years of ASEAN is a failure as the country has not achieved food sovereignty and the agriculture industry had stunted growth.

In a collective statement to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the ACSC/APF 2017 highlighted how civil society has critically engaged the ASEAN despite minimal outcomes in terms of substantive improvements in peoples' lives. Members of the ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ASEAN Peoples' Forum (ACSC/APF 2017) raised pressing issues on trade, human rights and access to justice, migration, environment, peace and human security, decent work, essential services and social protection as they stressed the urgency for governments to address the peoples' demands to end poverty, deprivation, injustice, inequality and discrimination in the region.

"While we continue our engagement with ASEAN, we also lay down the preparations for developing an alternative Southeast Asian regional integration based on alternative practices on the ground among communities and social movements that challenge the neo-liberal model of development. An alternative regional integration entails thinking and acting outside the ASEAN box and linking these local practices in their economic, political, and socio-cultural dimensions along the principles of cooperation, solidarity, mutual benefit, the commons, and joint development," said Prof. Eduardo Tadem, president of Freedom from Debt Coalition and co-convenor of ACSC/APF 2017 National Organizing Committee.

To illustrate the peoples' plights and reiterate their demands to ASEAN, ACSC/APF 2017 members presented their situations. For instance, migrant workers who are mostly in low-skilled sectors and in the informal economy remain vulnerable to greater risks under the ASEAN integration. ACSC/APF Regional Steering Committee Chair Jelen Paclarin, executive director of Women's Legal and Human Rights Bureau, said that the integration has failed to recognize the social cost of migration, in particular, the impact on families and children left behind. ASEAN must adopt ASEAN Instrument on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of All Migrant Workers immediately to protect the workers and their families.

Cambodian activist Sophea Chre shared that workers and farmers in Cambodia fight for decent work especially in this time of widening inequality. "The workers demand regular jobs with just wages and other rights they are entitled to such as social security and essential services." Meanwhile, Indonesian feminist Rena Herdiyani of KALYANAMIRA expressed strong concern over growing incidence of child marriage in ASEAN and related increasing mortality rate especially in Indonesia. She underscored the need to address structural issues. "To achieve a sustainable Social ASEAN, these structural issues must be addressed -- democratic participation, gender

equality, and protection and promotion of rights of workers and vulnerable groups. Existing ASEAN Declarations with a social dimension must also be made binding on governments.”

ShalmaliGuttal, executive director of Thailand-based Focus on the Global South, raised that the neoliberal thrust for an integrated regional market steers member states into preparing the region to take its place in a global market ever hungry for profit accumulation. “This is evidenced and reinforced, for one, by FTAs such as the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) and new generation bilateral treaties that are a growing cause for concern owing to its impending attacks on the region’s agricultural sector; on labor rights including those of migrant workers, women, marginalized sectors, and indigenous populations; access to cheap and life-saving medicines; and a threat to national sovereignty.”

As ASEAN is obviously adopting an extractivist development model, the environmental groups pointed out the need for ASEAN to have a fourth pillar – on environment. Ian Rivera of the Philippine Movement on Climate Justice explained the urgency of addressing the worsening state of environment in the region. “The pursuance of the ASEAN governments of expanding the market and achieving economic growth at the expense of the destruction of the environment still persists despite their commitment to work towards sustainable development as well as promoting the clean and green environment. Further, recognizing the critical role of fighting the climate crisis in the region, we call for a pillar on the environment and phasing out of coal and other fossil fuels in Southeast Asia and the immediate shift to clean, safe, and renewable energy system.”

The ACSC/APF reiterated its call to ASEAN to ensure the integration of a social dimension and sustainable development into ASEAN’s development plans, policies and strategies in order to implement people-centered and ecologically-sustainable development policies and programs, rather than harmful activities are undertaken in the name of development. “For ASEAN to be a truly caring and sharing community, it must guarantee social protection, food, decent work and essential services for all. At least 6% of the country's GDP should be allocated for social protection. Our governments should stop the policy of privatization of public services especially healthcare, education, water, energy and housing,” said Ana Maria Nemenzo, co-convenor of DIGNIDAD and Network for Transformative Social Protection

ASEAN should also put front and center the issues of regional peace and human security that continue to challenge the stability of the whole regional community and beset the lives of the most vulnerable peoples in the region. Gus Miclat, executive director of the Initiatives for International Dialogue, explained that these challenges are embedded in the inability and inaction of most governments to address the roots of the internal armed conflicts arising from assertions of the right to self-determination, ethnic struggles, political unrest, violent extremism, the rise of terrorism, disputes over cross-border territorial and maritime issues, militarization, and the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms among others.

Former House Representative Walden Bello also shared the increasing threats to people’s lives and access to justice as authoritarianism is on the rise in the region. He reiterated the need for ASEAN to create or strengthen mechanisms to investigate, monitor, and provide effective redress and remedy for human rights violations in the region, and the observance of International Humanitarian Law. Further, he also called for strengthening the protection mandate and the Terms of Reference of ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR), and a halt on the current *war on drugs* that is taking place in the region.

The ACSC/APF said that in its 50th year, ASEAN is presented with a momentous opportunity to prove its relevance and responsiveness to peoples in the region by moving towards the realization of its vision. “We call on the President of the Republic of the Philippines as the host of this year’s ASEAN summits, to rise to the challenge of demonstrating leadership in building a just, equitable, and humane Southeast Asia. This can only be done credibly if Pres. Duterte starts with policies and programs here at home that enable the delivery of the many pro-people pronouncements he made during his campaign, such as putting an end to contractualization, ending corruption, opening new public health facilities, and pursuing an independent foreign policy in line with international human rights standards. Ultimately, the success of this year’s summits will be judged by its ability to respond to the people’s needs and advance the principles of social justice, and human rights and welfare across all dimensions in Southeast Asian region.”

Organizations present at the march and press conference were AksyonsaKahandaansaKalamidad at Klima, Dignidad, Freedom from Debt Coalition, Focus on the Global South, Initiatives for International Dialogue, Kilos Maralita, National Movement for Food Sovereignty, Network for Transformative Social Protection, PartidoLakas ng Masa, Pangisda-Pilipinas, Philippine Movement for Climate Justice, Philwomen on ASEAN, Sanlakas, and Women’s Legal and Human Rights Bureau. ###