



ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ ASEAN Peoples' Forum 2017

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Press Release

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ACSC/ASEAN Peoples' Forum criticize ASEAN's exclusivist character, shrinking civic space; calls for alternative regionalism

The ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ ASEAN People's Forum 2017 pinpointed today ASEAN's characteristic exclusion of marginalized peoples and underprivileged sectors since the regional organisation's inception 50 years ago and called for an alternative regionalism that puts utmost premium to peoples' rights and concerns in development programs and regional integration.

Jelen Paclarin, Chair of the ACSC/APF Regional Steering Committee, deplored the shrinking civic space given to civil society and peoples' organizations in ASEAN processes and mechanisms.

"Since the start of this year, the ACSC/APF has been persistently seeking dialogues, interactions and engagements with ASEAN leaders in order to bring to their attention key issues faced by the peoples of Southeast Asia and develop alternatives that address social injustices. However, these have virtually fallen on deaf ears as ASEAN Heads of States and Ministers give least priority to our proposals and initiatives. They do not even give time to meet and discuss with us," she said.

Paclarin explained that among the reasons they organized a Town Hall meeting entitled "Addressing Shrinking Civic Space in Southeast Asia" in the ACSC/APF activities today was precisely to raise the issue of limited CSO participation in the ASEAN. A town hall meeting is designed to be a venue for civil society, parliamentarians and government representatives to learn from one another on key democracy and human rights issues in the region.

"We organized our own gathering expecting that ASEAN leaders would come upon our invitation and fully listen to peoples' voices and concerns. Unfortunately, ASEAN leaders chose to grant only token representation by sending ASEAN representatives to our meeting, who are not in positions of significant influence although they may be committed in engaging the people."

The ACSC/APF further said that over the past 50 years, "the ASEAN and its member-states have generally ignored the plight and demands of farmers, fisherfolk, workers, women, indigenous groups, youth and children, persons with disabilities, and LGBTIQ."

The ASEAN civil society network said these sectors have historically been excluded in the ASEAN's development targets as governments pursue pro-trade liberalization policies that are damaging to peoples' livelihoods and jobs and further worsen inequalities.

"While we persist in our engagements with ASEAN, we are also building and developing an alternative Southeast Asian regional integration based on alternative practices on the ground among communities and social movements," said Dr. Ed Tadem, co-convenor of the ACSC/APF Philippine National Organizing Committee. "We also want to ensure a social dimension to the ASEAN, create a Social ASEAN that fulfils the rights of people and guarantees social protection, decent work and essential services, especially healthcare, for all."

"This framework challenges the neo-liberal model of development and links local practices in the ASEAN's economic, political, and socio-cultural dimensions along the principles of cooperation, solidarity, mutual benefit, the commons, and joint development," he added.



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Paclarin further pointed out that “under the existing ASEAN integration, many remain vulnerable to greater risks, particularly women migrant workers who are mostly in low-skilled sectors and in the informal economy.”

Paclarin said the ASEAN integration has failed to recognize the social cost of migration, particularly the impact on families and children left behind. She stressed the urgent need for the ASEAN to adopt the instrument on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of All Migrant Workers immediately to protect the workers and their families.

On the second day of the ASCS/APF at the UP Diliman campus, over 1000 delegates gathered to discuss in plenary and workshop groups critical issues concerning the ASEAN, such as pursuing a social dimension in regional integration towards a life of dignity for all, impact of corporate greed and power, human rights and access to justice, and labor mobility and mixed migration.

The conference will continue until November 14 as participating people’s organizations, social movements and NGOs, and academics from the ten (10) ASEAN countries plus East Timor substantially tackle issues and firm up unities in their continued engagements with the ASEAN. [#ASEAN#ASEANPeoples #ACSCAPF2017](#) [Philwomen on Asean](#) [ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ASEAN Peoples' Forum \(ACSC/APF\) 2017](#)