



## **ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ ASEAN Peoples' Forum 2017**

c/o PH NOC Secretariat, 11 Matimpiin Street, Brgy. Pinyahan, Diliman, Quezon City, Philippines  
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**14 November 2017**

### **Press Statement of the ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ASEAN Peoples' Forum**

During this 31st ASEAN Summit, we, of the ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ASEAN Peoples' Forum 2017 (ACSC/APF) collectively demand an urgent break away from the dominant development narrative that has bred economic, social and environmental crises, including extreme inequalities, extensive human rights violations, situations of conflict and violence, and wanton exploitation of natural resources.

Amid appearances of economic growth, and self-congratulatory platitudes of the region's leaders in keeping the organization together through the "ASEAN way", we also find ourselves on a path of rapidly rising inequality. There is a yawning gap between the richest ASEAN member-states and those still in early stages of development.

ASEAN's narrow focus on creating a single market is seriously undermining peoples' food sovereignty and reducing policy space that protect small-scale farmers and fishers. 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.

The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) and new generation bilateral treaties are a growing cause for concern owing to their negative impacts on the region's agricultural sector, on labor and migrants rights, women, marginalized sectors, and on indigenous peoples, access to reasonably priced and life-saving medicines, and on national sovereignty.

Corporate dominance and greed, supported by ASEAN states, also manifest in the unabated pursuit of extractive activities and fossil fuel projects, even as climate science has shown incontrovertible links between climate change and dirty energy use. Our region ranks among the most threatened in the world by intensifying climate-related impacts.

Presently, Southeast Asia faces serious threats to peoples' right to peace. There is an increased militarization of ASEAN countries because of overlapping territorial and maritime claims. Most ASEAN countries have correspondingly increased their spending for importing arms anywhere from 6% to more than 100%, resulting to higher access to arms in conflict areas.

The exclusion of a large part of the region's population from exercising their basic rights continue to fuel national and sub-national situations of ongoing conflict and violence. Furthermore, global superpowers, aiming to protect their interests in the region, have encouraged militaristic approaches to the resolution of armed conflicts instead of preventing the escalation of such by addressing the root causes of the unrest.



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Despite voices of concerns from regional and international communities, China is adamant on using its military power to expand its territorial claims in the South China/West Philippine Sea/Vietnam's East Sea, aiming especially for the rich marine and seabed resources of Southeast Asian countries, particularly Vietnam and the Philippines.

Furthermore, ASEAN States continue to ignore the universality and interdependence of human rights. Despite ASEAN having its own human rights mechanism, AICHR remains weak and toothless. In some ASEAN countries, governments are installing laws and committing acts that continue to destroy the enabling environment for CSOs and grassroots organizations, as well as human rights defenders. Ordinary innocent people become targets of extra judicial killings. Leaders of groups challenging government policies are threatened and intimidated with trumped up charges.

Freedoms of expression, religion, belief, peaceful assembly and association are being curtailed in many ASEAN States both in online and offline spaces while hate speeches targeting LGBTI groups, human rights defenders, national human rights institutions, journalists, parliamentarians, and minorities. There is a pervasive culture of impunity in violence against women and girls, owing mostly to the ASEAN governments' blatant disregard for women's rights. In conflict or post-conflict situations, sexual violence persists.

Furthermore, throughout ASEAN's 50 years, majority of the people are deprived of their social and economic rights and criminalized for practicing their sustainable traditional livelihoods.. More than 50 percent of workers are in precarious working condition, suffering from poverty-level income. ASEAN women in vulnerable employment, comprising more than 60% of workers, are not covered by labor laws or social protection. Adequate income especially in times of old age, chronic and serious illness, disability, and unemployment, as well as guaranteed essential services are most needed by majority. However, government spending on social protection remains low – an average of 3% of GDP, way below the minimum 6% recommended by ILO.

Also, ASEAN's economic integration and migration policies continue to neglect realities of the region which is characterized by large displacement of people from their lands, labor mobility and different migration flows. While the integration will provide greater mobility for workers, it fails to recognize that the majority of migrant workers are found in low-skilled sectors and in the informal economy. Many of them are women migrant workers who are more vulnerable to greater risks.

ASEAN also fails to recognize the social cost of migration, in particular, the impact on families and children left behind. People escaping from conflict such as Rohingya, who face constant abuse and harassment including systematic violation of human rights in Myanmar, are at the mercy of traffickers and horrendous treatment in countries of destination. Protection of migrant workers' rights remains inadequate, subjecting them to low wages, long hours and dangerous work, and have led to the endangerment of the lives of migrants.



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Forced migration has increased in the wake of climate change and its intensifying impacts. Persistent poverty, deprivation and large coastal populations make Southeast Asia one of the most climate-threatened regions in the world.

Lastly, for 50 years, genuine peoples' participation in the ASEAN has been severely limited. Despite CSOs' efforts to initiate engagements for constructive dialogue alongside ASEAN's claims of having more inclusive and meaningful spaces, ASEAN remains largely inaccessible to the people. What we are witnessing is a direct assault on civil and political, as well as economic, social, and cultural rights of the people.

In the face of these grave challenges, peoples' movements are consolidating and building networks to resist and push back these attacks on peoples' rights. The rallying cries and demands are finding their way in new protest art, plays, and musicale, street dances, effigies helping to educate, awaken, enrage and mobilize the public to stand up for their rights.

An ASEAN well-grounded in the concerns of its peoples and receptive to active civil society participation can only work to its benefit, by making its policies and programs more responsive and effective. It can begin right here, with ASEAN heeding the following **general recommendations from the ACSC/ASEAN Peoples' Forum**:

- 1. PUT A SOCIAL DIMENSION TO THE ASEAN INTEGRATION with emphasis on rights of people particularly marginalized and discriminated sectors**
- 2. UPHOLD HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE RULE OF LAW**
- 3. REVIEW THE ASEAN PRINCIPLE OF NON-INTERFERENCE AND ADVANCE DEMOCRACY AND DEMOCRATIC DECISION MAKING IN ASEAN**
- 4. FORGE REGIONAL SOLUTIONS TO REGIONAL PROBLEMS LIKE CONFLICT**
- 5. ADOPT INTERNATIONAL LAWS AND POLICIES (e.g. human rights, labor laws, law on refugees, etc)**
- 6. EXPAND SPACES FOR PEOPLES PARTICIPATION**
- 7. BUILD CAPACITIES FOR PEOPLE EMPOWERMENT**
- 8. PRIOTIZE PEOPLES' AGENDA OVER CORPORATE AGENDA**
- 9. SUPPORT PEOPLES' ALTERNATIVE REGIONAL INTEGRATION**
- 10. RESPECT STRUGGLES OF COLLECTIVE RESISTANCE**

We urgently call on ASEAN Heads of States and leaders to make partners of peoples' organizations and social movements so we all can truly create a just, equitable and human Southeast Asia and an ASEAN advancing programs and policies that are genuinely people-centered.#