



ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ ASEAN Peoples' Forum 2017

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Press Release

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Detained Timorese delegates to ASEAN civil society assemblies released

Four East Timorese nationals earlier detained by immigration authorities who arrived to attend the ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ASEAN Peoples Forum (ACSC/APF) were finally released at around 6 o'clock in the evening yesterday. Philippine Immigration authorities at the Ninoy Aquino International Airport (NAIA) held the four at the airport's terminal 3 holding area for almost twelve (12) hours.

The Immigration officials allowed the delegates' entry to the Philippines after they verified during negotiations with the organizers and lawyers of the ACSC/APF that the Timor Leste nationals are indeed participating in the civil-society ASEAN assemblies organized by the group. However, airport officials still withheld the visitors' passports for "safekeeping" pending the issuance of a "Recall of Exclusion Order" or REO.

The official reasons cited for the "exclusion order" were: "not able to explain the purpose of their travel" and "not able to establish financial capacity for their visit."

The ACSC/APF legal team is assisting the Timorese nationals and is working out the issuance of the REO in order for their passports to be released by Monday.

Members of the ACSC/APF National Organizing Committee (NOC) expressed appreciation for the favorable intervention of BI Commissioner Chief Jaime Morente, and the assistance of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process Sec. Jesus Dureza. They are pleased that the Timorese delegates are no longer detained and are now out of the airport.

However, while the NOC understand the more stringent security measures being implemented due to the upcoming ASEAN summit, they remain concerned of the possibility of similar incidents upon the arrival of many more participants from other countries in the coming days. They hope that this recent incident will not happen to other foreign delegates to the ACSC/APF.

The ACSC/APF regard the participation of foreign delegates in the civil society led-ASEAN forums as crucial in the meaningful intervention of social movements and sectoral groups from Southeast Asia towards forging a socially-responsive ASEAN. The ACSC/APF has been engaging and recognized by the ASEAN as a civil society platform since its inception at the ASEAN summit in 2005 in Malaysia. The Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) have been regularly in touch with the ACSC/APF in the run-up to the summit.