



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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Regional civil society movement upset over ASEAN leaders' inaction on human rights abuses, territorial conflict and people's rights

Civil society leaders and activists from the region under the banner of the ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ASEAN Peoples' Forum deplored today the lack of substantial discussions and policy actions on critical issues such as human rights atrocities, peace and security, the territorial conflict on the South China/West Philippine Sea/East Sea, social protection for all peoples, especially those affected by economic regional integration, during the 31st ASEAN Summit and East Asia Summit.

The ACSC/APF Regional Steering Committee (RSC) expressed disappointment that "ASEAN Heads of States and government leaders swept under the rug the crucial concerns confronting the peoples of Southeast Asia, which require urgent and decisive actions." They released the statement in the wake of the closing of the 31st ASEAN Summit and the issuance of the ASEAN Chair's Statement.

"There no agreements or even official ASEAN statements concerning the human rights violations and culture of impunity hounding most ASEAN countries such as the extrajudicial killings in the Philippines that has victimized more than 16,000 individuals, the genocide of the Rohingyans and the sexual violence against Rohingya women in Myanmar, and the crackdown on activists and dissenters in Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia and Cambodia," said JelenPaclarin, Chair of the ACSC/APF RSC.

A day after the summit, the main Cambodian opposition party was dissolved by the Supreme Court headed by a judge belonging to the ruling party of strongman Prime Minister Hun Sen, who is the world's longest serving prime minister. Hun Sen was facing likely defeat from the popular Cambodian National Rescue Party in the upcoming elections next year. In the Philippines, Congress resumed deliberations on the impeachment of the Chief Justice, who President Duterte has been at loggerheads with and whose resignation he has called for.

Meanwhile, Co-convenor of the ACSC/APF Philippine National Organizing Committee Ed Tadem decried the ASEAN silence on the protection of fishers and the deprivation of their livelihoods as a consequence of the competing claims on and the occupation of the South China/West Philippine Sea/East Sea, particularly by Chinese forces.



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Jane Aileen of Indonesia Legal Aid Foundation (YLBHI) also lamented that despite agreements on investments and cooperation in economic ventures such as infrastructure-building, “there are no deals pertaining to job generation and ensuring decent work and living wage among Southeast Asian peoples.”

“Furthermore, there are no clear resolutions on guaranteeing social protection for every citizen to have a life of dignity, or even for marginalized sectors,” added Cambodian representative SreySotheavy. “Universal healthcare and education and affordable shelter were not put on the conference table. Non-discrimination and ensuring the welfare of women, youth, children, LGBTs, the elderly and indigenous groups were not also tackled,” she said.

Soe Min Than of Singapore, who is among the organizers and host of next year’s ACSC/APF in Singapore, said the silence from ASEAN leaders on these issues are manifestations of the “low priority they give to peoples’ concerns and their token engagement with civil society and people’s organizations.”

“Despite the ASEAN’s rhetoric of reaffirming the importance of engagement and dialogues with CSOs towards attaining ASEAN Vision 2025, the Chair’s Statement failed to mention the ACSC/APF and our efforts to surface various pressing issues in the region,” he said.

The ACSC/APF leaders called on ASEAN leaders to transform their decision-making processes and institutionalize peoples’ participation so they are well-informed about realities on the ground and are able to partner with grassroots communities and social movements towards developing socially-responsive and just policies.

“It is time that ASEAN makes a shift to alternative regionalism where people are deeply involved and engaged in shaping the ASEAN’s policy directions and governments exercise effective development practices together with CSOs,” concluded Ed Tadem, co-convenor of the ACSC/APF Philippine National Organizing Committee. “ASEAN must support peoples’ alternative regional integration founded on solidarity, cooperation, complementarity, friendship and peaceful coexistence, and accountability to peoples.”