

## ACSC/APF 2017 Convergence Space

### LIFE WITH DIGNITY

#### Background and Introduction

Neoliberal programs aggressively pushed in ASEAN integration have widened inequality in the region. Market liberalization, deregulation and privatization wherein big businesses and transnational corporations are the main beneficiaries, have led to the loss of traditional livelihoods and means of survival, and further exploitation of workers. They have also led to diminished public access to essential services as well as social security.

Throughout ASEAN's 50 years, majority of the people have been suffering from social and economic insecurities. More than 50 percent of workers are in precarious condition – without regular jobs and suffering from poverty-level income. The average number of ASEAN women who are in vulnerable employment is slightly above 60%, unprotected and not covered by labor laws or social protection. And only 27% or 2 to 3 in every 10 persons have social protection. Despite commitments made by governments across Southeast Asia, workers in many countries are still prohibited from forming independent trade unions. Labor policies across ASEAN states do not protect people from employment and discrimination based on various grounds such as disability, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and ethnicity.

The ILO core labour standards are essential to creating the conditions to achieve decent work. Stable and sustainable forms of employment should be promoted, and oppressive labor flexibilisation practices outlawed. Yet they await national level ratification and implementation.

There is need to campaign for ASEAN governments to provide not only for universal, free and quality primary and secondary education but also for free public higher education that will actually translate to decent work and the capacity to set up livelihoods afterwards, and ensure that these are aligned with people-centered national ecological industrialization programs.

Despite 50 years of ASEAN, and the crafting of the blueprint for the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community, many vulnerable groups in the region are still left out and disempowered, unable to experience the level of collective learning that would give them enough strength to break out of inter-generational and chronic poverty and inequality. Instead of recognizing transformative human capacity development through the promotion of quality formal and nonformal education and inclusive lifelong learning as people's rights that allow them to claim other rights, to participate fully in local community development, and to promote cultures of solidarity, these are reduced instead to 'enhancing the competitiveness of ASEAN human capital and catering to the needs of big business in the push for an integrated economic community. The individualistic and competitive means of acquiring knowledge, skills, competencies and credentials in the education systems have continuously eroded the sense of genuine community and cooperation, have distorted national self-identities through historical revisionism, and given the idea of resistance -- be it against injustices -- a negative association.

While the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework that is being put together supposedly encourages validation of learning gained outside formal education, yet it has explicitly said it aims to have a neutral influence on national qualifications frameworks of ASEAN member states. Indigenous people's knowledge is undervalued, but at the same time development of people's knowledge is hampered by the lack of universal access and freedom of information, within and beyond national boundaries.

Social protection is likewise a human right, an economic necessity, and investment in people. It addresses social injustice and inequality, as well as promotes social cohesion, human development and

political stability. ASEAN governments should create and legislate a universal and comprehensive social protection system towards guaranteeing a life of dignity, empowering people, and transforming societies in a democratic and sustainable manner. This includes, but not limited to living pensions for the elderly and persons with disability, child allowances, maternity protections, and income guarantees during unemployment, sickness, and natural disasters.

Guaranteeing essential services is part of a comprehensive social protection framework. Universal, affordable, and accessible quality healthcare, water, education, housing, and energy are public goods. The provisioning of these must therefore be guaranteed and financed by the state, as they are connected to the survival, dignity, and development of individuals as well as society as a whole. This calls for reversal of the privatization of these public goods, as well as forging of public-peoples partnership as alternative to public-(for-profit) private partnerships -- promoting state partnerships with non-profit groups like peoples' cooperatives or social enterprises to achieve more people-centered, transparent and accountable modes of social service delivery.

Governments must therefore ensure a social dimension in regional integration where decent work and sustainable livelihoods, workers' rights, human capacity development anchored on community needs, as well as guaranteed essential services and social security for all are integral components.

Only then can ASEAN peoples live a life of dignity.

### **3 Focal Concerns**

1. Decent work, living wages, and implementation of ILO core labor standards
2. Transformative Lifelong Learning and human capacity development that promotes culture of solidarity and resistance
3. Universal, transformative social protection; guaranteed access to essential services

### **The substantive content of all the discussions under this CS should cover:**

1. Common issues and trends in Southeast Asia on 3 focal concerns for a Life of Dignity
2. Current struggles, campaigns and responses of peoples in Southeast Asia to issues, denying them the right to a Life of Dignity, and highlighting alternative practices already being done to address them
3. Strategising ways of collaboration and coordinated action plans in the framework of a Life with Dignity

### **Proposed time slots during the ACSC/APF: (Can still change)**

- 1) Day 2 - Nov 11, 14:00-14:30 PM      Opening of Convergence Space on Life with Dignity
- 2) Day 2 – Nov 11, 14:30-16:30 PM      Decent work, living wages, and implementation of ILO core labor standards
- 3) Day 3 – Nov 12, 11:30am-13:30 PM      Towards a Culture of Solidarity and Resistance:  
Transformative Human Capacity Development
- 4) Day 3 - Nov 12: 15:00-17:00 PM      Transformative Social Protection and Guaranteed Essential Services for all
- 5) Day 4 - Nov 13: 9-10:30 AM      Assembly of all those who participated in Life with Dignity Convergence Space and discussion of possible common, coordinated campaigns/actions and strategies/next steps going forward.