



ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ ASEAN Peoples' Forum 2017

Statement of the ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ASEAN Peoples' Forum 2017

As government leaders from ASEAN and their dialogue partners convene for the 31st ASEAN Summit and related meetings in the Philippines, more than a thousand participants coming from civil society and peoples' organizations gathered from 10 to 13 Nov for the 2017 ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ASEAN Peoples' Forum 2017 (ACSC/APF) in Quezon City, Philippines. Representing sectors such as workers, smallholder farmers, women, indigenous peoples, youth, urban poor, LGBTI, social workers, educators, cultural activists, human rights advocates, and environmentalists from all ASEAN countries including Timor Leste, we took the collective stand to demand an urgent break 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 that are overwhelming the region's ecosystems.

Amid appearances of economic growth, inequality is rapidly rising. There is a yawning gap between the richest ASEAN member-states and those still in early stages of development. Equally worrying is the increasingly entrenched inequalities within countries.

Throughout ASEAN's 50 years, majority of the people have been deprived of their social and economic rights. 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.

Growing corporate greed and power in the region is evident in ASEAN's aggressive push for neoliberal bilateral free trade agreements such as the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) that will further lead to the concentration of wealth and resources in the hands of foreign investors, agro-TNCs, extractive and energy businesses, and pharmaceutical companies to the detriment of workers, urban and rural poor, women, indigenous peoples, LGBTIs, migrants, and other exploited and marginalized sectors, and the environment.

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.



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ASEAN is one of the flashpoints of rivalry between the world's superpowers. Insofar as pushing for all-out liberalization of the region is concerned, U.S., Japan, China, and Russia unite in breaking down barriers to trade and investment to allow the unhampered plunder of the region's natural and human resources. But rivalry over dominance of the region is increasingly transforming this contingent unity into an antagonistic confrontation. The fight over the control of the South China Sea trade route has resulted in US and China saber-rattling.

ASEAN Member States continue to ignore the universality and interdependence of human rights. Despite having its own human rights mechanism, the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights remains weak and toothless. In some ASEAN countries, governments are installing laws and committing acts that destroy the enabling environment for CSOs and grassroots organizations.

For the past 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.

Despite tremendous challenges, the people in the region are determined to continue to organize and consolidate their ranks to resist and push back these attacks on their rights. Grassroots and civil society organizations in the region are mobilizing and building solidarity networks for an independent, sovereign, peaceful, and people-led ASEAN.

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. The following are the general recommendations to ASEAN from the ACSC/APF 2017:

1. **Put a social dimension the ASEAN Integration**, emphasizing the rights of peoples, particularly the marginalized and discriminated sectors
2. **Upholding human rights and 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 such as conflicts**
5. **Adopt international laws and policies** such as human rights and humanitarian laws, labor, laws on refugees
6. **Expand spaces for peoples' participation**, redefining boundaries of democratic practice and institutional politics towards reconstructing or overhauling governance institutions for the expansion of effective citizen participation and representation that is constant and renewing
7. **Build capacities for people empowerment**, enabling people to claim their rights and hold duty-bearers accountable, as well as self-organize and self-mobilize as development actors in their own right
8. **Prioritize peoples' agenda over corporate agenda**, supporting peoples' trade agenda and calls for robust legally-binding corporate accountability mechanisms



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9. **Support peoples' alternative regional integration** founded on solidarity, cooperation, complementarity, friendship and peaceful coexistence, and accountability to peoples
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 humane Southeast Asia and an ASEAN advancing programs and policies that are genuinely people-centered. ###