



“A PEOPLE-CENTERED ASEAN COMMUNITY: MAKING IT HAPPEN”

ACSC/APF 2015 CONFERENCE OUTCOME STATEMENT

17 – 19 November 2015, Kuala Lumpur

1. While the focus in the region is on the upcoming 27th ASEAN Summit between the ASEAN heads of states and the global dialogue partners, representatives from ASEAN civil society have gathered again at the ACSC/APF 2015 Conference, titled “A People-Centered ASEAN Community: Making it Happen”, from 17 – 19 November 2015, to collectively deliberate and assess the impact of our 10 years of engagement with ASEAN.
2. This is a pivotal moment for the region with the ASEAN Community coming into being at the end of 2015, and with the adoption of the ASEAN Community Vision 2025. ASEAN regionalism is focused on achieving political cohesiveness, economic integration, a socially responsible, people-oriented, people-centred and rules-based ASEAN.
3. Civil society in ASEAN have repeatedly taken a stand that these processes need to be transformative and people-centred in the most meaningful, inclusive and representative manner in determining and shaping the aspiration and future of the region and its peoples.
4. The thematic concerns and recommendations raised in the ACSC/APF 2015 – CSO Statement (April 2015) on development justice; democratic processes, governance and fundamental human rights and freedoms; peace and security; and discrimination and inequality remain serious priorities for the region. An assessment of the last 6 months, post the submission of the ACSC/APF 2015 – CSO Statement (April 2015), demonstrates the continued silence of ASEAN in addressing the concerns and recommendations expressed in the CSO Statement. While globally ASEAN portrays itself as a cohesive regional bloc it remains indifferent to what it considers national prerogatives unless it has economic bearings.
5. We have in fact seen an escalation of human rights violations and lack of commitment of ASEAN to engage on these issues in a cohesive and meaningful manner. The deleterious consequences of the worst haze the region has experienced, situation of boat-people and the exemption of Rohingya and other ethnic minorities from exercising their rights to participate as voters and candidates in the recent electoral democratic process, well as the continued targeting and enforced disappearances of human rights defenders are some cases in point.
6. Given the apathetic and dismal response by ASEAN to the interventions and recommendations of the ASEAN civil society in the last 10 years of engagement, we are compelled to question the meaningfulness of the rhetoric on people-oriented and people-centred ASEAN. The impunity of recalcitrant ASEAN member states compound the escalation of violations and prevent the idea of regionalism as enshrined in the ASEAN Charter.
7. We, therefore, reaffirm our concerns and reiterate our preceding recommendations and call on ASEAN to escalate its responses to the interventions by the civil society.

8. In addition, the Conference also calls on ASEAN to address the following:

8.1 Strengthened engagement with civil society organisations

- a. ASEAN to recognise civil society as key stakeholder in the standard setting, standard interpretation and implementation processes of ASEAN laws, policies and programmes;
- b. ASEAN to critically reflect on and adopt institutional measures and mechanisms to engage with civil society, with mutual respect, in a manner that is meaningful, transparent, accessible and inclusive, and in accordance to international laws and standards, towards a people-centred ASEAN community;
- c. ASEAN to recognise the diversity of the multiple Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and peoples' organisations that is reflective of the issues and priorities of the region. Thus, all engagement and consultations shall be inclusive and representative across all nations and issues in ASEAN. Gender balance and diversity shall be a key consideration. Rigid accreditation procedures only serve to undermine participation;
- d. ASEAN shall not invoke the principles of non-interference, respect for national sovereignty, and domestic particularities, and its selective interpretation in censoring issues that particular ASEAN member states deem unsuitable;
- e. Access to information and relevant standard- setting documents shall be made available prior to and during consultations to ensure the most effective and meaningful dialogue rather than a tokenistic action.

8.2 Modalities for engagement between CSOs and ASEAN governments

- a. Adopt consultative mechanisms that guarantee meaningful, representative and inclusive dialogue and systematic feedback with ASEAN member states both nationally and regionally, and is aimed at advancing peoples' voices and advocacies;
- b. The identification and selection criteria for any interface/dialogue shall be in adherence to principles of participation that includes self-selection on the basis of an open and transparent process;
- c. Facilitate multi-stakeholders engagement, especially in context of economic integration, particularly in mitigating adverse consequences of trade liberalisation policies and free-trade agreements on the peoples of ASEAN;
- d. The annual interface between civil society and heads of ASEAN member states during the ASEAN Summit should be an institutionalised practice and go beyond a symbolic gesture. It shall facilitate meaningful dialogue rather than monologues and have real impact on the decisions of the ASEAN leaders.

8.3 Enhanced role of ASEAN Secretariat and its institutions and organs

- a. ASEAN, in accordance to the ASEAN Charter, to enable and enhance the role of the Secretariat in facilitating and working with civil society by establishing and institutionalising more effective mechanisms that are accessible to all peoples of ASEAN;
- b. ASEAN Secretariat to facilitate effective communication and engagement of civil society with relevant bodies and organs in ASEAN;

- c. ASEAN Secretariat, through the other ASEAN entities, including the ASEAN Foundation, to ensure effective information exchange and dissemination, through all accessible forms of tools and media;
- d. ASEAN Secretariat to contribute to civil society capacity building initiatives in engaging the ASEAN;
- e. Enhanced ASEAN Secretariat and its institutions and organs to mainstream human rights and provide meaningful and dedicated support;
- f. Dedicated secretariat support to be established for the AICHR and ACWC, which shall include sufficient resources and accessible structures to facilitate receiving of information and complaints/communications on violations of human rights.

8.4 Mainstream human rights and fundamental freedoms

- a. Human rights and fundamental freedoms to be mainstreamed in all pillars of ASEAN and across all entities and structures. It shall recognise primacy of universal principles of human rights and prioritise elimination of all forms of discrimination against all peoples in and from ASEAN, and promote realisation of substantive equality of all individuals and collective human rights of all peoples;
 - b. ASEAN human rights mechanisms and instruments must strictly adhere to international law and universal principles and standards on human rights and fundamental freedoms.
9. Finally, the ACSC/APF 2015 has decided that the ACSC/APF in 2016 will not be hosted in Lao PDR given the lack of readiness of the civil society organisations in the country and the absence of assurance of a safe space for open and constructive discussions of all issues of concerns in the region. This is an exceptional decision made on the basis of our guiding principles and modalities of engagement. It will be held in Timor Leste.