

Press Release
by the Chair of the High Level Panel (HLP) on an ASEAN Human Rights
Body (AHRB)
at the Conclusion of the 3rd Meeting of the HLP on AHRB
12 September 2008, Manila

The 3rd Meeting of the High Level Panel on an ASEAN Human Rights Body (HLP on AHRB) was held in Manila, the Philippines, on 11-12 September 2008.

The first half day of this meeting was dedicated to a dialogue between the HLP and major human rights stakeholders and CSOs in ASEAN, including the Working Group on an ASEAN Human Rights Mechanism, the Network of 4 National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) and Solidarity for Asian Peoples' Assembly (SAPA), in which both sides had widely and constructively shared and exchanged their views relating to the Terms of Reference (TOR) of an AHRB.

During the dialogue, the Chair of the HLP, H.E. Ambassador Sihasak Phuanketkeow, from Thailand, emphasized the importance of the establishment of an AHRB as a contributing course towards the more people-centred ASEAN Community. He also briefed CSOs on progress made so far by HLP saying that while HLP just started its substantive discussion, it had already set clear goals. These goals are, first, to make an AHRB a credible, realistic and effective body to promote and protect human rights in ASEAN and, second, to have an AHRB launched by the 15th ASEAN Summit in Thailand by the end of next year.

Additionally, he said that the HLP recognized positive and meaningful role that CSOs can play in the drafting process of the TOR of an AHRB and would, therefore, seek further opportunities to engage with and listen to views of CSOs.

In response, the representatives from the Working Group, 4 NHRIs expressed their appreciation for an opportunity to meet with the HLP and hoped that the HLP would have continuous dialogue with CSOs throughout the TOR drafting process. They offered various concrete ideas regarding functions, status, composition and other elements of an AHRB. Some had also submitted proposals in writing, which the Chair of HLP assured that the Panel would seriously take into consideration.

The two sides have planned to meet again after the first draft of the TOR of AHRB is submitted to ASEAN Foreign Ministers in December 2008.

Later on in the 3rd Meeting of HLP, the Panel discussed some elements of the TOR of AHRB, including preamble, purposes and principles of an AHRB. It was able to agree on some common grounds, including that AHRB should adhere to purposes and principles enshrined in the ASEAN Charter as well as recognized international human rights norms and standards. Nonetheless, HLP recognized that there are points that would have to be further discussed and elaborated.

The meeting was marked by very constructive and cooperative spirit of all HLP Members, all of whom had shown their determination to move the process forward.

HLP will submit a written report on progress of their work to the Informal ASEAN Ministerial Meeting in New York on 29 September 2008.

The next meeting of HLP will be held in Singapore on 3-4 November 2008.
