

The 2013 Dialogue between the ASEAN Secretary-General, the ASEAN Secretariat and the Representative of Civil Society Organizations

Civil Society's Recommendations for the ASEAN Secretary-General and the ASEAN Secretariat, submitted in Jakarta, Indonesia on 1 November 2013

1. We, civil society organizations, peoples' organizations, think tank, and young people from Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao P.D.R., Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam, have gathered in Jakarta, Indonesia for the 2013 Dialogue between the ASEAN Secretary-General, the ASEAN Secretariat and the Representative of Civil Society Organizations, organized by the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) and the Human Rights Working Group (HRWG) on 31 October – 1 November 2013, to provide feedback and recommendations to the ASEAN Secretary-General and the ASEAN Secretariat to further improve the involvement of civil society in building an ASEAN Community and strengthen the efforts to promote and protect human rights in the region.

ASEAN Community and Human Rights

2. We recognize that ASEAN is currently pursuing its goal of building an ASEAN Community by 2015. We are, however, alarmed that human rights is not mainstreamed in the three ASEAN Community Blueprints. We are concerned that there has been no synergy displayed among the three ASEAN Community Pillars that further negatively impacts on the rights of the ASEAN people.
 3. We would like to call for renewed efforts in addressing our pressing concerns regarding the political, economic, social development and environmental degradation in the region. We are united over these concerns and their implications towards the fulfilment of social justice and our rights. Urgent to our agenda are labor migrant issues and free trade; trafficking in persons, particularly women and children; rampant discrimination against persons with disabilities, ethnic minorities and indigenous peoples as well as person with different sexual orientations and gender identities; continuing disregard for refugees, political prisoners, and other marginalized groups.
 4. We support a general call for access to justice as a framework and tool of ASEAN toward social justice to guarantee effective resolutions of injustices committed against the poor and the powerless.
 5. We urge the ASEAN Secretary-General to encourage member states to adopt and ratify international human rights conventions.
 6. We stress our view that it is our right to monitor the implementation of ASEAN agreements. To this end, we call for the guarantee of the freedom of expression and the right to information in ASEAN.
 7. We also encourage the ASEAN Secretary-General to initiate discussions amongst stakeholders on the establishment of an ASEAN Human Rights Court.
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8. We reiterate our recognition of the role of the ASEAN Secretary-General as well as the ASEAN Secretariat as important channels for civil society to hold ASEAN Member States accountable to their international and regional obligations to promote, protect and fulfill human rights as enshrined in the ASEAN Charter.

Civil Society Engagement

9. We appreciate the commitment shown by the ASEAN Secretary-General and the ASEAN Secretariat to continue the engagement with civil society in the region. Considering that establishing a culture of dialogue in ASEAN as a prerequisite to building an ASEAN Community, we urge, ASEAN Secretary-General to institutionalize the engagement with civil society, with the involvement of the ASEAN Secretariat, such as this meeting, to be annually organized.
10. We are concerned that there has been no institutionalized access for civil society to engage ASEAN at all levels, despite one of the principles of ASEAN “[t]o promote a people-oriented ASEAN in which all sectors of society are encouraged to participate in, and benefit from, the process of ASEAN integration and community building”.
11. We urge the ASEAN Secretary-General to recognize civil society platforms such as (and not limited to) the annual ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ ASEAN Peoples Forum (ACSC/APF), ASEAN Youth Forum, and ASEAN Disability Forum.
12. We call for the ASEAN Secretary-General to institutionalize civil society’s engagement with ASEAN organs and sectoral bodies, i.e. ASEAN Ministers Meeting (AMM).

The Review of the Terms of References (TOR)

13. We request the ASEAN Secretary-General and the ASEAN Secretariat to facilitate the process of the TOR’s review and the participation of civil society groups, national human rights institutions, and broader stakeholders. The process of review should be transparent, accountable to the people and ensure substantive participation.
14. We envision that the review of TOR leads to strengthening the ASEAN human rights mechanisms with a dedicated secretariat, stronger protection mandate covering all rights under international standards, and independent and qualified Representatives through open selection processes, accountable to the people.

ASEAN Secretariat

15. We are on the view that the capacity of the ASEAN Secretariat needs to be strengthened, especially on engaging the stakeholders, public outreach, updating information in the website to make it accessible to different needs, such as providing multiple languages and disabled-friendly.

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