

Asian Political Leaders Must Address Regression of Human Rights, Democracy, and Peace in Asia

Statement on the 28th and 29th ASEAN Summit, 19th ASEAN+3 Summit and the 11th East Asia Summit (EAS) at Vientiane, Laos on 6-8 Sept. 2016

(Seoul, 6 September 2016) Asian political leaders, in particular, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) must take concrete measures to address international concerns on the regression of human rights and democracy in the Southeast Asian region and the disputes in the South China Sea at the 28th and 29th ASEAN Summit, the 19th ASEAN+3 Summit and the 11th East Asia Summit (EAS) on 6-8 September 2016 in Vientiane, Laos if they are going to remain credible and relevant as an international body.

The concrete measures should include making both the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) and the ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children (ACWC) completely independent from the governments and are able to investigate human rights violations in the ASEAN countries and the region freely.

Asian political leaders should set a clear definition of democracy in line with international standards and institute robust mechanisms to assist member states when crises of democracy take place. It cannot turn a blind eye to such developments as it will threaten regional peace and stability as illustrated in the case of Myanmar in the past two decades.

The Asian region has witnessed a sharp turn for the worst of human rights and democracy development in recent years. Since the coup d'état in Thailand in 2014, Thailand remains under the tight grip of the military junta without elections and an elected government. It has just passed a controversial constitution in a referendum that handed enormous power to the military while dissents are muzzled, most notably with the *lèse-majesté* law.

The situation in Cambodia has deteriorated since the last national elections in 2013 that saw the ruling Cambodian People's Party (CPP) winning only by an extremely small margin. Supporters of the opposition Cambodian National Rescue Party (CNRP) were jailed while its party leader, Sam Rainsy, remains in self-imposed exile overseas. The recent arrest of human rights defenders and staff of the Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association (ADHOC) and the assassination of political analyst Dr. Kem Ley in open daylight marks the worst is yet to come with the country leading up to the commune election in 2017 and national election in 2018.

The Republic of Lao, the host of the 28th and 29th ASEAN Summit this year continues to fail to provide a convincing explanation to the international community on the enforced disappearance of leading civil society activist, Sombath Somphone despite CCTV video showing him being taken by the police on 15 December 2012, after successfully organizing the 9th Asia-Europe Peoples' Forum (AEPF) in Vientiane prior to the Asia-Europe Summit (ASEM).

While Myanmar has made some positive progress and is making its return to the right track of democratic governance with elections being restored, Asian political leaders must now urgently

address the humanitarian crisis faced by the Rohingya and assist the Myanmar government in recognizing the right to citizenship of the Rohingya to avert the impacts of refugee outflow to the region.

With the ruling of the Permanent Court of Arbitration in favor of the Philippines' sovereignty right in the South China Sea disputes, ADN urges the ASEAN, China and the international community to explore, at the Vientiane Summits, a resolution on peaceful transformation of the South China Sea disputes for global public good, rather than for narrowly-defined national interest, in accordance with the rule of law. The parties involved should explore all possible means and approaches to resolve the issue peacefully, amicably, and justly either through multi-stakeholder or bilateral means or a combination of both, as long as the bilateral means do not undermine the multilateral means. At the same time, the nuclear crisis in the Korean Peninsula also needs to be addressed through dialogues among all state parties involved in accordance with internationally recognized norms. In both cases, Asian leaders must ensure the participation of the peoples affected by the conflicts in the search for solutions and specifically in the dissipation of the tensions.

Human rights, democracy, and peace are the foundations for sustainable development and regional stability. All political leaders within and outside of Asia, gathering in Vientiane this week must demonstrate their political will and accountability by adopting the action plans based on accountable democracy, human rights, and peace in the region.

In particular, all ASEAN member states must respect and enforce its own ASEAN Charter that enshrines human rights, democracy, and peace if it is to achieve the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 of establishing a rules-based, people-oriented, people-centred ASEAN in a region of peace, stability, and prosperity.

- Asia Democracy Network -

For inquiry, please contact:

1. Anselmo Lee, Secretary General of Asia Democracy Network, +82 10 4293 0707, email: alee7080@gmail.com

ADN Steering Committee Members for 2016-2017 is composed of regional and sub-regional NGOs and their networks as follows

- Asia Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA), Bangkok
- Asian Network for Free Elections (ANFREL), Bangkok
- Asia Development Alliance (ADA), Seoul
- Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC) Asia, Davao, the Philippines
- Migrant Forum in Asia (MFA), Manila, the Philippines
- International NGO Forum on Indonesian Development (INFID), Jakarta
- Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA) / Asia Democracy Research Network (ADRN), New Delhi
- People's SAARC (PSAARC) for South Asia, Kathmandu
- Southeast Asia Committee for Advocacy (SEACA) / Solidarity for ASEAN People's Advocacy (SAPA) for Southeast Asia for Southeast Asia, Manila
- Mongolia Democracy Network (MDN) / East Asia Democracy Forum (EADF) for Northeast Asia, Ulaanbaatar