

For Immediate Release

International Human Rights Day: Asian Governments Must Uphold the Right to Democracy



(Seoul, 10 December 2016) On this International Human Rights Day that is celebrated all over the world, the Asia Democracy Network (ADN), congratulate the peoples of Asia for their determined and continued struggle for the right to democracy as enshrined in Article 21 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which stipulates that “The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government. This shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures” and “Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives”.

This year is even more significant as we commemorate the 30th anniversary of the 1986 People Power, EDSA revolution in the Philippines.

This right has empowered huge democracy movements in the region. As witnessed with the ending of military dictatorship and the restoration of elections in Myanmar, the defeat of the authoritarian Rajapaksa regime in Sri Lanka and the recent democratic impeachment of President Park Geun Hye in the Republic of Korea after massive protests of one million Korean protesters on the abuse of constitutional power.

The right to democracy has also galvanized people in Malaysia and Cambodia to stage huge protests and demonstrations against election fraud in their national elections in 2013 and beyond. The quest for free and fair elections has resulted in the fifth Bersih (meaning clean in Malay) rally in Malaysia on 19 November 2016 with more than 40,000 gathered peacefully in Kuala Lumpur despite the threats and intimidation from the government as well as non-state actors.

We are gravely concerned with the continued military rule in Thailand with the suspension of national elections since 2014, the serious allegation of ethnic cleansing of the Rohingyas in Myanmar and the massive cases of extra-judicial killings in the Philippines in the war against drugs. We are further alarmed by the shrinking space in the Asian region for civil society and social movements with many Asian governments introducing regressive laws such as the Foreign Contribution Regulations Act (FCRA) in India to control foreign funding of CSOs, the Law on Associations and NGOs (LANGOs) in Cambodia and the Security Offences (Special Measures) Act (SOSMA) in Malaysia.

It is a misconception for many Asian governments to argue that they can do whatever that they wish with the mandate from the people once they win an election. More often than not, whether the elections are free and fair, are questionable. Furthermore, the mandate given by the people is a limited mandate and not a blank check to the government to do whatever they wish. Governments are required to rule in accordance with the Constitutions and international human rights laws.

We call on all Asian governments, especially members of the Community of Democracies (CoD) to double their efforts to respect, protect and fulfill the right to democracy of the peoples in Asia. Asian governments must show the international community that they are able to hold free and fair elections in their country. They must change their negative view of civil society organizations as civil society organizations can contribute positively to the country in many ways and a vibrant civil society is fundamental to a functioning democracy.

We also call on all Asian governments to develop full national action plans for the implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development known as Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted in Sept. 2015 by the UN General Assembly, especially goal 16 which is a cross-cutting and integral component of the SDGs. It is hoped that through the SDGs, democracy, and democratic governance will be advanced as stressed in the first UN Forum on Human Rights, Democracy and Rule of Law in Geneva on 21-22 No. 2016.

We stand in solidarity with all Asian peoples and call on all to remain steadfast in the struggle for the right to democracy in Asia.

For inquiry, please contact:

Anselmo Lee, Secretary-General of Asia Democracy Network, tel: +82 10 42930707, email: asiademocracynetwork@gmail.com

Soo Yon Suh, Coordinator of Asia Democracy Network, asiademocracynetwork@gmail.com