



**ASIA
DEMOCRACY
ASSEMBLY**
2021

Summary
Proceedings



2021



ASIA DEMOCRACY ASSEMBLY

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Main Poster for Event

Over the course of two days from November 23–24, the Asia Democracy Network held its annual *Asia Democracy Assembly* (hereafter the “Assembly”). With the theme “Confronting Democratic Regression and Reclaiming Civic Space”, the Assembly emphasized the need for pro-democracy stakeholders to unite in fighting against the increasing threat to the foundations of democracy, which was aggravated by the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic.

ADN and its partners invited forefront democracy advocates to conduct a series of constructive dialogues to map a course of action in reclaiming civic spaces. The discussions focused on the democracy-related issues identified during the sub-regional consultations, which was conducted a month prior to the assembly proper. This catalyzed a rich discussion, in which democracy actors were able to highlight prevailing conditions and challenges faced by civil society in the region, and craft a course of action on how to respond to these challenges, which was presented through a landmark document titled “Recession to Resilience – Road to Democracy Renewal in Asia.” In a region, where more authoritarians than democrats are in power it is vital that the civil society of the region band together and in unison commit to progressing and defending democracy.

The Assembly brought more than 150 participants, not only from civil society, but also other allied institutions such as intergovernmental organizations, media, academe, and parliamentarians. The discussions covered a myriad of issues in Plenary 1: “The current state of democracy, its challenges and crises, in Asia”, in which findings from sub-regional consultations were laid out, as well as special discussions conducted on captured spaces like Myanmar and Afghanistan, the situation of vulnerable sectors such as the Dalit, and the rise of illiberal powers in Asia. In Plenary 2: “Stakeholder perspectives on the next steps to strengthen democracy in Asia”, representatives from the academe, CSOs and INGOs, media, and the development sectors reflected on the trends presented, and encouraged stakeholders to craft comprehensive and cross-cutting actions which strengthen the capacity of pro-democracy actors and enable greater inclusion of pro-democracy sectors to respond to the grave democracy situation the region is in. The breakout session and Plenary 3: “Building CSO response to confront democracy regression” provided a means for the participants to directly share and contribute on the discussions and crafting of recommendation on how to confront the most pressing challenges identified, namely the imposition of draconian laws, the shrinkage of space for freedom of expression, and challenges to greater civil society solidarity in the region.

Through this program, ADN aimed to fulfill four objectives. First, strengthen solidarity among civil society actors in the region. Second, amplify unity among pro-democracy advocates. Third, catalyze greater re-commitment to defend and expand democratization in the region. And finally, build a roadmap to push against the regression of democracy in the region. To emphasize the importance of the gathering, Nobel Peace Laureate Dr. Jose Ramos Horta in his keynote speech, emphasized the need for pro-democracy stakeholders to continue the struggle

against injustices, inequity and human rights violations, build coalitions to better adapt to the “new normal”, and finally expand avenues for meaningful dialogue and better democracy education. Prof. Andrew Nathan, another keynote speaker, expressed his admiration for the Asian civil society who are at the forefront, confronting massive challenges, with courage and conviction to promote and protect democratic values. Through the Asia Democracy Assembly, we pay tribute to these sacrifices, and find ways to provide a medium for the pro-democracy community to unite and find common ground.

DAY 1

Opening Ceremony

The first day of the Asia Democracy Assembly kicked off with the opening remarks of Ichal Supriadi, the Secretary-General of ADN. Mr. Supriadi discussed the evolution of the Asia Democracy Assembly, from its prior format called the Asia Democracy Consolidation Forum held every two years. He shared that the Asia Democracy Assembly is the culmination of months-long consultative process, which gathered key stakeholders from North, Central and East Asia, South Asia and Southeast Asia to discuss challenges and actions pro-democracy stakeholders can do to promote unity and solidarity, and strengthen efforts to push back against democracy regression. Separate discussions were also held to tackle specific issues which need urgent responses such as the dire situation in Afghanistan after the Taliban’s takeover, the ongoing brutality perpetrated by the Tatmadaw in Myanmar, the continuous persecution of Dalits in South Asia, and the rise of illiberal forces and their impact in democratization in the region. Ultimately, he shared that the aim of the Assembly is to gather pro-democracy advocates across the region, and craft a unified action plan on how to counter the decline of democracy in the region and confront these challenges head on.

In his welcome speech, Mr. Gus Mclat, acting co-chairperson of the ADN and Executive Director of Initiatives for International Dialogue (IID) reflected on the situation of democracy in Asia. He shared that the last assembly was held in Malaysia, which was then in a positive political shift and transitioning towards a “more democratic arrangement”, but was effectively supplanted two years after by political instability. He recognized that the Covid-19 pandemic has not only caused concerns over everyone’s personal physical and mental wellbeing, it has also catalyzed an unprecedented contraction of democracy in the world, with autocrats imposing curbs against free speech and other fundamental rights to exercise greater control over citizens. Amid these challenges, however, he is optimistic that the civil society actors and their partner stakeholders remain vibrant and flexible, and has found creative ways to regroup and rebound to collectively fight against injustices, draconian policies despite limitations. He expressed pride that the Asia Democracy Network remains at the forefront in responding and acting on these challenges, and expressed hopes that the Assembly will consolidate the gains of the pro-democracy sector and usher greater solidarity among the various participants.

Ms. Nimalka Fernando, President of the International Movement Against All Forms of Discrimination and Racism (IMADR) and ADN Adviser also extended warm greetings to everyone. She expressed gratefulness to be present in the Assembly, despite the challenges posed by the Covid-19 Pandemic. She relayed that this period is not only to bemoan the challenges facing the region, but also to celebrate the lives of those who are struggling to fight for democracy and equality. She reflected about the rise of securitization and increase of violence, citing the situation in Sri Lanka, wherein women, ethnic and religious minorities face insecurity and were victimized by discrimination. In India, she also shared the difficulties in mobilizing due to harsh regulations imposed by the government, due to pandemic measures. Restrictions have now found their way in social media, with the imposition of social media regulations which restrict free expression and dissent. Similarly, she lamented over the dire situation of democracy and human rights in Afghanistan, which exposed the weaknesses of the international community. She hoped that through this assembly, we will be provided a space to plan on how to recapture democracy and human rights from the hands of authoritarian actors, and to keep the flame of resistance kindled. She expressed hope that amid these strange times, we find inspiration in the successes of the farmers in India, and the trade unions and teachers in Sri Lanka who continued the struggle for greater rights amid the dangers of Covid. She concluded by calling everyone in the Assembly to reaffirm and rededicate efforts to expand and protect democracy, continue activism and have faith in the struggles of the peoples of Asia.

In a recorded keynote speech, Andrew Nathan, Professor of Comparative Politics and International Relations at the Columbia University, called on Asian stakeholders to unite against the global recession of democracy, caused by various factors such as the rise of illiberal actors like China, the weakness of intergovernmental institutions in responding to issues like refugee crisis in many spaces, and the failure of democracies to use social programs to ease the impact of economic globalization on disadvantaged groups which gave rise to the populist-authoritarians. He emphasized the importance of a global, cross-sectoral pro-democracy movement, the strength of which is derived from courageous actions from individuals all over the world who fight for freedom, human rights and justice. He affirmed that the ADN and its pro-democracy partners are among the prime movers of this movement, and is proof that human rights and democracy are not just “Western values” utilized to spread Western hegemony, a view often held by anti-democratic forces. This yearning for democracy is the same reason why Afghans resist the Taliban’s undemocratic takeover of the country, and is no different from the desire for freedom anywhere else in the world to speak, write, learn, think and to be treated with dignity – a concrete proof that democracy is universal. He expressed admiration for those who are at the forefront in fighting for democracy, whether they be in Hong Kong, in Xinjiang, and other spaces, and called for everyone to support them. Practical help from networks such as this are important to support these brave individuals struggling who are oftentimes victimized by dangerous regimes, and they keep alive the possibility for change. He explained that the impulse for authoritarianism

never goes away due to the impulse of individuals to control, but this can be balanced by our desire to resist and fight against injustices. It will be a long battle, but our resilient human nature also never goes away. He expressed great faith in the ability and intelligence of Asian actors to surmount the complex democracy problems that the region is facing, and concluded by encouraging everyone to find ways to unite in supporting each other who are struggling for democracy.

The opening session culminated with a live keynote address by Dr. Jose Ramos-Horta, Nobel Laureate and former President of Timor-Leste. He opened by sharing the positive developments of healing Timor-Leste after the unfortunate events in 1999. He then traced the roots of the regional problems we have at present, dating back to World War 2, with some powers asserting influence over the region. He explained that these socioeconomic conditions have only been exacerbated by the Covid-19 Pandemic, and have brought us closer to a catastrophic regression. The ones who bear the brunt of these problems, however, are countries who did not benefit directly from globalization, and their citizens – the poorest of the poor. This has increased problems like child slavery and lack of access to quality education. This calls us to question where our sense of humanity is, and exposes the failures of our international institutions. This sense of misplaced humanity also manifests itself in the poor distribution of and profiteering from Covid-19 vaccines. On the democracy front, Asians tend to look for validation from Western powers to validate our conditions of democracy, but according to them, Timor Leste is the most democratic state in Southeast Asia. He humored, however, that with the bad state of democracy in ASEAN, it is not difficult to achieve this. Reflecting on the regional situation, he called stakeholders to step up in supporting democracy in Myanmar, with the Tatmadaw victimizing the youth, artists, journalists and opposition parliamentarians after the coup. He ended by welcoming the decision of some ASEAN countries to block the Tatmadaw from sending its representatives in the bloc's summit. Amid the setbacks in democracy, this unprecedented action condemning the coup shows in itself that at least some progress has been made in the region. He expressed hope that the region will triumph against these challenges, especially in this generation that embraces democracy and freedom above all else. He concluded by congratulating the Asia Democracy Network for hosting this momentous event, and expressed gratitude for the international community for the support it has given to Timor Leste.

Tribute to Chair Chito Gascon, ADN Senior Adviser

After the opening speeches, ADN paid a tribute to its former adviser, the Chair of the Philippines' Commission on Human Rights, Chito Gascon, who passed away due to Covid-19. In the tribute, Ms. Safina Maulida said, "This year was quite a difficult one as we lost many of our democracy leaders. Among them we lost one really dear to our hearts, Chair Chito Gascon. The Asia Democracy Network doesn't have any one particular founder but it was founded by a group of leading democracy and human rights advocates in Asia. One of those key actors that designed ADN into existence was Chito and until the end supported us and truly believed in the

strength of a regional democracy network. Chair Chito was a mentor, a leader, and an inspiration to us all. This is our dedication to him. Chair Chito thank you for your service and we will always keep you alive through the spirit of democracy.”

Plenary 1

Plenary 1 tackled the summaries of the pre-assembly events ADN held to identify the challenges faced by pro-democracy actors in the various Asian sub-region and delve on the most important issues faced by various sectors.

Mr. Debendra Adhikari, South Asia Programme Manager, Forum-Asia, shared the findings of the subregional consultations.

The consultations found alarming regress and deficits to democracy and human rights in Asia. It was made clear that authoritarian forces have significantly coordinated and created an environment to repress fundamental freedoms and compromise democratic values. It was also made clear that we have lost a lot of time to respond and rebut authoritarian narratives and now more than ever solidarity and coordination is dire. The focus groups were attended by members of civil society that are on the front lines of advocating, protecting, and defending democracy and human rights in Asia therefore, appropriately reflects the current situation.

Based on the three consultations, the following conclusions were made:

- A. Weakened democratic institutions and draconian laws are severely oppressing fundamental freedoms and restricting civic space
- B. The weaponization of misinformation is controlling public opinion and empowering democratically elected leaders with authoritarian tendencies to oppress freedoms
- C. Increasing illiberal influences affecting regional economics and geopolitics is enabling space for bad regimes.
- D. Civil society continues to respond to the deterioration of rights amidst current difficulties, however there is still a lot more to do that requires well thought out modalities.

With the alarming rate of regress of democracy in the region, the civil society of Asia identifies that the region must in solidarity and unity recommit to defending and promoting democracy. This recommitment indicates the strong will of democracy advocates in Asia to come together to work towards better coordination, sharing of resources, improving intersectionality to remedy the deteriorating human rights and democracy situation. Democracy advocates in Asia made the following recommendations of action to respond to the democracy regress and to reclaim

civic space in Asia.

- A. Increase platforms for multi-stakeholders of like minded democracy advocates to come together to share knowledge, experiences, and resources to create innovative solutions to the democracy situation.
- B. Through these platforms, increase intersectionality and break silos improving coalition among democracy actors
- C. Increase democracy education for all. Not only education for the general public, but democracy education for parliamentarians, government, and private sectors are necessary.
- D. Research on illiberal influences and their effects on democratic governance, economy, and human rights in the Asia region must be conducted and utilized for advocacy.
- E. Increase capacity building and strategy to respond to increasing surveillance state and weaponization of misinformation.
- F. Create effective and swift protection mechanisms for human rights defenders at risk.
- G. Youth movements have been effective in mobilizing and bringing policy change across the world. We need to move away from the categorization of youth as a separate movement body, rather create space to advocate and lead the movement alongside each other.

Mr. Karel Jiaan Galang then provided the participants a summary of the proceedings for the Assembly Side Events. ADN and its partners, Forum Asia, AMAN, EADF, and ADRN, hosted a series of sessions with regard to the very tragic situation of democracy in the region. Throughout the month of November, ADN conducted a series of side events tackling the very tragic situation in Afghanistan and Myanmar, the struggle of marginalized sectors, especially the Dalits in representation and democratic processes, as well as a special closed door session on how illiberal forces are trying to interfere with democratization processes in the region.

Starting with Afghanistan, we have covered aspects of utmost concern, such as the dangerous situation of women and children, the civil society and activists who are now held captive within their own land, and are now suffering in fear. It pains to know that the efforts of the Afghan community in establishing the foundations of a working political process, in creating and consolidating an active civil society network, and a media to hold those in power accountable, are now neglected and left at the mercy of an ultraconservative, bloodthirsty Taliban regime. Our speakers have voiced disappointment at how intergovernmental institutions have left these sectors in such a tragic state, and indeed the international community must step

up and assist in reclaiming Afghanistan as a space in which democracy is a way of life.

Another session was also conducted to discuss the insidious attempts by titanic illiberal forces in the region to reshape the international landscape in favor of autocratic actors. We have seen both established and democratizing states fall prey to tactics such as co-opting domestic actors to espouse illiberal agenda, deployment of actors to undermine political processes, to mobilizing a gigantic amount of economic and diplomatic force to provide a cover for and maintain control of illiberal regimes. The session points us to the weak underbellies of democracies, and much work needs to be done in order to patch the damage created by the “sharp power” of these regional illiberal forces. These include regional efforts to counter the capabilities of these illiberal actors, which should go hand in hand with capacity building of pro-democracy sectors to augment their capabilities in raising awareness and responding to these threats.

In the session regarding the role of journalists in Myanmar’s current situation, our esteemed panelists described the issues faced by domestic journalists in upholding their duty to ensure a free flow of information, and sow the seeds of accountability. The Tatmadaw has a massive arsenal of undemocratic actions which creates a hostile environment for the journalists in the country, who are subjected to threats, arrests, torture, harassment and censorship. The Myanmar civil society and media community are still resisting with creative means. At present, journalists are utilizing the power of livestreams to surface issues, while traditional media have been stepping up in continuously presenting facts and countering the massive propaganda machine of the Tatmadaw. However, with the delicate situation in the country, we do not know until when they can last. The Myanmar civil society lamented that while more than one thousand lives have already been claimed by the Tatmadaw, the country is still at a standstill and the intergovernmental institutions remain to do business as usual, conducting cooperative talks with the dangerous junta. The participants called on the international community to work together in supplying Myanmar’s media and civil society with the necessary assistance for them to continue their fight, in saving lives, in bringing out the truth.

The final side session was held to tackle the inhumane treatment and isolation of Dalit communities in South Asia. Discriminated based on their descent and work, they continue to face injustices on their day-to-day life, and have been so for many centuries -- from being deprived of land ownership, housing, education, employment, healthcare, social security, decision making and often face violence, to abductions forced conversions and are often forced into sanitation jobs and manual scavenging, and even non recognition under any special protection measures or policies and often deprived of taking part in the process of democracy due to their non-recognition by the State. The presenters provided how Dalits can reap the fruits of democracy which they have fought for, especially the commitment to an intersectional approach which provides justice for gender, financial, environmental, and due process and recognition of the Dalit sectors.

Before proceeding to Plenary 2, ADN presented a musical performance by Sarzamin Man Hashmat Gulestani, artist activist from Afghanistan regarding the situation of his country after the takeover of the Taliban in May 2021. The performance can be viewed [here](#).

Plenary 2

Moderated by Mr. Ichal Supriadi, Plenary 2 of the Democracy Assembly gathered among the most eminent pro-democracy stakeholders from the region to reflect on the situation of the region, and propose action points to strengthen democratization and solidarity among pro-democracy stakeholders in the region.

First to speak is Dr. Maiko Ichihara, Associate Professor from the Hitotsubashi University in Japan. Academia is moving towards correcting narratives and factors of structural discrimination. Internally, the academia has also been pushing for gender equality and inclusion by increasing employment of women scholars. This development was catalyzed by two factors: first, funding agencies incentivizes and supports institutions that are more inclusive, and second, academic institutions undergo regular assessments by groups like the QS World University Rankings which considers such factors when they release reports. Democracy related institutions can work with these ranking and financial institutions regarding advocacies to further steer democratization within the academic circles. However, there are some challenges to this development. She pointed out that governments are encouraging academic institutions to invest more in the fields of technology, specifically artificial intelligence, cyber data governance and cryptocurrency, given that these fields are at the frontlines of economic competition, while the fields of social sciences and democracy studies are not prioritized. Furthermore, academic institutions are also experiencing stronger state intervention, which poses a danger to academic freedom. The most extreme example is Hong Kong in the case of Asia, where freedom of speech in educational institutions has been taken away—making it impossible to conduct critical analysis, which is an essential component for liberal democracy. In post-coup Myanmar, schools have been shut down as a countermeasure to halt discussions. These two factors challenge liberal democracy, given that critical education is one of its cornerstones.

Ms. Tess Bacalla, Editor in Chief of ADN's Asia Democracy Chronicles, discussed the challenges and the responses the media are doing to advance democracy in their respective spaces. Among the many challenges they face are the hostile environments which present opportunities for repressive actors to encourage censorship, intimidation, cooptation and legal repression of journalists and truth tellers in the region while protection and resources remain dismal. As such, Asia has become among the most dangerous spaces in the world for journalists. Despite these challenges, journalists continue to be courageous in presenting stories crucial for democracy to survive. Journalists have also learned to band together in order to present minority voices, finding themselves as the medium to present voices that are often neglected. Journalists have become crucial agents to raise these voices

in the fringes of society. Ms Bacalla called on pro-democracy actors to pause and reflect on how to protect this space against further cooptation and harassment. Ms Shamini Kaliemuthu, Executive Director of the Forum-Asia, then shared how civil society actors are fighting to promote human rights values in the region. She shared that the civil society actors in the region are facing an increasing influence of authoritarianism in the region, which negatively impacts civic spaces, and subjects advocates to harassment and reprisals. This only exacerbated during the Covid-19 Pandemic. Furthermore, social and institutional weaknesses has hindered the growth of democracies, materializing into gender based discrimination, socioeconomic inequities and extremism among others. Amid these challenges, however, civil society actors continue to gather and continue tremendous work on areas such as anti-corruption, gender equity and the resolution of human rights violations. This form of collaborative solidarity has enabled calls for accountability and justice to expand at a global level, and fighting against the curtailment of the independence of international mechanisms. This solidarity enables civil society actors to fight against transborder challenges such as the emergence of illiberal influences such as China. She calls on the international community to resolve challenges such as the lack of enabling environment which enables draconian laws to persist and weakens human rights mechanisms, as well as the lack of resources given that donors and grassroots actors have a mismatch of priorities. She concluded that civil society actors need to strengthen their collaborations on multi-sector, evidence based advocacies.

Mr Anselmo Lee, Regional Coordinator of the Asian People's Partnership for Peace, Planet and Prosperity (APSD), shared how development workers are striving for a stronger mingling of democracy and development. He shared that human rights organizations such as Forum Asia have been doing advocacy work for more than 30 years, while APSD has only been present for 5 years. With human rights being challenged still at present, he shared that true and encompassing development in Asia cannot happen and cannot operate right – we still see corruption and electoral disputes happening around the region. There has been an agenda launched in 2015 which consolidated development actors to resolve this problems and places human rights at the heart of development. We need to create proactive platforms so that issues such as Cambodia, Thailand, Myanmar and Afghanistan will not continue to happen. He concluded by saying that we need to re-strategize and reflect on how we can enable equitable development to happen and realize the SDGs, and that is only after human rights mechanisms are strengthened.

DAY 2

The Youth on why they fight for democracy

After the first plenary, ADN released a video which highlights the importance of the youth in today's democratic movement. Qyira Yusbi (Malaysia), Akeda Pulati (Uyghur), Shun Lei (Myanmar), MD Enamul Haque (Bangladesh), Safina Maulida (Indonesia), and "Rung" Passanaya Sithijirawattanakul (Thailand), shared what the

youth in their respective spaces have been fighting for and their yearning for more free civic spaces in the region.

Musical Performance (Malaysia)

Malaysian artists, Sabda Jingga, presented a creative performance called Sejuta Suara (Million Voices) encouraging the democracy movement to continue the fight against injustice and human rights violations within their country and in Asia.

Plenary 3 and Breakout Session

The plenary was then divided into four breakout groups which discussed pertinent issues regarding democracy and human rights. The following guiding questions were used for all breakout sessions:

- A. How can national CSOs effectively respond to draconian laws, and prevent such laws from being legislated and used against democracy actors?
- B. Are there good practices in addressing draconian laws within the region that we can emulate?
- C. From your point of view, what is needed from the region to support national groups in the fight against draconian laws?

Breakout Session	Summary
<p>Session 1: Draconian Laws</p> <p>Trigger Speaker: Kingsley Abbott, Director, Global Accountability & International Justice, International Commission of Jurists (ICJ)</p> <p>Facilitator: Rachel Arinii Judhistari, Wikimedia</p>	<p>Draconian laws are bad laws usually disguised as national security, national order laws and mostly are used to protect the powerful. The laws often contain vague language making it difficult to verify what is unlawful giving broad powers to the authority. Draconian laws have become a tool to silence dissent. Laws packaged to shield unlawful state action and maintain rule of law, are exactly the opposite.</p> <p>We are seeing an increase of Draconian Laws across the world. Previous practices of bad governments blatantly breaking laws such as implementing enforced disappearances of dissenters has now transformed into lawful citizen's arrests for those breaking laws that were passed legally. Rule of law is now being used as a sword by the government. This is a perversion of the rule of law, a concept which means that states should uphold the law to protect people in their state. In the Asia region, we are seeing the use of draconian laws to stronghold power with these characteristics. They are usually framed to be used for public security, to protect the status quo. The laws contain penalties, lack of independent oversight mechanisms which affects access to justice and reparations.</p>
<p>Session 2: Freedom of Expression under expanding authoritarianism: How civil society should respond.</p> <p>Trigger Speaker: Sevan Doraisamy, Executive Director, SUARAM</p> <p>Facilitator: Kaustuv Bandyopadhyay, Director, PRIA</p>	<p>Authoritarianism runs rampant throughout the region, with governments using all the tactics at their disposal to further strengthen their grip on power.</p> <p>The response from CSOs from the region has been to increase regional solidarity wherever democratic institutions and practices are slipping and to show support across international lines. Community-based media also helps bring local stories to light where governments and state agents act with impunity and where citizens create their civic spaces through cooperation.</p> <p>The response is to go extremely local in places where governments overstepping goes unnoticed and to go regional and international for support and solidarity.</p>
<p>Session 3: Building Regional Solidarity: Enhancing civil society effort in responding to the democracy crisis</p> <p>Trigger Speaker: Ichal Supriadi, Secretary General, ADN</p> <p>Facilitator: William Gois, Regional Coordinator, MFA</p>	<p>There is always existing solidarity in the region. But somehow solidarity/advocacy disappears once the goal is achieved. Bigger/regional coalitions face difficulties when narrowing down their work to bring a more direct impact. Online solidarity seems to have helped strengthen bonds (e.g. Hongkong, Myanmar, Thailand supporting each other), and increased awareness of what is happening on the ground. But it is still decentralized. How to make this more effective? In some cultures, radical people tend to be excluded. Many times, we are speaking on behalf of the community. Smaller coalitions do not have the structures and resources.</p>

Closing Remarks

Dr. Hyungsik Shin, ADN's Senior Adviser, closed the Asia Democracy Assembly. He expressed thanks to all those who participated in the Asia Democracy Assembly and for their valuable contribution to the discussions. He expressed worries about the situation of democracy in the region, which has only gotten worse due to restrictions on civic space, which were placed under the guise of pandemic controls. During this period of pandemic, he shared his observations of deepening social polarization and an increasing neoliberal trend which calls for our attention and efforts to further strengthen the fight for freedom, equality, justice and inclusion – a call for greater political democratization. To achieve political democratization, we need to enhance economic democratization by establishing a fair system among economic actors, both laborers and corporations. One thing that has to be done is the strengthening of universal welfare policy to resolve polarization. He added that in order to overcome the global challenges, various social actors should improve the entire composition of the civil society which accompany the expansion of public character and the qualitative deepening of democracy by strengthening the competency of the people. He added that at a time like this, the impact and importance of realizing Sustainable Development is direly needed, and this can only be achieved by placing greater opportunities for people to access greater education on environmental sustainability and democratic citizenship. He concluded his remarks by calling for solidarity for the peoples of Myanmar, Hong Kong and Afghanistan.

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