

Statement of Concern

On Lao PDR and the ACSC/APF 2016

To the Regional Steering Committee
ACSC/APF 2015 Malaysia

Mr. Jerald Joseph, Malaysia, RSC Chair
Pengiran Datin Paduka Hajah Mariam Pg Hj Matarsat, Brunei Darussalam, RSC Member
Mr. Pen Somony, Cambodia, RSC Member
Ms. Mida Saragih, Indonesia, RSC Member
Dr. Maydom Chanthasinh, Lao PDR, RSC Member
Mr. Aung Myo Min, Myanmar, RSC Member
Mr. Eduardo C. Tadem, Philippines, RSC Member
Mr. Soe Min Than, Singapore, RSC Member
Ms. Wanun Permpibul, Thailand, RSC Member
Ms. Nguyen Thi Hoang Van, Vietnam, RSC Member
Ms. Reileen Dulay, Regional, RSC Member
Ms. Nalini Singh, Regional, RSC Member
Mr. Gus Miclat, Regional, RSC Member

We, the undersigned, are national, regional and international civil society organisations, networks and alliances working in South East Asian countries, and key movers of the ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ ASEAN People's Forum (ACSC/APF) processes through the last ten years, from 2005 to 2015. With you, we have been committed to promoting the ACSC/APF process as a civil society-driven, free and open space for building community and solidarity amongst the peoples of Southeast Asia.

While we have had a demonstrable commitment to the ACSC/APF process, we wish to raise our collective concern on the state of democracy and human rights in Lao PDR, and the difficulties we anticipate in having an ACSC/APF in Lao PDR in 2016.

During the consultations leading to and during the APF 2015, particularly during the 3rd Regional Organizing Meeting in March 2015, a group of unnamed Lao CSOs expressed their objection to the ACSC/APF's positions on issues, namely on 1) LGBTIQ/ lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer; 2) indigenous peoples, and dams; 3) multi-party systems and democracy; and, 4) the disappearance of Sombath Somphone. Dr Maydom Chanthasinh, Lao representative to the ACSC Regional Steering Committee, confirmed during the Regional Organizing meeting, that discussions on these issues would not be possible in Laos.

Based on this, we foresee and have reason to believe that any free discussions and dialogue on very crucial regional issues--on equality and diversity; on development

projects and their impacts on peoples and environments; on freedoms and human rights-
-will not and cannot take place in Lao.

Based on the prior experience of the Asia Europe People's Forum (AEPF9), we do not see any credible assurances from Lao CSOs based within the country that a prospective ACSC/APF 2016 in Lao will not be plagued by troubles similar to those experienced in AEPF9.

We are certain that an ACSC/APF 2016 will not be organized by Lao civil society. Instead, the government of Laos will certainly have its hand in controlling an ACSC/APF 2016, contrary to the spirit of a civil society organized event. Even if the current CSO representatives from Laos, or the government of Laos, are genuinely sincere in using this opportunity to recover its credibility to hold future events like the ACSC/APF, they have yet to address specific measures to prevent a repeat of any of the inexcusable examples of harassment and impunity by various state actors during and immediately after the AEPF9.

The issue of Sombath Somphone's enforced disappearance, and the developments around the AEPF9, particularly the inability of the Laos government to make good their promise of allowing the event to be held independently, without interference, is a warning on the current state of Lao society, and the Lao government's attitude towards civil society and the legitimate issues they work on. The reluctance of Lao civil society to participate, as well as the inability to do so independently in this post-AEPF9 period, clearly highlight the repercussions of the tragedy of the AEPF9. There should be no illusions about the reality of the prevailing fear within Lao society in mentioning issues that are deemed sensitive, such as, Sombath and enforced disappearances, Indigenous peoples, LGBTIQ, multi-party political systems and democracy.

The statement from the International Organizing Committee of the AEPF and other sources of narration of the foreign civil society actors being expelled from the country should serve as further reminders of the state's involvement in the current alarming situation of human rights abuses and danger to civil society within Laos.

Considering all of the above, there seems to be no possibility of a freely organized ACSC/APF in Laos. It would be impossible to uphold the agreed engagement modalities and guiding principles as determined during the ACSC/APF 2015.

We, CSOs in Southeast Asia, hope that the ACSC/APF 2015 Regional Steering Committee will provide the courageous leadership in answering the following questions among the ACSC/APF community, which are central to the current crisis in Laos, and are relevant to the ACSC/APF going forward.

- Are we prepared to accept an ACSC/APF that is not freely organized by regional civil society? Are we prepared to accept the controlling hand, whether seen or unseen, of the Lao government on the process?
- Are we fully cognizant of the risks and dangers toward participants, particularly Lao participants, by holding an ACSC/APF in Laos?
- Are we willing to disenfranchise participants and communities of the LGBTIQ, of indigenous peoples, of environmental groups, of anti-dam campaigners, of democracy activists and human rights defenders, of families of prisoners and the disappeared, by holding an ACSC/APF in Laos?
- Even if we wish to act upon the idea of benefitting Lao peoples in Laos, and of supporting Lao civil society, are we prepared to compromise the integrity of the ACSC/APF process in Lao, while keeping faithful to the ACSC/APF guiding principles and engagement modalities?

We foresee that the painful answers to the questions we raise will be in the negative; and therefore,

We implore the ACSC/APF 2015 Steering Committee, to seriously consider the option of not endorsing an ACSC/APF 2016 process in Lao.

We implore the ACSC/APF 2015 Steering Committee to bring this discussion back to the country and regional caucuses, to jointly imagine an alternative ACSC/APF process in 2016 outside of Lao PDR, while ensuring that Lao peoples and civil society can still participate freely in such a process.

10 September 2015

ORGANIZATIONS

Aliansi Masyarakat Adat Nusantara (AMAN)
 Aravati, Myanmar
 ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights (APHR)
 ASEAN SOGIE Caucus
 Asia Democracy Network (ADN)
 Asia Indigenous Peoples Network on Extractive Industries and Energy (AIPNEE)
 Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact (AIPP)
 Asia Pacific Indigenous Youth Network (APIYN)
 Asian Federation Against Involuntary Disappearances (AFAD)

Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)
Asian Network for Free Elections (ANFREL)
Association to Protect Religious Freedom, Vietnam
Ayar West Development Organization, Minbu, Myanmar
Ayeyarwady MATA , Myanmar
BAI National Alliance of Indigenous Women, Philippines
Boat People SOS (BPSOS)
Burma Partnership (BP)
Cambodia Indigenous Peoples Organization (CIPO)
Cambodia Indigenous Youth Association (CIYA)
Cambodian Civil Society Working Group on ASEAN (CCWA)
Cambodian Food and Service Workers' Federation (CFSWF)
Cambodian Volunteers for Society (CVS)
Cambodian Youth Network (CYN)
Capacity Building Initiative, Myanmar
Center for Sustainable Development in Mountainous Areas (CSDM), Vietnam
Civil Society Forum, Vietnam
Coalition of Cambodian Farmers Community (CCFC)
Coalition to Abolish Modern-day Slavery in Asia (CAMSA)
Colors Rainbow, Myanmar
Community Response Group (COMREG), Myanmar
Cooperation Committee for Cambodia (CCC)
Cordillera Women's Education Action Research Center (CWEARC), Cordillera Region, Philippines
Defend the Defenders, Vietnam
ECCD Network, Pwint Phyu, Myanmar
Education Garden, Magway, Myanmar
Equality Myanmar
Farmer Rights and Development Organization, Magway, Myanmar
Focus on the Global South
Free Jonas Burgos Movement, AFAD, Philippines
Fundação Feto iha Kbiit Servisu Hamutuk (FFKSH), Timor Leste
Genuine People's Servants (GPS), Myanmar
Green Future Environmental Activities Group, Yenangyaung, Myanmar
Green Network Sustainable Environment Group, Magway, Myanmar
Green Peasant Institute (GPI), Myanmar
Guardian Network, Pakokku, Myanmar
Hands of Unity Group, Magway, Myanmar
Harmony Volunteer Group, Magway, Myanmar
Highlander Associations (HA), Cambodia
HuMa, Indonesia
IFI Watch, Magway, Myanmar
Ikohi, AFAD, Indonesia
Imparsial, Indonesia

Indigenous Peoples Human Rights Defenders (IPHRD)
Indigenous Peoples Task Force on ASEAN
Ingyin Thar Social Service, Myo Thit, Myanmar
Innabuyog Federation of Indigenous Women in Cordillera, Philippines
Institut Titian Perdamaian (ITP / Peacebuilding Institute), Indonesia
International NGO Forum on Indonesian Development (INFID)
International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC)
International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB)
International Rivers (IR)
Internet Law Reform Dialogue (iLaw), Thailand
Jaringan Orang Asal SeMalaysia (JOAS)
Justice for Peace Foundation, AFAD, Thailand
Kachin Peace Network, Myanmar
Kachin Women Peace Network, Myanmar
Karen Environment and Social Action Network, Myanmar
Khối Nhon Sanh (KNS) CAODAISM, Vietnam
Koalisyon ng mga Katutubo at Samahan ng Pilipinas/National Coalition of Indigenous Peoples in the Philippines (KASAPI, Inc.)
Kontras, Indonesia
Kusog sa Katawhang Lumad sa Mindanao (KALUMARAN), Philippines
Land Core Group, Myanmar
Lands In Our Hand, Myanmar
Lighthouse, Myanmar
Local Resource Center, Myanmar
Magway EITI Watch Group, Magway, Myanmar
Magway Farmer Union, Myanmar
Magway Youth Network, Myanmar
Manaw Thukha Social Service, Yesagyo, Myanmar
MATA (Mdy working group), Myanmar
ME, Community Development Center, Magway, Myanmar
Metta Development Foundation, Myanmar
Migrant Forum in Asia (MFA)
Mintae Development Group, Mintae , Pwint Phyu, Myanmar
Myaing Youth Development Organization, Myaing, Myanmar
Myanmar China Pipeline Watch Committee
Myanmar Civil Society Coordinating Group on ASEAN
Myanmar Social Initiative Group, Magway, Myanmar
Nationalities Youth Forum, Myanmar
Organic Agro and Farmer Affair Development Group, Pwint Phyu, Myanmar
Organisation for the Promotion of Kui Culture (OKC), Cambodia
Pan Pyoe Lat Social Organization, Pwint Phyu, Myanmar
Paung Ku, Myanmar
Peace and Justice, Myanmar
Peace & Open Society, Kyaukse Township, Myanmar

People's Empowerment Foundation (PEF), Thailand
Pikhumpangan Dlibon Subanen, Inc. (PDSI), Philippines
Pioneer Star, Seik Phyu, Myanmar
Pyo Khinn Thit , Myanmar
Relatives Committee of the May 1992 Heroes, AFAD
Religion and Ethnic Minorities Defenders, Vietnam
SAVE Rivers, Sarawak
School for Wellbeing Studies and Research, Thailand
Shwe Ye' Na Thar Labour Group, Yenangyaung, Myanmar
Social Care Volunteer Group, Magway, Myanmar
Solidarity for Asian Peoples' Advocacies (SAPA) Working Group on ASEAN
South East Asian Committee for Advocacy (SEACA)
Task Force Detainees of the Philippines (TFDP)
The Sombath Initiative
Thirst Aid, Myanmar
Triangle Women Group, Myanmar
U Chit Maung Library and Community Forestry Group, Minhla, Myanmar
United ACT, Myanmar
Vietnamese League for Human Rights in Switzerland
Vietnamese Prisoners of Conscience (FVPOC)
Vietnamese Women for Human Rights (VNWHR)
VOICE Vietnam
Women for Human Rights in Vietnam (WFHR)
Yayasan Lintas Nusa Batam, Indonesia
Yoema Yape, Ngaphe' , Myanmar
Youth Current Group, Taung Dwin Gyi, Myanmar

WITH SUPPORT AND SOLIDARITY FROM OTHER ASIAN AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AND INDIVIDUALS:

Active Society Nepal (ASN), Nepal
Adivasi Women's Network
Advocacy Forum, AFAD, Nepal
Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons, AFAD, Kashmir, India
Borok Peoples Human Rights Organisation/Borok Indigenous /Tribal Peoples Development Center (BPHRO/BITPDC), India
Chittagong Hill Tracts Citizens' Committee (CHTCC), Bangladesh
CHT Indigenous Jumma Association Australia (CHTIJAA)
Civil Society Women Organization (CSWO), Meghalaya, North East India
Conflict Victims Society for Justice, AFAD, Nepal
Defence for Human Rights, AFAD, Pakistan
Families of the Disappeared, AFAD, Sri Lanka
Finnish Asiatic Society

Indigenous Peoples Movement for Self Determination and Liberation (IPMSDL)
Indigenous Women's Forum Northeast India (IWFNEI)
International Coalition Against Enforced Disappearances (ICAED)
International Council for the Indigenous Peoples of CHT (ICIP-CHT), France
Kapaeeng Foundation, Bangladesh
Karbi Human Rights Watch, NE India
Kirat Chamling Language Culture Development Association (KCLCDA), Nepal
Kirat Welfare Society (KWS), Nepal
Kirat Youth Society (KYS), Nepal
Knights for Peace, International
Kulung Mimchha Guskham (KMG), Nepal
La Voix des Jummas, France
Lawyers for the Human Rights of Nepalese Indigenous Peoples (LAHURNIP), Nepal
Naga Peoples Movement for Human Rights (NPMHR), North East India
Naga Women's Union, Manipur, India
National Indigenous Woman's Federation (NIWF), Nepal
Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities (NEFIN)
Nepal Kirat Kulung Bhasa Sanskriti Utthan Sangh (NKKBSUS)
NGO-Federation of Nepalese Indigenous Nationalities (NGO-FONIN)
North South Initiative
Odhikar, AFAD, Bangladesh
Papura Indigenous Development Association (PIDA), Taiwan/China
People Unity Youth Society (PUYS), Nepal
Youth Awareness Society Nepal (YASN)
Youth Federation of Indigenous Nationalities (YFIN), Nepal

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