

## **CSO Statement to the ASEAN High Level Conference on Social Protection**

**August 15, 2017**

In 2013, the ASEAN Heads of State adopted the “ASEAN Declaration on Strengthening Social Protection” with a vision “to uplift the quality of life of ASEAN People by 2025”. As described in the declaration “social protection covers, but is not limited to, social welfare and development, social safety-nets, social insurance, social assistance, social services, in ASEAN Member States”. This was a historic act being the first time that the ASEAN formally recognized in a document that Social Protection is a Right that should be enjoyed by the people in the region and which the States have a duty to fulfill.

While there is a Regional Framework and Action Plan adopted in 2015, there is virtually no mechanism for CSO engagement in the crafting of social protection measures responsive to the realities of ordinary men and women and vulnerable groups. CSOs and trade unions lack information on the progress of the framework and action plan as participation in the ASEAN has been traditionally confined to the business sector. Furthermore, no country-level consultations have been undertaken to follow through on the framework and action plan.

The ASEAN Declaration on Social Protection deserves to be implemented and budgeted. There are no clear accountabilities, resource allocations and participatory mechanisms that would ensure each ASEAN state undertakes or improves social protection measures. Due to the ASEAN principle of non-interference, each government is effectively left on its own to operationalize ASEAN’s declared social protection aspirations.

Furthermore, an examination of government spending by ASEAN countries show highly inadequate support for social protection. A 2015 study by International Labor Organization reveals that seven (7) out of nine (9) ASEAN countries spent less than 3% of their GDP for social protection, which is not even half of the 6% of GDP spending recommended by the ILO.

The continued low priority given to social protection is distressing considering that the ASEAN integration process and the development path pursued by ASEAN governments have given rise to greater inequality and the further social and economic marginalization of many.

Market liberalization, deregulation and privatization have led to the loss of traditional livelihoods and means of survival, and further exploitation of workers. These have also

led to diminished public access to affordable essential services, such as electricity, water, healthcare and education in most ASEAN member countries.

Furthermore, while some Southeast Asian States have registered impressive economic growth, majority of the people continue to experience social insecurity, increasing poverty and vulnerability, widening inequality, and life-threatening impacts of severe environmental degradation.

Of growing concern is the increasing informalization of formal labor and precariousness of work. Nearly sixty per cent (60%) of the workforce in Asia are in the informal economy, enduring precarious working and living conditions. Most of these workers are female who are compelled into this work due to discrimination in the formal economy. On the other hand, workers in the formal sector receive measly wages under unacceptable working environments while being deprived of labor rights such as security of tenure and the right to organize. Discrimination based on gender, sexual orientation, age, race, among others, are still rampant. Migrant workers suffer these same sordid realities with the added burden of being unable to access even the limited social protection programs available both in their countries of origin and destination.

The harsh impact of climate change on people's livelihoods, food and shelter worsen the situation. According to Global Risk Insights, Southeast Asia is most vulnerable to the worst effects of global warming.

Failure to address the root causes of systemic problems such as poverty, inequality, discrimination, disasters due to climate change, terrorism and conflicts make peoples more exposed to contingencies, risks and shocks.

As officials meet from August 15 to 17 for the ASEAN High Level Conference on Social Protection, we, representatives of civil society, trade unions and people's organizations in Southeast Asia, call on ASEAN leaders to take action on the following demands:

1. Expand ASEAN framework on social protection to ensure the progressive realization of a life of dignity for all and which embraces the principles of human rights and social justice. Social protection must move from being targeted to the most vulnerable in the form of a social safety net to being ultimately universal, covering each individual, as a matter of human right to a life of dignity.
2. Implement transformative social protection programs to address power imbalances by empowering people, expanding and institutionalizing peoples' participation, and tackling structural causes of poverty, inequality, and roots of vulnerability.

3. Ensure that social protection is comprehensive, institutionalized through legislations with clear financing, monitoring and implementation mechanisms, and integrated in a country's national development strategy.
4. ASEAN governments must heed the demands of the people and comply with their obligations consistent with internationally-accepted human rights and labor rights standards.

The following are specific recommendations that require urgent action:

**1. Ensuring Availability and Accessibility of Social Protection by addressing issues of coverage, eligibility, affordability, participation and physical access.**

- Social protection should be made available for all people throughout their life cycle and independent of labor market status.
- Social protection should be inclusive and universal as well as tailored to address the specific needs and contexts of marginalized people such as persons with disabilities, indigenous groups, LGBTQI, the elderly, women, migrant workers, workers in the informal economy, farmers and fisher folk.
- Legislate measures or mechanisms for people participation in the planning, design, implementation, and monitoring of Social Protection programs.
- Create an independent monitoring and complaints body with CSO and trade unions participation that will ensure compliance, enforcement, and implementation of universal and comprehensive Social Protection.
- Guarantee a universal and comprehensive social protection system through sustainable and solidarity-based financing, just taxes and compensation from accountable developed countries for the impact of climate change. Specifically, allocate sufficient amount of resources, not going below the 6% of GDP-ILO recommended expenditure for social protection and keep increasing this percentage until it fulfills the rights of people. Also, expand fiscal space by increasing public budget and instituting effective tax and fiscal reforms, and creating a regional social protection fund.

**2. Ensuring Universal and Comprehensive Social Protection Programs**

- Implement a comprehensive social protection system that covers decent work for all including informal sector workers; solidarity-based and sustainable

- livelihoods; right to land and other productive resources; right to food including food security, sovereignty and safety; access to essential services (healthcare, water, education, housing, energy, and transportation); and social pension for older people and adequate income support for children, persons with disability, and calamity survivors or climate refugees.
- Ensure direct assistance to all, especially the most vulnerable.
  - Realize a universal healthcare system across ASEAN.
  - Increase knowledge and capacity of all stakeholders regarding Social Protection.
  - Give recognition to the most vulnerable groups to ensure non-discrimination on any basis (e.g. adopt SOGIE)
  - Adopt a living wage across ASEAN. Appropriate mechanisms should be adopted to avoid people's incomes falling below the poverty level.
  - Adopt the decent work programme of the ILO, as well as the core labor standards comprising more particularly of the right to organize and the right to collective bargaining, social dialogue, non-discrimination, banning of child labor and of forced labor.
  - Eliminate existing gender inequality in employment, the gender pay gap, inadequate maternity protections, unpaid care work and discrimination against female workers due to their family responsibilities. Implement concrete measures to enable the social and economic empowerment of women and LGBTQI. These include providing opportunities for skills development and vocational training as well as support for women entrepreneurs and women in leadership roles.

### **3. Strengthening ASEAN Instruments and Mechanisms**

- Trade unions, civil society organizations, and academia should be able to engage through institutionalized participatory mechanisms in established ASEAN processes, including the ASEAN Labour Ministers Meeting (ALMM), the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR), the ASEAN Commission on Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children (ACWC), the Senior Officials Meeting on Social Welfare and Development (SOMSWD), ASEAN Committee on Migrant Workers (ACMW), and other ASEAN-level committee created to formulate and implement the various social declarations. This may be institutionalized through a Terms of Reference between CSOs and ASEAN.
- Adopt the ASEAN Instrument on the Promotion and Protection of the Right of Migrant Workers to implement the Cebu Declaration on Migrant Workers.

- Develop a mechanism that would increase coverage and allow portability of social protection for migrant workers, particularly for women migrant workers.
- Benchmark the 16 Social Protection Recommendations of the 9<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Forum on Migrant Labor in Vientianne, Laos, in October 2016.
- Endorse to ASEAN member-States the ratification of the ILO Convention 102 (Social Security) Minimum Standards 1952.

The full and effective realization of the measures embodied in this statement contributes in the attainment of a life of dignity for all ASEAN people. The adoption and implementation of the above recommendations place primacy on the rights and interests of people and their communities over markets and profits. We put forward these recommendations in pursuit of the full development of human potential based on equality, solidarity and sustainability, and through democratic and participatory processes.

**Endorsed by:**

ASEAN SOGIE Caucus

Buhay na may Dignidad para sa Lahat (DIGNIDAD)

Cambodian Grassroots Cross-Sector Network (CG-CSN)

Center for Migrant Advocacy (CMA)

Civika Asian Development Academy

Coalition of Services of the Elderly (COSE)

Confederation of Indonesia People Movement (KPRI)

Farmers for Farmers Network (FFF-Cambodia)

Galang Philippines

Independent Farmers Association for Community Development (IFACD-Cambodia)

Inkrispena (Indonesia)

Helpage International

HomeNet Southeast Asia (HNSEA)

Konfederasi Serikat Nasional/National Union Confederation (KSN)-Indonesia

Network for Transformative Social Protection (NSTP)

SENTRO (Philippines)

Social Action for Change (Cambodia)

Task Force on ASEAN Migrant Workers (TFAW)

ASEAN Watch, Thailand

Think Centre (Singapore)

Tuong Lai Centre for Health Education and Community Development (Tuong Lai Centre-Vietnam)

Women and Gender Institute-Miriam College (WAGI-MC)

Women's Legal and Human Rights Bureau

ASEAN Services Employees Trade Union Council (ASETUC)

Associated Labor Union (Philippines)

Migrant Forum in Asia

ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights

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