

## Statement of the Solidarity for Asian Peoples Advocacy (SAPA) Working Group on ASEAN

Conveners: South East Asian Committee for Advocacy (SEACA) and the Alternative ASEAN Network on Burma (ALTSEAN-Burma)

March 23, 2014

After years of struggles and campaigning for democracy, human rights and peoples' participation in Burma, we welcome the staging of the ASEAN Civil Society Conference / ASEAN Peoples Forum 2014, jointly organized by the civil society in Burma, the border organizations and Southeast Asian civil society organizations, in this one closed society. More than two thousand peoples from Burma and all over the region had come together to raise issues that matter to all of us. Who would have thought that this was possible four years after the dramatic opening of the country? Indeed, this is a very historic occasion for all of us and we appreciate very much this opportunity that we had fought so hard for.

The ACSC/APF 2014, more importantly, is a symbol of the Burmese civil society's triumph against adversity and years of abuse under the former military regime. Now, they have a bigger platform to express to the whole world their continuing struggle for genuine democracy, transparency and accountability in their country, and to stand in solidarity with the rest of the peoples of the region. However, in the face of the continuing attacks on peoples' freedoms and human rights by some member-governments of ASEAN as well as the dreaded economic integration in 2015, we need to be more vigilant and to continue our work for the benefit of the marginalized peoples and communities around the region.

The enforced disappearances of Sombath Somphone, Jonas Burgos and Somchai and dozens of Southeast Asian activists highlight ASEAN's insincerity in protecting the human rights of its peoples. Its failure to meaningfully respond to these cases is immoral and unjust, especially to the families of the victims. For the nth time, we strongly urge ASEAN to instruct its representatives in the regional human rights body, AICHR, to investigate these cases and formulate recommendations that will punish the perpetrators and eliminate cases of enforced disappearances. The true test of the legitimacy of AICHR and ASEAN's commitment to human rights is when they finally act on these cases and help in the elimination of rights abuses in the region.

Meanwhile, the recent political and social upheavals in Cambodia, Malaysia and Thailand and the highhanded responses of the governments show that democratic recession is happening in the region. It is quite ironic that as ASEAN trumpets its 'achievements' and marches towards economic integration, it backpedals on peoples' rights and fundamental freedoms. We are concerned that more repression will increase as we approach 2015. We reiterate that the current economic growth model of some ASEAN member-states, which is export-oriented and heavily dependent on resource extraction is not sustainable and very exploitative and impacts negatively on peoples' lives and livelihood. We call on ASEAN to ensure that social protections are provided to our peoples. Increase in trade and investment must not mean a rise in rights abuses.

Finally, as we discuss various issues in this year's ACSC/APF 2014, we continue to raise alarm over the deplorable situation of the Rohingya people in this country. We still believe that the government in NayPiDyaw fails to stem the abuses committed

against these people. We fear that government's inadequate response to the plight of the Rohingyas will unnecessarily radicalize them and this will negatively impact the country's transition journey. NayPiDyaw and ASEAN should do more to protect the rights of the Rohingyas and ensure that violence is stopped once and for all. For us, inaction means complicity. It will only prove our suspicion that the government is insincere in promoting human rights for all its peoples, and puts cloud over its reform agenda.

The dream of a truly people-centered ASEAN will remain to be elusive and unattainable if ASEAN and its member-government continue to pay lip service on the issue of human rights and peoples' participation.

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