

The ASEAN We Want

June 20, 2019

In 2009, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) based in Southeast Asia and working closely with local communities on environment, social and human rights issues, proposed the ***ASEAN-Civil Society Dialogue on Environment***¹ as a framework to dialogue with ASEAN. The proposed framework asked that “ASEAN should launch a fourth Strategic Pillar on Environment and prepare a blueprint that commits the member states to place international best practices on environmental sustainability at the center of decision-making.” The framework outlined three core themes of concern for dialogue:

1. ***Large-scale development projects*** that lead to environment and livelihood destruction, especially hydropower dams on the Mekong and Salween Rivers, and extractive industry sectors (oil, gas and mining).
2. ***Climate Change***, which increasingly highlights the vulnerability of the region.
3. ***Biodiversity***, which is threatened by large scale development projects to achieve rapid economic growth. The loss of the region’s rich biodiversity has exacerbated inequality and food insecurity in the region and created “the lack of access and control over land, water, productive resources, genetic resources, as well as social protection.”

Despite growing evidence that environmental destruction and degradation are the main causes of livelihood insecurity and violation of peoples’ rights in the ASEAN region, there have been no improvements by governments, businesses and corporations in addressing environmental problems over the past decade. Instead, people are witnessing and experiencing rapid losses of land, water sources, forests, minerals, biodiversity and good air quality. The impacts of climate change have already resulted in tremendous uncertainty about peoples’ futures, especially those who live in ecologically and economically vulnerable conditions.

ASEAN’s prioritization of economic integration and linkages to build the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) has encouraged member countries to welcome foreign investors with little regard to the negative impacts on people’s territories, livelihoods and economic conditions. Backed by politically and financially powerful countries and international financial institutions, private investors have become increasingly more aggressive in their demands to ASEAN governments, and wield far greater influence over policy and law making than ten years ago. By agreeing to investor protection mechanisms such as Investor State Dispute Settlement (ISDS), ASEAN governments have weakened their abilities to protect local populations, environments and public interest from encroachments by investors.

¹ “***ASEAN-Civil Society Dialogue on Environment***”, 2nd ASEAN Peoples’ Forum/5th ASEAN Civil Society Conference, 18-20 October 2009, Cha-am, Phetchaburi Province, Thailand. **Working group:** Chulalongkorn University Social Research Institute (CUSRI); Thai NGO Coordinating Committee on Development (NGO-COD); People’s Empowerment Foundation, Sustainable Agriculture Foundation; Thai Volunteer Service (TVS); Altsean-Burma; Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (Forum-Asia); Committee for Asian Women (CAW); Focus on the Global South (FOCUS); Southeast Asia Committee for Advocacy (SEACA); Towards Ecological Recovery and Regional Alliance (TERRA); Union Network International, Asia-Pacific Regional Office (UNI-APRO) **Supporting organisations:** Towards Ecological Recovery and Regional Alliances (TERRA), Alternative Agriculture Network Thailand; Thai working Group for Climate Justice; Ecological Awareness Building (EAB); Biothai; PalangThai; Living River Siam (SEARIN), Action Group on Erosion Technology and Concentration (ETC Group), Bank Information Centre (BIC), Focus on the Global South (FOCUS); International Rivers (IRs); Alyansa Tigil Mina

On the occasion of the ASEAN Summit in Bangkok, Thailand from 20-23 June 2019, we, peoples, communities and CSOs from Southeast Asia, and members of concerned international communities, present our hopes and demands for a just, prosperous and genuinely sustainable ASEAN. Given our experiences and the trends we have witnessed in the region and globally, we want an ASEAN where:

1. The value of nature as the basis of life and foundation for sustainable development is recognized and respected by all, and not reduced to monetary value and pricing.
2. Public interest is understood as upholding the needs of majority of the population, not the interests of elite and wealthy members of society.
3. Economic development does not destroy or degrade the environment and undermine the livelihoods and rights of local peoples and communities.
4. Resources are distributed and governed to ensure equitable access, especially with regard to critical resources such as food, land, water and energy, and for economically and socially vulnerable peoples/communities.
5. The roles and importance of local communities in protecting and regenerating the vitality of eco-systems and natural wealth are recognized, respected and upheld by governments; further, the ancestral territories of indigenous peoples are appropriately recognized and respected, and their roles in environmental conservation are promoted and supported.
6. Diversity means that different ethnic nationalities and genders can practice their cultures with full social and legal support, and are protected against prejudice and discrimination.
7. Peoples' visions and practices of food sovereignty, agroecology and environmental stewardship are realized and supported in all their dimensions.
8. Governments put the needs and aspirations of local communities, food producers, workers and indigenous peoples over the interests of corporations and businesses. Especially important here are the needs of women and youth in all sectors and strata.
9. The investments made by local people and communities in producing food and protecting their environments are protected by law, and respected over those of private, corporate investors.
10. Human rights—individual and collective—are upheld in each country as well as regionally, and there are measures to correct past and continuing inequities, inequalities, and injustices. Especially important here are the rights of women, indigenous peoples and workers.
11. There are no evictions, displacement, dispossession and resettlement of local populations, and peoples' access to the commons are not restricted or lost.
12. The rule of law protects people and the environment, not businesses and corporations, and ensures justice for all, especially the most vulnerable and historically marginalized and exploited.
13. Investor protection provisions (including ISDS) are removed from trade and investment laws and agreements, and investors are held legally accountable for negative impacts and human rights abuses resulting from their projects.
14. A low carbon and non-extractivist development model is adopted by all countries.

Overall, we ask for a common and collective understanding that “A people-centred ASEAN” cannot be achieved unless the roles, rights and livelihoods of people are sincerely respected and upheld by ASEAN governments and other relevant actors, specially businesses and corporations. We look forward to a real, meaningful dialogue with ASEAN governments, and to working with you to build a better region.

Signed By

1. 3S Rivers Protection Network (3SPN), Cambodia
2. Aksi for gender, social and ecological justice, Indonesia
3. Alliance for Conflict Transformation (ACT), Cambodia
4. Alternative Forum for Research in Mindanao (AFRIM), Philippines
5. ALTSEAN-BURMA
6. Assembly of the Poor Pak Mun Dam, Thailand
7. Alyansa Tigil Mina (ATM), Philippines
8. Aniban ng Manggagawa sa Agrikultura (Farm Workers Union), Philippines
9. Asian NGO Coalition (ANGOC)
10. Ayeyawady Youth Network, Myanmar
11. Bago Woman Development Group, Myanmar
12. Bayay Sibuyanon, Inc., Philippines
13. Baywatch Foundation, Philippines
14. Both ENDS, Netherlands
15. CamASEAN Youth's Future (CamASEAN), Cambodia
16. Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR), Cambodia
17. Cambodian Human Rights Action Coalition (CHRAC), Cambodia
18. Cambodia Labour Confederation (CLC), Cambodia
19. Cambodian Volunteers for Society, Cambodia
20. Centre for Social Research and Development (CSR), Vietnam
21. Coalition of Cambodian Farmer Community (CCFC), Cambodia
22. Citizen Action for Transparency (CAFT), Myanmar
23. Committee for Free and Fair Elections in Cambodia (COMFREL)
24. Comité pour le respect des Droits Humains "Daniel Gillard," Belgium
25. Community Peace-building Network (CPN), Cambodia
26. Community Resource Centre Foundation (CRC), Thailand
27. Community Response Group (COMREG), Myanmar
28. Cooperation Committee for Cambodia (CCC), Cambodia
29. Culture and Environment Preservation Association (CEPA), Cambodia
30. Culture Identity and Resources Use Management (CIRUM), Vietnam
31. Dawei Development Association (DWA), Myanmar
32. Dawei Probono Lawyer Network, Myanmar
33. Dawei Watch Foundation (DWF), Myanmar
34. EarthRights International
35. Ecological Justice Interfaith Movement (ECOJIM), Philippines
36. Environics Trust, India
37. ETO Watch Coalition, Thailand
38. Europe Solidaire Sans Frontière (ESSF), France
39. Focus on the Global South
40. Forum Against Disastrous project in Konkan, India
41. Foundation for Environmental and Natural Resources (FENR), Thailand
42. Freedom from Debt Coalition (FDC), Philippines
43. Friends of the Earth, Japan
44. GRAIN
45. Green Innovation and Development Centre (GreenID), Vietnam
46. Greenpeace Thailand
47. Human Rights Lawyers Association
48. Indian Social Action Forum, India.

49. International Accountability Project
50. International Rivers
51. Kachin Development Networking Group (KDNG), Myanmar
52. Kanlat Metta Organization, Shan State, Myanmar
53. Karen Environmental and Social Action Network (KESAN), Myanmar
54. Karen Rivers Watch, Myanmar
55. KIARA, Indonesia
56. Kruha, Indonesia
57. Khmer Kampuchea Krom for Human Rights and Development Association (KKKHRDA), Cambodia
58. LAIN Technical Support Group, Myanmar
59. Land Core Group, Myanmar
60. Land In Our Hands, Myanmar
61. Laos Dam Investment Monitor (LDIM), Thailand
62. Law and Policy of Sustainable Development Research Centre (LPSD), Viet Nam
63. Living River Association, Thailand
64. Malaysian Youth League, Malaysia
65. Mandalay Community Centre, Myanmar
66. Mekong Butterfly, Thailand
67. Mekong Community Institute Association, Thailand
68. Mekong Delta Youth (MDY), Vietnam
69. Mekong Legal Network
70. Mekong Wetland University Network, Vietnam
71. Mekong Energy and Ecology Network (MEENet)
72. Mekong Watch, Japan
73. Migrant Forum Asia
74. MiningWatch Canada
75. Minority Rights Organization (MIRO-Cambodia)
76. Mong Pan Youth Association, Myanmar
77. Myanmar Cultural Research Society (MCRS), Myanmar
78. Myanmar People Alliance (MPA), Shan State, Myanmar
79. NGO Forum on Cambodia, Cambodia
80. Nyan Lynn Thit Analytica, Myanmar
81. Pace On Peaceful Pluralism, Myanmar
82. Pakistan Fisherfolk Forum, Pakistan
83. Paungku, Myanmar
84. People and Nature Reconciliation, Vietnam
85. People's Empowerment Foundation, Thailand
86. Perlumpulan AEER, Indonesia
87. Persatuan Aktivis Sahabat Alam (KUASA), Malaysia
88. Philippine Movement for Climate Justice (PMCJ), Philippines
89. Program on Alternative Development, University of the Philippines Centre for Integrative and Development Studies (UP CIDS AltDev), Philippines
90. Project Sevana South-East Asia
91. Qadir Law Associates, Pakistan
92. Radio Emergency Communications Network Philippines, Inc. (RECON Philippines)
93. Regional Center for Social Science and Sustainable Development (RCSD), Thailand
94. River Basin Friends, India.
95. Salween Basin Community Network, Mae Hong Son, Thailand
96. Shwechinthae Social Support Group, Myanmar

97. Sibuyanons Against Mining (SAM), Philippines
98. Southern Youth Organization, Tanintharyi, Myanmar
99. STAR Kampuchea, Cambodia
100. Suara Rakyat Malaysia (SUARAM), Malaysia
101. Summer Shelter Library, Shan State, Myanmar
102. Synergy-social harmony organization, Myanmar
103. Taunggyi Education Network, Myanmar
104. The Corner House, UK
105. UNLAD-BLFFA, Philippines
106. Urgent Initiative, Philippines
107. World Rainforest Movement
108. Worker's Information Centre (WIC), Cambodia
109. Women's Network for Unity, Cambodia
110. Youth Resource Development Program (YRDP), Cambodia