

## **Joint-Statement**

**ASEAN urged to heed UN Sec-Gen call for ceasefire, ensure human rights amid COVID19**

# **Southeast Asian states should heed call for global ceasefire, ensure conflict sensitivity and human rights in responding to COVID19 crisis**

We, the undersigned civil society organisations and individuals, strongly urge the Member-States of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to heed the call of the UN Secretary-General António Guterres for immediate global ceasefire in active armed conflicts in all parts of the world, in order to focus on the fight against the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic. We likewise call on States to place human security and conflict sensitivity as core principles in their emergency responses, ensuring that measures are proportionate, necessary and non-discriminatory aligned with international human rights law and standards, and are sensitive to the disproportionate vulnerability to pandemics of conflict-affected communities, refugees, asylum-seekers, stateless, internally-displaced persons (IDPs), people with disabilities, women, children and elderly.

In Southeast Asia, active armed conflicts are ongoing in the Philippines especially in Mindanao, in West Papua in Indonesia, in the Southern provinces of Thailand, and in various ethnic states all over Burma/Myanmar. These armed conflicts have created millions of refugees and internally displaced peoples. According to the UNHCR, in 2017, there were 3.37 million “persons of concern” in Southeast Asia, of which approximately 1.46 million were refugees, 74,416 asylum seekers, 1.17 million stateless, and 665,051 internally displaced persons. Not only are health systems of war-torn communities inadequate, but the access to healthcare and other forms of social protection by the most marginalized groups in ongoing active armed conflicts is almost none.

The COVID19 pandemic will undeniably test the capacity for crisis mitigation and response of governments, and will potentially ravage each and every society. We are concerned, however, of countries and communities where overt violence and political instability are present and where economic capacities and social capital are fragile, making them more vulnerable to the impact of the outbreak, and possibly exacerbating existing conflicts or giving rise to new ones.

This is a test of ASEAN leadership in the region, and a test of ASEAN integration beyond just economics and trade. Unsurprisingly, however, the ASEAN members have yet to respond to the crisis as a regional community. Many countries beyond the region have also taken a me-first strategy, as the UN itself struggles to rally a decisive, coordinated global response. States need to recognize that while border lockdowns may temporarily contain the pandemic, without supporting the capacities of more fragile countries and without coordinated action, we will not be able to beat the virus. Solidarity among peoples and nations is needed now more than ever.

The virus will not discriminate with regards to religion, race, ethnicity, political ideology and affiliation. This will hurt us all, but still this will unevenly hurt the poor, the politically and economically marginalized and the communities that are already devastated by violence -- the same people in whose name many of the state security actors and non-state armed groups claim to fight for.

It is in light of these that we argue that a global ceasefire is not only a prudent step, but a moral imperative.

All efforts must be expedited to contain the pandemic and find durable solutions to this common problem. Ceasefires will allow humanitarian aid to reach the most vulnerable communities, and can open corridors for dialogue and coordination for emergency response, without the risk of being derailed due to any unnecessary armed confrontation. Resources must be directed preventing further damage to those who have already lost so much through armed conflict.

In line with this aim, States must ensure that human security and social justice are at the heart of their response, and that emergency powers are not abused for narrow political gains, otherwise such will only exacerbate the inequalities, insecurity and distrust that underpin these armed conflicts.

*Thus, we call on States to take the following steps without delay:*

- 1.) Declare immediate unilateral ceasefires in order to establish humanitarian corridors and delivery of aid, particularly health education and services, to affected communities. This can serve as a starting point to negotiate and forge reciprocal ceasefire agreements and ceasefire monitoring mechanisms with armed groups;
- 2.) Allocate adequate resources to ensure non-discrimination, transparency and respect for human dignity in the delivery of health services and humanitarian aid, regardless of citizenship, race, religion, political affiliation, gender and economic status. Utmost attention must be provided in addressing the particular needs of the most vulnerable and conflict-affected communities, such as indigenous peoples, refugees, stateless, asylum seekers, IDPs, such as their access to clean water and sanitation, to protective and hygiene equipments like face masks, and to immediate testing, quality medical care and social protection. The special needs and disproportionate risks for displaced women must be addressed;
- 3.) Ensure that the crisis response, including implementing state services and security forces, abides by the existing standards and principles of international human rights law. Declarations of state of emergencies, community-quarantines, lockdowns and restriction of freedom of movement must not come at the expense of the right to freedom of expression and access to information. Internet shutdowns that are in place in conflict-affected areas must be lifted, and context-specific information dissemination must be put in place in order to ensure every person is informed on the status of the pandemic and the government response. Emergency powers enacted into law must have clear limitations and have oversight and grievance mechanisms;
- 4.) Take steps to ensure support for and the safety of people involved in crisis response, especially healthcare workers in the frontlines, such as by providing them adequate protective gears and equipment and psychosocial support; and,
- 5.) Divert resources from arms and military spending to healthcare, social services and peacebuilding.

We further call on the ASEAN to initiate and facilitate the space for mutual support and strategic coordination among member-states, especially in ensuring the wellbeing and rights of conflict-affected communities, refugees, asylum-seekers, stateless, internally-displaced persons. This is the moment for ASEAN and its member-states to act as a “people-centred, people-oriented,” caring and sharing community.

**Endorsed by:**

## **Organisations**

- 1. Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC)-Southeast Asia**
- 2. Initiatives for International Dialogue (IID), the Philippines**
- 3. Airavati, Myanmar/Burma**
- 4. Alliance for Conflict Transformation (ACT), Cambodia**
- 5. ALTSEAN-Burma**
- 6. AMAN-Indonesia**
- 7. Asia Pacific Partnership for Atrocity Prevention (APPAP)**
- 8. ASEAN SOGIE Caucus**
- 9. ASEAN Youth Forum (AYF)**
- 10. Asia Democracy Network (ADN)**
- 11. Asia Pacific Centre for the Responsibility to Protect (APR2P), Australia**
- 12. Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)**
- 13. Asian Muslim Action Network (AMAN)**
- 14. Cambodian Civil Society Partnership, Cambodia**
- 15. Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies (CPCS), Cambodia/Asia**
- 16. Center for Peace Education (CPE)-Miriam College, the Philippines**
- 17. Center for Social Integrity - CSI, Myanmar/Burma**
- 18. Child Rights Coalition (CRC) Asia**
- 19. Focus on the Global South**
- 20. Gaston Z. Ortigas Peace Institute (GZOPI), the Philippines**
- 21. Ichsan Malik Center for Peace and Dialogue, Indonesia**
- 22. In Defense of Human Rights and Dignity Movement (iDEFEND), the Philippines**
- 23. Institutu ba Estudu Dame Konfliktu e Sosial (KSI), Timor-Leste**
- 24. Kachin Development Group, Myanmar/Burma**
- 25. KontraS (Commission for the Disappeared and Victims of Violence), Indonesia**
- 26. Lumah Ma Dilaut, the Philippines**
- 27. MADPET (Malaysians Against Death Penalty and Torture), Malaysia**
- 28. Metta Development Foundation, Myanmar/Burma**
- 29. Pax Christi Institute, the Philippines**
- 30. Pax Christi Pilipinas, the Philippines**
- 31. Penang Peace Learning Centre (PPLC), Malaysia**
- 32. Peace Building Club Malaysia**
- 33. Peoples Empowerment Foundation, Thailand**
- 34. Philippine Alliance of Human Rights Advocates (PAHRA), the Philippines**
- 35. Progressive Voice, Burma/Myanmar**
- 36. Pusat KOMAS, Malaysia**
- 37. Radio Rakambia, Timor-Leste**
- 38. Research and Education for Peace, Universiti Sains Malaysia (REPUSM), Malaysia**
- 39. Southeast Asia Conflict Studies Network (SEACSN)**
- 40. Southeast Asian Human Rights and Peace Studies Network (SEAHRN)**
- 41. Strengthening Human Rights and Peace Research/Education in Asean/Southeast Asia Programme (SHAPE-SEA) Governing Board**
- 42. Suara Rakyat Malaysia (SUARAM), Malaysia**
- 43. Sulu Current Research Institute - Sharif UI Hashim Inc., Sulu Archipelago, the Philippines**
- 44. Task Force Detainees of the Philippines (TFDP)**
- 45. Terres de Hommes-Germany in Southeast Asia**

**46. Working Group for Peace (WGP), Cambodia**

**47. Youth Education for Development and Peace (YEDP), Cambodia**

**Individuals**

- 1. José Manuel Ramos-Horta, 1996 Nobel Peace Prize co-awardee, Timor-Leste**
- 2. Seng Raw Lahpai, 2013 Ramon Magsaysay awardee, Myanmar/Burma**
- 3. Tirmizy Abdullah, Associate Professor, Mindanao State University, the Philippines**
- 4. William Nicholas Gomes, Human Rights Activist and Freelance Journalist, York, United Kingdom**