



## **ASEAN: Ten years on, has the ASEAN Commission of Women and Children (ACWC) fulfilled its mandate?**

(Bangkok, 8 October 2020) – The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) and the Solidarity for Asian Peoples Advocacy (SAPA) launched a report on the ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children (ACWC) marking the tenth anniversary of the ACWC's establishment with an online public lecture today.

This comprehensive report was commissioned by FORUM-ASIA and SAPA to reflect and examine the Commission's achievements, challenges, opportunities and setbacks over the decade. This report was also developed to understand the experiences and lessons learnt from civil society organisations which have worked on women's or children's rights and engaged with the ACWC.

A public lecture held in conjunction with the launch today, hosted by FORUM-ASIA and the ASEAN Studies Center of Universitas Gadjah Mada, saw representatives from FORUM-ASIA, the ASEAN Studies Center, the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR), Indonesia's representatives to ACWC for Women's Rights and Indonesia's representative to ACWC coming together to highlight and discuss key events, challenges, opportunities and recommendations in light of the ACWC ten-year review.

Based on the report, three out of ten women in Southeast Asia face physical and sexual violence while discriminatory laws and practices perpetuated by several ASEAN Member States, along with the lack of commitment to strengthen ACWC's efforts to protect women and children, has unsurprisingly led to the stagnation of ACWC's performance.

'The production of this report coincides with the COVID-19 pandemic, which brought to the forefront issues such as violence against women and children and their linkages to public health, politics, security, and the economic underpinnings of the ASEAN community,' said Rachel Arinii Judhistari, East Asia and ASEAN Programme Manager, FORUM-ASIA, at the lecture.

This report is based on primary and secondary sources, including official information from the ACWC, the ASEAN Secretariat, and ASEAN Member States; publicly accessible reports; and interviews with key individuals and organisations including United Nations (UN) experts, members of civil society organisations, activists, as well as former and current ACWC representatives and academics.

While this report is not designed as an exhaustive audit of the ASEAN human rights mechanism, it aims to fulfil two main objectives: firstly, it offers a set of recommendations to the ACWC, ASEAN Member States, Foreign Ministers, and relevant stakeholders in order to enhance ACWC's effectiveness in strengthening and implementing its mandate. Secondly, it provides a qualitative assessment from the viewpoint of civil society to contribute to the accountability and effectiveness of the ACWC in its service of human rights.

'More needs to be done and improved, especially to ensure that the rights of women and children continue to be respected, protected and fulfilled in a time of pandemic. Most importantly, ACWC

needs to be receptive to a progressive interpretation and broadening of its mandates to ensure better protection of women and children in the region,' said Yuyun Wahyuningrum, Indonesia's Representative to AICHR.

'Funding is always going to be limited, and decision-making in ASEAN is always going to be incremental. There are, however, definitely other fronts to go ahead with policy change and action, that are worth exploring such as stronger engagement with the media as powerful actor in agenda-setting, and the research community to help policy-makers in choosing the right priorities,' Agustina Kustulasari, Senior Fellow at the ASEAN Studies Center.

'Alongside the other challenges in the region, including the shrinking civic space and specific human rights crises, it remains to be seen whether in the future the ACWC will be able to adapt into a stronger human rights mechanism, particularly in fulfilling its protection mandate. Still, lessons from the past decade reveal the potential for the ACWC and its partners to tackle these challenges in the pursuit of stronger promotion and protection of the rights of women and children in ASEAN. And this is where hope lies,' said Shamini Darshni Kaliemuthu, Executive Director of FORUM-ASIA.

The Report on ACWC+10: Assessing the Commission's Impact on Protecting Women and Children's Rights in ASEAN is available for download here: <http://l.forum-asia.org/ACWC10YearsReport>

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#### **About FORUM-ASIA:**

*The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) is a Bangkok-based regional network of 81 member organisations across 21 Asian countries, with consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council, and consultative relationship with the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights. Founded in 1991, FORUM-ASIA works to strengthen movements for human rights and sustainable development through research, advocacy, capacity-development and solidarity actions in Asia and beyond. It has sub-regional offices in Geneva, Jakarta, and Kathmandu. [www.forum-asia.org](http://www.forum-asia.org)*

#### **About ACWC:**

*The ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children (ACWC) was inaugurated on 7 April 2010 in Ha Noi, Viet Nam, on the occasion of the 16th ASEAN Summit. The ACWC comprises twenty Representatives of ASEAN Member States for women's rights and children's rights. Each ACWC Representative serves a term of three years and may be re-appointed for a second term. The government may decide at any time to replace its ACWC Representative without notice or explanation. The 1st official meeting of the ACWC was conducted in February 2011. Held twice a year, in 2016 the ACWC will convene their 13th meeting to be attended by the Representatives.*

#### **About the ASEAN Studies Center of Universitas Gadjah Mada:**

*The ASEAN Studies Center of Universitas Gadjah Mada is a multi-disciplinary research institution. The Center is responsible for providing critical and objective assessments on various prominent issues*

*surrounding ASEAN, as well as institutional arrangements to strengthen ASEAN's role in the three pillars of political-security, economic and socio-cultural, for the benefit of sciences development and policy formulation in Indonesia. <https://asc.fisipol.uqm.ac.id/>*

**About SAPA:**

*SAPA is an organisation which unite regional and national civil society organisations that do joint strategizing and action in engaging the ASEAN. The SAPA Working Group has engaged the ASEAN on the drafting process of the ASEAN Charter and the ASEAN Human Rights Declaration (AHRD). It also works with other CSOs in engaging ASEAN on various thematic issues including civil society participation mechanism, labour and migration, agriculture and trade, food security, extractive industries, climate change, freedom of information, corporate accountability, border conflicts, indigenous people's rights, gender and children's rights.*

**For further information, please contact:**

- East Asia and ASEAN Programme, FORUM-ASIA, [ea-asean@forum-asia.org](mailto:ea-asean@forum-asia.org)

**For media inquiries, please contact:**

- Melissa Ananthraj, Communication and Media Programme, FORUM ASIA, [communication@forum-asia.org](mailto:communication@forum-asia.org)