Oral Statement delivered by FORUM-ASIA during the 6th ASEAN Human Rights Dialogue

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Excellencies, FORUM-ASIA congratulate Indonesia and Lao PDR for chairing the 6th ASEAN Human Rights Dialogue. On this occasion, as a civil society with a consultative relationship with the AICHR, we would like to express our view and deep concerns regarding the human rights situation in Southeast Asia.

In 2024, we have observed alarming trends of democratic backsliding, shrinking civic space, and widespread violations of environmental rights and human rights across the region. Governments in Southeast Asia have increasingly resorted to repressive laws to silence critics, protestors, opposition parties, NGOs, journalists, and vulnerable communities advocating for human rights and justice. Excessive use of force by law enforcement against protesters, including youth and students, has also been documented in several countries. We also remain deeply concerned about the ongoing humanitarian and human rights crises in Myanmar, where the military junta continues to perpetrate atrocities, forced conscription, and impunity, further worsening an already dire situation with little to no meaningful intervention from ASEAN.

Environmental human rights defenders (EHRDs) are facing increasing threats. Since 2021, FORUM-ASIA has documented over 330 cases of violations against EHRDs in Asia, 80 percent of which have occurred within ASEAN countries. These defenders continue to face attacks, threats, judicial harassment, and intimidation, signaling an urgent need for stronger regional action and accountability. We remain concerned that the current effort to adopt an environmental rights framework of ASEAN does not put protection on those who defend the environment as priority.

Lastly, transnational repression is on the rise, as ASEAN member states collaborate to target human rights defenders and activists beyond their borders. In 2024, Cambodian activists in exile faced arrest, and Vietnamese defenders risked extradition from Thailand.

FORUM-ASIA calls on ASEAN leaders to address these human rights violations, particularly by institutionalizing a more robust human rights instrument in ASEAN. In particular, we call on ASEAN to include stronger commitment and action points in protection of human rights defenders, including EHRDs, in ASEAN Vision 2045, revision of AICHR Term of Reference to embed more protection mandate, and the ASEAN Framework on Environmental Rights. We thank you.