

# The **Multiple** **Faces** of **Civil Society** in **Southeast Asia**

by Isis International-Manila

*Indeed, the ASEAN Civil Society Conference (ACSC) established its level of independence from its parallel organisation by allowing the event to take place at all—while the ASEAN itself opted to cancel its scheduled Leaders Summit, the ASEAN Civil Society pushed through with its conference, in spite of typhoons and rumored threats of terrorism. This dichotomy between the state-centered organisation and its NGO-focused sister-conference creates an easy binary between the “mainstream” and its “alternative,” defining the ASEAN Civil Society only as a counterpoint to the status quo. However, within the ASEAN Civil Society itself, one finds a diverse and nuanced picture of leftist perspectives in Southeast Asia.*



The conference took place at Montebello Villa Hotel, Cebu, Philippines in December 10-12, 2006.

Nadine Navarro

Conference participants wait for the first plenary on "Addressing the **Democratic Deficit** in Southeast Asia"



Joralen Wenceslao

A diverse panelists of the last plenary talked about "**The Way Forward** for Civil Society in ASEAN."

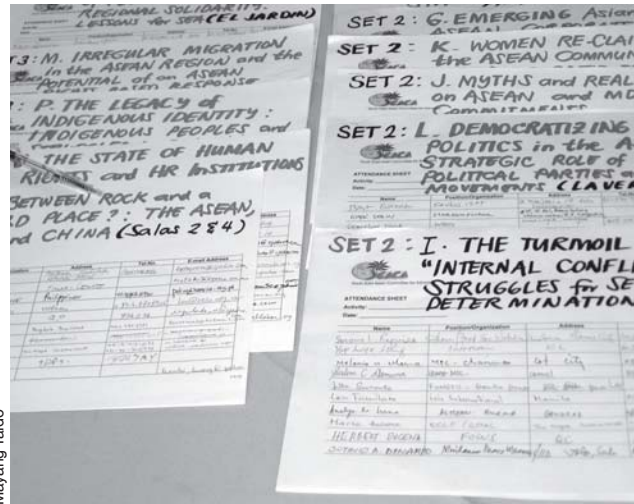


Mayang Taldo



Joraleen Wenceslao

Participants register for workshops on various topics. Several smaller roundtable discussions were held – of topics on trade, agriculture, democracy, human rights, communication rights, labour, migration, gender, **among others.**



Mayang Taldo



A panel on **"Barriers to Access to Information, Knowledge and Communication Rights in Southeast Asia,"** is led by (from left to right) Rajjeli Nicole (Isis International-Manila), Loraine Gallabayan (The Access Initiative-Philippines), Roby Alampay (South East Asian Press Alliance), and Al Alegre (Foundation for Media Alternatives).



Nadine Navarro

Workshop participants listen intently to the panel on **"The Turmoil Within: 'Internal' Conflicts and struggles for Self Determination in Southeast Asia."**



Khin Ohmar of the Burmese Women's Union as she shares her experience during the workshop on "Women Re-claiming the ASEAN Community as a Democratic Project" which clearly depicts how ASEAN is turning a blind eye on the atrocities done against Burmese women.



Nadine Navarro

A list to start an **email discussion group** on topics related to free trade agreements in Southeast Asia is being circulated among participants.



Statements critiquing the ASEAN's theme, "A Caring and Sharing Community," from the Asia Pacific Solidarity Coalition, a regional group started in May 2004 aimed at promoting **genuine justice** and human rights in the Southeast Asian and Pacific regions.



The International League of Peoples' Struggle, an anti-imperialist organisation dedicated to the **social liberation** of oppressed and exploited countries.



The rhetoric of participating organisations wallpapered the hotel. The banner of Jubilee South, an international anti-debt network focused on the Global South, reads, "No Peace, No Justice Under Debt and Domination."

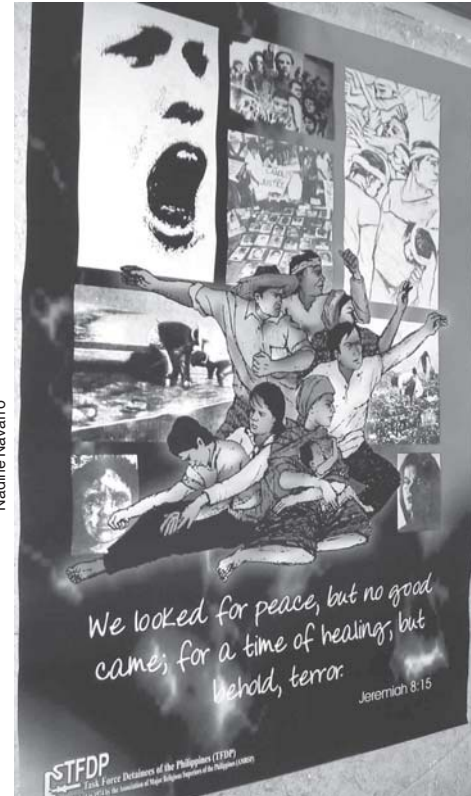


Free pamphlets on farmers' rights from the Asian Partnership for the Development of Human Resources in rural Asia.



A letter to President Macapagal-Arroyo, asking her to ratify the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court; which would help prosecute those who commit crimes against humanity.

Nadine Navarro



"We looked for peace, but no good came; for a time of healing, but behold, terror," reads the Task Force Detainees of the Philippines poster. The organisation works for the release of political prisoners and helps send their children to school.





Political party “**Laban ng Masa**” (Fight of the Masses) gathered in the streets of Cebu to express their disappointments in the present Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo **administration.**

Mayang Talido



*Laban ng Masa call for the end of elite rule and the development of a transitional revolutionary government, organised a street protest to coincide with the conference.*



Nadine Navarro



As the host country, local issues such as “cha-cha” or charter change and “con-ass” or constitutional assembly – **sought regional solidarity.** .....



The **media**  
**environment** in Asia  
remains as **unstable**  
as its geology.



This young member of the women's peasant group *Kababayan-an sa Katipunan alang sa Kalambuan* (*Katipunan Women for Development*) or the *KKK*, is among **many youth** who definitely make one face of civil society.

**Fists** are raised in the air as a "leftist" song is played.



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*This Isis Manila photo essay project was led by Jasmine Nadua Trice; with Lea Aviles, Elvira Colobong, Nadine Navarro, Mayang Taldo, and Joralen Wenceslao.*

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**WIA randomly** interviewed participants of the 2<sup>nd</sup> ASEAN Civil Society Conference and asked them on their thoughts on **citizenship, democracy, and regionalism** – some of the big themes up for discussion in the **three-day conference**.

**The working definition** in our organisation is that democracy should be based on two principles – social justice and civil liberties. We also formulated the term “in relation to non-domination.” So democracy means that people have social justice and civil liberties in relation to non-domination.

That is the substance of democracy, people could talk with their own ideas.

**Arief. Patramijaya Zen**

*Yayasan Lembaga Bantuan Hukum Indonesia (Indonesia Legal Aid Foundation)*

**I think democracy is** all about sharing of experiences and problems, as part of the ASEAN. I think many people here have the ideas, some of which are difficult to implement. One important thing is to communicate. How to rely on network, the community, civil society groups, and community groups’ relationship with the government.

**Juluanus Septer Manufandu**

*Forum Kerjasama LSM West Papua / Indonesia*

**With regard to the coup,** in relation to democracy and regionalism, I think it is very important that we continue to network with our friends and share our stories. I think that we cannot really expect much from the ASEAN government because right after the coup dies not many critical statements [were] made by the ASEAN government. Maybe we can have some hope on Australian or European government since their democracy is quite developed and quite progressive. What we can rely on is the power of civil society especially regional civil society around ASEAN.

**Pokpong Lawansiri**

*September 19 Network, Thailand*

**Our notion of citizenship** has always been defined by the nation-state. I think citizenship is a very dynamic concept and citizenship now, as we are wanting to assert it, is an assertion of people’s rights. The problem with the modern concept of citizenship, that is the Western concept, is it is too individual-focused. But now we would like to assert citizenship in terms of communities — building communities and using universal human rights principles. One important thing is that we can have a discourse on Southeast Asia citizenship, which could lead to international solidarity.

Citizenship has always been defined by the government in the past. But this time, I think what we like to see is the kind of citizenship defined by the people.

**Maya Bans-Cortina**

*KANLUNGAN Centre Foundation, Inc. (Centre for Migrant Workers), Philippines*

## Civil Society Commitment and Call to Action

- The challenge of building a regional community is complex. Equally challenging is the task of monitoring and exacting accountability from the national and regional institutions that claim to lead the building of this community on our behalf. We, participants of the ACSC II, in line with a shared understanding and analysis of trends, issues and concerns discussed in ACSC I and II, and guided by the different national and regional processes that we are involved in, commit to work together to build a people-centered and people-driven community in the ASEAN region based on the principles of human rights and dignity, human security, a just and lasting peace, participation and social dialogue, social and economic justice, cultural and ecological diversity, environmentally sustainable development, and gender equity.
- We resolve to continue to engage with and challenge the ASEAN at all levels, making use of all available spaces and opportunities to defend and advance the rights and interests of the marginalised and excluded people in all societies and communities in the region. In particular, we resolve to engage the official process of the ASEAN Charter.
- We resolve to strengthen our ranks and expand our initiative in solidarity and movement building, challenge ourselves to be more inclusive and participatory, and respond to issues of urgent concern in a timely manner.
- We resolve to continuously build and strengthen initiatives that will concretise the community building processes that we want to pursue. Towards this end, we will further our monitoring, analysis and challenge to regional issues and initiatives with the view of highlighting the people's agenda. We commit to build an ASEAN People's Charter that reflects the rights, interests and aspirations of all peoples in the ASEAN region.
- We demand that the ASEAN create effective mechanisms for transparency, accountability and people's participation. In particular, we demand for automatic civil society seats in all decision making processes of the ASEAN.
- We demand that ASEAN include automatic review clauses in all its initiatives and agreements internally and with partners outside of the region. This is to ensure that initiatives and agreements not responsive to or inimical to ASEAN people's welfare are recasted, while those upholding ASEAN people's interests are enhanced.
- We demand that the ASEAN guarantee the full participation of civil society in the ASEAN Charter drafting process, and that the final draft be subjected to national referendum.
- We resolve to meet again at the ACSC III in Singapore in 2007 in conjunction with the 13th ASEAN Summit, armed with new challenge, renewed energy and greater determination to advance the kind of regionalism we aspire for. We will continue to meet as ACSC parallel to all ASEAN Summits and assert that we are recognised as a broad platform for citizen participation in the official process, even as we persist in similar endeavours both outside and inside the ASEAN, on the streets, in the community, and in all forms of just struggle.

*These are excerpts from the Statement of the 2nd ASEAN Civil Society Conference, 10-12 December 2006, Cebu, Philippines. To request for the full statement, please contact the South East Asian Committee for Advocacy (SEACA) <[www.seaca.net](http://www.seaca.net)> or Isis International-Manila <[www.isiswomen.org](http://www.isiswomen.org)>.*