



**JOINT STATEMENT TO
ASEAN LEADERS' MEETING IN THE 43RD ASEAN SUMMIT 2023
From the ASEAN PEOPLE CENTRUM**

Jakarta, 31st August 2023

ASEAN Leaders have failed to exercise the spirit of the ASEAN Charter. There is minimal evidence of people-centered ASEAN that is responsive to people and to the nuances of challenges faced by people in the region. ASEAN Leaders have been “centering ASEAN” to find consensus among leaders only and falling short of the aim of ASEAN Centrality. We call upon the 43rd ASEAN Summit to address this challenge in the midst of new international dynamics.”

On this day, 31st August 2023, we, the undersigned civil society of thinkers, think-tank, youth, activists, journalists, and civil society organizations from across Indonesia and Southeast Asia, joined hands thru the ASEAN People Centrum, witness a growing discrepancy between the state-centric orientation of current state practices with the desired emancipated people-centric outlook as stipulated in the ASEAN Charter. We express our deep concern over the continuous signs of discrepancy between the rhetoric and products by ASEAN and the needs of people. ASEAN Leaders and mechanisms claim to have engaged civil society, but the reality is far from such claims. ASEAN has grown more into an elitist and state centric rather than a people centered entity.

This affects negatively on how ASEAN respond to the dynamics of international politics, where there has been a high expectation for ASEAN to be central. Unless the people are fully embedded within, Asean is a hollow. ASEAN Centrality has multiple meanings, but several aspects of the Centrality indicators can be noted as the following:

- (1) The ASEAN Charter article 1.15 said that the ASEAN Centrality is the aim of ASEAN. The indicator is when ASEAN “maintains a proactive role as the primary driving force in its relations and cooperation with its external partners in a regional architecture that is open, transparent and inclusive”.
- (2) ASEAN's success in “living with the giants” within its macro-region, that is managing the powerful external actors, primarily China, the United States, but also Japan, and increasingly Australia, India, South Korea, and the European Union (Beeson 2013).
- (3) ASEAN as “the leader, the driver, the architect, the institutional hub, the vanguard, the nucleus, and the fulcrum” of East Asian institutions, that ASEAN lies and must remain at the core of Asia (or Asia-Pacific) regional institutions, especially the ASEAN Plus Three, the ASEAN Regional Forum, and the East Asian Summit (Acharya 2017).

Through ASEAN People Centrum, a non-state regionalism initiative comprising of youth, thinkers, think-tanks, journalists and civil society activists and organizations from various levels in Southeast Asia that explores and acts together to improve the achievements of our works and networking for people in Southeast Asia, connected by Synergy Policies and powered by partnership of the network, we noted the following findings on ASEAN practices on matters pertaining to people in the region:

- (a) **ASEAN member states continue to work in silo** rather than through ASEAN mechanisms to generate investment, trade, tourism opportunities. The purpose “to create a single market and production base which is stable, prosperous, highly competitive and economically integrated with effective facilitation for trade and investment, facilitated movement of business persons, professionals, talents and labour, and freer flow of capital” that the ASEAN Charter article 1.5. promised remains minimal.
- (b) **ASEAN people continue to move across borders of Southeast Asian countries and other parts of the world without “effective response” from states against all forms of threats, transnational crimes and transboundary challenges** that the ASEAN Charter article 1.8 promised.
- (c) **ASEAN people continue to struggle in their own national boundaries “to alleviate poverty and narrow the development gap”**, despite the promise of the ASEAN Charter article 1.6. that ASEAN as an institution will provide mutual assistance and cooperation. Labour in certain ASEAN member state may receive certain standards of wage, social protection and human rights recognition at home but it is not portable in other ASEAN member states.
- (d) **ASEAN people including women, youth, persons with disability remain left behind with less than equitable access to opportunities for human development, social welfare and justice** as promised by the ASEAN Charter article 1.11.
- (e) **ASEAN creates exclusive mechanisms for participation rather than inclusive engagement for civil society in its dialogues and interface with officials.**
- (f) **ASEAN mechanisms for civil society engagement are placed in a separate track from the main organ track.** Dialogs become superficial and mundane. There is no mechanism to work together to solve problems faced on a daily basis among people in the region.
- (g) **ASEAN lacks attention to the quality of democracy in the region by advancing clean governance, transparency, and anti corruption** as promised by the ASEAN Charter article 1.7.
- (h) **Journalists are placed in the position of focusing only on matters stated and done by the state officials rather than the substantive works inside of ASEAN main organs.** There has been minimal information available for all journalists on ASEAN work for people.

In other words, ASEAN’s claim of working according to the ASEAN Charter remains more of a work in process rather than a work in progress.

ASEAN Leaders should recall that ASEAN is not formed for the sake of having dialogues among government officials and “selected” civil society representatives. ASEAN Leaders should be mindful that the Bangkok Declaration of 8th August 1967 has progressed since the ASEAN Charter was issued on 15th December 2008 which is people-centered in spirit:

1. “We, the PEOPLES of the Member States of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN),...” (see Preamble).
2. At least 10 of the 15 “purposes” of ASEAN are directly related to the peoples of ASEAN (see Article 1.4, 1.6-1.14).
3. People at the center of the ASEAN community-building process (ASEAN website on the significance of the ASEAN Charter).
4. “To promote a people-oriented ASEAN in which all sectors of society are encouraged to participate in, and benefit from, the process of ASEAN Integration and community building (see Article 1.13).

Furthermore, the leaders also have committed to be people-centered in these documents:

1. The ASEAN Community Vision 2025 saying that “We, the Heads of State/Government representing the peoples of the Member States of the ASEAN...”
2. The ASEAN Human Rights Declaration point thirty-nine (39): “ASEAN Member States share a common interest in and **commitment to the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms which shall be achieved through, inter alia, cooperation with one another as well as with relevant national, regional, and international institutions/organizations**, in accordance with the ASEAN Charter.”

We, therefore, conclude that **ASEAN Leaders have failed to exercise the spirit of the ASEAN Charter. There is minimal evidence of a people-centered ASEAN that is responsive to the people and to the nuances of challenges faced by the people in the region. ASEAN Leaders have been “centering ASEAN” to find consensus among leaders only and falling short of the aim of ASEAN Centrality. We call upon the 43rd ASEAN Summit to address this challenge in the midst of new international dynamics.**

Media contacts:

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List of endorsers (circulated 24 - 30 Aug 2023) : 43 individuals from various areas & countries in Southeast Asia, representing 40 groups/institutions.

1. Dinna Prapto Raharja, Synergy Policies, Indonesia.
2. Marzuki Darusman, Synergy Policies, Indonesia.
3. Faisal Basri, Synergy Policies, Indonesia.
4. Puri Lestari, Synergy Policies, Indonesia.
5. Wahyu Susilo, Migrant Care, Indonesia.
6. Timboel Siregar, BPJS Watch, Indonesia.
7. Taufiq Hidayat, Yayasan Autisma Indonesia, Indonesia.
8. Emmy Sahertian, Zero Human Trafficking Network, Indonesia.
9. Cornelius Damar Hanung, Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development, Indonesia.
10. Atashendartini Habsjah, Cedaw Working Group Indonesia (CWGI), Indonesia.
11. Adelina Kamal, Independent Analyst, Indonesia.
12. Budhis Utami, Institut KAPAL Perempuan, Indonesia.
13. Mike Verawati, Koalisi Perempuan, Indonesia.

14. Hariyanto Suwarno, Serikat Buruh Migran Indonesia (SBMI), Indonesia.
15. Nimah OXFAM
16. Savitri Wisnu, Jaringan Buruh Migrant
17. Angelika Fortuna, INFID
18. Ruby AMAN
19. Budhis Utami, Kapal Perempuan
20. Mike, Koalisi Perempuan Indonesia
21. Dini, Penabulu
22. dr. Erfen Gustiawan Suwangto, Sp.KKLP, SH, MH (Kes), Ph.D, Indonesian Doctors Association, Indonesia.
23. Tegar Pulung Subhiksa, Korps Mahasiswa Hubungan Internasional (KOMAHU) Gadjah Mada University, Indonesia.
24. Albert Julio, Indonesian Student Association for International Studies (ISAFIS), Indonesia.
25. Ishaq Rahman, Hasanuddin University, Indonesia.
26. Yazid Suhada Jaelani, Diponegoro University, Indonesia.
27. Ghazan Sattar Ikhsan, Diponegoro University, Indonesia.
28. Jasmine Caroline, Pelita Harapan University, Indonesia.
29. Hanny Dwi Khoirunnisa, Budi Luhur University, Indonesia.
30. Budi Riyanto, LSPR Institute of Communication and Business, Indonesia.
31. Sasmito, Aliansi Jurnalis Independen (AJI), Indonesia.
32. Dwi Sasongko, SINDONews.com, Indonesia.
33. Tama Salim, The Jakarta Post, Indonesia.
34. Marcheilla Ariesta, Medcom.id, Indonesia.
35. Reni Erina, Kantor Berita Politik Republik Merdeka (RMOL), Indonesia.
36. Father Chrisanctus Paschalis Saturnus, Komisi Keadilan Pastoral Migran dan Perantau (KKPPMP) Batam, Indonesia.
37. Kapten Junius Pakaya, The Salvation Army, Gereja Bala Keselamatan Batam, Indonesia.
38. Aryz Lauwing Bara, Gereja Masehi Injili di Timor (GMIT), Indonesia.
39. Isach Wahyu Zulfikar Karmiadji, Southeast Asian Network for Transparency and Good Governance (SEANTAG), Indonesia.
40. Laode M Syarif, The Partnership for Governance Reform (KEMITRAAN), Southeast Asian Network for Transparency and Good Governance (SEANTAG), Indonesia
41. Don Tajaroensuk, People Empowerment Foundation, Southeast Asian Network for Transparency and Good Governance (SEANTAG), Thailand.
42. Norin Im, Transparency International Cambodia, Southeast Asian Network for Transparency and Good Governance (SEANTAG), Cambodia.
43. Isad Chung, Sinar Project, Southeast Asian Network for Transparency and Good Governance (SEANTAG), Malaysia.
44. Kobsak Chutikul, Former Ambassador & Member of Parliament, Thailand.
45. Khin Ohmar, Progressive Voice, Myanmar.
46. Edmund Bon, Malaysia National Working Group for an ASEAN Human Rights Mechanism, Malaysia.
47. Khoo Ying Hooi, Universiti Malaya, Malaysia.
48. Jerald Joseph, Pusat Komar, Malaysia.
49. Safina Maulida, Initiatives for International Dialogue, Philippines.

50. Unnamed civil society (1 person).
51. Unnamed youth (3 persons).
52. Unnamed journalists (8 persons).

About ASEAN People Centrum

ASEAN People Centrum is a non-state regionalism initiative born on the 9th August 2023, in Jakarta, from a series of intensive meetings between non-state actors (thinkers, think-tanks, civil society activists, youth, journalists) working in various sectors across Southeast Asia as connected and organized by Synergy Policies. The goal of the ASEAN People Centrum is to develop a ripple breakthrough in Southeast Asia from the network of people so that the spirit of people-centered ASEAN can become a reality.

*Synergy Policies is an independent think-tank based in Jakarta, established in 2014 by a number of experts across disciplines. Synergy now has a global reach. Leveraging a multi-sectoral network of thinkers and practitioners, Synergy Policies believes that when more stakeholders understand the process for creating synergies that will lead to constructive solutions for policy problems and increasing support from a broader stakeholders. Synergy Policies' works in the form of policy studies, policy evaluations, social impact analysis, videos, stakeholder engagement, and products resulting from community collaboration. Our current partners are across Indonesia, Southeast Asia, East Asia, parts of Europe and America. They are government officials of various levels, entrepreneurs, activists of various sectors, journalists, youth and international organizations such as WHO Geneva, ITUC Asia-Pacific, ILO, Education International, The Consortium of Union of Education Norway, Heinrich Boll Stiftung, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, and GIZ. Our profile can be found on www.synergypolicies.com. Email: synergypolicies@synergypolicies.com
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