

For Immediate Release**Civil Society Calling for ASEAN Governments' Commitment to Strengthen the AICHR & the ACWC**

(Bangkok, 8 December 2014), The ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) and the ASEAN Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children (ACWC) should accelerate its efforts in developing protection and redress mechanisms for victims of human rights violations in the region, said today the Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) and its members organisation People's Empowerment Foundation (PEF).

The 2013 performance of the AICHR and ACWC has been evaluated in the report "Four years on and still treading water", published by FORUM-ASIA and the Solidarity for Asian People's Advocacy – Task Force on ASEAN and Human Rights (SAPA TFAHR). The 108-page report identifies and assesses the AICHR and ACWC's main activities in 2013 and provides recommendations to both ASEAN bodies and member states.

"There is a glaring gap in the TOR of the AICHR and the actual implementation of the mandates in that it fails to develop protection and redress mechanisms for human rights victims in the region. This means that the people of ASEAN have no adequate protection of human rights when their governments fail to do so", said Atnike Nova Sigiuro, FORUM-ASIA ASEAN Advocacy Manager.

"Article 1.1 of the AICHR's Terms of Reference (TOR) affirms that its purpose to promote and protect human rights. Article 4.1 of the TOR stipulates that one of the mandates and functions of AICHR is to develop strategies for the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms to complement the building of the ASEAN Community. This is why the AICHR should also develop its protection and redress mechanisms and not just focus solely on promotion mechanisms", said Nova Sigiuro.

"How can we rely in the AICHR if it has never formally acknowledged the numerous cases of human rights violations submitted by civil society organisations?", asked Warunyakorn Fakthong, Programme Officer of People's Empowerment Foundation (PEF). The inadequacy of the mandate, combined with the non-responsiveness towards human rights violations, have resulted in denial of justice to the victims. "The institutional building process can be slow and gradual, but as human rights bodies, the AICHR and ACWC cannot expect the victims of human rights violations to be patient. Human rights cannot wait", Fakthong emphasized.

By 2014 the TOR of AICHR is due for review. The same review will also take place with the TOR of the ACWC. "Civil society hope that the two reviews should ensure that the capacities and mandate of the AICHR and ACWC will be enhanced to ensure not only promotion, but also protection of human rights" stated Nova Sigiuro. "This is now the role of government whether they want ASEAN to have a stronger human rights body which could address and enhance human rights protection in this region by enhancing the current TORs", concluded Fakthong.

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About FORUM-ASIA:

The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) is a regional human rights group with 47 member organisations in 16 countries across Asia. With offices in Bangkok, Jakarta and Geneva, FORUM-ASIA addresses key areas of human rights violations in the region, including freedoms of expression, assembly and association, human rights defenders, and democratisation.

About People's Empowerment Foundation (PEF):

People's Empowerment Foundation works to promote a wide range of human rights and human security issues throughout Thailand and Southeast Asia by serving as a civil society network through which community-based partner organizations share knowledge, strategies, and resources to work together for positive social change.

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