

# A New **ASEAN** is on **Her Way**



## Who is she?



### **The Women's Caucus:**

- Commonly known as the Women's Caucus, we are the primary civil society network that engages ASEAN to advance women's human rights in the region.
- We are an extensive alliance of women's organisations across Southeast Asia, with over 55 partners in 11 countries.

## What does she do?

### **Strategic Engagement and Increasing Engagement:**

- The Women's Caucus directly engages with ASEAN. At the same time, we enhance the capacity of women to strategically engage and advocate for women's human rights at national and regional ASEAN fora.



# The Southeast Asia Women's Caucus on ASEAN

## The Women's Caucus is committed to :

**1** HUMAN RIGHTS FOR ALL ABOVE ALL, particularly for marginalised, disadvantaged women and girl children;

**2** ACCOUNTABILITY TO WOMEN AND THE PEOPLES OF SOUTHEAST ASIA through independent, transparent, effective and responsive processes and structures which are consistent with Member States' human rights obligations to protect, promote, fulfil and realise the human rights of women. This includes extraterritorial obligations and recognition of primacy of human rights over and above other obligations;

**3** MEANINGFUL & SUBSTANTIVE PARTICIPATION AND REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN ASEAN which is inclusive and representative of the diverse and multiple sectors of society. This is aimed at eliminating discrimination and ensuring substantive equality of all women in Southeast Asia.

ASEAN is about inter-governmental cooperation. As such, a movement to positively influence ASEAN must include both national and regional level engagement. The coordinated efforts of national women's groups and the strategic regional networking of the Women's Caucus are key to its effectiveness. The Women's Caucus strategically and positively engages with ASEAN to ensure that women's perspectives are included in all ASEAN processes, decisions, instruments, policies and structures.

## *Representing the voices of women*

On the international landscape regional integration is becoming increasingly important – bodies such as the European Union, Organization of American States (OAS), African Union, South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), Pacific Islands Forum, and ASEAN influence the daily realities of women across the world.

In the past however, this growing influence of ASEAN has not represented the voices of women and the interests of civil society. ASEAN's official aims and purposes primarily included the promotion of regional peace and stability, and the acceleration of economic growth, but often to the detriment of women.

However, this may be changing – a new ASEAN may be on her way.

Civil society's engagement with ASEAN has deepened significantly in recent years. The Women's Caucus shares this history of engagement.

ASEAN has determined that it will work on three major pillars: political - security, economic integration and socio-cultural cooperation. The Women's Caucus believes that all three pillars impact on women's lives and therefore it is essential that women engage with all of ASEAN's work.



## *What is ASEAN and how can it improve the lives of women?*

To open the door for a new ASEAN, the association now has its own constitution called the ASEAN Charter- all 10 ASEAN countries are legally bound to abide by the Charter's purposes and principles. The Charter led to the creation of the three new human rights mechanisms that are tasked with promoting and protecting human rights in Southeast Asia.

The Women's Caucus on ASEAN was formed in 2008, to ensure ASEAN is holding member nations accountable to their human rights obligations and to ensure women's voices are informing ASEAN processes throughout the three pillars.



# *How does the Women's Caucus engage with ASEAN?*

To ensure women's perspectives are included in ALL ASEAN processes, decisions, instruments, policies and structures, the Women's Caucus strategically engages with diverse actors in the ASEAN arena. This includes everyone from ASEAN member states, National Women's Councils, and line ministries to National Human Rights Institutions and numerous civil society networks. It also includes the ASEAN secretariat and actors within the ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC), ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) and the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC).

The Women's Caucus has also actively been engaging with ASEAN's three new human rights mechanisms:

## **1) ASEAN Inter-Governmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR)**

- works to promote human rights in ASEAN
- is authorized to obtain information from an ASEAN country on its actions taken to protect human rights. This can mean asking an ASEAN country about complaints it has received on violations of human rights in that country.
- provides the opportunity to seek redress of major human rights violations that a country is unable to handle

## 2) ASEAN Commission on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Women and Children (ACWC)

- aims to promote and protect the rights of women and children under 18
- recognises the importance of international human rights instruments such as the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)
- emphasises participation of women and children

## 3) ASEAN Committee on the Implementation of the ASEAN Declaration on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers (ACMW)

- aims to promote and protect the rights of Migrant Workers
- has been tasked to ensure effective implementation of the commitments made under the Declaration and to develop an ASEAN Instrument to protect and promote rights of migrant workers against exploitation and mistreatment



# What issues does the Women's Caucus address?

The Women's Caucus addresses all issues and concerns related to women's human rights in Southeast Asia. It has however identified 5 key priority issues for women in Southeast Asia including:



## Migration

Poverty, conflict and the loss of small scale agricultural lands drive women across borders. Despite policies that support migration, little exists among those which offer protection for women migrant workers. Most women migrants work in unregulated and low paying industries like domestic work where exploitation and abuse are common.

## Violence against women (VAW)



While violence against women occurs overwhelmingly in the home, VAW has many other forms and permeates other spaces. This includes:

- Lack of or inadequate laws and policies on gender-based violence
- Sexual violence committed with impunity by military, police and paramilitary forces
- Lack of gender awareness among public officials
- Absence of data collection and analysis of VAW



## Economic rights



Women are economically disadvantaged in earnings ratio, access to property and resources and overall wealth. Persistent efforts to deregulate, privatise and remove trade restrictions may have increased trade in the region but have done little to reduce poverty for the most marginalised. Women in the informal sector such as domestic workers are largely underpaid, undervalued and continue to be exploited. In the formal sector, women experience discrimination in wages and unequal access to employment. Gender stereotyping and inadequate legal frameworks leave little opportunity for women to redress these issues.



## Political participation

Lack of effective implementation, monitoring and assessment of policies to promote women's political participation, coupled with reluctance to institute temporary special measures impede women's political participation. Further obstacles include persistent gender stereotyping and patriarchal attitudes in society, government, and media that impact negatively on women's participation in the political arena.



## Discrimination in laws, policies and practices

Reluctance to fully legislate against discrimination, to perform a comprehensive review of laws to identify discriminatory laws, to implement policy measures and machinery to strengthen women's human rights are identified as major barriers to the advancement of women's human rights. Further, government efforts to eradicate harmful social and cultural beliefs and practices including those in media are required.

## So how is ASEAN relevant to you?

Regional human rights bodies like AICHR, ACWC and ACMW are useful to uphold the principle that human rights are universal.

We all have the right to be safe from all forms of discrimination and violence and the right to freedom of expression.

**If your rights are not promoted and protected by your government, you can approach:**

**ASEAN Secretariat , who is acting as the Secretariat for AICHR and ACWC at this time.**



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**You can also contact the Women's Caucus for more information.**

The Women's Caucus is co-convened by:

Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD)

International Women's Rights Action Watch Asia Pacific (IWRAP Asia Pacific)



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