



Concluding Statement
20th Annual Conference
South East Asia National Human Rights Institutions Forum (SEANF)
22-24 November 2023
The Sukosol Hotel, Bangkok

The South East Asia National Human Rights Institutions Forum (SEANF) is a cooperation framework of six national human rights institutions comprising of the National Human Rights Commission of Indonesia (Komnas HAM); Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (SUHAKAM); Myanmar National Human Rights Commission (MNHRC); Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines (CHRP); National Human Rights Commission of Thailand (NHRCT) and Provedor for Human Rights and Justice of Timor-Leste (PDHJ). The 20th SEANF Annual Conference was held on 22-24 November 2023 in Bangkok, Thailand, hosted by the NHRCT as the SEANF Chair of 2023. Representatives of the World Justice Project (WJP) and the Association for the Prevention of Torture (APT) were invited to participate in the Conference as observers.

The main outcomes of the 20th SEANF Annual Conference are as follows:

Opening remarks by SEANF Chair (NHRCT)

1. Ms. Pornprapai Ganjanarintr, Chairperson of the NHRCT, welcomed SEANF members to the 20th SEANF Annual Conference 2023 and reiterated the importance of SEANF as a useful platform for collaboration among

members and with other partners. On the 30th anniversary of the Paris Principles, she urged SEANF members to have a self-reflection with a view to further strengthening SEANF.

2. The Chairperson highlighted some of the issues to be discussed, including implementation of SEANF Strategic Plan, collaboration with AICHR, proposals on inter-NHRI inquiry and a regional human rights framework on the environment and climate change, as well as SEANF engagement with civil society organizations (CSOs).

3. In celebration of the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the NHRCT, SEANF and the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights co-hosted the “Regional Consultation on the General Comment on the human rights impacts of Drug Policies” on 24 November 2023 as the side event of the Annual Conference. This is an important activity as the outcome would be beneficial to the work of NHRIs in monitoring state’s obligation relating to ESC rights.

Adoption of agenda

4. The provisional agenda of the 20th SEANF Annual Conference on 22-23 November 2023 was adopted with an amendment made to include “The Situation of Displaced Rohingyas” as proposed by Komnas HAM under agenda item 9 on “Other matters.”

Updates on major developments and activities since the 19th SEANF Annual Conference

5. SEANF members shared their major developments and activities, lessons learned and challenges since the 19th SEANF Annual Conference. The presentations covered a wide range of issues including statelessness; protection of human rights defenders; business and human rights; abolition of the death penalty; prevention of torture; visits to places of detention;

human rights education; rights of older persons; children's rights; gender-based violence; right to a healthy environment; non-discrimination; and cooperation with all sectors of the society as well as with the international human rights system.

Updates on the implementation of SEANF Strategic Plan (2022-2026)

Priority 1: Ensure human rights are central in COVID-19 environment

6. CHRP presented the "Baseline Report 2023: Human Rights-Based Approach to COVID-19 Response and Recovery in the SEANF Member Countries. The meeting took note of the report which needed some further review before adoption by SEANF members.

Priority 2: Protect and promote human rights in business

7. MNHRC presented updates of its activities to implement Priority 2 and the baseline assessment survey on the implementation of the UN Guiding Principles on business and human rights in SEANF member countries together with recommendations. The meeting took note of the progress made and suggested that MNHRC coordinate with individual SEANF members for support in this undertaking if needed.

Priority 3: Prevent torture and other cruel, inhuman, degrading treatment or punishment

8. NHRCT summarized its activities to implement Priority 3 by supporting and SEANF members to develop their respective torture prevention action plan in cooperation with the APT, and presented its own action plan. The meeting exchanged views on the challenges faced in combating torture and acknowledged the NHRCT's Action Plan on Torture Prevention.

Priority 4: Strengthen SEANF as a credible, independent and effective institution

A. Review of SEANF process and structures

9. SUHAKAM presented the report of the Technical Review Working Group (TRWG) Consultation that was held on 20 July 2023 alongside the second SEANF TWG 2023 on the survey results about SEANF which would involve review of SEANF rules of procedures. The meeting exchanged preliminary views and would further discuss the matter upon submission of the final report.

B. Establishment an interim secretariat and the progress of the permanent secretariat

10. Komnas HAM presented the work done over the years to establish SEANF secretariat. The meeting took note of the obstacles and challenges faced by Komnas HAM and agreed to put this issue to rest. SEANF members expressed their deep appreciation to Komnas HAM for its dedicated efforts on this matter.

Update on the activities between SEANF and AICHR

11. NHRCT summarized the completed activities between SEANF and AICHR in 2023 and two future collaborative activities on the issue of torture (December 2023) and on business and human rights (mid-2024). The meeting took note that PDHJ and NHRCT would coordinate with SEANF members in due course.

Proposal on Inter-NHRI Inquiry Mechanism (INIM)

12. CHRP presented the proposal on the development of Inter-NHRI inquiry as a mechanism to deal with the issues imbued with extraterritorial obligations and the cross-border dimensions. The meeting agreed in

principle with the INIM but acknowledged that some SEANF members needed more time to consider the proposal in more detail.

Proposal on Regional Human Rights Framework on the Environment and Climate Change

13. CHRP presented the working draft of regional human rights framework on the environment and climate change in Southeast Asia to be submitted to AICHR/Philippines. The meeting acknowledged the CHRP's initiative and SEANF members having comments on the draft regional human rights framework would send them to CHRP directly.

Engaging with stakeholders

- **Asian NGO Coalition for Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (ANGOC) on Land Rights**

14. ANGOC presented an overview of 2023 Land Conflict Monitoring report in the six countries, namely Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Indonesia Nepal and the Philippines, and invited SEANF to co-host its upcoming workshop to present the report in February 2024 in Indonesia. SEANF members exchanged information on the topic and thanked ANGOC for the presentation. ANGOC was requested to coordinate with PDHJ as incoming Chair of SEANF and Komnas HAM with regard to the co-hosting and venue of the workshop.

- **World Justice Project (WJP) on Human Rights Dashboard**

15. WJP presented the proposal to develop a Southeast Asia Human Rights Dashboard with SEANF as a tool for human rights monitoring, using WJP's Rule of Law Index data as a basis. SEANF members inquired more information about the project from WJP for their consideration. SEANF members expressed appreciation to WJP for a comprehensive presentation and concrete proposal and would further consider WJP's proposal.

Disinformation Regulation by SUHAKAM and WJP

16. SUHAKAM and WJP presented the outcomes of the Asia Pacific Expert Meeting on Disinformation Regulation and the Free Flow of Information jointly held by SUHAKAM, WJP and LexisNexis on 30 September 2023. The Meeting exchanged views and expressed appreciation to SUHAKAM and WJP's for the presentation. The meeting agreed that this was a major problem and disinformation regulation must be proportionate and primarily we must ensure that freedom of expression is protected.

Other matters

17. Komnas HAM presented a summary report of the "Regional Conference on the Simultaneous Movement for Combating Human Trafficking in ASEAN Countries Region: Strengthening regional cooperation in handling of human trafficking cases and migrant workers protection based on human rights perspective and gender responsive in the South East Asia region" as other matter. SEANF members exchanged views and took note of Komnas HAM presentation.

18. Komnas HAM made a presentation on the situation of displaced Rohingyas in Aceh. SEANF members exchanged view on the topic and the meeting agreed that it is a major problem effecting many Southeast Asia nations. We acknowledged that Myanmar has a major role to play in this issue. We accepted that all countries must ensure that minimum human rights standards are provided to the displaced persons in the interim.

Adoption of the Concluding Statement of the 20th SEANF Annual Conference 2023

19. SEANF members unanimously adopted the Concluding Statement of the 20th SEANF Annual Conference 2023.

Hand-over of the 2024 SEANF Chairpersonship to PDHJ

20. SEANF Chairpersonship presented the SEANF flag to PDHJ as symbolic gesture to hand over the SEANF Chairmanship to the PDHJ at the conclusion of the 20th SEANF Annual Conference 2023.

Bangkok

23 November 2023