



Resolution

Defending Democracy, Political Rights, and Civic Space in Southeast Asia

Adopted at ASEANPeoples@ASEAN2025 | Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia | 26 May 2025

We, the undersigned civil society organisations (CSOs), human rights defenders, youth leaders, scholars, and pro-democracy advocates from across Southeast Asia, convened at **ASEANPeoples@ASEAN2025** in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia on 24 & 25 May 2025, in shared commitment and principled urgency to confront the deepening democratic crisis in our region.

COMMITTED to strengthening democracy in Southeast Asia through collective action, people-centred governance, and meaningful civic participation. We pledge to promote inclusive, rights-based reforms grounded in justice and equity, and to uphold democratic norms as indispensable foundations of national and regional peace and stability.

CONCERNED that democracy in Southeast Asia is not merely under strain but facing sustained and serious threats. Electoral processes are undermined, opposition voices silenced, and civil society delegitimised. Shrinking civic space, the suppression of independent media, and the surveillance of dissenting voices further erode public trust and democratic legitimacy.

ALARMED by the accelerating trends of democratic backsliding, and the growing constraints on political rights and civil liberties in several ASEAN Member States. In many contexts, repressive practices are becoming normalised, authoritarian tendencies are re-emerging, and disinformation is increasingly used to undermine democratic institutions. At the same time, violations against marginalised communities, gender-based violence, environmental degradation, and systemic discrimination continue, often without accountability.

DISTURBED by the growing use of digital technologies to threaten the safety and security of pro-democracy human rights defenders and activists in the digital era, including exposure to unlawful or arbitrary surveillance, privacy violations, targeted interception of communications, and malicious cyberattacks such as hacking—often state-sponsored. These digital assaults are frequently accompanied by violence, harassment, intimidation, smear campaigns, threats, and doxing, all aimed at silencing dissent and weakening civic movements.

RECOGNISING that such tactics have a particularly disproportionate and gendered impact on women and LGBTIQ human rights defenders, who are uniquely targeted through misogynistic abuse and disinformation, and noting with deep concern the increasing use of repressive measures that restrict access to information in digital spaces—such as internet shutdowns, censorship, and digital surveillance—across Southeast Asia, which collectively undermine fundamental freedoms and democratic participation.

ACKNOWLEDGING the vital role of civil society in safeguarding democratic values, promoting inclusive governance, and providing a voice for communities. Democracy must transcend the ballot box; it must be participatory, accountable, and rooted in the lived realities of those historically excluded from power.



AFFIRMING the transformative potential of youth leadership, grassroots mobilisation, and transnational solidarity in revitalising democratic life and holding power to account. The future of Southeast Asia hinges on its people’s right to speak, participate, organise, and decide.

CONFIRMING our commitment as CSOs in Southeast Asia to voice out our common concern regarding the decay of principles of fundamental rights adversely affecting the element of humanity in other regions around the world such as in Palestine and Ukraine.

We therefore declare our collective and unwavering commitment to the following urgent actions:

I. Advancing Democracy in Southeast Asia

- Reaffirm democracy, political pluralism, and human rights as core principles of ASEAN regionalism, to be implemented through clear benchmarks, national reporting, and civil society participation. Reaffirm our shared commitment to democracy, political pluralism, and human rights as core principles of ASEAN regionalism, to be upheld through clear benchmarks, inclusive national reporting, and meaningful civil society engagement.
- Call on ASEAN to embed these principles in its Vision 2045, transforming rhetorical commitments into enforceable standards, people-centred commitments that strengthen trust and accountability across the region.
- Reject the misuse of the principle of non-interference when used to shield authoritarian abuses and democratic backsliding and encourage ASEAN to interpret the principle in ways that uphold human dignity and democratic resilience, rather than hinder collective action against abuses.

II. Strengthening the Democratic Ecosystem

- Enhance the capacity of all democratic actors—civil society, youth leaders, parliamentarians, religious figures, journalists, human rights defenders, and grassroots communities—to monitor and resist democratic backsliding.
- Facilitate cross-border coordination through shared strategies, digital tools, regional campaigns, and solidarity actions.
- Provide rapid-response mechanisms to protect at-risk civic actors and communities.
- Promote regional frameworks rooted in democratic principles, the rule of law, gender equality, and political inclusion.
- Call on ASEAN Member States to encourage and enable safe civic space for dialogue, collaboration, and people-centred regional engagement without fear of reprisals.



III. Reforming Institutions and Promoting Good Governance

- Advocate for the independence, integrity, and accountability of democratic institutions—including electoral bodies, constitutional courts, ombudsman offices, and anti-corruption commissions.
- Promote transparency, robust parliamentary oversight, whistleblower protections, and safeguards against political interference.
- Support decentralisation and the empowerment of local governance for more responsive, participatory decision-making.

IV. Ensuring Clean, Free, and Fair Elections

- Affirm that independent and impartial observation enhances transparency, builds public confidence, and deters electoral misconduct.
- Demand ASEAN Member States to ensure legal and institutional guarantees for free, fair, and transparent elections, including independent monitoring, open vote-counting, and equitable media access.
- Call on ASEAN Member States to institutionalise election observation - domestic and international - as a cornerstone of democratic integrity. The right of civil society to monitor elections must be fully protected and recognised by the legal framework for elections—free from harassment, intimidation, or criminalisation.
- Strengthen institutional engagement among electoral stakeholders, including election commissions, legislatures, and civil society through sustained advocacy and lobbying for meaningful, inclusive, and transparent electoral reforms.
- Call on ASEAN Member States to provide safeguards against vote-buying, algorithmic manipulation, gerrymandering, and the abuse of state resources.

V. Protecting Human Rights and Civil Liberties

- Call on ASEAN to urgently strengthen the mandate and institutional capacity of the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) by empowering it to conduct independent investigations, hold public inquiries, and improve complaints mechanism to meaningfully respond to human rights situations in the region
- Urge ASEAN Member States to review, amend, and repeal laws that criminalize peaceful expression, public assembly, protest, and independent journalism, and to ensure that all national legislation is fully aligned with international human rights standards and principles.
- Urge ASEAN Member States to enact and enforce comprehensive legal frameworks that protect human rights and civil liberties, including specific legislation that guarantees the safety, freedom, and recognition of human rights defenders at both the national and local levels.
- Demand that ASEAN Member States provide comprehensive legal, financial, and psychosocial protection for human rights defenders, journalists, whistleblowers, and marginalised communities, recognising their essential role in upholding democracy, transparency, and human rights in the region.



- Call on ASEAN Member States to safeguard digital rights and ensure that online civic spaces remain open, inclusive, and protected from censorship, surveillance, and interference. Urge governments to refrain from misusing digital technologies to suppress dissent, undermine democratic processes, or target pro-democracy defenders, journalists, and civil society actors. This includes halting practices such as internet shutdowns, digital censorship, targeted disinformation campaigns, and restrictions on access to information.
- Encourage business enterprises, including telecommunications providers and social media platforms, to uphold their responsibility to respect human rights, and to actively contribute to the protection of democratic space. They should avoid complicity in state and non-state abuses and implement policies and technologies rooted in human rights-based approaches that ensure transparency, accountability, and access to remedies for affected individuals and communities.

VI. Empowering Youth and Emerging Leaders

- Invest in civic education, democratic leadership, and regional exchanges to cultivate a new generation of democracy defenders.
- Support youth-led innovations in digital democracy, civic monitoring, and inclusive governance.
- Ensure meaningful youth participation, in particular women, Indigenous peoples, LGBTQI+ individuals, and persons with disabilities, in national and regional policy processes
- Explore the possibility of establishing Youth Democracy Fellowships for women, Indigenous peoples, LGBTQI+ individuals, and persons with disabilities leading grassroots advocacy.

VII. Recognising Fundamental Rights as a Shared Global Responsibility

- Acknowledge that Fundamental Rights issues are a common concern around the world.
- Recognise the 'spillover effect'—any human rights violation in the world will spill over to Southeast Asia if the issue is not curbed.
- Call on CSO leaders and human rights defenders in Southeast Asia to condemn any violations of fundamental rights happening towards any nations across the globe such as the persecuted Palestinians and the people of Ukraine.

VIII. A Call to ASEAN and the ASEAN Chair 2025

As ASEAN prepares its Vision 2045 under Malaysia's chairmanship, we call on the ASEAN Member States and ASEAN Chair to:

- Institutionalise democracy, human rights, and civic engagement as core tenets of ASEAN's future.
- Establish an ASEAN Democracy Dialogue for open deliberation among states, civil society, youth, parliamentarians, and independent experts.
- Develop an ASEAN Framework on Democratic Governance, Electoral Integrity, and Rule of Law that includes standards for free and fair elections, safeguards against



authoritarian regression, and mechanisms for accountability. This framework should also affirm the role of citizen election observation—both domestic and international—as a vital tool to enhance transparency and credibility.

Adopted on 26 May 2025, in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

We, the undersigned, resolve to defend democracy, uphold human rights, and reclaim Southeast Asia’s democratic future:

Regional

1. ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights (APHR)
2. Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)
3. Asian Network for Free Elections (ANFREL)
4. Journalists Against Corruption (JAC)

Cambodia

5. Cambodian Alliance of Trade Union (CATU)
6. Center for Alliance of Labor and Human Rights (CENTRAL)
7. The Coalition for Integrity and Social Accountability (CISA)

Indonesia

8. Association for Elections and Democracy (PERLUDEM)
9. Tempo Indonesia
10. Indonesia Corruption Watch (ICW)

Malaysia

11. Aliran, Malaysia
12. Muhammadiyah
13. Malaysian Islamic Youth Movement (ABIM)
14. The Coalition for Clean and Fair Elections (BERSIH)
15. Tindak Malaysia
16. UNDI18
17. Muslim Aid Malaysia
18. Center to Combat Corruption and Cronyism (C4 Center)
19. Humanist Malaysia
20. Association of Family Support and Welfare Selangor & KL (Family Frontiers)
21. Pusat Komus
22. Suara Rakyat Malaysia (SUARAM)
23. HAYAT
24. Justice for Sisters
25. Southeast Asia Muslim Students Federation (PEPIAT)
26. The National Union of Malaysian Muslim Students (PKPIM)



- 27. Martabat Untuk Semua Petaling Jaya (Martabat PJ)
- 28. Klima Action Malaysia (KAMY)
- 29. Greater Equitable Measures (GEM)
- 30. JEJAKA
- 31. Advocates for Non-Discrimination and Access to Knowledge (ANAK)

Philippines

- 32. Legal Network For Truthful Elections (LENTE)
- 33. G-Watch Philippines

Myanmar

- 34. Myanmar Ethnic Organization

Singapore

- 35. End FGC