



# OFFICIAL STATEMENT

## People's Forum Statement on the 14th East Asia Summit

We, participants from civil society organizations and people's movements in Asia Pacific, gathered in Bangkok, Thailand on the occasion of the 14th East Asia Summit (EAS) to discuss the implications of its agenda and how it will affect 54% of the world's population<sup>1</sup> mostly the marginalized sectors — farmers, workers, indigenous people, women, among many others, across the region and our continuing actions in the spirit of people's solidarity.

The EAS is a leaders-only meeting of ASEAN member states with their 8 partner countries - the US, Russia, New Zealand, China, India, Japan, Australia, and Republic of Korea. Formed in 2005 as a forum for "strategic dialogue and cooperation on regional peace, security and prosperity," the EAS plays an important role in the regional architecture serving as institutional support for the building of the ASEAN community.

Purportedly to be "open, inclusive, transparent, and outward-looking," in reality, the EAS in the last 14 years has remained consistent with their agenda which is primarily centered only on strategic interests of the state and not on its people's rights. While the EAS boasts of broadness and inclusivity compared to other existing regional formations, it discounts the people on the ground and cuts them out of the picture when concluding major decisions involving their way of living.

People across the region have long been victims of the agreements and negotiations surrounding the dialogues. Landlessness and hunger have been more apparent among farmers and indigenous peoples. Corporations continue extracting profit from its workers while women bear the heavy of burden of patriarchy and the youth are robbed of their future. Platforms such as the EAS have proven useless in addressing the people's plight. There has been no substantial change that will truly serve their needs.

For years, the summit has remained a closed-door meeting of heads of states with no room for civil society organizations and only serves as means for leaders to position themselves in the global roster of economic frontrunners.

On top of the EAS agenda on 4th November 2019 is the much-awaited conclusion of the negotiations for the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). This China-backed mega-regional trade deal covers half of the world's population, 38 percent of the world's economy, and 30 percent of the world's trade volume. We have time and again pointed out RCEP's damaging provisions on investment, intellectual property, e-commerce and services, among others with impending impacts across sectors and communities especially its role in facilitating greater corporate investment protection at the expense of people's rights. Once RCEP comes into force, this will further stunt ASEAN countries' agricultural sector through aggravated land and resource grabbing, almost 13.5 million workers in Asia Pacific region will remain in slave-like labor conditions<sup>2</sup>, indigenous communities will be largely displaced from their ancestral lands, and on a wider scale, the masses will be further marginalized. On top of all the repercussions of the mega-trade deal, corporations can freely block national social and environmental protection policies by filing claims in Investment State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) courts whereby governments can be sued for corporate profit lost. We demand that RCEP be junked and to push for a pro-people economy and growth for the many.

Another agenda is the pitch for broad support to the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP), the grouping's latest approach to ASEAN-led multilateral cooperation. Anchored on the ASEAN Treaty of Amity and Cooperation, AOIP has no specific articulations on how the mechanism can promote regional peace and stability in the midst of the festering human rights

situation and climate crisis across the region.

AOIP has 4 key elements: maritime cooperation, connectivity, SDG Agenda 2030 and the economy does not take into account the fact that real economic growth cannot be achieved without genuine peace. These areas of cooperation anchored on the same neoliberal paradigm that precipitated the multiple crises of severe poverty, inequality in the region will only bring serious consequences to the people's right to development. We demand that the East Asian leaders rethink their approach and put human rights at the center of their discussions.

Finally, negotiations on the Code of Conduct in the South China Sea are also expected to be discussed. However, China and the US, are seeking to dictate

Aidwatch (Australia)  
Asia Pacific Research Network  
Asian Migrants Coordinating Body (Hong Kong)  
Bahrain Transparency Society (Bahrain)  
Center for Development Programs in the Cordilleras (Philippines)  
Center for Environmental Concerns- (Philippines)  
Center for Human Rights and Development (Mongolia)  
Center for Sustainable Research Development (Vietnam)  
Centre for Community Economics and Development Consultants (India)  
COAST Trust (Bangladesh)  
Center for Research and Advocacy Manipur (India)  
Ecumenical Institute for Labor Education and Research, Inc. (Philippines)  
Forum of Women NGOs of Kyrgyzstan (Kyrgyzstan)

their interests and hegemony on the account of political and economic interests and the sovereignty of East Asian countries through military deployment and projecting their military force in the region. We demand East Asia leaders to uphold the law of commons and sovereignty of countries involved in territorial disputes and commit to working together to build a people-centered regional cooperation and integration architecture in our region.

We demand for ASEAN leaders to refocus their discussions in the East Asia Summit towards genuine change for the people that is anchored on their needs and capacity and we call on the people to be at the frontline of the struggle to raise their calls on sustainable development and strengthen their solidarity inside and outside these platforms.

General Federation of Bahrain Trade Unions (Bahrain)  
Institute for Motivating Self-Employment (India)  
NAMASUFA-NAFLU-KMU (Philippines)  
National Campaign for Sustainable Development (Nepal)  
NGO Federation of Nepal (Nepal)  
Palestinian Non-Governmental Organizations Network (Palestinian)  
Pacific Network on Globalization (Fiji)  
Peoples Coalition for Food Sovereignty (Philippines)  
Policy Research for Development Alternative (India)  
Rural Women's Association (Kyrgyzstan)  
Sustainable Development Foundation (Thailand)  
Voices for Interactive Choice and Empowerment (Bangladesh)

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1 Tyler, M. and Arthur, R. (3 November 2019). What can we expect from this year's East Asia Summit? East Asia Forum. Retrieved 4 November 2019 from the World Wide Web: <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2019/11/03/what-can-we-expect-from-this-years-east-asia-summit/>

2 Kelley, A. (3 April 2013). Modern-day slavery: an explainer. The Guardian. Retrieved 4 November 2019 from the World Wide Web: <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2013/apr/03/modern-day-slavery-explainer>

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