

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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ASEAN: Make draft human rights declaration public

As a first draft of the ASEAN Human Rights Declaration nears completion, Amnesty International called upon ASEAN institutions to make the draft public and accessible to the people of the region. An inclusive drafting process, taking into account input from civil society and any other interested individuals or groups, is crucial for the Declaration. The ASEAN Human Rights Declaration concerns every woman, man and child in the region, and it is only natural that they should be given an opportunity to have their say.

The Drafting Group appointed by the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) to prepare a “basic draft” of the Declaration will hold its last meeting on 4-6 January. The Group is to submit its draft to AICHR, which is scheduled to meet on 8-9 January to study it. AICHR will report to ASEAN Foreign Ministers on the drafting process later this month.

Amnesty International has been disappointed by the secrecy surrounding the drafting process so far. Not a single piece of substantive information on the process has been officially shared, and even the Terms of Reference of the Drafting Group have been kept confidential. While several national and regional non-governmental organizations, including Amnesty International Thailand, have made submissions to AICHR on the Declaration, there has been no official response.

A few AICHR representatives have engaged in meaningful dialogue with civil society nationally, but on the regional level consultations have been minimal.

The ASEAN Human Rights Declaration could be a milestone in the development of human rights mechanisms in the world’s largest continent. On the other hand, it could be a step backwards to times when some regimes used distorted concepts such as “Asian values” to justify denying their people’s basic human rights.

A clear, open, inclusive and interactive process will ensure that the Declaration stands alongside similar regional and universal instruments in defending the full range of human rights for all individuals and groups without discrimination.