

UN rights chief to Southeast Asian leaders: make your landmark human rights declaration more inclusive



High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay. UN Photo/Jean-Marc Ferré

8 November 2012 – The top United Nations human rights official today called leaders of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations ([ASEAN](#)) to review their efforts to produce the region's first ever human rights declaration, saying there had been insufficient input from civil society and other stakeholders in the document's drafting.

“This is not the hallmark of the democratic global governance to which ASEAN aspires, and it will only serve to undermine the respect and ownership that such an important declaration deserves,” the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay, [said](#) at the 5th Annual Bali Democracy Forum in Indonesia, where ASEAN leaders are among representatives of more than 80 governments and international organizations meeting to discuss promotion of democratic practices.

In expressing her concerns, Ms. Pillay noted that “inadequate involvement of civil society and other stakeholders” had prompted similar reservations “even among some members of the ASEAN institutions,” according to a [news release](#) from the Geneva-based Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights ([OHCHR](#)).

She highlighted that blanket restrictions in the draft that were “not part of international human rights law,” the release noted, though she also welcomed the inclusion of many fundamental rights.

The declaration is one of the key mandates of the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR), which the association of 10 member states created in 2009, saying it was intended to “promote and protect human rights and fundamental freedom” of the 600 million people within their borders. The declaration, according to OHCHR, is due to be adopted at the ASEAN Summit in the Cambodian capital of Phnom Penh later this month.

In addition to using her remarks in Bali to commend ASEAN’s efforts to strengthen democracy and the rule of law through the creation of AICHR, Ms. Pillay said that “it is very important that the new ASEAN declaration complements and does not undermine international standards.”

“I urge the governments of the region to take the necessary time to develop a Declaration that fully conforms with international human rights standards and is framed with the participation of all key stakeholders,” she said.

According to OHCHR, Ms. Pillay said the “energy and contributions” of all key stakeholders should be additionally harnessed for building ASEAN’s new human rights mechanisms. “This has been the key to success for similar mechanisms in all other regions of the world,” she noted.

The High Commissioner also used her address to welcome the emergence of the Bali Democracy Forum as an “important” platform for the promotion of good governance, the rule of law and human rights in the region.

“The Bali Democracy Forum is particularly relevant at this time when a new wave of democratic aspirations and change is sweeping different parts of the world,” the human rights chief said. “Intergovernmental regional gatherings like this one can provide effective and relevant platforms for bringing stakeholders together – but it is crucial that mechanisms exist for broad and meaningful consultations with civil society.”

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