

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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ASEAN: Guarantee rights throughout the region

Amnesty International welcomes the steps ASEAN is taking, however hesitant, towards regional protection and promotion of human rights.

However, the final Terms of Reference for the ASEAN human rights body leave much room for improvement.

The establishment of an ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) is a positive development. We now urge ASEAN governments to make this a truly independent and robust body with full powers to monitor, investigate and report on the human rights records of all 10 member states.

Key concerns are a lack of a clear protection mandate for the AICHR; lack of binding requirements for independence and expertise of AICHR members; and an emphasis on “regional particularities” and “non-interference in the internal affairs” which could undermine respect for universal human rights standards.

The Terms of Reference also allow for decisions by consensus only, which means that each state would be able to reject any criticism of its own human rights record by veto. This which could lead either to paralysis or to the adoption of weak positions based on the lowest common denominator.

In particular Amnesty International is calling for a clear mandate for the ASEAN human rights body to protect as well as promote human rights.

The ASEAN human rights body must be empowered to investigate human rights abuses and be able to receive complaints of abuses. Without such powers the body will not be able to address serious human rights situations in the region, for example in Myanmar.

Amnesty International also urges ASEAN to ensure a transparent mechanism to select independent expert members to the human rights body. It is essential that the membership of the body is reflective of wider civil society.

Amnesty International calls on the ASEAN human rights body to uphold all human rights in accordance with universal principles and internationally agreed treaties and standards.

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