

[Summary of the 16th Roundtable of AGAC]

The sixteenth ASEM Global Ageing Center Roundtable was held online over two days, July 2nd and July 5th, 2024. This roundtable aimed to share the activities and current situations of National Human Rights Institutions and civil society organizations in five ASEAN countries (Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand). It also provided a platform for exchanging ideas on future cooperation measures.

Date & Time:

- 1st Roundtable: July 2nd, 2024, 15:30 KST (online meeting)
- 2nd Roundtable: July 5th, 2024, 15:30 KST (online meeting)

Meeting Agenda:

- Introduction of ASEM Global Ageing Center
- Sharing the activities and current situations of National Human Rights Institutions and civil society organizations in Southeast Asian countries and exchanging ideas on future cooperation

Participants:

- 1st Roundtable
 - Dr. Tengku Aizan Binti TENGKU ABDUL HAMID (Member of Supreme Management, National Council of Social Welfare Organizations)
 - Ms. Kurniasari Novita Dewi (Human Rights Educator, The Indonesian National Commission on Human Rights)
 - Mr. Sawang KAEWKANTHA (Executive Director, Foundation for Older Persons' Development)
 - Dr. Chew Chee Ming (Commissioner, Human Rights Commission of Malaysia)
 - Ms. Binti Shaik Sulaiman ELZA NADIAH (Policy Division Officer, Human Rights Commission of Malaysia)
 - Ms. Chayaporn THATAKIAN (Director of International Cooperation Sub-division, Ministry of Social Development and Human Security of Thailand)
- 2nd Roundtable
 - Mr. Vira TUM (Executive Director, HelpAge Cambodia)
 - Ms. Emily N BERIDICO (Executive Director, Coalition of Services of the Elderly)
 - Ms. Eva Anne Jeanne SABDONO (Executive Director, Yayasan Emong Lansia Indonesia)

Meeting Summary

1. Moderator (AGAC): During the latest Open-Ended Working Group on Ageing, it has been recognized that a new UN Convention on the Rights of Older Persons is one way to address gaps in protection of older persons' rights. A new UN Convention is expected to be proposed at the UN General Assembly in September 2024. In this context, AGAC would like to remind everyone participating in this meeting that now is an opportune time to address key areas needing attention in each country and to develop action plans to protect and promote the older persons' rights. Therefore, the purpose of this roundtable is to understand the current situations in each country and share ideas and thoughts for smooth discussions and to come up with recommendations for protecting and promoting the rights of older persons in ASEAN region. An invitation is extended to all participants to share their opinions.
2. Dr. Tengku Aizan Binti TENGKU ABDUL HAMID (Member of Supreme Management, National Council of Social Welfare Organizations): Most Malaysian CSOs focus on the treatments of older persons rather than having human rights perspectives. CSOs operate on a regional basis, lack nationwide cooperation and are still in the early stages of service provision, which makes it hard for CSOs to address human rights issues effectively.
3. Ms. Kurniasari Novita Dewi (Human Rights Educator, the Indonesian National Commission on Human Rights): A meeting was held with the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Ministry of Health and leading university centers on elderly issues and other civil society organizations concerned with ageing issues. The Ministry of Health predicts that by 2045, 29% of Indonesian population will be older persons. Despite the Indonesian government's significant interest in issues related to older persons, there is a notable lack of essential regulations. In 2020, the National Commission on Elderly was disbanded due to its ineffectiveness. The disbandment of National Commission on Elderly has had a significant impact on efforts to promote rights of older persons in Indonesia. There is a need for legal regulation including regional policies as well as local custom to fulfill the rights of older persons. Additionally, raising awareness of issues related to older persons through social media was proposed.
4. Mr. Sawang KAEWKANTHA (Executive Director, Foundation for Older Persons' Development): Currently, Thailand has an Act on the Elderly that was enacted in 2003 and is being implemented. However, while many discussions focus on urban areas such as Bangkok, but situations in rural areas are entirely different. Therefore, it is necessary to understand the current conditions in remote areas and propose policies to fill the gaps.
5. Dr. Chew Chee Ming (Commissioner, Human Rights Commission of Malaysia): Politically, Malaysia is divided into three levels of government, federal, state and local. The federal government has not yet actively advocated for the rights of older persons and legislative processes are still ongoing. However, caregivers and NGOs who are directly involved in the care of older persons are very active. At the local government level, support for older persons is being provided, but there is a lack of cooperation between local governments. Efforts are underway to seek concrete action plans through collaboration, with human rights as a common goal.

6. Ms. Binti Shaik Sulaiman ELZA NADIAH (Policy Division Officer, Human Rights Commission of Malaysia): Malaysian Human Rights Commission collaborates with NGOs and CSOs by gathering information from them. Currently, the legislative process for enacting Older Persons Act is ongoing. There is a need to strengthen the Commission's knowledge on the human rights of older persons through close collaboration with NGOs and CSOs.
7. Ms. Chayaporn THATAKIAN (Director of International Cooperation Sub-division, Ministry of Social Development and Human Security of Thailand): Thailand protects and promotes the rights of older persons in accordance with the Act on the Elderly and receives recommendation from the National Human Rights Commission.
8. Mr. Vira TUM (Executive Director, HelpAge Cambodia): The Cambodian Human Rights Commission is continuously putting efforts to promote the rights of older persons. Cambodia has thousands of CSOs, but not many focus on the human rights of older persons. While there are many CSOs dealing with various human rights issues, there is a lack of focus on the rights of older persons. However, the rights of older persons are inherent in Cambodian Constitution and culture. Moving forward, it is necessary to enhance cooperation between CSOs and the government, improve accessibility for older persons, and expand education on the rights of older persons to find ways to promote their human rights.
9. Ms. Emily N BERIDICO (Executive Director, Coalition of Services of the Elderly): The Philippine National Human Rights Commission focuses on long-term care for older persons, anti-age discrimination laws, and healthcare. Civil society organizations are actively engaged in raising awareness through orientation and information materials, capacity-building efforts, and advocacy activities including lobbying for legislation to eliminate ageism. To further enhance these efforts, there is a need to strengthen the implementation of existing policies and to conduct active advocacy and educational campaigns. In particular, it is essential to enhance cooperation between the government and CSOs and to provide human rights education to improve understanding and awareness of the needs of older persons.
10. Ms. Eva Anne Jeanne SABDONO (Executive Director, Yayasan Emong Lansia Indonesia): The Indonesian Human Rights Commission has been providing universal health insurance for older persons since 2014. CSOs support older persons in asserting and advocating for their rights, facilitate meetings between older persons and local authorities, and engage in advocacy for better implementation of existing laws and policies. However, older persons often face obstacles from family members when it comes to self-realization and autonomy, and their vulnerability becomes especially apparent during disasters. There is a need to create an age-friendly environment. A major challenge is the shortage of human and financial resources to support older persons across all regions. Moving forward, there is a need to develop policies that encourage older persons' social participation, strengthen community-based support systems, and engage in international cooperation to share resources and experiences.