AICHR drafts rules of procedure and five-year work plan

THE ASEAN INTERGOVERNMENTAL Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) convened its first meeting from 28 March to 01 April 2010 in Jakarta, Indonesia to discuss how it can operate effectively as the overarching human rights institution in ASEAN. The AICHR was inaugurated in Cha-Am Hua Hin, Thailand in 23 October 2009.

AICHR Chairperson Mr. Do Ngoc Son said that the representatives discussed its Rules of Procedure which will provide the guidelines for the conduct of the work of AICHR in all aspects. The development of a Five-Year Work Plan, which will be the road map of programs and activities for the AICHR, was also in the meeting’s agenda. The work plan, to be drafted by a task force of AICHR representatives, will be further discussed at a special meeting prior to their second meeting in June 2010.

The AICHR representatives also met with representatives of the Senior Officials Meeting on Social Welfare and Development (SOMSWD) and the ASEAN Committee on Women (ACW) to discuss the alignment of the ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children (ACWC) with the AICHR. The AICHR also met with the Committee of Permanent Representatives to ASEAN (CPR) to thresh out operational matters, including the Commission’s budget.

The AICHR is the first sub-regional mechanism on human rights in the Asia-Pacific region. It was 13 years in the making, the outcome of much lobbying by civil society after the 1993 ASEAN Joint Communiqué first expressed the need to consider such a body for the region. It was not surprising, therefore, that civil society representatives were disappointed when they were not able to meet with the AICHR during its first formal meeting.

“The High Level Panel that drafted the ToR (Terms of Reference) of the AICHR met with civil society…before they finalized the ToR, I don’t see why the AICHR cannot meet and consult with civil society before they finalize the Rules of Procedure,” said Yap Swee Seng, the co-convener of Solidarity for Asian Peoples Advocacy Task Force on ASEAN and Human Rights (SAPA-TFAHR), in an interview with the Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network. He added, “The AICHR must take an inclusive and participatory approach especially at these early stages that would determine how the body will operate.”

The AICHR, for its part, explained that it will engage with civil society, including those from international organizations, once its Rules of Procedure and engagement mechanism have been finalized. The Rules of Procedure are expected to be finalized during its second meeting in Viet Nam from 28 June to 02 July 2010, for approval by the 43rd ASEAN Ministerial Meeting in mid-July, also in Viet Nam.
Indonesia to assume ASEAN Chair in 2011

AT THE 16TH ASEAN Summit in Ha Noi, Viet Nam on 8-9 April 2010, the ASEAN Member States agreed to the request of Indonesia to be the next chair of ASEAN in 2011 after Vietnam.

“We endorsed the exchange between Indonesia and Brunei Darussalam in their turns for the ASEAN chairmanship and welcomed Indonesia as the ASEAN chair in 2011,” the ASEAN leaders declared at the end of the summit.

The ASEAN Charter provides that the chairmanship of ASEAN shall rotate annually, based on the alphabetical order of the English names of the Member States. Indonesia was scheduled to chair ASEAN in 2013. However, Indonesia will be hosting the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) meeting on the same year.

Jakarta wants to give full attention to both the APEC and ASEAN Summits,” said Mr. Teuku Faizasyah, spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Indonesia. Thus, Indonesia requested to swap with Brunei Darussalam to better fulfill its international duties and responsibilities.

The ASEAN leaders assured the public that the exchange will not create “precedence in the future” and will also not influence Cambodia’s assumption to the ASEAN Chairmanship in 2012. ASEAN Secretary-General Dr. Surin Pitsuwan further clarified that the swap will not affect the rotation of the ASEAN Chairmanship as provided in the Charter.

“This is a one-off swap,” he emphasized, “It was done with real necessity.”

The ASEAN leaders’ decision reflects a welcome flexibility in ASEAN procedures when necessary. The Secretary-General of the Indonesian Working Group for an ASEAN Human Rights Mechanism, Dr. Budiono Kusumohamidjojo, welcomed the decision of ASEAN. “The decision shows a more dynamic ASEAN,” he said. “Perhaps it may lead to other opportunities where ASEAN’s flexibility can also be explored.”

ASEAN inaugurates Commission on Women and Children

THE ASEAN LEADERS inaugurated the ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children (ACWC) on 07 April 2010 in Ha Noi, Viet Nam.

“The establishment of the ACWC represents the common will of the ASEAN Leaders enshrined in the Vientiane Action Programme in 2004 and the roadmap for the ASEAN Community for 2009-2015,” said VietNam Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung in a speech delivered at the inauguration. He added that the creation of the ACWC will contribute greatly to the empowerment and participation of women and children especially in building an ASEAN Community.

According to its ToR, the ACWC shall develop policies, programs and innovative strategies, and propose and promote appropriate mechanisms for the prevention of all forms of violations against the rights of women and children.

The ACWC is the second human rights institution established by ASEAN after the entry into force of the ASEAN Charter. In October 2009, the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) was created as the overarching human rights institution in ASEAN with overall responsibility for the promotion and protection of human rights in the region. The launching of the ACWC is seen as a commitment of the ASEAN Member States to pursue their obligations under the commonly ratified Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).

In 2001, when the Working Group for an ASEAN Human Rights Mechanism co-organized with the Republic of Indonesia its first Workshop for an ASEAN Regional Human Rights Mechanism, the establishment of an ASEAN commission on women and children was considered as a first step towards the realization of an ASEAN human rights commission. This view was shared by ASEAN in 2004 when it adopted the Vientiane Action Programme and provided for the establishment of an ASEAN commission on the promotion and protection of the rights of women and children. This provision was carried over in the recent Blueprints of the ASEAN Political-Security Community and the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community.

The ACWC is scheduled to hold its first meeting in Jakarta, Indonesia on 5-6 August 2010. Nine ASEAN Member States have already appointed their representatives. The Philippines is expected to complete the list with its appointees before the meeting.
ASEAN framework instrument for migrant workers in the works

A DRAFTING TEAM created by the ASEAN Committee on the Implementation of the ASEAN Declaration on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers (ACMW) is currently outlining a unifying framework instrument for migrant workers, pursuant to the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) Blueprint and the ASEAN Declaration on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers.

Mr. Hans Cacdac, a member of the Philippine delegation to the drafting team, said that the Philippines and Indonesia have already submitted a draft of the rights to be covered by the instrument to Malaysia and Thailand for comments. The draft instrument, which was submitted even before the 3rd meeting of the ACMW in Kuala Lumpur on December 2009, has yet to be approved due to two contentious matters that need to be resolved. These are: (1) the definition of migrant workers (whether this will include both regular and irregular workers), and (2) whether the instrument will be legally binding or not.

According to Mr. Cacdac, two possible scenarios could surface. Ideally, ACMW representatives will resolve such issues by making mutually agreed compromises. However, it is also possible that the current drafting team will be dissolved altogether and a new one will be created if no resolution is reached. The CSOs are disappointed, according to Mr. Sinapan Samyodorai, head of the Task Force on ASEAN Migrant Workers, since the drafting process is not seen to be transparent. The draft document has not been shared with any ASEAN CSO and will most likely remain unpublished because of the sensitivity of the process.

Mr. Cacdac, however, assured that the draft document adequately covers salient points of the proposal made by CSOs as well as important provisions of the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families. He added that there is also a proposed dispute settlement mechanism and a proposal on what rights of migrant workers and their families ought to be covered by the instrument.

Mr. Cacdac candidly shared though that the goal of finalizing everything by 2010 might not materialize taking note of the pace of the process thus far. This is further heightened by the fact that ASEAN interacts through a non-confrontational and consensual approach. Thus, both the government and civil society have to be patient and strategic in supporting this process.

On 13 January 2007, the ASEAN leaders adopted the ASEAN Declaration on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers pursuant to the Vientiane Action Programme. Article 22 of the Declaration provides that “[The ASEAN countries will] task the relevant ASEAN bodies to follow up on the Declaration and to develop an ASEAN instrument on the protection and promotion of the rights of migrant workers, consistent with ASEAN’s vision of a caring and sharing Community.”

On 01 March 2009, ASEAN adopted the ASCC Blueprint which states that ASEAN member-states should “operationalize the ASEAN Committee on the Implementation of the ASEAN Declaration on the Protection and Promotion of Rights of Migrant Workers under the auspices of the SLOM to implement the provisions of the Declaration and work towards the development of an ASEAN instrument for the protection and promotion of the rights of migrant workers.”

SEANF intensifies collaboration and networking activities

THREE YEARS AFTER signing a constitutive Declaration of Cooperation in Bali, Indonesia, the South East Asia National Human Rights Institutions Forum (SEANF), formerly known as the ASEAN National Human Rights Institutions Forum, has intensified its collaborative efforts and its networking activities with other relevant institutions.

On 19-20 February 2010, SEANF held its 6th Technical Working Group (TWG) Meeting in Jakarta, Indonesia, to finalize its Rules of Procedure, discuss pending joint projects and its engagements with other ASEAN bodies. It agreed that the individual national human rights institutions (NHRIs) would touch base with their respective countries’ representatives to the relevant ASEAN bodies – specifically, ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR), ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children (ACWC), and ASEAN Committee on the Implementation of the ASEAN Declaration on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers (ACMW) – for better coordination, and to explore activities for capacity building.

Similarly, in a meeting with the Working Group for an ASEAN Human Rights Mechanism, the SEANF discussed future collaboration, including the prioritization of its offer of assistance to Cambodia regarding the establishment of its own NHRI (see related article on the Cambodian Joint Working Group’s study visit to Manila).

Aside from strengthening its internal capacity and expanding its network, SEANF agreed to “undertake activities to combat trafficking of women and children and strengthen initiatives to support the efforts undertaken by their respective governments in investigating cases of trafficking” in the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)
CHR hosts study visit of Cambodian Joint Working Group

THE COMMISSION ON Human Rights of the Philippines (CHR) played host to representatives of the Joint Working Group for the Establishment of an Independent NHRI in Cambodia (JWG) on 24-26 May 2010 who came to the Philippines for a study visit in line with the drafting of a bill to create an independent national human rights institution compliant with the Paris Principles.

The 13-member delegation, which was led by H.E. Mak Sambath, Deputy Chief of the governmental National Human Rights Committee (NHRC), included representatives from the Cambodian government and civil society.

On the first day of the study tour, the delegation was welcomed by CHRP Chairperson Leila de Lima and Commissioners Cecilia Rachel Quisumbing and Jose Manuel Mamauag. Key CHRP directors gave the Cambodian representatives an orientation on the functions, powers, programs, operations and services of the CHRP, and engaged them in a mutually edifying discussion on institutions and conditions in the two ASEAN Member-States.

Over the next two days, the delegates also had the opportunity to dialogue with representatives from other human rights agencies in the Philippines on how they coordinate with, and relate to, the CHRP. They met with the Committee on Human Rights of the House of Representatives (House Committee) whose vice-chairperson, Rep. Eduardo Nonato Joson, told them that the House Committee’s relationship with the CHRP is based on mutual support and these two institutions have worked closely together in a range of activities, from undertaking parallel investigations of human rights issues to prioritizing legislative action on draft bills pertaining to human rights.

The JWG also visited Malacanang Palace where they met key officials of the Presidential Human Rights Committee (PHRC). PHRC executive director, Undersecretary Severo Catura, shared the PHRC’s mandate and functions, adding that it also serves as a clearing house for human rights-related complaints involving officials and employees of the executive department. Usec. Catura

SEANF intensifies collaboration and networking activities ...

Against Trafficking in Women and Children which the NHRIIs signed during their 7th TWG Meeting on 29-30 March 2010 in Manila. At this meeting, the SEANF also discussed the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process and how the NHRIIs could optimize their partnership with other Southeast Asian governments in preparing for the UPR.

The SEANF met with representatives from partner organizations as part of its continuous engagement and capacity-building efforts. They discussed the proposal of the Asia Pacific Forum (APF) to establish a sub-regional office in the Southeast Asian region and a possible project on migration with Ms. Thuy Doan Smith, APF’s Development Manager.

With the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights (OHCHR), the discussions revolved around the usefulness of the new OHCHR human rights mechanism database being developed by the Regional Office in Bangkok. According to Mr. Homayoun Alizadeh, OHCHR’s Regional Representative for Southeast Asia, this system was created to increase awareness of the human rights recommendations issued to States and to assist government agencies and NGOs in implementing these recommendations.

The SEANF also met with Atty. Carlos Medina, Jr., Secretary-General of the Working Group for an ASEAN Human Rights Mechanism, to discuss the possibility of joint activities, such as consultations regarding the drafting of an ASEAN Declaration on Human Rights and AICHR-related programs.

SEANF recognized the importance of collaborating with the Working Group and assured continued engagement as provided in its recently adopted Rules of Procedure.

SEANF is composed of the national human rights commissions of Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand. For more updates, please go to SEANF’s website at www.aseannhriforum.org.

Commissioners and directors of the CHRP headed by Chairperson Leila M. de Lima with representatives of the Cambodian Joint Working Group.
CAMBODIAN CIVIL SOCIETY held a strategy meeting on 25-26 March 2010 in Siem Reap to reassess their previous efforts and strategize on the initiative to establish an independent National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) in Cambodia. Representatives of Cambodian civil society, led by the Cambodian Working Group for an ASEAN Human Rights Mechanism (CWG), renewed their commitment to work with the government contingent of a Joint Working Group to realize the establishment of the NHRC in Cambodia.

Mr. Sok Sam Oeun, director for the Cambodian Defender’s Project, presented the draft bill and the participants identified and assessed possible contentious areas for deliberation with their government counterparts. One of the highlights of the discussion was on the Paris Principles, which everyone agreed should be reflected in the final draft of the law in order for the NHRC to be truly independent. The participants further discussed the need to hold consultations with the Cambodian people before the draft bill is approved by Parliament.

At the end of the meeting, the Cambodian civil society representatives were confident and optimistic that Cambodia will soon have an independent NHRC. Regional conferences and dialogues with study visits have been organized to aid in the discussion of and progress in establishing the NHRC. The process has also been supported by the Southeast Asia National Human Rights Institutions (NHRI) Forum, the network of the four existing NHRIs in Southeast Asia (Indonesia, Philippines, Malaysia and Thailand).

At a meeting in Siem Reap in 2006, Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen committed to the establishment of an independent NHRC in his keynote address. In the same event, Cambodian Human Rights Committee President Om Yen Tieng endorsed the creation of a Joint Working Group tasked to draft a law establishing the NHRC of Cambodia. After several meetings, the Joint Working Group decided to allow its civil society component to initiate the drafting of the law. As such, the civil society component began the drafting process through a series of consultations and awareness-raising activities. Almost four years after the Joint Working Group’s creation, the civil society draft law is now with the government component for the latter’s consideration.

CHR hosts study visit of Cambodian Joint Working Group

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identified areas where various human rights institutions can work together, shared his team’s experience in preparing reports for the Universal Periodic Review and treaty-mandated submissions, and in preparing a comprehensive national human rights action plan.

The program also included a field trip to a CHRP office outside Manila. The group visited the Region III office in Pampanga which also arranged a jail visit in the vicinity where the delegates were able to see firsthand the conditions of the detention facilities in the province and appreciate how the CHRP works to protect the rights of detainees.

To keep the momentum for the establishment of their own NHRI, the delegates spoke of inviting resource speakers from the members of the Southeast Asia National Human Rights Institutions Forum (SEANF) to help them in capacity-building. H. E. Mak Sambath expressed his appreciation to the CHRP and to the Working Group for an ASEAN Human Rights Mechanism, which assisted in the preparations for their study visit.
Basic sectors draw up national HR agenda for new government

ON 12 JANUARY 2010, the Philippine Working Group for an ASEAN Human Rights Mechanism (PWG) convened the Kapihan on Human Rights where the basic sectors were given the opportunity to discuss priority issues and identify matters that should ideally be included in the human rights agenda of the incoming Philippine administration. The sectors represented at the forum were as follows: children, civil and political rights, indigenous peoples, peasants, fisher folk, labor, LGBT (Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals, and Transgenders), migrant workers, persons with disabilities, public sector, rural poor, women, urban poor and the youth.

From the different human rights related issues raised by the sectors, it was observed that the prevailing problems pertain to accountability and transparency from state agents, the harmonization and implementation of laws, and concerns regarding non-discrimination and equal participation. Apart from identifying essential issues that need to be prioritized, the different sectors also looked into how such issues are being addressed and gave recommendations on how to better address them.

Since 2002, the annual Kapihan on Human Rights of the PWG has been a venue where the different branches of government and civil society elaborate on their plans and present their assessment of the human rights situation in the country. The 2010 Kapihan, however, veered from this format in view of the national elections and the need for stakeholders to identify issues that should be tackled in a comprehensive national human rights agenda by the new administration.

The importance of being heard and of standing up to be counted, especially during the elections, was emphasized by Chairperson Leila M. de Lima of the Commission on Human Rights who said, “We make such nostalgic statements about our peaceful revolutions, our freedoms and our rights…. Yet for all our nostalgia, 2010 now comes as a looming test not for election front-runners and dark horses, but a test for our people. It is a test of our intelligence, our memory, our indignation, our celebrated values. It is a test if we really do have these. Our votes and the leaders we elect, and their adherence to human rights, will be our judge.”

SWG continues engagements with government ministries and NGOs on human rights related issues

IT’S BEEN A hectic but fruitful 2010 so far for the Singapore Working Group for an ASEAN Human Rights Mechanism (SWG).

Besides having an informal dialogue with Singapore’s ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) representative, Mr. Richard Magnus, the SWG met with Mr. Githu Muigai, the Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance. It was the first visit by a UN special rapporteur to Singapore.

The SWG has also maintained its active engagement with various government ministries. In January 2010, two representatives from the SWG attended a briefing organized by the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports (MCYS) on the ASEAN Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children (ACWC). MCYS asked the groups present to consult with their stakeholders on, and/or to nominate suitable candidates as ACWC representatives.

Considering the fact that the Singapore government is scheduled to report to the UN in 2011 as part of its Universal Periodic Review (UPR) obligations, the SWG also organized a closed door workshop with a technical expert from the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights (OHCHR) to introduce the UPR to local NGOs and to solicit interest among the groups to form a working group to prepare the shadow report.

The SWG continues to partner with various organizations with a keen interest in human rights. One example is recent collaboration with the US Embassy to celebrate Black History Month. A seminar was also held at Singapore Management University (SMU) on the role of the civil rights and the women’s movements in America.

Lastly, the Me & My Friend campaign continued in its research phase, with the assistance of various individuals who have a keen interest in disability issues. The SWG hopes to build on the campaign which started in late 2009 and has included an event at the Speaker’s Corner, a film-screening, and an art showcase.

The SWG is planning to host two workshops on human rights for the youth around September or October this year. In the coming months, it will also be preparing its submission to the UN for the UPR, where the human rights situation in Singapore will be reviewed.
THE PHILIPPINE WORKING Group for an ASEAN Human Rights Mechanism (PWG) wrapped up its eight-month “Human Rights: Asan nayan sa ASEAN?” nationwide University Roadshow with an evaluation conference on 26-27 April 2010 (see related box below). The roadshow, which was intended to raise the Philippine public’s awareness of ASEAN and human rights, allowed the PWG to touch base with 60 universities and approximately 13,000 participants in almost all the major cities in the Philippines. While the greater part of its audiences were university faculty and students, local government officials and members of civil society (e.g., from the media, the church and NGOs) also attended the forums and actively participated in the discussions.

The forums centered around three topics: an introduction to ASEAN as a regional organization; human rights in international law and the ASEAN context; and the human rights situation in the Philippines (including significant developments and specific concerns in the localities). The PWG speakers were invariably heartened by the interest of the participants and were kept on their toes by the variety of questions and comments made during the interactive portion of the forums.

Common issues that emerged in relation to ASEAN and human rights, include the significance of the ASEAN Charter; the relevance of the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) to human rights on the ground; the so-called “ASEAN Way”; the situation in Myanmar; and the perceived notion of state agents that human rights discourse benefits criminals and rebels while their own rights are sidelined.

The roadshow was identified by the PWG as one of its concrete contributions to raising the awareness of the Philippine public on matters which concern them and the regional institutions which exist for their ultimate benefit. While there have been encouraging developments on the regional level with the ratification of the ASEAN Charter in December 2008 and the completion of the ToR of the AICHR in July 2009, the people-oriented ASEAN Community that is envisioned can only be realized when the people of ASEAN are confident that they can claim ASEAN as their own.

The success of the University Roadshow has led to a number of developments. The possibility of similar road shows in other ASEAN countries is being explored by other national working groups. In addition, the membership of the PWG and participants at the evaluation conference have recommended a second phase for the road show, this time aimed at deepening the understanding of the issues already tackled and preparing university partners to echo their learnings in their own communities.

The roadshow was undertaken by the Philippine Working Group in partnership with the Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines with the support of the British Embassy in Manila, the European Union, the Friedrich Naumann Foundation, and the SEARCH project of the Canadian International Development Agency.

Recommendations by the evaluation conference

At the evaluation conference held by the PWG to wrap up and assess its University Roadshow “Human Rights: Asan na yan sa ASEAN?”, the following action points were adopted by the plenary:

1. draw up activities for ASEAN Month in cooperation with universities and other partners;
2. undertake a second phase of the roadshow
3. cooperate with community extension offices for community level human rights education (paralegal trainings where necessary), and capacity-building; and
4. materials development (e.g., handouts and instructional materials on human rights) for future use.

The participants included representatives from the PWG roster of speakers as well as coordinators from partner universities. With the new opportunities opened by the roadshow and the interest of the PWG’s partners, the PWG hopes that the enthusiasm of the universities and its other partners will be sustained, utilized and enhanced to further promote and protect human rights not only in the Philippines but in the entire Southeast Asian region.
FROM THE SECRETARY GENERAL’S DESK

The immediate tasks of AICHR and ACWC

WITH THE RECENT establishment of the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) and the ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children (ACWC), human rights have formally assumed a central role in the ASEAN agenda.

The immediate and primary task at hand is to get the two human rights bodies going – as soon as possible. This will require not only the appointment of representatives to these bodies, but also the provision of adequate resources in terms of capital and personnel support.

In this regard, we are happy to note that all ASEAN countries have already appointed their representatives to the AICHR. We expect the list of country representatives to the ACWC to be completed soon.

We are likewise glad to learn that AICHR representatives have already met as a group and with other ASEAN officials to discuss its budget, work plan and other operational issues, and we hope that the ACWC is not far behind on these matters. The budgets and work plans of these bodies are of great concern. They will tell us how serious ASEAN really is in pursuing its human rights agenda. A human rights body without enough funds and provisions for quality personnel support cannot be expected to do much.

The more significant task, however, is to ensure that AICHR and ACWC secure the necessary political support from their various constituencies, i.e., ASEAN governments, ASEAN peoples and other stakeholders, including civil society and the international community. Political support is crucial, for in the end it is what will make AICHR and ACWC relevant.

Such support may already exist to the extent that the goals of these bodies and their mandates, as outlined in their Terms of Reference, are clear and are shared by all. It also helps that these bodies are unrivalled; they are the only ones of their kind in the region.

However, there are formidable constraints placed on them. Among others, they will have to balance conflicting interests among powerful and influential stakeholders. They will also have to deal with the principles of non-interference and consensual decision-making, both of which are sacred to ASEAN intergovernmental processes.

How AICHR and ACWC will handle these constraints will determine their effectiveness and relevance as guardians of human rights in the region. One thing is clear, though. If ASEAN is to be truly people-oriented, and if AICHR and ACWC are to get the support of their most important constituency, they must ensure they are accessible to the people.

Carlos P. Medina, Jr.