



Network of Social Democracy in Asia

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PRESS RELEASE

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Asian social democrats pitch 7-point agenda on the global economic crisis

MANILA, Philippines – Parliamentarians, trade unions, and leaders of social democratic-oriented political parties and organizations from various Asian countries have drawn up a seven-point agenda for their respective governments to address the current global economic crisis and to reconfigure their development model away from the failed neo-liberal paradigm to an equitable and sustainable path.

In its first regional conference held here, the newly-launched Network of Social Democracy in Asia urged governments to focus their stimulus package towards policies that will create jobs, improve social protection, address gender inequality, and embrace the Decent Work Agenda.

The conference, dubbed "Responding to a Systemic Crisis – Asian Social Democrats in Search of Policy and Practical Solutions," was held on 20 – 23 May 2009 at the Discovery Centre in Ortigas, Pasig.

In their Communiqué, social democrats from Burma, Indonesia, Malaysia, Mongolia, Pakistan, the Philippines, South Korea, Sri Lanka, and Thailand stressed that in order to address the immediate impacts of the crisis, governments should:

- Stimulate demand by investing in community-based infrastructure, public transportation, low-cost housing, health services and education to address poverty and generate jobs;
- Provide relief for displaced workers, including overseas migrant workers, through unemployment benefits; and initiate rural employment guarantee schemes that will absorb returning workers;
- Pursue labor policies that will retrain and upgrade the skills of workers;
- Achieve universality of coverage of social protection schemes, such as health insurance and cash-transfers, that mitigate risks, reduce poverty in line with the Millennium Development Goals and enable human development;
- Repudiate odious debts to finance social protection;
- Invest in green technologies to address climate change concerns, contribute to ecological justice and develop the jobs of the future; and,
- Establish a social dimension in regional integration processes.

Budiman Sudjatmiko, a member of the Indonesian parliament and the one who read the Communiqué, said that Asia is "faced with a severe slowdown in economic activity caused by global recession."

“It has resulted in losses in jobs, income and employment opportunities especially for young people, decrease in overseas remittances and escalating social inequalities. Governments have further cut subsidies for social services and development programs or increased its debt to finance services,” he said.

The Communiqué also mentioned that with low wages and inequitable income distribution being among the core reasons for the economic imbalances that have led to the crisis, Asian social democrats demand a response that is based on the value of social justice.

On Burma

As social democrats, the participants also took the conference as an opportunity to express their solidarity with the people of Burma, whose democratic icon Daw Aung San Suu Kyi is undergoing trial together with members of her household for allegedly breaching the terms of her detention because American John Yettaw swam to her lakeside home and was allowed inside.

Suu Kyi is the leader of Burma’s National League of Democracy and honorary president of the Socialist International. She maintained her innocence in front of a prison tribunal on Friday as the prosecution wrapped up its case on the fifth day of her trial.

Mario Aguja, former member of the Philippines’ House of Representatives, condemned this latest “trick” by the Burmese military government, adding the network’s voice to the international condemnation and a statement of concern from the 15-member U.N. Security Council.

“It is especially striking that these events practically coincide with the expiry of her house arrest on May 27,” stressed Aguja.

“The Network of Social Democracy in Asia strongly urges Burma’s authorities to immediately release Daw Aung San Suu Kyi as well as all political prisoners and to engage in an inclusive process of national reconciliation, which is essential for setting Burma on a genuine path to stability and prosperity, and to initiate a new phase in the development of the country,” he added.

Further, the social democrats called on the members of Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and Asian governments to take a pro-active role to request Burma’s authorities to respect human rights.

Pakistan-Afghanistan border violence

The network also expressed its deep concern about the economic fall-out, breakdown of social services, and physical displacement of millions of people as a result of war between extremist militant groups, NATO-led International Security and Assistance Force (ISAF) and Pakistani forces in areas along Pakistan-Afghanistan border.

“We renounce this violence and urge the concerned governments to seek peaceful solutions to the problem and invest in providing security and decent livelihood to the affected population,” said Harris Khalique of Pakistan’s Awami Party. ###