

ASEAN democracy and free and fair elections

Democracy and Elections

Key challenges to achieve a democratic framework include: the electoral system, in particular the seat allocation formula, election administration, election dispute resolution, voter's registration, electoral justice, election observation, election and gender equality, equal access for people with disabilities and other vulnerable persons, party and campaign financing, transparent declaration of politician asset, equal and equitable access to media, military, police and civil servant neutrality, use of state resources, election-related conflict and the use of technology in elections.

Considering the ASEAN Blueprint for Democracy and Free and Fair Elections created by Asian Network for Free and Fair Elections (ANFREL), and the Jakarta Declaration on Electoral Community endorsed by the ASEAN Electoral Management Bodies Forum, we recommend ASEAN and/or its member states that have not yet done so to :

- Ratify the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights;
- Join the International Parliamentary Union (IPU) and abide by the IPU standards to hold free and fair elections.

ASEAN and/or its member states to:

- Integrate the Universal Declaration of Human Rights into the national framework of each member state to create an environment for free and fair elections;
- Establish independent election bodies to assure a neutral and informed environment for the organization of free and fair elections;
- Continue the fight against illiteracy and introduce specific programs on politics and human rights in their educational systems to increase citizen's awareness of their rights to participate in democracy.

ASEAN, its member states, civil society and political parties to:

- Learn from each other's experience in conducting free and fair elections.

ASEAN Free and Fair Elections

Elections are a pre-condition to democracy and as they promote social, political, and economic development, all ASEAN member states, particularly those that do not currently hold elections, must commit to periodic, free and fair elections. Only then can we fulfill the potential of ASEAN and ensure it empowers its citizens and remains people-centered.

We encourage all ASEAN member states, their Election Management Bodies (EMBs) and civil society members to endorse the Bangkok Declaration on Free and Fair Elections. Created by civil society members and EMBs from across Asia the declaration addresses, in a practical way, many of the challenges concerning elections in the ASEAN region. By governments can prove their full democratic legitimacy to become of the people, by the people and for the people they serve.

To hold a free and fair election, countries must, in the context of their own country and its unique challenge, nevertheless meet some specific criteria:

1. Have a complete electoral/legal framework that ensures universal participation of citizens and functional independence for Election Management Bodies.
2. The framework should empower minorities, marginalized citizens and other people with special challenges while promoting the full participation of women in elections and facilitating voting for citizens living abroad.

3. Systems for Electoral Dispute Resolution must ensure that all complaints and electoral disputes are settled in a timely and impartial manner with adequate investigation and neutral resolution mechanisms.
4. Voter lists must be accurate so as to ensure the right to vote for all citizens. Voter registration must be simple, convenient, accessible, available and conducted in a timely manner that results in an accurate, complete voter list.
5. The electoral campaign should be peaceful, free and fair. Media should be impartial.
6. There should be proper oversight of parties' campaign finance and no misuse or abuse of government resources or interference by security services.
7. Fair voting operations must include professional polling station management.
8. Both citizens and election officials must have adequate training and education to perform their roles reliably and responsibly.
9. Citizens Election Observers should be fully recognized, accredited, and included in elections. Citizens observers can promote the integrity and transparency of the entire election process.

We urge ASEAN and/or its member states to utilize and benefit from the rich electoral experience found across Asia. We recommend they turn the documents into action and work together to build and ensure free and fair elections across the region.

The statement is a part of ACSC/APF2012.

- “Democracy and Elections” found in the Joint Statement of the ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ASEAN Peoples' Forum from March 2012 and
- “ASEAN Free and Fair Elections” released in the Join Statement of the ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ASEAN Peoples' Forum in November 2012.