

ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) Statement on Mainstreaming the Gender Dimension in Business in ASEAN

15 December 2025 – The ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) welcomes the ASEAN Declaration on Promoting the Right to Development and the Right to Peace Towards Realising Inclusive and Sustainable Development (2025) that was adopted at the 47th ASEAN Summit on 26 October 2025 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. AICHR reaffirms ASEAN's commitment to eliminate all forms of discrimination and address inequalities while strengthening measures to ensure the active and meaningful participation and contribution of all peoples of ASEAN in the development process, and to empower them to participate and contribute equitably and effectively to realise their full potential. Further, the greater involvement and meaningful contribution of the private sector in advancing inclusive growth and sustainable development through responsible business conduct, good corporate governance, and mitigating the potential adverse impacts of their business operations are strongly encouraged.

In this regard, AICHR recalls the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979), ASEAN Human Rights Declaration (AHRD) and the Phnom Penh Statement on the Adoption of the AHRD (2012), Declaration on the Advancement of Women in the ASEAN Region (1988), Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women in the ASEAN Region (2004), Ha Noi Declaration on the Enhancement of Welfare and Development of ASEAN Women and Children (2010), Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women and Elimination of Violence against Children in ASEAN (2013), ASEAN Declaration on the Gender-Responsive Implementation of the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 and Sustainable Development Goals (2017), ASEAN Gender Mainstreaming Strategic Framework 2021–2025 (2021), Declaration on Building a More Sustainable, Inclusive and Resilient Future: Unlocking Women's Entrepreneurship in ASEAN (2022), and ASEAN Declaration on the Right to a Safe, Clean, Healthy and Sustainable Environment (2025).

Taken together, these instruments establish a progressive whole-of-ASEAN institutional framework and approach to promote and protect gender equality, empowerment, and inclusion across the political-security, economic, and socio-cultural ASEAN pillars; recognise that development, peace, environment, human rights, and gender equality are interdependent and mutually reinforcing; affirm the equitable and meaningful participation of women in all spheres of life at both national and regional levels; underscore the critical role of women entrepreneurs

in fostering inclusive growth, resilient communities, sustainable development and business practices across the region; and commit ASEAN to advancing gender equality, empowerment, and inclusion, and responsible business conduct as integral to inclusive, resilient, and sustainable development in the region.

AICHR notes that both public and private sector actors play vital and complementary roles in respecting and upholding human rights and advancing gender equality, empowerment, and inclusion across business operations, value chains, and trade and investment practices. Gender issues have increasingly also been recognised as a cross-cutting, complementary and mutually reinforcing priority in ASEAN's vision requiring the mainstreaming of a gender-responsive and intersectional approach within the business and economic agenda to ensure that no one is left behind. Adequate measures should be taken to prevent or mitigate adverse impacts on women's and girls' human rights that are linked to business operations, while respecting human rights and contributing to achieving substantive gender equality.

The world has passed the midpoint in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development that features the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and targets towards a more equitable and inclusive world. The 2030 Agenda places gender equality and empowerment at the heart of its implementation. ASEAN Member States (AMS) have made significant progress in narrowing gender gaps — in education, health, and economic participation, among others. Positive strides have also been seen in the mainstreaming of gender equality and empowerment across the political, economic, social, cultural, and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. Through concerted efforts at the national and regional levels, AICHR applauds the development and implementation of gender-responsive policies, increased awareness of gender issues, and enhanced data collection to better inform national and regional decisions and actions.

However, vulnerabilities and barriers still remain. Some of these are referenced in the ASEAN Gender Outlook 2024 report. Further, women, girls, and persons in vulnerable or marginalised situations, may experience the impacts of business activities differently and often disproportionately. Intersectional factors can compound these risks and hinder access to effective assistance and justice. Advancing gender equality and empowerment across ASEAN's economic agenda contributes directly to the enjoyment of all human rights and equitably addresses the developmental and environmental needs of present and future generations where everyone can enjoy peace and the fruits of development.

Emphasising the need to accelerate the full realisation of the SDGs across the world, AICHR encourages stakeholders to adopt a human rights-based approach and robustly integrate gender perspectives across national laws, policies, and practices relevant to business, trade, investment,

labour, environment, public procurement, and digital governance; and treat gender equality and empowerment as a cross-cutting priority while shaping business practices. Gender-responsive impact and scenario planning of major economic initiatives including in trade, investment, and supply chains could be conducted. Economic empowerment initiatives by supporting decent work, equal pay, safe workplaces, inclusive procurement, access to finance and markets, leadership pathways, and entrepreneurship should be enhanced. Commitments to respect women's human rights and advance substantive gender equality in governance, policies, and codes of conduct should be embedded, resources allocated and leadership accountability implemented.

Guided by *ASEAN 2045: Our Shared Future*, AICHR further encourages stakeholders, in particular, businesses to implement responsible business conduct and gender-responsive human rights risk assessments, strengthen access to effective remedies and justice for women and girls affected by business-related harms, and foster inclusive, multi-stakeholder collaboration to ensure that ASEAN's economic growth is equitable, sustainable, and people-centred. Appropriate steps should also be taken to ensure that all business enterprises respect the human rights of women and girls, and avoid infringing on women's human rights while addressing actual and potential adverse human rights impacts that they cause, contribute, and are directly linked to.

AICHR stands ready to continue working closely with and supporting the ASEAN Commission on Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children (ACWC), ASEAN Committee on Women (ACW), ASEAN Senior Economic Officials Meeting (SEOM), ASEAN Senior Officials on Environment (ASOEN), ASEAN Business Advisory Council (ASEAN-BAC), ASEAN Coordinating Committee on Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (ACCMSME), and other relevant ASEAN bodies and stakeholders to advance gender perspectives and mainstreaming throughout ASEAN's work on environmental, social, governance (ESG) aspects of trade and investment, and on business and human rights.

As the overarching Human Rights Body of ASEAN under the ASEAN Charter, AICHR aims to enhance ASEAN efforts towards realising an ASEAN Community through a consultative and multi-stakeholder approach where business activities consistently respect, promote, and protect human rights and advance gender equality. ASEAN human rights initiatives in the ESG, and business and human rights agendas will contribute to the enjoyment of human rights by all.