



SUMMARY REPORT

AICHR REGIONAL CONSULTATION TO SUPPORT THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE AICHR FIVE-YEAR WORK PLAN (2026-2030) IN LINE WITH THE ASEAN COMMUNITY VISION 2045 AND STRATEGIC PLANS OF ACTION

29 April 2025
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Introduction

1. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations ('ASEAN') Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights ('AICHR') develops a new Five-Year Work Plan ('FYWP') every five years, which serves as the strategic document guiding AICHR's priorities, future work, and overall direction. The FYWP also informs and shapes engagement with AICHR's key stakeholders, including ASEAN sectoral bodies and civil society organisations ('CSOs'). The development of the work plan provides an opportunity for the Commission to reflect on the human rights issues affecting the region, as well as the progress made, existing challenges, and emerging opportunities in addressing contemporary human rights concerns in ASEAN.
2. As the FYWP 2021–2025 concludes in 2025, AICHR is developing the FYWP 2026–2030, expected to be adopted by mid-2025. The new work plan is informed by the 2023 mid-term review and the final review presented at AICHR's Special Meeting 1/2025, held from 8 to 10 April 2025 in Penang, Malaysia. Building on AICHR's 155 activities across 40 thematic human rights areas, the consultation sought to identify key issues, challenges, and opportunities to strengthen human rights promotion and protection in ASEAN, as well as AICHR's role as the region's overarching human rights body.
3. The Consultation, convened by AICHR and led by Malaysia, together with its co-proponents Thailand, Lao PDR, Indonesia and Singapore, brought together over 60 delegates representing a wide range of stakeholders. These included AICHR Representatives, Alternate Representatives and Assistants, representatives from ASEAN sectoral bodies, national human rights institutions ('NHRIs') and human rights committees, CSOs as well as regional and international experts. The consultation provided a platform for participants to exchange views and provide inputs to support the formulation of AICHR's next FYWP. The Consultation was jointly supported by ASEAN through its AICHR Fund and Australia, through the Australian Human Rights Commission ('AHRC') and Australian AID ('AusAID').

Opening Session

4. In his welcoming remarks, **H.E. Edmund Bon Tai Soon**, AICHR Chair 2025 and Representative of Malaysia to AICHR, shared that since its establishment in 2009, AICHR has adopted three FYWPs to implement its mandate and functions. These work plans outline AICHR's priority areas, indicative activities, and expected outputs, while also setting the strategic direction for the Commission's work.

5. He explained that AICHR's development can broadly be understood in two phases. The first was the inception and norm-setting phase (2009–2012), during which AICHR Representatives negotiated and established key human rights norms that would form the foundation of the Commission's work. The second phase, beginning in 2013, was the socialisation phase, during which AICHR expanded its activities to promote awareness and engagement on human rights issues across the region. To date, AICHR has organised 155 activities covering around 40 thematic issues. Reports from these activities contain follow-up actions and recommendations and are largely accessible through the official AICHR website.

6. He further noted that AICHR currently has approximately 30 CSOs with consultative relationships with the Commission, with additional applications under consideration. This reflects a growing interest among civil society stakeholders in engaging with AICHR. He added that AICHR has also been addressing emerging human rights developments as a standing agenda item during its regular meetings and through the annual ASEAN Human Rights Dialogue. In addition, AICHR continues to communicate common positions on regional developments through press releases, including its recent statement issued on 2 April 2025 in response to the devastating earthquakes in Myanmar and Thailand.

7. Reflecting on AICHR's progress over the past 16 years, he noted that following the phases of norm-setting and socialisation, AICHR is now entering a new phase of programming aimed at strengthening the impact of its work in promoting and protecting human rights in ASEAN. The AICHR Transition Workshop held in Langkawi in February 2025 highlighted expectations from stakeholders for AICHR to enhance the effectiveness of its work through greater adaptability and flexibility.

8. He further highlighted that this consultation marks the first time AICHR has convened a regional consultation with a broad range of stakeholders in the development of its FYWP. Such engagement is important for creating an open and safe platform for dialogue, enabling AICHR to listen to diverse perspectives and inputs from stakeholders across the region. The consultation is a joint initiative led by Malaysia, with support from Thailand, Lao PDR, Indonesia, and Singapore. He also expressed appreciation to Australia for its generous support, which was instrumental in making the consultation possible. His remarks appear as **Annex A**.

9. In her remarks, **Ambassador Tiffany McDonald**, Head of the Australian Mission to ASEAN, highlighted that Australia has been working closely with AICHR on human rights initiatives since 2011, with support from the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

She emphasised that the consultation provides an important opportunity to gather insights and reflections on the implementation of AICHR's current FYWP, while also allowing stakeholders to contribute inputs for the development of future work plans.

10. She further noted that Southeast Asia, like many other regions globally, continues to face a range of human rights challenges, including those arising from ongoing violence and repression. As human rights are interdependent and interconnected, addressing them requires engagement across different sectors and institutions. Continued dialogue and cooperation with ASEAN bodies, national institutions, and other stakeholders are therefore essential to ensure that efforts to promote and protect human rights in the region remain holistic, inclusive and responsive to emerging challenges. She concluded by reaffirming Australia's commitment to continued cooperation with AICHR in advancing human rights in the ASEAN region.

Session 1: Reflection — Self-Assessment of AICHR Five-Year Work Plan (2021–2025) And Lessons Learned

11. The session was moderated by **H.E. Associate Professor Dr. Bhanubhatara Jittiang**, the Representative of Thailand to AICHR, and aimed to reflect on achievements, challenges and lessons learned from the implementation of the current AICHR's FYWP, which covers the period of 2021 to 2025.

12. The first speaker, **Le Thi Nam Huong** from the ASEAN Secretariat's Human Rights Division, highlighted that that AICHR's work spans 25 thematic areas of human rights, covering a broad range of issues including migrant workers and migration management, persons with disabilities, business and human rights, the right to health, access to remedies, women's rights, and trafficking in persons, among others.

13. She noted that in implementing these programmes, cross-pillar and cross-sectoral collaboration has been a key feature of AICHR's work. This approach has enabled AICHR to engage and collaborate with various ASEAN bodies, including the ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children ('ACWC'), the ASEAN Committee on Women ('ACW'), and the ASEAN Committee on the Implementation of the ASEAN Declaration on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers ('ACMW'), as well as other relevant ASBs.

14. Drawing from the review of the current FYWP 2021–2025, she identified several elements for consideration in the development of AICHR's future work. These include the need to strengthen both the functional and thematic dimensions of AICHR's activities in order to ensure the continued relevance and coherence of AICHR's work across the region. She also emphasised the importance of producing tangible results while strengthening AICHR's policy influence and contribution to the development of human rights norms in ASEAN.

15. She further noted that capacity-building and awareness-raising initiatives should remain an important component of AICHR's future programming, particularly in responding

to emerging human rights challenges in the region. Among the recommendations she presented for consideration included: (i) strengthening strategic engagement and cooperation with a wider range of stakeholders; (ii) identifying clear strategic priorities for the next five-year cycle, to be reflected in the FYWP 2026–2030; and (iii) enhancing institutional strengthening of AICHR, including through improved monitoring and evaluation (‘M&E’) mechanisms to support the effective implementation of its programmes and activities. These measures, she noted, would help ensure that AICHR’s future work remains strategic, impactful, and responsive to evolving human rights developments in ASEAN.

16. The second speaker in this session was **Siew Hui Lew**, an expert evaluator who conducted an independent evaluation of the implementation of AICHR’s FYWP 2021–2025. She explained that the evaluation was based on publicly available data and information, complemented by in-depth interviews with several key informants. The evaluation examined AICHR’s areas of achievement, key challenges, and recommendations, with the aim of supporting the development of the next FYWP 2026–2030. She highlighted four key areas of achievement in AICHR’s work during the FYWP period:

- a) Increased cross-sectoral partnerships within ASEAN.
- b) Greater involvement of ASEAN sectoral bodies and external stakeholders in AICHR’s programme activities.
- c) Improved regional policy uptake of human rights-related initiatives.
- d) Notable progress in advancing environmental rights within ASEAN discussions.

17. While acknowledging these achievements, she also identified several challenges faced by AICHR, including:

- a) Lack of impact-oriented M&E mechanisms.
- b) Financial constraints affecting programme implementation.
- c) A relatively weak accountability framework, including the absence of structured follow-up mechanisms for complaints.
- d) Political sensitivities surrounding certain human rights issues.
- e) Limited engagement with private sector actors.
- f) Inadequate institutional memory, which affects continuity in programme implementation.

18. In light of these findings, she proposed several recommendations for consideration in the development of the next FYWP:

- a) Maintaining certain focus areas already initiated by AICHR to enable long-term impact tracking.
- b) Expanding the coordination role of the ASEAN Secretariat, particularly to support stronger cross-sectoral collaboration.
- c) Addressing financial constraints through multi-year funding mechanisms, as well as exploring regional pooled funding and strategic partnerships.

- d) Institutionalising regular consultations with CSOs.
- e) Establishing structured follow-up and feedback mechanisms to strengthen accountability.

19. She concluded by highlighting several emerging human rights issues that AICHR is increasingly expected to address proactively, including the rise of digitalisation and its potential negative impacts on human rights, climate governance and environmental protection, and the growing phenomenon of migration across the ASEAN region. These issues, she noted, will likely require continued attention and strategic engagement in AICHR's future programming.

20. The third speaker in this session, **Associate Professor Dr. Akekalak Chaipumee** from Kasetsart University, Thailand, presented the findings of a separate independent evaluation of the implementation of AICHR's FYWP 2021–2025. Similar to the previous evaluation, his assessment relied on publicly available data and information, supplemented by qualitative insights obtained through a series of in-depth interviews with experts. His presentation was structured around three main components: achievements, challenges, and potential areas for improvement.

21. In reflecting on AICHR's achievements, he noted that the Commission has made progress in institutionalising a rights-based approach in its work. He observed that AICHR has encouraged voluntary reporting on the human rights situation in ASEAN Member States, which contributes to raising awareness and improving understanding of regional human rights developments. He also highlighted that AICHR has been able to build consensus on several emerging issues, including the rise of artificial intelligence ('AI') and its potential implications for human rights. In addition, AICHR has initiated early steps toward establishing complaint mechanisms, signalling a gradual move toward strengthening its role in addressing human rights concerns.

22. Despite these positive developments, he also pointed to several challenges affecting AICHR's effectiveness. These include limited capacity for safeguarding human rights, limited engagement with CSOs, and repetitive programming that may constrain innovation in AICHR's activities. He further noted that the delayed review of AICHR's Terms of Reference ('TOR') remains a significant issue. Beyond these challenges, he identified several structural barriers facing the Commission, including differing understandings of the rights-based approach among AICHR Representatives, the continued reliance on outdated focus areas that may not fully capture emerging human rights concerns, and weak linkages at the national level that hinder the translation of regional initiatives into national action.

23. In discussing potential opportunities, he highlighted that AICHR's work on environmental rights represents a notable area of progress and could serve as a new frontier for the Commission's work in the region. He also suggested that AICHR could consider leveraging the "ASEAN-X" approach as a flexible model in addressing complex human rights issues where consensus among all Member States may be difficult to achieve.

24. Drawing from the overall findings of the evaluation, he underscored the importance of strengthening AICHR's responsiveness to human rights concerns. This could be achieved through the establishment of a structured complaint mechanism, the introduction of thematic complaint categories to organise and address cases more effectively, and the implementation of safeguards to ensure complainants' safety. He also suggested reviving the initiative to develop a regional human rights index as a tool to monitor and assess human rights progress across AMS. He concluded that these measures could help strengthen AICHR's institutional capacity and enhance its effectiveness in promoting and protecting human rights in the region.

25. In response to the presentations and insights shared by the speakers, participants raised several points for further discussion and future consideration. Among the issues highlighted was the need for AICHR to establish a more structured M&E framework, including clearer reporting mechanisms to track the implementation and impact of its programmes and activities. Participants also underscored the importance of strengthening AICHR's engagement with a wider range of stakeholders, particularly CSOs, to ensure that diverse perspectives are reflected in its work.

26. Participants further emphasised the importance of strong leadership among AICHR Representatives in advancing the Commission's mandate. This includes actively raising human rights concerns, advocating for the protection and promotion of human rights, and responding to emerging issues affecting the region. Such leadership was viewed as essential to strengthening AICHR's visibility, credibility and effectiveness in addressing human rights challenges in ASEAN.

Session 2: Big Picture — Contemplating Current and Future Human Rights Issues and Challenges

27. This session was moderated by **H.E. Associate Professor Eugene Tan Kheng Boon**, Representative of Singapore to AICHR. This session aimed to examine current and future human rights issues and challenges in the region. In his introductory remarks, the Representative of Singapore noted that AICHR's five-year work plan provided a strategic long-term plan and goal-setting framework to transform vague aspirations into structured, actionable goals. Given the evolving human rights landscape, he emphasised that effective implementation was critical to ensure resources are prudently used and there was accountability.

28. The first speaker of this session, **H.E. Ambassador Nguyen Trung Thanh**, Representative of Viet Nam to AICHR, highlighted the current geopolitical and geoeconomic shifts and their implications for development and human rights at both the global and regional levels. He noted that developments such as trade tensions have significant consequences for economic stability and development, particularly given that many ASEAN Member States are highly dependent on international trade. Climate change was also identified as a pressing challenge, with serious implications for the environment and as a test of the region's collective commitment to addressing environmental sustainability. He further pointed to emerging

concerns such as the rapid rise of AI technologies, which are increasingly shaping daily life and raising new human rights considerations. At the same time, ongoing violence and conflicts in several parts of the world continue to pose challenges for development and the protection of human rights.

29. Against this backdrop, he emphasised that AICHR is well-positioned to contribute to addressing these challenges, particularly by prioritising the protection of vulnerable groups, including women and children, migrant workers, and persons with disabilities. While acknowledging that there is no one-size-fits-all solution to these complex issues, he stressed the importance of community empowerment as a key approach in addressing them. He also underscored that ASEAN and AICHR should continue to play a leadership role in advancing human rights narratives both regionally and internationally. In doing so, it is important to maintain a balance between human rights and development, taking into account the realities and challenges faced by the region, including political considerations. At the same time, he highlighted the importance of promoting the universality of human rights while recognising the specific context of ASEAN, noting that AICHR can serve as a model in advancing human rights perspectives from the Global South.

30. The second speaker in this session was **H.E. Anita A. Wahid**, the Representative of Indonesia to AICHR. She began by highlighting that there are no “old” or “new” human rights. Longstanding issues such as discrimination based on gender, religion, and social status, and discrimination against migrant workers and persons with disabilities, continue to persist despite ongoing efforts. She said these are not new issues, but they get increasingly exacerbated by rising inequality and political instability. She also noted that the rise of technologies such as AI further undermines the enjoyment of human rights and indirectly promotes digital authoritarianism, in which technologies are used to spread hate and restrict freedom of expression. It is becoming more challenging for States to manage the increasing use of technologies and the impacts on freedom of expression.

31. She further highlighted the challenge of adapting human rights frameworks to local contexts across AMS, including the need to appropriately “translate” or contextualise human rights language. She concluded by underscoring the importance of the AICHR evolving from a primarily promotional role to a protective one, including strengthening how it addresses complaints it receives.

32. The third speaker in this session was **Paul Buckley** from the ASEAN-Australia Counter Trafficking (‘ASEAN-ACT’) programme. In his remarks, he emphasised that trafficking in persons is often a symptom of deeper structural problems involving exploitation and abuse of vulnerable individuals. He explained that ASEAN-ACT works closely with several ASEAN sectoral bodies in supporting the implementation of the ASEAN Convention Against Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (‘ACTIP’), with a focus on addressing the root causes of trafficking in the region. As part of this effort, ASEAN-ACT has been prioritising the non-punishment principle, which seeks to ensure that victims of trafficking are not penalised for offences they may have committed as a direct consequence of being trafficked

into a country. In addition, ASEAN-ACT is actively promoting responsible business conduct and ethical recruitment practices to ensure that labour migrants are protected from exploitation throughout the migration process.

33. He noted that many incidents of trafficking and forced labour occur within the private sector, yet engagement and partnerships with corporate actors remain limited. He also highlighted several challenges in migration governance in the region, including weak governance systems and inadequate accountability mechanisms. These weaknesses can lead to corruption and complicity, which are often difficult to investigate and address effectively. Furthermore, he observed that, in some contexts, migration continues to be framed primarily as a national security issue rather than a development concern, and stressed that while national security considerations are important, they must be carefully balanced with broader development objectives. He reaffirmed ASEAN-ACT's interest and commitment to supporting the work of AICHR, particularly in addressing human rights issues related to trafficking in persons and forced labour, including those occurring within private sector operations across the region.

34. The final speaker in this session was **Wong Yoon Long**, representing the National Council for the Blind Malaysia. He began by expressing appreciation to AICHR for its continued efforts to engage representatives from the blind community and persons with disabilities across the region in consultations and dialogues. He outlined several recommendations for AICHR's consideration. First, he urged AICHR to continue supporting the implementation of the ASEAN Enabling Masterplan ('EMP') 2025, which aims to promote the inclusion and empowerment of persons with disabilities in ASEAN. He also emphasised the importance of establishing structured M&E mechanisms for the Masterplan, both at national and regional levels, with meaningful engagement of relevant stakeholders in the evaluation process. He further highlighted the need to ensure the meaningful participation of persons with disabilities in AICHR's programmes and activities. In this regard, he suggested that outcome reports and official documents produced by AICHR should be made available in accessible, easy-to-read formats, including digital formats accessible to persons with disabilities.

35. He stressed the importance of promoting intersectionality and cross-sectoral collaboration across AICHR's thematic programmes, noting that issues related to human rights inevitably affect persons with disabilities in different ways. He also underscored the need to ensure the adequate participation of persons with disabilities in the implementation of the ASEAN Community Vision 2045, as well as in discussions on the post-ASEAN EMP 2025. In closing, he proposed the idea of establishing a dedicated regional body to promote and protect the rights of persons with disabilities, suggesting the possible creation of an ASEAN Commission on Persons with Disabilities.

36. In closing the panel, the Representative of Singapore observed that human rights challenges would persist and that AICHR must constantly evolve to make itself relevant. How AICHR went about its mandate and tasks, including drafting the five-year work plan, was

critical. He reiterated that AICHR was not just a commission on human rights but an “intergovernmental” commission on human rights. Moreover, while human rights issues and challenges were similar across AMS, different approaches were needed across AMS because domestic circumstances and national contexts differed. As such, AICHR could not be prescriptive in carrying out its mandate.

Session 3: Moving Forward — Advancing Stakeholder Engagement and Regional Human Rights Cooperation

37. This session was moderated by **Dr. Andika Ab. Wahab** from the Institute of Malaysian and International Studies, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (National University of Malaysia). This session aimed to discuss ways forward to advance stakeholder engagement and regional human rights cooperation in ASEAN.

38. The first speaker in this session was Rigoberto Monteiro, representing the Office of the Provedor for Human Rights and Justice (‘PDHJ’) of Timor-Leste. In his presentation, he explained that the PDHJ is an independent national institution that operates separately from the government and reports directly to the National Parliament of Timor-Leste. The Office plays an important role in promoting and protecting human rights across the country. He highlighted that the PDHJ is actively engaged in promoting human rights awareness among national institutions and public bodies, while also undertaking preventive work through human rights education and the provision of recommendations to relevant authorities to strengthen human rights protection. He noted that ensuring the right to education and sustainable livelihoods remains particularly important in Timor-Leste, given that many communities reside in rural areas with limited access to basic services. In this regard, sustained development in the country requires investment in quality education for younger generations.

39. He further explained that the PDHJ is responsible for receiving and investigating public complaints, including cases involving corruption and abuse of power. Drawing on Timor-Leste’s experience, he stressed that strengthening democratic governance is essential for protecting human rights. This includes reinforcing the electoral process and ensuring the establishment and functioning of an independent judicial system. He concluded by presenting several recommendations for AICHR’s consideration. These included the need for continued capacity-building initiatives involving relevant officials from Timor-Leste, as well as sustained collaboration between AICHR and NHRIs, including through joint training programmes and dialogues aimed at strengthening human rights promotion and protection in the region.

40. The second speaker in this session was **Dato’ Hasanal Reza Merican Habib Merican**, Commissioner of the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (‘SUHAKAM’). In his remarks, he explained that SUHAKAM was established by the Parliament of Malaysia and is mandated to promote and protect human rights in the country. Among its key functions are raising public awareness on human rights, advising and providing recommendations to relevant government agencies and Parliament, and reporting on the human rights situation in Malaysia.

41. Drawing from SUHAKAM's institutional experience, he offered several recommendations for AICHR's consideration in strengthening its work in the region. These included the establishment of a formal complaint and investigation mechanism within AICHR to address human rights concerns more effectively. He also emphasised the importance of enhancing engagement with CSOs and other relevant stakeholders, including increasing the number of CSOs with consultative relationships with AICHR. In addition, he encouraged AICHR to further promote the business and human rights agenda in the region, recognising the growing role of the private sector in development and human rights impacts. He also suggested that AICHR consider engaging political parties, including encouraging the establishment of Human Rights Bureaus within political parties as a means of strengthening awareness and commitment to human rights principles. Finally, he stressed the importance of cultivating a culture of human rights across societies in ASEAN as a foundation for sustainable and inclusive development.

42. The final speaker in this session was **William Gois** from Migrant Forum in Asia. In his remarks, he reflected on the progress made since the establishment of AICHR in 2009, noting that while the Commission has undertaken numerous initiatives over the past 16 years, some human rights issues have yet to achieve consensus among AICHR Representatives. This, he observed, raises important questions about the future direction of AICHR and how it can strengthen a common regional approach to addressing pressing human rights concerns. He further highlighted that one of the overarching themes of Malaysia's ASEAN Chairship is "inclusivity." In this regard, he noted that inclusivity must also encompass accessibility, prompting reflection on how accessible AICHR is to the broader population of ASEAN. He encouraged AICHR to consider ways to enhance its accessibility and engagement with communities across the region. He also emphasised the need for AICHR to reflect on how it shapes and advances human rights narratives within ASEAN, including how these discussions are framed and deliberated at the regional level.

43. He concluded by echoing points raised by previous speakers regarding the importance of establishing a credible and accessible complaint mechanism within AICHR. Such a mechanism, he noted, would enable individuals and communities to raise grievances and concerns with confidence, thereby strengthening AICHR's role in promoting and protecting human rights in the region.

Workshop Session 4 & Plenary Session 5: Input and Feedback for AICHR Five-Year Work Plan (2026-2030)

44. Participants in the breakout group discussions provided inputs and recommendations to inform the development of the AICHR FYWP 2026–2030, based on the mandates and functions of AICHR under its TOR. The discussions highlighted several priority areas to strengthen AICHR's role in promoting and protecting human rights across ASEAN.

45. A key finding from the discussions was the need to strengthen awareness and understanding of ASEAN human rights frameworks, particularly the ASEAN Human Rights

Declaration ('AHRD') 2012. Participants emphasised the importance of expanding outreach efforts and strengthening collaboration with NHRIs, CSOs, academia and other stakeholders to promote human rights awareness among the peoples of ASEAN. Participants also highlighted the importance of inclusive consultations and engagement with stakeholders in shaping ASEAN's human rights agenda. Greater dialogue with CSOs, workers' representatives, experts and other stakeholders was viewed as essential to ensuring that regional initiatives are inclusive and responsive to emerging human rights issues. Another key issue raised was the need to strengthen monitoring, evaluation and accountability mechanisms for AICHR's programmes and activities, including clearer reporting mechanisms and structured follow-up actions to ensure that recommendations are effectively implemented. Participants further underscored the importance of enhancing regional cooperation and cross-sectoral collaboration among ASEAN bodies and stakeholders, particularly in addressing complex and cross-cutting human rights issues in the region.

46. The key recommendations proposed by the breakout groups were as follows:

- a) Disseminate the AHRD more widely to increase awareness in ASEAN.
- b) Organise in-depth consultations and dialogues with diverse stakeholders in developing human rights declarations, plans of action and other regional initiatives.
- c) Conduct mid-term and final evaluations of the FYWP, and implement the findings and recommendations from such evaluations.
- d) Promote regional cooperation to address the root causes of modern slavery, trafficking in persons and forced labour.
- e) Strengthen the promotion and protection of the rights of migrant workers, women and children.
- f) Collaborate with NHRIs, CSOs and other stakeholders to raise public awareness on human rights.
- g) Encourage knowledge-sharing and exchange of good practices among ASEAN bodies, treaty bodies and international human rights mechanisms.
- h) Conduct capacity-building initiatives involving government agencies, national human rights institutions and private sector actors.
- i) Strengthen dialogue with CSOs, human rights defenders, students and experts to address emerging human rights issues and the shrinking civic space.
- j) Promote intersectionality and cross-pillar cooperation across ASEAN Community pillars.
- k) Ensure that development initiatives adopt a human rights-based approach, including meaningful participation of affected communities and stakeholders.
- l) Integrate environmental sustainability considerations into development policies and programmes.
- m) Establish transparent mechanisms for rights-holders to raise grievances and concerns.
- n) Address development inequalities between rural and urban areas and ensure policies respond to the needs of marginalised groups.
- o) Strengthen corporate accountability, including codes of conduct and accountability measures for businesses involved in development initiatives.

ANNEX A

**OPENING REMARKS DELIVERED BY THE CHAIR OF THE ASEAN
INTERGOVERNMENTAL COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS (AICHR) AND
REPRESENTATIVE OF MALAYSIA TO AICHR,
H.E. EDMUND BON TAI SOON, AT THE AICHR REGIONAL CONSULTATION
TO SUPPORT THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE AICHR FIVE-YEAR WORK PLAN
(2026-2030) IN LINE WITH THE ASEAN COMMUNITY VISION 2045 AND
STRATEGIC PLANS OF ACTION**

**29 APRIL 2025
KUALA LUMPUR, MALAYSIA**

YBhg Dato' Suhaimi Jaafar, Undersecretary (Special Functions), High-Level Task Force on ASEAN Community's Post-2025 Vision,

Professor Dr Surya Deva, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Development,

Ms Joanna Mansfield, Team Leader, International Engagement, Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC),

Excellencies, distinguished participants, ladies and gentlemen.

Salam sejahtera. Good morning and a very warm welcome to all of you.

Since its establishment on 23 October 2009, the AICHR has adopted three Five-Year Work Plans to implement its mandates. The work plans are the life of the Commission, and they detail our priority areas, indicative activities, and expected outputs. They also set AICHR's strategic direction.

The AICHR has gone through at least two phases. First is the inception, norm-setting phase from 2009 to around 2012. Unlike the African human rights mechanism, ASEAN decided first to establish a commission and then agree on a charter of rights. It meant that AICHR representatives had to first reach a common baseline on substantive human rights for them to work on. Without enunciating the rights, it would have been difficult for AICHR to operate.

AICHR was tasked by the ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting (AMM) to draft the ASEAN Human Rights Declaration (AHRD). This inception period saw AICHR representatives negotiating human rights that ought to form the basis of their work. It was a difficult but important phase characterised by norm contestations among AICHR representatives and ASEAN member states to agree on a political, non-binding document. You will note that the AHRD was endorsed with an accompanying statement by the ASEAN leaders — the Phnom Penh Statement on the Adoption of the ASEAN Human Rights Declaration 2012. The Statement reaffirms ASEAN's commitment to implement the AHRD in accordance with its commitment to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948 (UDHR).

When the AHRD was being negotiated, certain rights language and text were left out for subsequent deliberations on a binding human rights convention. Some ASEAN member states were keen on a binding convention on women and children's rights while particularly contested rights were postponed for such a convention. Several workshops were then held to discuss moving ahead on the convention but there has been no further uptake.

From 2013 onwards, the second phase of human rights socialisation saw more activities by the AICHR. In 2010, there were no programmes. In 2011 there were four, and this spiked to 18 in 2017. By the last count, AICHR conducted 16 and 17 activities in 2023 and 2024 respectively. In total, 155 activities have been organised, covering a range of 40 thematic issues. We have many reports containing proposed follow-up actions and recommendations. Some are available on our website, aichr.org.

Today, we have 30 civil society organisations with consultative status and there are other applications pending. This shows an increasing interest to engage with the Commission. We have also been addressing recent developments on human rights as a standing agenda item in the AICHR and our annual ASEAN Human Rights Dialogue. We have taken common positions through our press releases, the last being one on the deadly earthquakes in Myanmar and Thailand issued on 2 April 2025. The two declarations — on an environmental rights framework, and on peace and the right to development — are also relevant.

Of course, more can be done.

The upcoming Work Plan commences in 2026. After two phases of norm setting and socialisation — and 16 years since our establishment — we are looking at a new phase of AICHR's programming to protect and promote human rights in the region. At the Transition Workshop held in Langkawi in February 2025, we heard from stakeholders on the need for AICHR's work to be impactful through its adaptability, flexibility, and being balanced on the promotion and protection aspects of human rights.

Given the extensive nature of the next work plan, when Malaysia assumed leadership this year, we proposed assessing AICHR's work after 15 years for consideration as to what is next, moving ahead. The AICHR is currently deliberating on this matter and will be reporting to the AMM in our annual interface.

Today marks the first time AICHR is hosting a regional consultation to develop its proposed work plan. We believe it is crucial to create an open and safe space for dialogue on how AICHR can strengthen its human rights efforts and position itself among the leading commissions globally, while remaining relevant to current challenges. Our aim is to finalise the work plan by June, but as of now, nothing is set in stone. We are here to listen and learn from you. As always, we welcome all perspectives and look forward to receiving your recommendations on how we can improve the previous work plan.

Importantly, we cannot forget that our work must impact the people. How do we adopt a more programmatic approach? How do we deepen the understanding or reporting or monitoring of the 40 thematic areas to ensure coherence in the region? How do we respond to emerging threats and challenges to human rights?

This regional consultation is a joint programme led by Malaysia and supported by Thailand, Lao PDR, Indonesia and Singapore. On behalf of the proponents, I thank each of you for taking the

time to join us today, whether in person or virtually. I am also grateful to Australia for its generous support, which has been critical in making this meeting happen.

Finally, I thank the members of the AICHR Working Group led by my assistants Umavathni Vathanaganathan and Dr. Andika Ab. Wahab who are drafting the next Five-Year Work Plan. I appreciate the AICHR Malaysia organising team led by Dr. Andika Ab. Wahab together with Puan Nurul Aliaa Azman, Puan Raja Intan Nor Zareen, Puan Nurkamelia Ghazali, and the support staff from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Malaysia.

I look forward to a rich and action-packed consultation!

Thank you.
