

Summary Report
Regional Forum on Human Rights Cities in ASEAN:
Localising Human Rights for Inclusive Development Towards Localising
The ASEAN Community Vision 2045
Hybrid from Grande Centre Point Lumphini, Bangkok, Thailand
27-28 April 2026

Welcoming and Officiating Remarks

1. **H.E. Asst. Prof. Dr. Bhanubhatra Jittiang**, the Representative of Thailand to the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights, officially welcomed participants by framing the city as a space where innovation and extreme inequality coexist. He defined cities as the front line where inequality is most exposed, particularly in the areas of housing, transportation, and clean air. He argued that the real test of human rights is local, faced daily by persons in wheelchairs waiting for a bus or the homeless seeking a safe shelter.
2. His personal inspiration for this program came from **Dr. Seree Nonthasoot**, whose encouragement moved him to take action. He lauded Bangkok for its achievement as the first city in Asia to receive the UNDP Gold Gender Equality Seal. He expressed his hope that this forum would bridge the implementation gap between regional diplomatic commitments and the municipal fabric, where commitments are fully realised in the daily realities of residents.
3. **Dr. Bernadia Irawati Tjandradewi**, the Secretary General of United Cities and Local Governments Asia Pacific and the ASEAN Governors and Mayors Forum Secretariat, emphasised the urgency of the forum because more than half of the world population now resides in cities. She noted that the localisation of rights is essential for basic needs such as clean water and air. She characterised the human rights city not as an abstract concept but as a practical governance framework that helps local authorities translate regional commitments into inclusive policies.
4. She announced that a framework to support the localisation of the ASEAN Community Vision 2045 is currently being developed and will be presented in Manila later this year. This framework acts as a practical guide to help cities align development plans with strategic pathways. She quoted a well-known Thai proverb that trees of the same kind will flourish together, calling for deeper collaboration across the region to ensure human rights are felt by all people regardless of their condition.
5. **H.E. Ms. Phasporn Sangasubana**, the Executive Director of the ASEAN Centre for Sustainable Development Studies and Dialogue, stated that sustainable development must go hand in hand with human dignity and the principle of leaving no one behind. She highlighted that the forum aligns with the mission to reduce regional inequalities and promote the right to a healthy environment and peace. She noted that human rights serve as an essential foundation for a resilient and people-centered ASEAN community.
6. She expressed her hope that the event would serve as a platform for ASEAN member states to exchange best practices with external partners, such as the European Union, to strengthen inclusive urban development. She noted that the city of Bangkok serves as a point of departure for this journey, showing vibrancy while addressing rights-based challenges. She wished the forum success in generating practical ideas and actionable pathways for the benefit of all communities.
7. **Dr. Tavidia Kamolvej**, the Deputy Governor of Bangkok, shared the struggles of managing a city with a daily population of 10 million people, including a shadow population of 2.2 million from

other provinces. She detailed Bangkok's 214 action plans designed to tackle extreme urban heat, where indices have reached 52 to 55 degrees Celsius in high-density housing without proper ventilation. She noted that fulfilling all dimensions of human rights is a long road requiring a strong partnership with the national government.

8. She shared that achieving the Gold Gender Equality Seal required three years of persistent effort to close systemic gaps. For her, a human rights city is not just about signing documents but about concrete inventions, such as making homeless shelters feel homey and ensuring public spaces are shared organically. She invited participants to explore the city firsthand and witness how inclusive and sustainable practices are taking shape on the ground.
9. **H.E. Mrs. Luisa Ragher**, the Ambassador of the European Union to the Kingdom of Thailand, noted that human rights begin where people live, making cities the primary site where policy meets daily reality. She provided a global perspective, stating that by 2050, about 70 percent of the population will be urbanised, with significant shifts occurring in Southeast Asia. She underscored that political leadership is the deciding factor in turning abstract rights into practical solutions for the most vulnerable groups.
10. She emphasised that the EU continues to support city efforts to promote inclusiveness through policy frameworks such as the European Pillar of Social Rights. She highlighted the role of the European Agency for Fundamental Rights in supporting the implementation of human rights cities globally. She concluded by praising the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration for its declaration of intent and for the concrete steps already taken to advance the rights of its residents.
11. **H.E. Mr. Vijavat Isarabhakdi**, representing the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Thailand, officially inaugurated the forum by noting that ASEAN is undergoing one of the fastest urban transformations in the world. He remarked that around 2020, the region crossed a critical threshold as the urban population surpassed the rural population. Invoking the late Kofi Annan, he reminded the audience that development, security, and human rights are interdependent and that one cannot enjoy one without the others.
12. He reaffirmed Thailand's commitment to the right to health, pandemic preparedness, and business human rights, stating that rights must take root where people interact. He stressed that cities must evolve not only as engines of economic growth but as spaces that promote equity and dignity. He concluded by praising Bangkok for taking steps to become a model human rights city and encouraged a forward-looking approach to enhance cooperation among ASEAN cities.

Keynote Remarks

13. **Dr. Seree Nonthasoot**, as a Member of the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, delivered a comprehensive keynote remark emphasising that as Bangkok and other ASEAN metropolises approach periods of political renewal and leadership elections, the localisation of human rights must transition from abstract theory into a core administrative reality. Reflecting on his eighteen-month collaboration with Deputy Governor Dr. Tavid Kamolvej and the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA) team, Dr. Seree proposed a dual understanding of the "city" as both a socio-geographic phenomenon and a formal administrative unit. He noted that while global urbanisation is the defining phenomenon of the 21st century, traditional methods of accounting for populations often neglect marginalised groups in informal settlements. Citing recent December reports, he highlighted a significant shift in global demographics where Jakarta, with a population of 42 million, has surpassed Tokyo as the world's largest megacity, followed

closely by Dhaka. He defined a city as a geographic configuration with a population density of at least 1,500 inhabitants per square kilometre and a total population of 50,000, noting that by 2050, nearly all of the world's projected 10 billion people will reside in such urban settings.

14. In addressing the framework for a Human Rights City, Dr. Seree underscored the importance of integrating the seven elements of Human Security and the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goal 11, with the nine-core international human rights treaties. He observed that within the ASEAN region, only three of these treaties are universally ratified, creating a protection gap that cities must fill as primary "agents of change." Using Thailand's Human Security Index as a reference, he noted the disparity in human rights enjoyment across provinces, citing Mae Hong Son as a region requiring specific focus. To operationalise these standards, Dr. Seree advocated for two major international frameworks for human rights cities: one developed by the EU: Human rights cities in the EU: a framework for reinforcing rights locally (2021) and another by the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR): the Guidance Framework for creating a Human Rights City (2025). He detailed how Bangkok has mapped its strategic "9 Goodness" pillars—encompassing facets like governance, economy, and social welfare—against the International Covenants, which celebrate their 60th anniversary in 2026, to ensure that the city functions as a dedicated duty-bearer on the global map.
15. The address outlined a pioneering eight-step operational framework for Bangkok to become a role model Human Rights City, marking it as the first city in the region to establish a dedicated Human Rights City Committee. This mechanism involves conducting rigorous human rights due diligence, issuing a formal declaration of political commitment, and implementing specialised training for stakeholders. Crucially, Dr. Seree highlighted the need for rights-based budgeting and the use of digital grievance tools like the "Traffy Fondue" application to provide real-time monitoring and reporting of human rights performance. By establishing a clear focal point within the administrative structure, the city can ensure that public funds are utilised in a people-centred manner that reaches the most vulnerable segments of society, including those in the city's "hidden" alleys and slums.
16. Concluding his remarks, Dr. Seree addressed the inherent challenges of administrative boundaries, noting that cities often struggle to manage transboundary issues such as rising sea levels or PM2.5 pollution. He illustrated this through the irony of current policies, where, during severe air quality crises, governors may have the authority to shut down schools but lack the jurisdiction to regulate the factories causing the pollution. He argued that a Human Rights City framework provides the necessary platform for the collaboration required to mitigate these new realities. He urged ASEAN member states to embrace the emerging concept of the "Right to the City," where urban centres are recognised not merely as sites of economic activity but as protectors of human dignity. By reporting on human rights performance and prioritising the needs of all residents regardless of citizenship status, ASEAN cities can lead the way toward a truly inclusive and resilient Community Vision for 2045.

Session 1: Localising Human Rights

17. **H.E. Assoc. Prof. Eugene Tan Keng Boon**, the Representative of Singapore to AICHR, moderated the session and framed the human rights city as a necessary process to bring international standards closer to the ground. He asserted that rights are effectively meaningless if no one has the assigned responsibility to ensure they are being promoted and protected. He encouraged the panel to explore

how cities can identify local priorities within finite resource envelopes to ensure benefits for society.

18. He emphasised that every city faces similar challenges regardless of its state of development, such as providing accessibility for persons with disabilities or creating a pollution-free environment. He highlighted the importance of responsibility, noting that rights must be co-created through collaboration between local and central governments. He concluded that human rights cities are ultimately about being people-centric and promoting change that allows every individual to flourish.
19. **H.E. Ms. Phasporn Sangasubana**, the Executive Director of ACSDSD, discussed the interdependency of human rights and sustainable development. She noted that while human rights focus on legal accountability, the Sustainable Development Goals provide measurable outcomes rooted in the principle of leaving no one behind. She highlighted that over 90 percent of goal targets correspond directly to international human rights obligations, making the goals a practical technical vehicle for implementation.
20. She specifically called for a homegrown approach that empowers youth as the future generation and active aging populations as critical agents of change. She emphasised that these groups can lead advocacy for climate justice and gender equality while ensuring policies reflect local community interests. She concluded by stating that localisation in the most effective way must move beyond top-down implementation to incorporate traditional practices and local wisdom.
21. **Ms. Jing Yu**, a Senior Human Settlements Officer at UN-Habitat, posited that urban development is fundamentally a human rights issue rather than a purely technical one. She defined the city as the outcome of a social process, stating that if the urbanisation process is participatory and equitable, the resulting city will naturally deliver on rights. She stressed that rights become meaningful when they determine local design, such as the safe location of a bus stop or the security of tenure in housing.
22. She further explained that adequate housing must be understood as more than just four walls and a roof, encompassing affordability and the protection of dignity through access to basic services. She shared examples from the ASEAN Sustainable Urbanisation Strategy where tools like safety audits and participatory mapping have empowered residents as co-creators. She concluded by asserting that empowering local governments to use data effectively is essential for ensuring safety and equality in every neighbourhood.
23. **Mr. Lee Yoong Yoong**, a Strategic Advisor for the ASEAN Governors and Mayors Forum, provided a historical perspective by noting that human rights were once a taboo term in ASEAN documents before the year 2000. He praised the ASEAN Community Vision 2045 for explicitly embracing these principles and argued that localising rights is about translating principles into daily services. He emphasised that local governments are critical because they have their finger on the pulse of resident expectations and feel public dissatisfaction first.
24. He identified three key ways to move forward, including stronger multi-level coordination, the use of practical tools for cities, and securing financing for infrastructure. He argued that platforms like the ASEAN Governors and Mayors Forum help bridge regional priorities with city-level implementation to ensure the 2045 vision is made real. He concluded by reminding the audience that human rights are realised in how citizens live and move, making city leaders the primary agents for upholding these commitments.

25. **Ms. Windi A. Iman**, the Regional Director for Asia Pacific at the Raoul Wallenberg Institute, joined virtually to trace the global history of human rights cities from the 1993 Vienna Conference to the current UN Guidance Framework. She explained that a city achieves this status through three key pillars: political commitment via declarations, institutional structures like dedicated committees, and operational tools such as participatory planning. She shared that her institute host city, Lund, was the first human rights city in Sweden.
26. She highlighted RWI's current collaboration with the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration to develop a practical toolkit for air quality management based on the UN Guidance Framework. She noted that this thematic area was chosen because it aligns with ASEAN goals of achieving a clean and safe environment. She concluded by stating that participation and non-discrimination are the most resilient tools for navigating cultural sensitivities and achieving peaceful coexistence in diverse urban populations.
27. **During the Open Forum, H.E. Amb. Nguyen Trung Thanh**, Representative of Viet Nam to AICHR, raised a critical concern regarding the tension between individual rights and social order, specifically within the deep religious and cultural contexts of Asia. He cautioned against a mere Western transplantation of ideals and asked how localisation can remain inclusive without being perceived as an imposition that disrupts local harmony. He suggested that ASEAN should look to European models for inspiration rather than replication, adapting international standards to fit the local content and regional preference for social harmony.
28. In response, **H.E. Ms. Phasporn Sangasubana** advocated for a model of managed coordination where local governments and religious communities engage in active dialogue to ensure policies reflect resident interests. **Ms. Jing Yu** added that localisation is effectively achieved through the power of communication and visibility, noting that radio broadcasts of Bangkok's strategy daily make rights a tangible reality for foreign workers and shadow populations. **Ms. Windi A. Iman** concluded that the core pillars of participation and non-discrimination are the best tools for navigating sensitivities and finding common ground that respects universal dignity.

Session 2: Building Inclusive and Participatory Cities: The Role of Local Governments

29. The session was moderated by **H.E. Mr. Edmund Bon Tai Soon**, Representative of Malaysia to AICHR, who framed the discussion by emphasising that local governments are the primary duty-bearers in translating international human rights standards into daily municipal services. He noted that inclusivity is not merely a policy goal but a fundamental requirement for social stability and the realisation of the ASEAN Community Vision 2045.
30. **Dr. Tavidia Kamolvej**, Deputy Governor of Bangkok, Thailand, shared the "9 Goodness" strategy (9 Pillars) as the framework for Bangkok's urban governance. She emphasised that communication is the central key to localizing the SDGs, as simplifying complex rights-based language into the concepts of a "good society, good economy, and good governance" makes the objectives more accessible to citizens. Dr. Tavidia highlighted that Bangkok's diversity necessitates a data-driven approach to human rights; without granular "City Data," it is impossible to identify and serve the specific needs of vulnerable segments, including the urban poor, street vendors, and the elderly. She specifically addressed the impact of PM2.5 on the health of senior citizens, noting that the BMA now relays health and environmental data directly onto city maps to guide both top-down policy and bottom-up community interventions.

31. Expanding on practical tools, Dr. Tavida detailed the success of the Traffy Fondue application, which has fundamentally transformed accountability by allowing citizens to file over 1.2 million complaints. With an 81 percent resolution rate and high levels of citizen satisfaction, the app serves as a real-time evaluation of municipal performance. Beyond digital tools, she described the "Committee Visits" where officials walk through every alley and corner of the city to engage with residents. This inclusive approach extends to the "Food Bank" initiative, which coordinates surplus food from temples, grocery stores, and residents to support those in need, and the "24-hour city" logic, which aims to improve the living conditions and economic security of night workers through better lighting, safety, and health service expansion in urban poor areas.
32. **Adj. Prof. Morten Kjaerum**, joining virtually as representative from Aalborg University and the Raoul Wallenberg Institute, argued that institutionalising human rights at the local level is essential to preventing the systemic exclusion that often leads to social violence and conflict. He traced the evolution of the European human rights city model, noting that while the EU provides a comprehensive legal framework, a persistent gap remains between regional laws and ground-level implementation. To bridge this, he highlighted the 2018 Swedish initiative where local and regional authorities adopted a structured framework for rights development, which was later refined into the 2022 Global Guidance Framework. He noted that the upcoming Global City Network 2025 would further provide a structured roadmap for cities to align their internal assessments with international standards.
33. Professor Kjaerum introduced the RIGHTSCITIES approach, which categorises city functions into five roles: societal actor, democracy actor, welfare actor, employer, and economic actor. He explained that training modules developed under this project help city officials understand how human rights relate to their specific strategic responsibilities, moving the concept away from being an "extra" task to becoming a core administrative duty. He emphasised that rights for marginalised groups—such as children, migrants, and the elderly—should not be siloed within a single "Human Rights Department" but integrated across housing, labour, and health sectors. He recommended the establishment of local Ombudsman institutions as a best practice for strengthening transparency and providing an extra layer of accreditation for rights-based performance.
34. **Mr. Diego Gil Barroso**, Sustainable Urban Development Expert from Spain, discussed the urgent need for inclusive governance in the face of climate change and emerging social tensions. He argued that "co-creation"—involving citizens directly in the decision-making process—is no longer an optional luxury but a necessity for building the trust required to manage modern urban challenges. He cited the White Paper on European Governance (2001) as a successful framework for institutionalising the relationship between city authorities and the public. Mr. Barroso noted that in Spain, participation is measured by the extent to which diverse groups are heard, warning that if a policy does not reflect citizen input, it risks being perceived as illegitimate, regardless of its technical merits.
35. Mr. Barroso highlighted specific tools for participation that have moved from experimental phases to mainstream governance, such as Paris's participatory budgeting system where citizens propose and vote on municipal projects. In Granada, "Decision Committees" allow residents to directly influence local laws and spending. He detailed several EU-funded programs, including URBACT and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), which provide millions in funding for municipal integrated action plans. He concluded by identifying the success factors for these programs: strong political commitment, clear methodologies for engagement, and a dedicated

technical community. He stressed that the ultimate goal of inclusive governance is to build "Trust"—trust between institutions and citizens, and trust between different social groups within the city.

36. **Miss Leticia O. Clemente**, Baguio City Budget Officer, presented the "Baguio Model" of participatory governance, which is founded on the principle that public office is a responsibility of stewardship rather than a privilege of authority. Despite being a densely populated city, Baguio has successfully institutionalised citizen participation through the People's Council, where CSOs, youth, and indigenous peoples are directly engaged in the local council and the budgeting process. This commitment is underscored by the city's landmark Human Rights Defender Ordinance, which protects those advocating for rights and ensures that participatory governance is legally safeguarded against shifting political tides.
37. Ms. Clemente explained that Baguio advances a rights-based governance model through public-private partnerships that focus on safe public spaces and innovation. The city has established a 911 Command Centre and a smart city application to enhance real-time representation and transparency, allowing residents to report concerns directly to the Baguio City Police Office. In response to the ongoing global crises, the city has developed a resilient economic plan that is grounded in local reality and responsive to the needs of marginalised sectors. She concluded that the goal for Baguio moving forward is to further operationalise sectoral representation and embed rights-based principles across all municipal operations, creating a culture of "active citizenship."
38. **The Open Forum** facilitated a deep dialogue on the challenges of accountability and the physical design of cities. A representative from the ASEAN Youth Forum questioned how accountability is maintained in cities like Bandung, Indonesia, where regional frameworks often lack oversight. **Dr. Tawida Kamolvej** responded that in Bangkok, accountability is achieved through open data; by making the resolution status of 1.2 million complaints public, the leadership is held directly responsible by the citizens. She argued that without leadership taking these metrics seriously, data is meaningless, and she advocated for the shared use of "Objective Key Results" (OKRs) across different city departments to reduce fragmentation and ensure all deputy governors work toward a single, inclusive goal.
39. The discussion then shifted to the "unjust design" of car-centric cities, with a participant from Thailand representing persons with disabilities (PWDs) noting that while cities have improved, they remain difficult to navigate due to barriers like street furniture and a lack of elevators. **Mr. Sawang Srison** from T4A reiterated that "ramps are not accessibility, they are exhaustion," and he advocated for the 15-minute city model, where essential services are reachable within a short walk. **Professor Kjaerum** supported this by citing Medellin and Lund as examples where easy access to public transport directly contributes to the social inclusion of PWDs and the elderly. He noted that universal design benefits the entire population, and that legislative work on accessibility must ensure that public transport does not become a tool for the exclusion of those without cars.
40. The session concluded with a consensus that building inclusive cities is an ongoing process of local accountability and rights-based budgeting. **Miss Leticia Clemente** emphasised that local governments must identify and fund specific rights-based programs every year to ensure they are not just "one-off" initiatives. The panellists agreed that the White Paper model and the establishment of local Ombudsmen are transferable best practices that could strengthen the ASEAN Human Rights City movement. The forum ended with a call for cities across the region to shift their

focus from "managing" inhabitants to "engaging" them as partners in urban governance, grounded in the mutual trust between the state and the people.

Site Visits: Inclusive and Sustainable Urban Practices in Bangkok

41. The visit to the **Bueng Sakae Ngam Nursing Home** featured a detailed presentation by the Deputy Governor regarding the facility's role in providing social welfare services for the elderly and persons with disabilities. **Mr. Mike Mohen A. Padilla** asked whether the elderly residents receive wages from their vocational training. The staff answered that the training consists of short-term courses, such as bakery training, which are intended to help residents share skills with family members or sell goods within their local village for a small income rather than formal employment.
42. Participants also asked about the nearest medical facilities and how the centre handles health emergencies. The staff explained that most users are from the surrounding area and that an emergency rescue unit is stationed on site with a hospital located less than 10 kilometres away, accessible in under 30 minutes. Regarding contagious diseases like tuberculosis, the instructors clarified that all users must provide a medical certificate before accessing facilities such as the water therapy pool. The visit highlighted how homemade equipment is used to help residents maintain muscle and joint health.
43. At the **Baan Im Jai Emergency Shelter**, participants observed a facility that reopened in February 2026 with a mission to make residents feel homey rather than just housed. **Mr. Lee Yoong Yoong** asked about the current occupancy and gender ratio of the residents. The staff answered that approximately 62 people currently live there, with men being the majority, and that over 200 people have utilised the centre since its reopening. **Ms. Jing Yu** asked why the shelter had previously closed, and staff explained that BMA did not originally own the land and had to negotiate a new lease with the owner to reopen the site.
44. **Ms. Elen De Vibar Pasion** inquired about how the facility ensures that residents are mentally sane, as the qualifications require normal mental health. The staff explained that the shelter has a psychologist for consultations and will transfer those with severe mental issues to specialised hospitals or other emergency shelters. Regarding the budget, staff noted that the annual expense is approximately 11 million baht, which is funded by the BMA with additional private sector sponsorships for food and services. The group also learned that provincial job seekers are allowed to stay for seven days with full access to facilities.
45. The visit to the **BKK Food Bank** highlighted its role in reducing inequality and promoting food security through the redistribution of surplus food. Participants observed that the bank also provides household necessities like soap and oil to vulnerable groups. Representatives from Timor-Leste and Indonesia asked about the target demographics and how recipients are identified. The staff explained that they prioritise the elderly and disabled, though the requirement for recipients often depends on a system of trust and data mapping within the concerned district.
46. Participants raised questions about the involvement of the private sector and the sustainability of the program. The staff answered that they collaborate with several vendors for waste management and food delivery, ensuring the system remains efficient and free of charge for the poor. They also clarified that while the project is currently an ad hoc initiative, it relies on strong political will to collaborate across all sectors of the city. The group concluded that legislative policy is needed to ensure the project survives beyond the term of the current governor.

47. At **Benjakitti Park**, participants explored a comprehensive urban ecological park that was formerly a tobacco factory. Staff explained that despite the land being valued at 3 million baht per square meter, the government chose to develop it as a public park rather than pursuing commercialisation. The instructors detailed the Sponge City architecture, explaining that the park is designed to help the land recover from flooding by absorbing 128,000 cubic meters of water, equivalent to more than 50 Olympic sized pools.
48. A question was raised regarding the public acceptance of fruit bats in the park given the virus concerns following the pandemic. The staff answered that the number of bats is not large enough to create a reservoir of virus and that the park management actively creates awareness about the benefits of bats as part of the local biodiversity. They also highlighted the natural wetland wastewater treatment system used to water the park plants. The group recommended improvements for accessibility, such as increasing tactile paving for the visually impaired and lowering informative signage for children.

Session 3: Voices from the Ground (Site Visits Recap)

49. **Group 1** described the **Bueng Sakae Ngam Nursing Home** as a vision of the future that provides physical and mental well-being for those over 60 years old. Located 33 kilometres from central Bangkok, the facility occupies 51,000 square meters, surrounded by large green areas, and offers integrated services such as advanced water therapy and bakery training. The group noted that the facility is non-segregated, allowing family members to participate in activities, which improves the quality of life for the entire family unit.
50. The group highlighted that the residents have become viral ambassadors for elderly rights on TikTok, which has helped raise national awareness about the capabilities of older persons. However, they pointed out a significant challenge regarding the capacity of the centre, which serves 3,000 users while Bangkok has 1.3 million elderly citizens. They concluded that scaling up such models requires sustainable financing and stronger partnerships between the city, the national government, and the private sector to make care affordable and lasting.
51. **Group 2** reported that **Baan Im Jai** focuses on making residents feel homey rather than just housed, providing a roof and vocational training to help them reintegrate into society. They praised the two-month vocational training model and the presence of a whiteboard that tracks residents who have successfully found employment and returned to the market. The group also noted the seven-day safety net provided for provincial job seekers in Bangkok to prevent them from falling into chronic homelessness.
52. However, the group raised a serious concern regarding human rights and discrimination within the shelter screening process. They found it unacceptable that social workers currently qualify homelessness based on the subjective physical appearance of an individual, which they argued leads to unfair treatment and excludes those who may not look destitute. They recommended that the shelter establish structured, data-driven criteria for admission to ensure that the process is transparent and consistent with international human rights standards.
53. **Group 3** evaluated the **BKK Food Bank** as an excellent initiative that aligns with SDG 2 on zero hunger and SDG 12 on responsible consumption. They observed that the project fulfils obligations under the ICCPR regarding the right to food by redistributing surplus food and household necessities like soap and oil. The group praised the collaboration between the city, temples, and

private vendors, identifying it as a spectacular example of integrating the right to food with environmental sustainability.

54. To ensure long-term sustainability, the group argued that the project needs to be institutionalised through legislative policy rather than remaining an ad hoc program dependent on the current governor. They also identified a critical need for efficient data mapping and tracking to better understand the demographics of the recipients, such as the unemployed or persons with disabilities. They concluded that a national blueprint is required to help other ASEAN countries replicate this model and turn it into a sustainable regional commitment.
55. **Group 4** described **Benjakitti Park** as a powerful demonstration of a government's commitment to public welfare over economic gain, given the land's high commercial value. They detailed the park design as an ecological sponge park capable of absorbing 128,000 cubic meters of water to mitigate urban flooding and store water for the dry season. The group also noted the thriving ecosystem that has seen bird species increase from 50 to 200 and the use of fruit bats for natural mosquito control.
56. The group concluded that while the park is open to the public and accessible via ramps, there is significant room for improvement regarding inclusivity. They specifically recommended the installation of more tactile paving for the visually impaired and lowering the height of informative signage to accommodate children and wheelchair users. They also suggested that the park management strengthen public education efforts so that citizens can better appreciate the uniqueness and environmental value of the park's natural wastewater treatment system.

Session 4: Implementing Human Rights Cities in Practice: The Strategic Role of Regional, National and Local Stakeholders

57. **H.E. Asst. Prof. Dr. Bhanubhatra Jittiang, Representative of Thailand to the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR)**, moderated the session.
58. **Ms. Le Thi Nam Huong**, Head of the Human Rights Division at the ASEAN Secretariat, opened the session by outlining the foundational role of existing ASEAN frameworks in advancing the human rights city agenda. She specifically highlighted the ASEAN Sustainable Urbanisation Strategy (2018) and the ASEAN Smart Cities Framework (2018). While these documents are non-binding, she noted their significant impact on urban governance across the region. The Smart Cities Framework, which focuses on six key areas, aligns closely with the objectives of making cities more liveable and inclusive. She reported that the network is expanding, with nine additional cities recently joining, reflecting a growing regional interest in environmental sustainability and public service quality.
59. Ms. Huong emphasised that the upcoming ASEAN Community Vision 2045 provides a clear trajectory for advancing a people-oriented urban agenda. This vision focuses on resilience, inclusivity, and the vital role of regional and multi-stakeholder partnerships, particularly with civil society. She urged stakeholders to build upon existing digital technology frameworks and digital platforms to promote transparency and citizen engagement. She noted that while tools for inclusivity already exist under AICHR's mandate, the next step for ASEAN is to refine these into a conceptual framework that offers practical guidance for local governors and mayors.
60. She concluded by suggesting that the ASEAN Governors and Mayors Forum should serve as a primary platform for integrating a human rights-based approach into municipal administration. This requires establishing viable criteria for "Human Rights Cities" that move beyond mere participation

to a deep integration of people's lived perceptions and daily experiences. She expressed hope that the campaign for human rights cities would successfully decentralise these principles from regional policy to the actual experience of urban inhabitants.

61. **Mr. Antoine Ripoll**, Minister Counsellor for Parliamentary Affairs at the EU Delegation to ASEAN, discussed the strategic importance of the EU's Urban Agenda in institutionalising human rights at the local level. He highlighted the European Parliament's commitment to green urban development and inclusive planning by treating local communities as active partners. A cornerstone of this approach is the allocation of 200 billion euros in the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) for the 2021-2027 period. This budget power allows the EU to monitor and guide local actions, such as Barcelona's community gardens and emission reduction projects, which simultaneously create local jobs and foster social cohesion.
62. Mr. Ripoll explained that the EU Parliament uses research and research reports to guide its mandate, focusing on issues like housing segregation and urban mobility. He cited the European Urban Initiative, which provides 100 million euros to over one hundred cities for innovative projects, such as Vienna's expansion of bike lanes and free public Wi-Fi. These initiatives are designed to ensure that marginalised voices are heard, as seen in the "Cities of Equality" partnership and Rotterdam's program for redesigning community spaces to include ramps and cooling zones for climate resilience. He argued that the power of the parliament lies in its ability to check results and ensure that urban projects answer real social needs.
63. Reflecting on EU-ASEAN cooperation, Mr. Ripoll pointed to the five-million-euro Smart and Sustainable ASEAN Cities project as a successful model of inter-regional collaboration. This initiative promotes European innovation in climate resilience, social management, and energy efficiency at the urban level. He noted that cities in Vietnam and other ASEAN states are already participating in EU-supported air quality monitoring programs. Moving forward, he advocated for increasing the human rights dimension within these existing cooperation frameworks to make ASEAN cities more responsive to the fundamental freedoms of their residents.
64. **Ms. Elen De Vibar Pasion**, Undersecretary and Chairperson of the Special Committee on LGBTQIA+ Affairs at the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) in the Philippines, shared a landmark national milestone: Executive Order 51, signed in December 2023. She explained that in a traditionally conservative and predominantly Catholic country, this order represents a significant shift from abstract human rights principles to concrete, inclusive public service delivery. The order mandates all national agencies and government-owned corporations to integrate diversity and inclusion into their policies, ensuring that marginalised communities are not left behind in development outcomes.
65. Ms. Pasion emphasised the importance of an intersectional approach in local governance. This lens recognises that an individual's experience is shaped not only by their gender identity but also by their economic status and geographic location. By institutionalising the inclusion of dedicated diversity officers across various government levels, the Philippines is working to fill the gap in structured representation for the LGBTQIA+ community. She stressed that human rights must be grounded in local reality, which requires empowering local government units (LGUs) to uphold dignity through evidence-based and reality-based policymaking.
66. She concluded with a call to action for other ASEAN member states to follow this initiative as part of the Vision 2045 goals. She argued that the diversity within marginalised communities means that experiences are not uniform, and thus, data gathering is essential to fully capture and respond

to these diverse realities. By strengthening agency-level implementation and fostering continuous dialogue with non-governmental organisations, the Philippines reaffirms its commitment to a vision of progress that is truly inclusive of its diverse communities, serving as a potential role model for the region.

67. **Mr. Suriya Yeekhuns**, Mayor of Prik Municipality and Representative of the Municipal National League of Thailand, provided a powerful perspective on how a "small but beautiful" municipality can lead in human rights practice. He stated that for human rights to be meaningful, they must move beyond abstract concepts to become part of the local consciousness and practical administration. In Prik, every policy statement delivered to the city council and the public serves as a promise of community-oriented development. This is operationalised through annual community participation events where citizens join in the planning, monitoring, and evaluation of municipal activities.
68. Mayor Suriya highlighted Prik's multicultural harmony, where a population of 90 percent Muslim, 9 percent Buddhist, and 1 percent Christian residents coexist and support one another's traditions. He framed municipal services—such as disaster relief for flooding and public accident response teams—as the practical implementation of Article 2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. He specifically noted that Prik's "innovation for all" vision includes a localised educational curriculum that differs from the central government's standard. This curriculum utilises "play and learn" active methods where teachers act as facilitators, ensuring that even the poorest families have access to a high-quality, inclusive learning environment.
69. Furthermore, the municipality has prioritised healthcare and environmental sustainability, offering facilities like free co-working spaces with Wi-Fi and free drinking water for all residents. Mayor Suriya shared that Prik has collaborated with the Ministry of Public Health to establish sustainable water systems, emphasising that a local government's role, while small in scale, is powerful in impact. He concluded that the measure of success for any municipality should not be its size or wealth, but the dignity and well-being it affords to every resident, ensuring that no one is left behind.
70. **Mr. Sawang Srison**, representing Transportation for All (T4A), addressed the critical gap between human rights policy and the physical reality of urban design. He identified Independence, Dignity, and Participation as the three essential keywords for inclusive cities. Independence allows individuals to move through the city without assistance; dignity ensures they are respected by the environment; and participation allows them to take a full part in urban life. He argued that many cities, including Bangkok, are currently living with the consequences of "unjust design," where a lack of accessibility serves as a modern form of human rights violation.
71. Mr. Srison cautioned that accessibility is often misunderstood; for example, poorly designed ramps can be more of an "exhaustion" than an aid. He advocated for universal design principles like the continuous walkways on Silom Road, which benefit the elderly as much as they do persons with disabilities. He reflected on the long journey of Bangkok's transit system, noting that while 199 out of 200 stations now have lifts, it took 27 years to reach this stage. He stressed that accessibility must be viewed as an asset rather than a cost, and it must function "door-to-door"—from a person's home to the station and finally to their destination—to be truly effective.
72. He concluded by calling for urgent capacity building for all mayors and governors. He pointed out that if a city leader does not understand the fundamentals of inclusivity, the city cannot become a human rights city overnight. Leaders must realise that inclusive design is not just about physical structures but about the development of human resources and leadership committed to equity. He

urged ASEAN cities to learn from one another's mistakes and successes to accelerate the transition toward urban environments that benefit everyone.

73. **Marian Kevin**, representing the ASEAN Youth Forum, offered a critical perspective on the inequalities inherent in urban centres. Marian noted that cities are often where inequality is most challenged but also most visible, particularly regarding who gets access to safe housing and employment. As a trans person, Marian shared the "living experience" of facing systemic barriers in education and job applications, noting that for many youth, human rights are not a matter of high-level policy but of "everyday survival." Marian praised the efforts of young activists in creating safe spaces for gender-diverse youngsters and environmental groups but warned that their contributions are often extracted by governments without true responsibility-sharing.
74. Marian argued that a human rights city must go beyond extracting youth labour to recognising their unique resources and agency. Emphasising that the current generation will inherit the consequences of today's urban policies and thus expects real accountability from those in power. Regarding the statistics showing Jakarta as a megacity of 42 million people, Marian questioned whether the "Human Rights City" label can truly help such massive entities unless the concept is decentralised to smaller, local units where meaningful change is more achievable.
75. Marian Kevin concluded by advocating for the integration of indigenous knowledge into urban planning. Rather than adhering to a universal idea of concrete-heavy development, Marian suggested that the wisdom of indigenous communities regarding land and waste management could help redesign cities to be more sustainable and less prone to gentrification. For the youth, a human rights city is one where their voices actively influence policy rather than just being a peripheral part of a campaign.
76. **The Open Forum** opened with a reflection from **H.E. Amb. Nguyen Trung Thanh**, Representative of Viet Nam to AICHR, who questioned the sustainability of human rights initiatives beyond the standard five-year political term. He commended the panellists for their forward-thinking and asked whether the region could afford to wait for urban problems to occur before correcting them, suggesting a need for "future-proof" governing that anticipates the needs of the next generation. A participant from **Indonesia** echoed this sentiment, asking how local governments can ensure "meaningful participation" that reaches the lowest administrative units and identifying the right "momentum" for advocating on sensitive issues like climate change and social infrastructure within the current political climate.
77. Further discussion touched on the segregation between rural and urban perspectives. A question was raised regarding whether those living in rural areas have a "personalised" version of the human rights city or if they are being left behind by the regional focus on megacities. Concerns were expressed about gentrification and the displacement of indigenous communities in major development projects like Nusantara in Indonesia. Panelists responded by emphasising the need for good governance that transcends political terms through institutionalisation and NGO partnerships. **Mr. Antoine Ripoll** noted that the focus should be on good governance and utilising regional support from ASEAN and partners like the EU to ensure that local actions align with long-term social needs.
78. **Ms. Le Thi Nam Huong** and **Mr. Sawang Srison** both advocated for the creation of larger, more inclusive platforms within ASEAN. **Mr. Srison** specifically noted that while organisation for disability inclusion began in 2008, a "single-issue" organisation is no longer enough; a broader platform is needed where diverse stakeholders can learn from each other's lived experiences.

Marian Kevin added that indigenous knowledge is a vital tool against gentrification, while **Mayor Suriya** noted that a local government's closeness to the people is its greatest strength in ensuring co-working success. **Ms. Elen De Vibar Pasion** concluded by explaining that the Philippines uses its three branches of government to maintain continuous dialogue across diverse regions, such as Mindanao, to ensure that policy remains responsive to reality despite religious or social sensitivities.

Session 5: City-to-City Partnerships for Human Rights-Based Urban Governance

79. This session transitioned the forum from localised case studies to the strategic importance of international and regional networks in sustaining human rights-based urban governance. **Dr. Bernadia Irawati Tjandradewi**, as moderator, opened the session by noting that nearly 90 percent of local governments are now linked with other municipal bodies through various forms of collaboration. The panel established that city-to-city (C2C) partnerships are not merely diplomatic gestures but powerful "leapfrogging" modalities that allow local authorities to adapt tested solutions to their own contexts, thereby addressing human rights principles such as non-discrimination, participation, and dignity in a more efficient and technical manner
80. **Ms. Viktorija Kaidalova**, the Programme Officer for the EU Service for Foreign Policy Instruments, introduced the International Urban and Regional Cooperation program, which establishes equal footing partnerships between 94 cities and regions across Europe and Asia. She emphasised that for the European Union, human rights are not abstract principles but must be realised in the daily fabric of neighbourhoods, making issues like affordable housing a fundamental right. She explained that the program uses thematic communities of practice to find joint solutions for shared challenges like rapid urbanisation and aging populations, ensuring that international standards become a lived reality for every resident.
81. She cited the spectacular example of the food policy partnership between Bangkok and Milan, which directly integrated the right to food with environmental sustainability. Through this city-to-city exchange, Bangkok developed its food bank and central kitchen initiatives to redistribute surplus food to vulnerable populations, effectively strengthening social solidarity and reducing urban inequality. She also shared examples from Singapore regarding public housing designs adapted to support residents with dementia, and from Berlin regarding systematic policy regulation and public investment to maintain rented housing affordability for its four million residents.
82. In addressing the sustainability of these partnerships, Ms. Kaidalova clarified that the IURC is not intended to be a continuous financial pump but a mechanism for knowledge exchange that fosters local ownership. She argued that while individual leaders set the initial tone, long-term success depends on the continuity of city policy across different mayoral terms to ensure projects remain viable beyond one term. She concluded that by linking different stakeholders through a quadruple helix approach that includes academia, the private sector, and civil society, cities can turn abstract standards into practical daily services that uphold human dignity.
83. **Dr. Klaus Starl**, the Director of the International Centre for the Promotion of Human Rights at the Local and Regional Levels, presented the co-creation of toolkits for inclusive cities as a guidance framework developed for cities, by cities. He explained that his UNESCO-led centre facilitates the collective expertise of member cities rather than contributing its own theoretical knowledge, ensuring that the toolkits resolve practical administrative challenges such as rule-making, service provision, and public contracting. He highlighted the International Coalition of Inclusive and

Sustainable Cities, which includes over 500 member cities globally and offers a comprehensive overview of urban society through small and medium-sized towns.

84. He provided a rigorous mapping of the ASEAN Community Vision 2045 to human rights-based governance, showing how regional strategic goals regarding inclusive communities and human security directly align with rights-based urban functions. Dr. Starl argued that local self-governance and decentralisation are the most powerful enablers for human rights performance because local authorities are held most directly accountable by the people they serve. He noted that cities must view themselves as democratic institutions that ensure equity and equal treatment in every administrative action, from employment to service delivery, to build lasting trust with their citizens.
85. Dr. Starl concluded with a provocative analogy regarding indicators, suggesting that while administrative checklists are necessary, pain is the ultimate indicator of a human rights problem. He maintained that cities do not need complex metrics to know when their citizens are hurting; instead, they should use a human rights-based approach to budgeting to allocate public funds where the need for protection is most acute. He emphasised that becoming a human rights city is an ongoing adaptation toward international standards rather than a final destination and invited participants to join the Human Rights Go Local Academy in Graz for continued technical exchange.
86. **Mr. Diego Gil Barroso**, Sustainable Urban Development Expert from Spain, posited that cities learn most effectively from practice rather than theory, describing municipal environments as laboratories for participatory democracy. He emphasised that because cities worldwide face nearly identical challenges, city-to-city partnerships allow for the rapid adaptation of tested solutions, preventing local authorities from having to start from zero. He argued that local governments are the level of government closest to citizens and are therefore the primary actors in achieving global goals like the SDGs, serving as the essential link between regional policy and daily life.
87. He highlighted flagship EU programs such as URBACT and the European Urban Initiative, which treat urban exchange as a way to bolster local staff skills and accelerate innovation. He shared the example of the Cities After Dark network, which manages the nighttime economy while balancing safety and environmental impacts, and the Human Power Hub in Braga, which builds social innovation ecosystems centred on citizens. He stressed that for participation to be meaningful, it must be embedded in decision-making processes rather than remaining purely symbolic, as seen in the mandatory citizen participation requirements for Spanish integrated action plans.
88. Finally, Mr. Barroso introduced the New European Bauhaus principles of sustainability, beauty, and inclusion as a practical expression of human rights in urban design. He argued that building an inclusive city is fundamentally about building trust between citizens and their institutions, which can only be achieved through a governance culture of transparency and equal access to services. He concluded by asserting that participation is not merely a tool but a core value that must be nurtured through multi-level engagement across local, regional, and national levels to remain credible and effective in the long term.

Session 6: Partnerships for Human Rights-Based Urban Governance

89. **H.E. Asst. Prof. Dr. Bhanubhatra Jittiang** opened the final plenary by summarising the journey from conceptual frameworks to practical on-the-ground observations. He reflected on the importance of the site visits, noting that seeing projects like emergency shelters and food banks firsthand changed the perspective of many participants, making human rights feel like a day-to-day reality rather than just a policy term. He announced that the forum would lead to a second activity

held in conjunction with the ASEAN Governors and Mayors Forum to ensure the momentum continues.

90. He emphasised that it does not matter the size of the city, as even small municipalities like Prik have demonstrated the political will to execute human rights-based work. He argued that the forum had successfully bridged the gap between high-level regional policy and the municipal fabric of the city. He concluded by stressing that the alignment between national, regional, and local stakeholders is the only way to make the regional ambitions of the 2045 vision a tangible reality for every citizen across the region.
91. **Ms. Jacinta Dos Santos** from the Ministry of Rural Development and Community Housing of Timor Leste expressed her deep appreciation for the opportunity to learn from established regional partners. She noted that Timor-Leste is currently in the early stages of building its municipal frameworks and that the site visits provided valuable insights into how to integrate social welfare with human dignity. She remarked that seeing the elderly care models in Bangkok gave her group a concrete vision of what they hope to achieve in their own country as they grow and rise together.
92. She recommended that the ASEAN Secretariat and the forum organisers produce a formal report to be shared with all ASEAN member states and sectoral bodies to serve as a strategic matrix for implementation. She argued that having a blueprint of what works and what does not would prevent newer member states from repeating past mistakes and would accelerate their development progress. She concluded by stating that the goal of every government should be to ensure that citizens can enjoy their lives and rights before they pass away, thanking the organisers for treating all nations as equal partners.
93. **Mr. Mike Mohen A. Padilla**, representing the Senior Officials Meeting on Social Welfare and Development (SOMSWD), commended the forum for its strict alignment with the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Strategic Plan. He described the strategic plan as the bible for his department and noted that the human rights city framework provides a powerful way to validate and test that alignment. He argued that the forum provided the necessary depth and breadth to regional commitments that often remain vague or overly ambitious in diplomatic documents, offering a transferable model for other member states.
94. He posited that the human rights city approach offers a softer and more practical entry point for rights-based language within ASEAN by focusing on service delivery and well-being rather than confrontational political framing. He highlighted that cities are unique because they generate granular data on poverty and inequality that regional bodies often lack. He concluded by reiterating that the real value of the human rights city label is whether it fundamentally changes how decisions are made to benefit the most marginalised groups and looked forward to future activities that integrate city voices more deeply.
95. **Mr. Antoine Ripoll**, representing European Parliament, shared that he had just received news from the ASEAN-EU Ministerial Meeting in Brunei regarding the work toward the upgrade of the relationship to a comprehensive strategic partnership on the occasion of the 50th Anniversary of EU-ASEAN relations in 2027. He suggested that the forum should use this high-level political energy to reinforce actions at the local level. He argued that long-term investments in urban human rights require thinking beyond five-year democratic cycles to ensure that projects remain sustainable for the next thirty years, much like the successful models seen in China and Europe.
96. He reflected on his visit to the food bank and other projects, describing them as an essential ecosystem where regional, national, and local governments must work together. He noted that the

European Parliament uses its budget powers to guide local policies, ensuring that a portion of regional development funds is always reserved for projects that cities choose themselves. He concluded by encouraging the development of twinning programs between ASEAN and European cities to make cooperation more consequential and human rights-oriented for all urban dwellers.

97. **Dr. Bernadia Irawati Tjandradewi**, representing UCLG ASPAC/AGMF, detailed the ASEAN Governors and Mayors Forum's plan to develop a comprehensive framework for the localisation of the ASEAN Community Vision 2045. She announced that two expert group meetings had already been conducted and that the next meeting would take place in Kendari, Indonesia, to further refine the localisation guidelines. She explained that the framework is designed as a practical guide to help mayors align their municipal development plans with the strategic pathways of the regional blueprint.
98. She emphasised that the localisation process will include a bottom-up monitoring system that tracks progress on key human rights indicators, such as the inclusion of women in political decision-making. She noted that local governments are already extremely busy and cannot take on significant additional workloads, so the monitoring process must be kept simple and integrated into existing duties. She concluded by thanking Dr. Bhanubhatra and AICHR for the successful collaboration and looked forward to continuing the technical exchange in Baguio City.

Closing Remarks

99. **Mr. Bolivar L. Bao**, in his closing remarks as Acting AICHR Chair, reflected on his own career living in diverse cities such as Port Moresby, Toronto, and Vienna. He shared how these experiences afforded him a unique perspective on how different cities treat their citizens and the impact of rights-based governance on the quality of life. He commended Bangkok for its concrete steps toward becoming a human rights city and for illustrating the challenges and potential of localising rights in a dynamic urban setting.
100. He emphasised that the forum's work supports two landmark human rights instruments adopted by ASEAN leaders in late 2025, namely, the **ASEAN Declaration on the Right to a Safe, Clean, Healthy and Sustainable Environment** and the **ASEAN Declaration on Promoting the Right to Development and the Right to Peace Towards Realising Inclusive and Sustainable Development**. He noted that under the current chairmanship of the Philippines, AICHR is moving toward the concretisation of these declarations to ensure they provide workable benefits for all. He argued that the Human Rights City Initiative provides a clear pathway for ASEAN to realise its commitments for the 2045 community vision.
101. He concluded the forum by seeking the growing interest of more cities and municipalities to embark on the journey of developing their own unique approaches to human rights. He urged participants to return to their hometowns inspired by the initiatives they saw in Bangkok and to act as rights soldiers and duty-bearers. He thanked all the partners for their steadfast support and wished all delegates a safe journey home as they work to uphold the dignity of all people in ASEAN.