AICHR PRESS RELEASE ON THE 14TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE ADOPTION OF THE ASEAN HUMAN RIGHTS DECLARATION (AHRD) AND THE PHNOM PENH STATEMENT ON THE ADOPTION OF THE AHRD

18 November 2026 — Today marks the 14th anniversary of the adoption of the ASEAN Human Rights Declaration (AHRD) and the Phnom Penh Statement on the Adoption of the AHRD, both adopted on 18 November 2012. On this occasion, the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) reaffirms its commitment to promoting and protecting the human rights and fundamental freedoms of all the peoples of ASEAN.

Bearing in mind their different political, economic, legal, social, cultural, historical, and religious backgrounds, ASEAN Member States came together to agree on the AHRD, a shared statement of the rights of all the peoples of ASEAN. It is an ASEAN instrument created and owned by the region. ASEAN Member States affirm all the civil and political rights, and the economic, social and cultural rights in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Articles 10 and 26). Further, Article 7 affirms that all human rights are universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated, and that the realisation of human rights must be considered in the regional and national context. The Declaration sets out civil and political rights and economic, social and cultural rights alongside the right to development and the right to peace. In the Phnom Penh Statement on the Adoption of the AHRD, ASEAN Leaders reaffirm their commitment to ensure that the implementation of the AHRD is in accordance with their commitment to the Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, and other international human rights instruments to which ASEAN Member States are parties, as well as to relevant ASEAN declarations and instruments pertaining to human rights. That commitment continues to guide how the AHRD is understood as the foundation for the promotion and protection of human rights in the region, and implemented so human rights are relevant, felt, and effective in the lives of the peoples of ASEAN.

Guided by the principles of AICHR's Terms of Reference (TOR) and the ASEAN Charter, ASEAN Member States have continued to build on the AHRD through regional cooperation. The rights to development, to peace, and to a safe, clean and sustainable environment, first recognised in ASEAN through the AHRD, were given fuller expression and meaning in October 2025 through two ASEAN declarations: 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*.

Continued dialogue, consultation, and engagement are contributing to a growing common understanding on human rights in ASEAN. Through its thematic Notes, studies and documents, AICHR has agreed common approaches and positions, and issued statements, on a widening range of human rights matters of interest to ASEAN, including responsible business and migration; forced migration; the rights of persons with disabilities, their right to a safe, clean,

healthy and sustainable environment, mainstreaming their rights following the ASEAN Enabling Masterplan 2025, and strengthening disability-inclusive approaches to preventing and responding to trafficking in persons; advancing human rights and peace; telecommunication network fraud and online scamming; mainstreaming the gender dimension in business in ASEAN; the deadly earthquakes in Myanmar and Thailand on 28 March 2025; reflecting AICHR's journey in promoting and protecting human rights, on the occasion of ASEAN Day 2026; trafficking in persons, marking the World Day Against Trafficking in Persons; transboundary haze pollution; and combatting the COVID-19 pandemic. Each of these texts was agreed by consensus, in the spirit of mutual respect, dialogue and cooperation among ASEAN Member States on issues involving matters of significant national interest. Collectively, these efforts reflect ASEAN and AICHR's continued commitment to advancing regional cooperation on human rights.

There are emerging challenges to the enjoyment of human rights by the peoples of ASEAN today that were not foreseen in 2012. They include risks from artificial intelligence and online harms, climate change and environmental challenges, including forest and land fires and their transboundary impacts on air quality, public health, and the enjoyment of human rights, transnational crime that traffics people into forced criminality, including in online scam operations, and adverse impacts of business activities on workers and communities. The AHRD, together with the international human rights instruments to which ASEAN Member States are parties and relevant ASEAN declarations and instruments, continues to provide a basis for ASEAN Member States to address these challenges. In the realisation of the human rights and freedoms contained in the AHRD, the principles of impartiality, objectivity, non-selectivity, non-discrimination, non-confrontation and avoidance of double standards and politicisation should always be upheld. The process of the realisation of human rights shall take into account peoples' participation, inclusivity and the need for accountability (Article 9).

In a time of rapid change, ASEAN's regional human rights commitments should be put into practice, in a manner responsive to the region's changing circumstances and contexts. Recent AICHR regional dialogues show that awareness of human rights has grown and that ASEAN Member States have made progress in promoting and protecting human rights, while recognising that challenges still persist. Continued sharing of experiences and good practices, effective responses, capacity building and technical cooperation will contribute to the effective implementation of the AHRD.

AICHR remains open to receiving communications from the public regarding human rights issues and concerns in the region. The adoption of the AICHR Operational Guidelines on External Communications Received provides a procedural tool to streamline AICHR's engagement with external stakeholders, and AICHR will continue to strengthen its processes for handling such communications, in accordance with its TOR and consistent with the principles enshrined in the ASEAN Charter.

Looking ahead, as ASEAN works towards implementing *ASEAN 2045: Our Shared Future*, the AHRD should continue to be effectively promoted and implemented. AICHR encourages

ASEAN Member States to integrate the principles espoused by the AHRD in policies and development plans, in accordance with their national circumstances, and to enhance cooperation among ASEAN bodies across all three Community pillars in promoting the AHRD, encouraging the AHRD to be reflected in their work plans and standing ready to provide, upon request, advisory and technical assistance; and to implement the Declaration in line with the Phnom Penh Statement on the Adoption of the AHRD. AICHR, as the overarching human rights institution in ASEAN, will also continue to work with all other relevant stakeholders in promoting and protecting human rights.

AICHR will continue to promote regional cooperation on human rights in accordance with its TOR and relevant ASEAN instruments, taking into account the priorities and circumstances of ASEAN Member States.

Fourteen years ago, ASEAN Leaders adopted a Declaration for all the peoples of the region. It is a shared responsibility to ensure that the rights in the AHRD are effectively implemented and used to protect people. AICHR invites relevant stakeholders at the local, national, regional, and international levels, including ASEAN sectoral bodies as well as entities associated with ASEAN and centres, to work with AICHR so the rights in the AHRD take practical effect for all, including those in vulnerable situations.

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