

Better life for Asean residents

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The Asean People's Forum yesterday (October 19) called upon the governments of the grouping to take action to improve the lives of the people in the region. Grass-roots people from Asean member countries are meeting from Sunday to today to provide input to the leaders of Asean, who are gathering for their 15th summit late this week.

The forum welcomed the solidarity shown by their governments and the international community in the relief and rehabilitation efforts for Indonesia, which was rocked by earthquakes, and the Philippines and Vietnam, which were devastated by typhoons.

A group of people's and non-governmental organisations across Southeast Asia, calling itself the Network on Transformative Social Protection, claimed that transformative social protection must be the strategic response to the poverty and hunger, joblessness and homelessness, illiteracy and illness that most people in the region suffer with or without the natural and man-made calamities.

"Our call is for transformative social protection, which encompasses basic human rights so that people can live with dignity," said Chalida Tajaroensuk, executive director of the Peoples' Empowerment Foundation, which is part of the network.

She enumerated these rights as the rights to guaranteed jobs and livelihood, adequate food, basic services like housing, education, healthcare services and electricity, as well as to clean air and water.

Swee Seng Yap, executive director of Forum Asia, said transformative social protection is the mechanism by which basic human rights embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in many constitutions of Asean countries can become real to the majority of Asean's half-a-billion people.

Action Aid, another member of the network, wants Asean to recognise these transformative social protection measures as "statutory rights".

"This requires states and corporations to fulfil their roles both as duty bearer and facilitator to ensure that these very basic human rights are enjoyed by all," it said.

Junya Yimprasert of the Thai Labour Campaign said the network's call would make for healthy and productive Asean people.

"It is a great investment for economic growth and stability in the future, not a burden nor mere charity as what some governments tend to think," she said.

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