

Political killings in the AEPF spotlight as ASEM ignores human rights

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PRESS RELEASE Human right violations from human trafficking to political murders continue in the ASEM countries.

At the first ASEM, held in Bangkok in 1996, member governments claimed their support for international human rights treaties. But with ASEM now marking its tenth anniversary, the reality remains that child labour, the denial of free speech and limitations on the freedom of assembly are everyday practices in many ASEM countries.

The daily human rights violations committed by the Burmese military junta are among the worst examples of the abuse of human rights, but they are far from the only ones.

The people of the Philippines have witnessed constant violations of the right to life in recent years. According to Amnesty International's statistics, there were 66 or more political killings in 2005, and another 50 political killings have already been recorded in the first half of 2006.

"A condition of creeping martial law exists in the Philippines right now. The killing of political activists is a reflection of the worsening human rights condition in the Philippines" says Milet Morante of Kilusan para sa Pambansang Demokrasya (KPD), the 'Movement for National Democracy' in the Philippines. A number of KPD activists have been victims of political killings this year.

"The pattern of political killings in the Philippines indicates that these are not random excesses but part of a systematic national policy" according to a statement from Laban Nang Masa ('Struggle of the Masses'), a broad coalition of progressive political parties, people's organisations and NGOs from the Philippines. The coalition is demanding the formation of a genuinely independent citizen's commission that will investigate all political killings and bring the perpetrators to court.

"There will always be diversities, differences and disagreements but we have to start with learning, understanding and respecting the rights of all peoples and nations if we are to proceed with making peace" says Fatima Salapuddin of the Mindanao Peace Weavers, also based in the Philippines. "Governments should allow room for dialogue where no one is discriminated and persecuted."

Another serious human rights issue raised at the Asia Europe People's Forum - which, in stark contrast to ASEM, has made human rights violations a central focus - is human trafficking.

"In the European Union context trafficking is primarily considered as a problem of illegal immigration connected with organised crime. It is a multi-faceted issue, however, and this approach might prove to be questionable or even a misinterpretation or distortion of the reality of trafficking", says Venla Roth, researcher in International Law at the University of Helsinki.

The AEPF urges the ASEM summit to address critical human rights issues when it meets on 10-11 September in Helsinki.

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