

PRESS RELEASE

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Indigenous Peoples Face Further Marginalization at ASEAN Civil Society Conference

Indigenous Peoples representing 15 organizations from six ASEAN countries and other support organizations under the banner of the Indigenous Peoples Task Force on ASEAN (IPTF-ASEAN) have expressed their disappointment and condemnation for not allowing them to hold a workshop to discuss Indigenous Peoples rights to land, territories and resources and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People at the venue of the ASEAN Civil Society Conference in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. The workshop was intended to discuss the common issues of indigenous peoples in the ASEAN in relation to their rights over their lands, territories and resources and come up with recommendations for action of the ASEAN and its member states. The group learned late last night the cancellation of their venue and for the reason that the workshop theme is a sensitive issue.

“We, the indigenous peoples in the ASEAN form a big part of the culturally diverse ASEAN which is always proudly mentioned by the ASEAN governments. Despite this, we are not at all mentioned in any of the ASEAN documents, most importantly the recognition of our identities and our collective rights. In a civil society process such as the ACSC, we are further being marginalized by not allowing us to hold our workshop to raise our issues and concerns, “ said Richard Gadit from the Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact (AIPP).

“We came here with the expectation of sharing our experiences and struggles with the rest of the civil society but the government is yet again limiting the space for us. This is not a good practice for ASEAN governments to interfere with civil society processes when it banners itself a people-centered ASEAN while continuing to curtail the right to freedom of expression of its peoples, “ added Oum Mich, an indigenous leader from Kampong Thom Province who travelled to Phnom Penh eagerly to attend and share with his fellow indigenous peoples and the civil society gathered in the ACSC their issues on economic land concessions affecting indigenous peoples in Cambodia.

The IPTF-ASEAN strongly condemned this act of curtailment by the government and joined other civil society organizations in calling for the ASEAN to respect the right of its peoples to freely express their opinions and be allowed to hold their events if it is sincere in the building of a people-centered ASEAN Community.

For more information, please contact:

Richard Gadit, Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact: +85589789249/ +66897001749
Sochea Pheap, Cambodia Indigenous Youth Association: +85592617990

