

# ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) in Conflict Prevention: The Role of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)

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## Abstract

*In the end of 2015, the ASEAN Community is fully implemented in Southeast Asia. The community is expected to bring ASEAN countries to the next stage of cooperation in order to bring prosperity to the region. However, several obstacles still have to be faced by ASEAN. Territorial disputes between Indonesia and Malaysia, disputes concerning Preah Vihear Temple between Thailand and Cambodia, disputes over Sabah between Malaysia and The Philippines, etc. are some of the problems. Even another problem, which is the dispute related to the South China Sea, involves five ASEAN members. Although it is clear that ASEAN member countries agreed to settle their problems according to ASEAN mechanism as the most respective organization in the region, on several occasions they preferred to solve it bilaterally or by bringing it to The Hague. The assumption of non-interference principle as the organization's dispute settlement mechanism does not apply accordingly. As such, we have to find other ways. Peace can only be achieved through closer relations between ASEAN countries. Closer relations create better understanding between people within those countries. If 'high level' (G to G) conflict resolution does not work, we have to turn to the people. Closer relations among people will be a 'grass root' power to force the governments to end their dispute. This paper examines how ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC), alongside Civil Society Organizations (CSO), work in creating closer relations among ASEAN countries, in order to solve disputes in the region.*

Key words: ASEAN Community, ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community, dispute, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)

## Introduction

ASEAN is an organization and also a community comprised of different races, languages, and religions, which are connected with historical closeness and bond. Cities in ASEAN give a little clue about its harsh past. Skyscrapers now stand on the sites that were once destroyed by war and prolonged conflict, spread over an area of 4.48 million km<sup>2</sup>

with a population of more than 540 million inhabitants, consisting of indigenous people, immigrants, etc. As a region, ASEAN offers a rich diversity of talents, traditions, resources, and opportunities (Kotler, 2007, p. 5).

Although formally ASEAN is an organization of economic, social, and cultural cooperation, the background and aspiration of the early Bangkok

Declaration was a part of political commitment of member countries to unite and work together for Southeast Asia, at the time was marked by upheavals and disputes between countries, especially between Indonesia and Malaysia, as well as between non-state forces outside the region. Political aspirations underlying the Bangkok Declaration was essentially an effort to realize the regional stability that can support national development in all fields for ASEAN member countries.

The founders realized that among ASEAN countries there were differences in historical background and political attitudes as well as the fact that, in most countries, there were competitions as commodity producers. Therefore, sometimes ASEAN members can be very pragmatic. Although they are competing, ASEAN growth is actually running in slow fashion. ASEAN needs mutual understanding and to eliminate mutual suspicion among members to establish cooperation, which are of course to be developed to a better direction.

We need to realize that ASEAN is a regional organization and a single association based on common interest. Equality in membership is one of the principles in this cooperation. This regional cooperation was not designed to be integrative, but instead cooperative. ASEAN member countries are still fully sovereign to the inside or outside. The main foundation of this cooperation is the consensus to help each other for the sake of common interest.

### **Positive Peace and the Role of Civil Society**

Conflicts have been seen as a form of conflicts of interests between states. Whether it is realized or not, conflicts are undeniable. National interest is an

implementation of policy taken by a state as the consequence of its geography, the terrain from the geography itself, its natural resources, and the character of its people. Those three form a perception of threats and goals of the state, implied in the patterns of policymaking in the political system of the society. This situation is known as anarchy, as mainstream scholars debate on it. The debate on anarchy in international system increased as scholars try to solve how to eliminate it. Some reject the elimination of anarchy as it is assumed as a given situation, while others believe that the anarchic situation can be avoided through cooperation that creates peace (Lentner, 1974, p. 295).

Classical theory on peace proposed by Galtung proposes the 'Positive and Negative Peace' concepts. Nowadays, peace condition is still dominated by negative peace, i.e. the absence of violence. Galtung explains that peace is a condition without violence that is not only direct or personal, but also indirect or structural. Galtung stresses that a peace condition is a condition without violence and unjust in the society (Castro and Gallace, 2010, p. 19).

Meanwhile, on positive peace, Galtung mentions the obligatory good relations and justice on all aspects of life, including social, economy, politics, and ecology. By then, the structural violence such as poverty and hunger; the socio-culture violence such as racism, sexism, religion intolerance; or ecological violence such as pollution and over consumption can be avoided. According to Galtung, positive peace condition should be achieved after negative peace exists, with no physical (macro- or micro-) violence, such as war, torture, as well as violence to children and women (Castro and Gallace,

2010, p. 21). However, as indirect violence does not exist, structural violence often still exists and gives violence a way to the surface and harm peace (Webel and Galtung, 2007, p. 6). Men live in groups as a unity and form unique identities between them. These identities sometimes create problems between men in the context of interaction in order to achieve their interest. This situation exists as culture follows to the existence of the power (Avruch, 1998, p. 310).

Huntington points out that values in society, such as races, ethnicity, culture identity, and other social grouping, matter (Avruch, 1998, p. 305). Some often assume conflicts as a negative form of a situation, while on the other side others believe conflict as a positive process to a better change; as for that the presence of conflict should be acknowledged as useful for society.

Therefore, Uri Savir mentions that peace can only be achieved through cooperation and good attitudes between societies of the conflicting states. Savir sees the relations among men are influenced by their culture, social institutions, and political processes. The main power to create peace is not on the central government, but on the local government and mainly through the involvement of the civil society in the process of peacemaking itself. Savir believes that youth involvement as one of the factors of peacemaking plays an important role by placing co-existence as a common value in the society (Savir, 2008, p. 76).

### **ASEAN Three Pillars**

In the 1980's, ASEAN has already developed into a significant and integral part of Southeast Asia. It happened because ASEAN's role in regional

problems was significant and in a large scale. In fact, countries around the world recognized ASEAN as the key to understand the problems of Southeast Asia. Therefore, ASEAN leaders in the December 1997 ASEAN Summit in Kuala Lumpur decided to transform ASEAN into a stable, prosperous, and highly competitive region without uneven levels of economic development, socio-economic inequalities, and poverty.

In 2003, ASEAN planned to create three ASEAN communities (economic, security, and socio-cultural), to some extent echoing the structure of the European Union (EU) and the three European communities (European Coal and Steel Community [ECSC], European Economic Community [EEC], and European Atomic Energy Community [Euratom]), which became the 'European Community' in 1992. The EU was also created by the Maastricht Treaty in the same year. It encompassed the Community (first pillar) and added different forms of cooperation policy, including the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP, second pillar) and cooperation in the field of Justice and Home Affairs (JHA, third pillar). These policies are intergovernmental in nature and though they have institutions in common with the European Community, equally they possess their own institutions and procedures (Henry, 2007, p. 869).

At the October 2013 ASEAN summit in Bali, ASEAN leaders declared Bali Concord II to jointly establish the ASEAN Community by the year 2020. The Community would include three pillars, which were Political and Security Community, Economic Community, as well as Socio-Cultural Community, that intersect and encourage each other in order to support the creation of peace,

stability, and shared prosperity in the region (Directorate General of ASEAN Cooperation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Indonesia, 2010c, p. 9).

At the January 2007 12<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Summit in Cebu, Philippines, ASEAN leaders reiterated a strong commitment to accelerate the establishment of an ASEAN Community by the year 2015, with the signing of the Cebu Declaration on the Acceleration of the Establishment of an ASEAN Community by the year 2015. In particular, the leaders also agreed to accelerate the establishment of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) in 2015 and to transform ASEAN into a region where there would be a free flow of goods, services, investment, and skilled labor, as well as freer flow of capital (Directorate General of ASEAN Cooperation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Indonesia, 2010b, p. 7-8).

At the November 2007 13<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Summit in Singapore, ASEAN leaders agreed to sign the ASEAN Charter, which marked the commitment of the Heads of States of ASEAN to build a shared community based on regional cooperation and integration. In line with this, the blueprint of ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC) was adopted as a roadmap for the formation of APSC 2015 (Directorate General of ASEAN Cooperation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Indonesia, 2010a: 5). In addition, they also agreed on the formation of a blueprint of ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) to ensure the concrete follow-up in promoting the establishment of an ASEAN socio-cultural community (Directorate General of ASEAN Cooperation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Indonesia, 2010c, p. 9).

ASEAN Community with its pillars would play an important role in

the future of complex international relations. The APSC was designed to be able of norms sharing, conflict prevention and resolution, as well as peace development through positive political increase. The APSC would be used to fight terrorism and transnational crime such as drugs and human trafficking (Directorate General of ASEAN Cooperation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Indonesia, 2010a, p. 18-19). The AEC would bring capital, goods, services, and human resources to a single market and production base. These kinds of integration needed acceleration of free trade and businesses facilitation to develop Small and Medium Enterprises (SME) and to gain investors into ASEAN (Directorate General of ASEAN Cooperation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Indonesia, 2010b, p. 9 & 21-22).

Meanwhile, the ASCC was designed to represent the social and cultural interests of ASEAN people, as this region was moving into economic integration and globalization. The resources will be located to the education and training sector, the development of science and technology, the creation of jobs, and social protection (Directorate General of ASEAN Cooperation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Indonesia, 2010c, p. 13-14). In the latter section, we will discuss more about the ASCC, especially in terms of conflict prevention.

### **The ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) and Conflict Prevention**

There is nothing comparable for ASEAN; the submission of disputes to a third party and, a fortiori, to a tribunal would no longer be considered as an attack on, or an act inimical to, national sovereignty. In fact, for a long time, dispute resolution was understood as the

re-establishment of social harmony, where there was neither winner nor loser, but rather the resolution of litigation settled on the basis of law. The opposite of the Community legal order, the ASEAN legal order is subject to fluctuations of interpretations of a political character carried out principally by the member states, which leads to unique and very individualized solutions (Davidson, 2004, p. 167).

Moreover, ASEAN law is not always binding and for the moment deals very little with the rights of individuals. The ASEAN system has two institutionalized methods of dispute resolution, which are very different in their nature and their function. The first is an effort to resolve 'within the family' differences that can be qualified as 'political,' or at least considered as such by the states and which can degenerate into armed conflict.

It is a voluntary, intergovernmental system, provided by the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC). In effect, if parties, who have a dispute or situation capable of affecting regional peace or harmony, so wish, they can submit it to the High Council, composed of one representative of ministerial rank from each member state (Henry, 2007, p. 864). That is why disputes and conflicts among ASEAN countries are difficult to overcome. It needs different methods to solve and prevent conflicts from ever occurring. I would like to offer a mechanism to deal with the situation by the role of ASCC and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs).

The ASCC actually reflects ASEAN's social agenda that is focused on poverty eradication and human development. It is linked inextricably with the economic and security pillars of the

ASEAN Community. Social inequities can threaten economic development and in turn undermine political regimes. Economic instability can exacerbate poverty, unemployment, hunger, illness, and disease. Social instability can emerge from environmental scarcity or the inequitable distribution of environmental assets among stakeholders. Failure to address these critical and persistent social issues can further cause both economic and political dislocations.

The ASCC will evolve amidst profound changes that are taking place in ASEAN's social landscape. These include (1) the rise of consumerism and lifestyle changes resulting from rapid economic growth; (2) increased personal mobility resulting from advances in infrastructure and more open regimes; (3) transformation of the family roles and structures, with implications on the care of children and the elderly; (4) the potential of information technology to enhance the speed and quality of learning and development of human skills, thus narrowing the digital divide; (5) the rapid pace of urbanization and its impact on employment and the delivery of basic services; (6) shifts in the labor market resulting from economic integration; and (7) unsustainable exploitation of natural resources in the process of meeting developmental needs (ASEAN, 2012).

Embedded in ASEAN Vision 2020, Declaration of ASEAN Concord I (1976), Declaration of ASEAN Concord II (2003), and the Hanoi Plan of Action (HPA) is ASEAN's goal of a community of cohesive, equitable, and harmonious societies, bound together in solidarity for deeper understanding and cooperation. ASEAN must evolve into a 'community of caring societies,' and respond to the issues of poverty eradication, equity, human

development, and conflict prevention (Kraft, 2012, p. 14).

There are five key features in the ASCC. First, equitable access to opportunities will be universal, rising above the barriers of religion, race, language, gender, and social and cultural background. Second, human potentials are nurtured to the fullest, so that all individuals can participate meaningfully in a competitive world in a manner that gives paramount importance to their welfare and dignity. Third, norms of social and distributive justice are upheld by addressing issues of poverty and equity, and special care is given to vulnerable groups, children, youth, women, the elderly, and persons with disabilities, who could be the subject of abuse, neglect and discrimination. Fourth, the environment and natural resources are protected to sustain development, and as a legacy for future generations. Fifth, the most important of all, related to Civil Society Organizations. The ASCC will encourage Civil Society Organizations to engage in providing inputs for policy choices (ASEAN, 2012).

In my perspective, I feel that the ASCC provide the means to involve CSOs in conflict prevention efforts. The steps undertaken by ASEAN states (government) must include CSOs as an integral part of the conflict prevention or resolution efforts.

The ASCC also inserts features such as community interaction in their action plan. ASEAN citizens interact in a community conscious of its ties of history, aware of its cultural heritage and bound by a common regional identity. This kind of interaction between ASEAN citizens is the best way to solve or prevent conflict from occurring. One of the main problems in ASEAN is trust. The non-interference

principle shows that ASEAN states do not trust each other. For instance, the Burmese government will never allow ASEAN to conduct deeper investigation regarding to the Rohingya people in Rakhine. The accusation of gross human rights violation has never been solved.

That is why, with different race, religion, background etc., ASEAN people do not interact well among each other. There is no regional identity. ASEAN itself is not an identity, but it is an organization. What we need is one common identity to bind us as fellow ASEAN citizens and as a community. We need to create an ASEAN single identity. In doing so, we can resolve whatever problems that might come because we already feel as one family. An ASEAN single identity will create a perfect atmosphere for positive peace to happen.

Under the ASCC action plan, the goal of creating an ASEAN single identity involves mainstreaming the promotion of ASEAN awareness, regional identity, and values in national communications plans, educational curricula, people-to-people contact mainly through culture, arts, and sports, especially among the youth, and the promotion of ASEAN languages learning through scholarships and exchanges of linguists. With ASEAN awareness, arising conflict will be minimized and ASEAN states can achieve regional peace and security within their own region.

People interactions are also seen here as they conduct contact through culture, arts, and sports. With the high level of interactions among ASEAN people, better understanding between them will happen. Related to people interactions, social cohesion is a good way in building ASEAN single identity. The ASCC was formed to create a desire to

live together, a 'we-ness' feeling. Thus, one of the main objectives of the ASCC is to maintain regional cultural heritage and forming ASEAN single identity. With ASEAN single identity, the 'we-ness' feeling will help disputing ASEAN countries to end their conflict. ASEAN is one. CSOs will play an important part in making an ASEAN single identity (Henry, 2007, p. 874). The presence of civil society is an early sign of positive peace to occur in a post-conflict area.

It is very interesting to discuss about social and cultural aspects, especially if the aim is youth. The ASCC could facilitate ASEAN youth to take more active role in conflict prevention and resolution. They can create activities, events, discussions, and campaigns on conflict issues. Such method, starting from grassroots, is an effective way to be conducted as a problem solving mechanism if the governments cannot do anything significant to prevent or stop the conflict. Therefore, the ASCC must establish a forum to muster ASEAN youth to discuss conflict issues.

In addition, volunteering programs, such as the ASEAN Young Professionals Volunteer Corps Program that was held to enhance the role and contribution of youth in ASEAN in the field of socio-cultural and economic development of the region, can be used also in terms of conflict prevention and resolution (ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity, 2013). ASEAN youth will benefit much from this program, especially in giving more knowledge about conflict prevention and resolution issues.

In the future, the ASEAN single identity cannot merely talk about cultural identity. In the context of the EU, the European identity is defined not only

based on cultural aspect, but also has a political concept (Meyer, 2008, p. 103). Why? This is because if the EU identity is only culturally defined, then it means only Christian or Catholic identity will indicate the whole EU. During its development, the EU has expanded (as has ASEAN) to consider the inclusion of Muslim countries, such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Turkey as a potential candidate for joining the EU (European Commission, 2015).

ASEAN expansion brings multi-diversity. ASEAN does not only belong to one culture or belief. That is why ASEAN youth should practice tolerance among ASEAN people and countries. Toleration is a key word to prevent conflicts from ever occurring. ASEAN culture must be the culture of tolerance, disseminated all across the region. In doing so, regional peace and security in ASEAN will be created.

The identity as ASEAN citizens should be based on solidity of each ASEAN countries' tolerance culture, and it eventually will sustain ASEAN single identity. Democratic culture should be put as fundamental factors for the implementation of the ASEAN Charter and its three pillars. All ASEAN member states must comply with this term. Non-compliance will result in economic sanctions for member states that still practice intolerance and authoritarianism. Eventually, ASEAN diversity will lead to 'One ASEAN,' comprised of One Vision, One Identity, and One Community, and covered by principles of peace and secure regionalism. In other words, a positive peace.

### **The Role of ASEAN Civil Society Organizations**

The youth and ASEAN tolerance culture are related to the power of ASEAN people. In realizing them, the role of CSOs is important. CSOs are organizations outside family, non-governmental and non-market, that organize themselves for specific purposes. A CSO can be classified based on the type of membership, background establishment, as well as service-oriented or voluntarism character (Directorate of Bilateral Foreign Funding, Ministry of National Development Planning/BAPPENAS, Republic of Indonesia, 2011, p. 7). Further, the OECD defines CSOs as a multitude of associations around which society voluntarily organizes itself and which represent a wide range of interests and ties. These can include community-based organizations, indigenous people organizations, and non-government organizations (OECD, 2007).

In the field of development, there is a tendency to associate non-state organizations with non-governmental organizations (NGO). However, CSOs also include farmer associations, professional associations, organizations community, environmental groups, independent research institutes, universities, religious organizations, trade unions, and non-profit media (Directorate of Bilateral Foreign Funding, Ministry of National Development Planning/BAPPENAS, Republic of Indonesia, 2011, p. 8).

CSOs have become important actors for delivery of social services and implementation of other development programs, as a complement to government action, especially in regions where the government's presence is weak, such as in post-conflict situations. Perhaps

the most valid example and visible case of CSOs' involvement in a post-disaster/conflict situation occurred in Asia during the post-tsunami reconstruction after 2004, including the peacebuilding efforts after years of conflict between the Indonesian government and the Aceh separatists.

CSOs' influence in shaping global public policy has also emerged over the past two decades. This dynamism is exemplified by successful advocacy campaigns around such issues as banning of land mines, debt cancellation, and environmental protection which have mobilized thousands of supporters around the globe.

A recent manifestation of the vibrancy of global civil society has been the World Social Forum (WSF), which has been held annually since 2001 on different continents, and which has brought together tens of thousands CSO activists to discuss global development issues. Another example of the vibrancy and importance of civil society is the Global Call to Action Against Poverty (GCAP), an international civil society campaign advocating for debt relief and greater aid to poor countries. In 2008, the GCAP was estimated to have mobilized more than 116 million citizens to participate in the Stand up Against Poverty events held in cities throughout the world (World Bank, 2013).

The civil society sector is not only emerging as a clear societal actor in many parts of the world; it is also quite varied in its nature and composition. For this reason, definitions of civil society vary considerably based on differing conceptual paradigms, historic origins, and country contexts. The World Bank has adopted a definition of civil society developed by a number of leading



research centers: “the term civil society to refer to the wide array of non-governmental and non-for-profit organizations that being present in public life, expressing the interests and values of their members or others, based on ethical, cultural, political, scientific, religious or philanthropic considerations. Civil Society Organizations therefore refer to a wide of array of organizations: community groups, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), labor unions, indigenous groups, charitable organizations, faith-based organizations, professional associations, and foundations” (World Bank, 2013).

CSOs work in various fields and always become productive counterparts for their government in their own countries. One of the global development issues is related to conflict prevention or resolution. CSOs in ASEAN must cope with this challenge. In terms of conflict prevention, CSOs work in many ways to promote peace between ASEAN countries. Hopefully, regional peace and security can be reached with the help of ASEAN CSOs.

The role of ASEAN civil society’s interaction in the making of ASEAN Community that is ‘people-oriented’ and ‘people-centered’ is important. The interactions among ASEAN CSOs are among the possible ways to prevent conflict between countries. As ASEAN Charter states “we, the people” on its first line to mention the people of Southeast Asian nations, the leaders of ASEAN countries should start to work together hand in hand with the civil society within their organization. The initiative of working together does not only come from the government of ASEAN countries, but also from the CSOs that proactively approach the government to

give input, especially about conflict prevention.

CSOs in all ASEAN countries can urge their own governments to put forward diplomatic measures to solve conflicts with fellow ASEAN countries. The power of CSOs lies on their neutrality and their comprehensive studies regarding certain issue. CSOs, through their public relations, can also play a role as a hub to give information to the people regarding the progress of cooperation agenda among ASEAN countries. One of their active roles is to participate in conflict prevention or resolution efforts, which usually belong to the government domain.

ASEAN People’s Forum (APF) is a yearly agenda that involves CSOs of all ASEAN countries in many sectors, such as education, women and children empowerment, human rights, climate change etc. to discuss on those issues. The results of the discussion are a brief agenda on the ASEAN Leaders Summit with CSOs. The APF can work through this mechanism to ensure conflict prevention steps are to be taken by disputing governments (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Indonesia, 2013).

As ASEAN heads towards developing its Post-2015 vision of a people-centered and peaceful ASEAN, key members of CSOs see the crucial task for the regional bloc to strengthen their role in addressing the issues of regional peace and human security that continue to challenge the entire regional community. It is interesting to look at the opinion of Gus Miclat, the regional initiator of Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict-Southeast Asia (GPPAC-SEA) and executive director of the regional non-government advocacy and solidarity organization Initiatives for International

Dialogue (IID), in a press conference held last April during the 2015 ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ASEAN People's Forum (ACSC/APF) in Kuala Lumpur (Burma Partnership, 2015).

In Miclat's opinion, with the continuing armed conflicts and disputes within countries like Myanmar, the Philippines, and in south Thailand, ASEAN should go beyond its rhetoric of conflict management and prevention by creating concrete mechanisms to proactively prevent and resolve existing conflicts in the region. In demonstrating ASEAN's commitment to a comprehensive security as stated in the ASEAN political-security blueprint, ASEAN member governments must strengthen its preventive diplomacy to address comprehensive human security issues and the social impacts of recurring conflicts by establishing partnerships especially with civil society movements (Burma Partnership, 2015).

Preventive clause in the existing ASEAN dispute and settlement mechanism must be included in the ASEAN Charter to serve as a catalyst for dialogue, good governance, and peacebuilding. Towards this goal, the ASEAN Institute for Peace and Reconciliation (AIPR) that was created in 2011 should create consultative and partnership mechanisms with the CSOs to facilitate more active and inclusive citizen participation especially of communities directly affected by conflicts. The AIPR can be an effective tool to urge the governments of ASEAN countries to put dialogue and peaceful solutions to conflict situations. As ASEAN tackles peace and security issues in this year's summit, CSOs should appeal to the collective wisdom of the ASEAN leaders to make this event a landmark of new hopes,

genuine peace, and inclusive regional progress by providing greater attention to the legitimate concerns of all the people in the region (Burma Partnership, 2015).

### **Civil Society Organizations in Peacebuilding Efforts**

Besides conflict prevention, CSOs can also take a significant role in peacebuilding efforts. The civil society is widely assumed to be an important actor for peacebuilding. As such, substantive focus has been given towards building and strengthening the civil society, especially in countries experiencing or emerging from situations of armed conflict. In such environments, the civil society is understood as playing an important role in reducing violence and in facilitating the conditions necessary for building a sustainable peace.

However, despite this ever-growing emphasis on the role of civil society in peacebuilding, little systematic research has been undertaken to empirically support this assumption. As an effort to systematically examine the role of civil society in peacebuilding processes, the Centre on Conflict, Development and Peacebuilding (CCDP) has conducted a three-year comparative research project under the direction of Thania Paffenholz titled *Civil Society and Peacebuilding*. This report provides an overview of the findings thus far and focuses explicitly on their policy implications. The project began by developing a comprehensive framework through which the relevance and effectiveness of the role of civil society in peacebuilding could be more fully analyzed.

This framework, derived from democracy, development, and peacebuilding theories, outlines seven

possible functions to be played by civil society within various stages of conflict. These functions are: protection, monitoring, advocacy, socialization, social cohesion, facilitation, and service delivery. Through the comparative study of thirteen case studies, this project analyzes the performance of civil society in regards to the above functions within situations of both war and armed conflict. It also looks at the potential and actual role of civil society when a window of opportunity appears for peace negotiations and when large-scale violence has ended (Paffenholz, 2009, p. 20).

The project finds that civil society can play an important supportive role, though the impetus for peacebuilding comes in most cases from political actors and the conflict parties themselves. The findings of the research project demonstrate that the relevance of the seven civil society functions varies tremendously during different phases of conflict. However, activities of high relevance, such as protection during wars, are not necessarily equally implemented by civil society organizations. The effectiveness of activities also varies substantially. Overall, protection, monitoring, advocacy, and facilitation-related activities are of higher effectiveness, whereas socialization and social cohesion-related activities are of low effectiveness across all cases. These findings stand in stark contrast to the actual implementation and funding level of these activities (Paffenholz, 2009, p. 20-21).

There are several CSOs in ASEAN that play a role in peacebuilding efforts. One of them is the Asia-Pacific Inter-faith Network (APIN) that has representatives in all ASEAN countries. The mission of APIN is to promote dialogue and foster

mutual understanding, respect, and collaboration between the followers of the various world religions. Because Southeast Asia is a region full of different religions, APIN helps to promote peace between them (Interfaith Network, 2015).

Another CSO worth mentioning is the Asian Resource Foundation (ARF). Its main secretariat is in Bangkok, Thailand; however, they operate all over Southeast Asia. The ARF was established in 1996 as an Asian initiative to respond to the needs of vulnerable communities, particularly in the areas of children education, child rights, women empowerment, and youth leadership development (URI, 1996).

Lastly, the Human Rights Working Group (HRWG). The HRWG works in different sectors, such as women's rights, indigenous people's rights, labor rights including migrant workers' and domestic workers' rights, housing rights, health rights including sexual and reproductive rights, rights of persons with disabilities (PWD), rights of people living with HIV, rights of minority groups including religious minority group, rights to clean water and sanitation, mining network and rights to environment groups, as well as rights to development. In 2006, the HRWG expanded its advocacy work to the ASEAN human rights mechanism (HRWG, 2014). All of those CSOs play a role in peacebuilding efforts in ASEAN. If peacebuilding process can work well, ASEAN can be a region categorized as positive peace, just like Europe.

### **Conclusion**

The ASCC was designed to represent the social and cultural interests of the ASEAN people, as this region is moving into economic integration and globalization. The resources will be located to the education and training

sectors, the development of science and technology, the creation of jobs, and social protection. The fifth sector is the most important of all, as it is related to CSOs. The ASCC will encourage CSOs to engage in providing inputs for policy choices. In my perspective, I believe the ASCC would provide the means to involve CSOs in conflict prevention efforts. The steps undertaken by ASEAN member states (government) must include CSOs as an integral part of the conflict prevention or resolution efforts.

Citizens of ASEAN must interact based on common regional identity, no longer based on country identity. If only country-based interaction still applies, there will be no trust among ASEAN countries and also their communities. Therefore, the creation of an ASEAN single identity is a must. Rejection from member states should result in economic sanction. If ASEAN has a single identity, ASEAN can resolve whatever problems that may come because we'll already feel as one family, not as divided countries.

In terms of conflict prevention, CSOs work in many ways to promote peace among ASEAN countries. The APIN, ARF, HRWG are three of the many CSOs that play a role in peacebuilding efforts in ASEAN. In a way, they promote peace in the region in order for positive peace to occur in ASEAN.

Hopefully, regional peace and security will be reached with the help of ASEAN CSOs. The interactions among ASEAN civil society are important in the making of ASEAN Community that is 'people-oriented' and 'people-centered.' The interactions among ASEAN civil society are one possible way to prevent conflict between countries. As ASEAN Charter said "we, the people" on its first line to mention the people of Southeast

Asian nations, the current leaders of ASEAN countries should have started to work together hand in hand with the civil society around ASEAN.

The APF is a yearly agenda that involves CSOs of all ASEAN countries in many sectors, such as such as education, women and children empowerment, human rights, climate change etc. The results of the discussions are a brief agenda on the ASEAN Leaders Summit with the CSOs. CSOs can work through this mechanism to ensure that conflict prevention steps are taken by disputing governments. The APF meetings held in Jakarta evaluate the suggestions that are already given on ASEAN Summits and its actions. As ASEAN tackles peace and security issues in the summit, CSOs should appeal to the collective wisdom of the ASEAN leaders to make this event a landmark of new hopes, genuine peace, and inclusive regional progress by providing greater attention to the legitimate concerns of all the people in the region.

#### **About the Author**

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