

School of Advocacy for Youth on Human Rights in Southeast Asia

ASEAN Youth Forum

ADVOCACY SKILLS are essential for effective human rights activism. Advocacy involves promoting a cause or issue, and it can take many forms, such as public speaking, organizing events, lobbying government officials, and using the social media to raise awareness. Effective advocacy requires strategic planning, effective communication, and the ability to build alliances and coalitions.

Youth welfare is another important area that is closely linked to human rights. Ensuring that young people have access to education, health care, and other basic needs is essential for their well-being and for the development of society as a whole. However, many young people around the world still face significant challenges, including poverty, discrimination, and violence.

In order to be effective youth human rights activists, young people need to have a strong understanding of human rights principles and international law, as well as the ability to advocate for their own rights and the rights of others. They also need to be able to work collaboratively with others and to develop innovative strategies for achieving their goals.

Overall, the development of a capacity-building module on human rights and advocacy skills for youth is an important step towards promoting human rights and youth welfare in the ASEAN region and beyond. By equipping young people with the knowledge and skills they need to be effective advocates, we can empower them to make positive changes in their communities and to contribute to a more just and equitable world.

ASEAN Youth Forum

The ASEAN Youth Forum (AYF) commenced in 2009 as a movement for the young people in Southeast Asia to create a better regional community. From 2009 to 2013, the movement had made statements and recommendations for ASEAN to be more inclusive and rights-based. In 2014, under the guid-

ance of the Yangon Declaration (2014), the movement transitioned from a group making statements and recommendations to developing strategies for a youth-driven regional community. In 2019, AYF was fully institutionalized as a legal association, and AYF Secretariat based in Jakarta, Indonesia was established in 2020. As the movement began, AYF has been organizing annual forums which are hosted locally in the Southeast Asian countries to gather regional perspectives on youth rights issues ever since.

Vision, Mission, Basic Principles and Values

The AYF has adopted the following Vision, Mission, Basic Principles and Values:

AYF Vision

To create an environment in Southeast Asia where young people live with dignity and free from all forms of discrimination; an area where youth is not an additional group and a pure object of policy but shall also be included in the policy-making process;

To provide a space for youth in the context of the policy-making process and to meet youth needs while also giving youth space to build their capacities and opportunities to realize their vision.

AYF Mission

To respond to youth problems in the [sub]region;

To oversee the policies related to youth by ASEAN;

To engage the key actors including civil society, youth-related bodies at national, regional, and international levels by holding effective regular dialogues and expanding influence with other key groups in ASEAN and beyond;

To strengthen the capacity of agencies/organizations/networks and other related groups in the [sub]region;

To bring the youth in the [sub]region to take part in the movement toward ASEAN Community Vision of 2025.

AYF Basic Principle

AYF is a youth-based organization that upholds the principles of the Yangon Declaration, solidarity, and equality in Southeast Asia and performs

democratic practices, transparency, inclusivity, and accountability in the process with respect for human rights and non-discriminatory values.

AYF Basic Values

AYF upholds and grounds in the values of non-discrimination, equality, democracy, justice, freedom, human rights, empowerment, sustainability, transparency, accountability, and inclusivity.

Yangon Declaration

During the 6th ASEAN Youth Forum held in Yangon University from 16-19 March 2014, AYF adopted the Yangon Declaration that guided the movement's transition from a group making statements and recommendations to developing strategies for a youth-driven [sub]regional community.¹ The Declaration states that the AYF is a "youth-based, autonomous and independent regional movement that represents the voices of young Southeast Asians, and monitors and evaluates the implementation of youth-related policies, agenda, and recommendations."

It further demands that there should be

Meaningful participation of youth in all sectors, with emphasis on young vulnerable groups including adolescent girls, LGBTIQ (young people with diverse sexual orientation, gender identities, and gender expression), persons with disabilities, indigenous people, religious minorities, migrants, stateless people, people living in poverty, language minorities, women, pregnant girls, children, people living in the context of war and humanitarian contexts, sex workers, people living with HIV and AIDS, dropouts, drug users and internally displaced peoples; with genuine democratic consultation, sufficient funding allocation and provision of other resources, and protection on the rights to freedom of expression and assembly.

The Yangon Declaration identified the major issues in Southeast Asia that should be addressed with youth involvement:²

- Peace and reconciliation;
- Good governance, democracy, and freedom of expression;
- Decent work and livelihood;
- Quality education;

- Sexual & reproductive health and rights (gender, sexuality, access to health, and comprehensive sexual education);
- Migration: assuring safety, freedom, and rights (trafficking, refugees, statelessness, and migrant workers);
- Regional environment for self-determination, preservation of local wisdom and indigenous culture.

On Good Governance, Democracy, and Freedom of Expression, the Yangon Declaration provides:

- Reform and reinforce the existing youth government institutions and youth policies to ensure meaningful participation of youth in all levels of policy implementation;
- Review and repeal all laws and policies that are against the basic principles of democracy and human rights of young people and ... promote free, fair, and peaceful elections, free and independent media, transparency, accountability and access to information; and
- Empower existing regional institutions to ensure the promotion and protection of youth rights in ASEAN and accept and support ... the regional youth Charter.

Programs and Activities

AYF developed several programs that address a number of issues related to the youth in Southeast Asia.

a. School of Advocacy for Youth on Human Rights in Southeast Asia

The School of Advocacy for Youth on Human Rights in Southeast Asia (SAY-HR-SEA) was initiated in collaboration with the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) and Plan International Asia and Pacific. This initiative aims to strengthen the engagement of AICHR with the stakeholders, partners, and young human rights defenders, raise the awareness of AICHR, and build capacity in engaging and working with AICHR. This program started in 2021.

In 2022, ten youth from Southeast Asian countries held an online forum from 18 May to 31 August 2022 to present their ideas, proposals, and recommendations on advancing human rights in the subregion. In 2023, the SAY-HR-SEA Program continued with three online sessions and nine on-site sessions, allowing participants to meet face-to-face. Twelve participants from

Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Thailand, Timor-Leste, and Vietnam gathered in Bangkok on 10-12 August 2024. Some of the topics covered were Human Rights 101, Human Rights Convention, Advocacy 101, Advocacy in Practice, and Do's and Don'ts in Advocacy Meeting.

b. YUWANA Program

AYF believes that the youth in the subregion have multiple life perspectives which can be expressed through creative processes and are worth further amplifying. This is the main focus of its YUWANA Program. YUWANA is derived from the Sanskrit word *yauvana* meaning youth. It stands for young, united, witty, accessible, and non-discriminative activism. Through this zine-making process, AYF aims to build solidarity among the youth in the subregion. This program started in 2020.

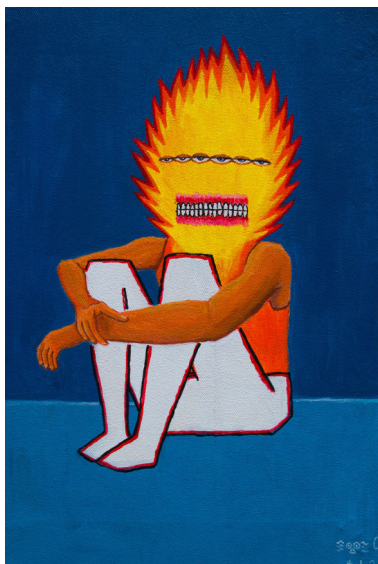
Under the YUWANA program, young artists are invited to reflect and create artworks that channel their mind, feelings and inspirations to promote human rights values in Southeast Asia.

This program has YUWANA Zine (a magazine containing youth artwork); YUWANA Exhibition (an on-site exhibition held to exhibit various artwork from the YUWANA Zine 7th edition), YUWANA Talk (Talk show during YUWANA Exhibition, where AYF invites experts in art and human rights to share knowledge and discuss activism, Zine, and their perspective on the exhibition topic), YUWANA Podcast (audio recording of the young artists' written artwork such as poems), and YUWANA Minority Circle for Activism/YMCA (a space for advocacy that has roots from activism and solidarity among minority youth in the region).

Since 2020, AYF collaborated with three hundred sixteen young artists across Southeast Asia and produced seven editions of *Yuwana Zine*. Each edition of *Yuwana Zine* had specific theme such as the following:

- 1st edition (2020) - On Feelings
- 2nd edition (2020) - Democracy, Voices, & Youth
- 3rd edition (2020) – Days of Activism
- 4th edition (2021) - LOCKDOWN
- 5th edition (2021) - Expressing Remembrance
- 6th edition (2021) - Creative & Disruptive Resistance

In the 7th edition (2022), young artists were invited to reflect upon the theme of “Grief, Loss, and Human Rights.” A YUWANA Exhibition held in



Title “Don’t Set Yourself on Fire” by Klyad (The Philippines). Artwork featured in YUWANA Zine 7th Edition.



Title “Run Over” by Remi F. (Indonesia)
Artwork featured in YUWANA Zine 7th Edition.

December 2022 was the first offline event under the program. The event took place in Jakarta on 9 - 10 December 2022 at Perpustakaan Nasional Republik Indonesia (Indonesia National Library) with a total of six hundred eleven visitors, and in Bangkok on 10 - 11 December 2022 held at the Shopping Mall Gateway Ekkamai, with a total of two hundred six visitors. The exhibition in Bangkok was held in partnership with Plan International Asia & Pacific and Thailand Youth Institute.

C. Mini Fund for Youth

The Mini Fund for Youth is a program designed to support youth-led movements and activism that promote human rights, democracy, justice, peace and freedom across countries in Southeast Asia during the pandemic. The fund is intended for programs, initiatives and activities targeting young people between the ages of 15-35 who have a vision of bringing positive change to their community in response to the issues of freedom of expression, the right to participate in political and public life, and the right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment.



Mini Fund for Youth 2023 Activity by Breakthrough (Cambodia).



Mini Fund for Youth 2023 Activity by Lingkar Studi Feminis (Indonesia).



Mini Fund for Youth 2023 activity by the Philippines Network of AYF (The Philippines).

D. Youth Networking

AYF has expanded its network to promote human rights and democracy by engaging with youth communities, youth leaders, ethnic minorities, Queer Communities (LGBTIQ+), girls and young women, secondary school students, Human Rights Defenders and civil society organization/non-governmental organization (CSO/NGO) workers, indigenous communities (indigenous rights holders), non-English speaking youth, Persons with Disability or Youth with Disability, religious minorities, university/college students and graduates, urban poor, young workers and professionals, youth in migration (exchange students, refugees, migrant workers, etc.), youth in rural area or conflicted area, and others representing those who are in the listed category of the program. As a result, AYF has become one of the leading organizations that has earned the trust of ASEAN in contributing to the ASEAN Work Plan on Youth 2021-2025.

Responses from all the participants and partners joining AYF activities are mainly positive and many of them express their satisfaction and hope to join it again next year.

E. Youth Right Ambassadors

AYF introduced a Youth Rights Ambassador scheme in 2022. This is part of AYF's efforts to further promote youth advocacy on human rights

issues in line with the objectives of the organization and also for the organization to gain new knowledge in building strategies that can assist in the continuity and sustainability of its youth rights advocacy.

Nine young people in Southeast Asia were selected as Youth Rights Ambassadors in 2022 for three different circles and joined events where the rights of the youth were discussed among various stakeholders. Every circle has three Youth Ambassadors that serve for three months for three different issues which were: The Freedom of Expression; The Right to a Clean, Healthy & Sustainable Environment; and The Right to Participate in Political and Public Life. The Youth Rights Ambassadors directly advocate human rights by delivering interventions and asking critical questions in subregional forums based on AYF's existing advocacy materials, voice out the concerns of youth within AYF's network, and act as AYF's focal persons.

School of Advocacy for Youth on Human Rights in Southeast Asia

The School of Advocacy for Youth on Human Rights in Southeast Asia (SAY-HR-SEA) is an initiative that revolves around the idea that youth should be facilitated with relevant human rights knowledge, effective advocacy skills, and rights-based approaches that are intersectional, analytical, and critical. The overarching objective of SAY-HR-SEA is to increase the capacity of youth in the subregion on human rights.

The co-conveners of SAY-HR-SEA (AYF, AICHR Indonesia and Plan International) were committed to

1. strengthening the engagement of AICHR with stakeholders and partners, particularly and especially young human rights defenders; and
2. building capacity and raising public awareness about AICHR among the young human rights defenders.

The SAY-HR-SEA is designed to enable the youth to unlearn, learn, design, and implement advocacy initiatives and activities in the region, specifically on claiming the space that they have in the mechanisms in the subregion.

SAY-HR-SEA started in 2021 virtually and it was part of the All About AICHR Program that was initiated with PLAN International and AICHR Indonesia. The first activity consisted of sessions on All About AICHR, where

youth were able to attend three sessions, which were: 1) Regionalism, human rights, and AICHR, 2) AICHR & Human Rights Issues in Southeast Asia, 3) AICHR & People's Engagement. The second activity consisted of Youth Presentations at SEA Youth Festival 2021. Selected youth prepared together and presented their ideas, proposals, and recommendations on the advancement of human rights in Southeast Asia. Ten youths were selected as the 2021 SAY-HR-SEA participants, coming from Indonesia, Myanmar, Thailand, Timor-Leste, and the Philippines. The youths presented their ideas in the AYF SEA Youth Festival 2021 Online event, where they discussed various topics: 1) Inclusive Education for Children with Disability; 2) Better Education System for the Enforcement of Human Rights; 3) Freedom of Religion or Belief issues in ASEAN Member States; 4) Deprivation of the Right to Life with the Involvement of Illegal Drugs and Political Interventions; and 5) Burma: The Story So Far.

In 2022, a total of ten young people across the region were selected to present their ideas, proposals, and recommendations for advancing human rights. They were from Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, Timor-Leste, and the Philippines. This program was carried out on 18 May to 31 August 2022. The three stages of this program included human rights learning, advocacy, and presentation skills. Participants agreed that the activity had improved their knowledge on human rights activism, helped build networks with other youth, and helped to consult with the mentors and human rights experts. They were engaged in such deep conversation with the speakers on the Howspace platform and during live sessions by learning about youth participation, youth activism, advocacy channels, and the essential of intersectionality in each issue.

AYF latest SAY-HR-SEA Program was conducted in 2023, with three online sessions and nine on-site sessions, allowing participants to meet face-to-face. Twelve participants from Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Thailand, Timor-Leste, and Vietnam gathered in Bangkok, Thailand from 10-12 August 2023.

2023 SAY-HR-SEA Program

1. Objectives

The program aims to “engage and empower youth to be human rights activists.” The output expected from this program is “Improved understanding of the youth related to Human Rights, ‘welfare.’ and Advocacy Skills.”

2. Participants

Table 1. 2023 SAY-HR-SEA Participants

No.	Country	Human Rights Issue
1	Cambodia	Freedom of Expression
2	Indonesia	Climate Justice, Human Rights
3	Indonesia	Interfaith, Queer, SRHR
4	Lao PDR	SRHR, Queer
5	Malaysia	SRHR
6	Myanmar	Digital Rights
7	Thailand	Democracy, Freedom of Expression
8	Thailand	Freedom of Expression
9	Timor-Leste	Queer, Environment
10	The Philippines	Education, Gender
11	The Philippines	Queer, Environment
12	Vietnam	Youth Development

3. Proceedings and Sessions

Welcoming Night

The session aims to welcome the confirming participants, and to kick off the program. The session is done online. The participants were also briefed about the platforms, allowances, and administrations, such as pre-course surveys, bank account, consent form for under 18, etc.).

Human Rights 101

The session is delivered online on Wednesday Evening, 26 July 2023. The session started with a pre-session quiz with 3 questions done through zoom. The session continued with a presentation with materials from the module (definition, values and principles, UDHR, and characteristics). The participants then continued to do group work of case studies. They were asked to analyze cases (in total of 3 cases prepared) with rights-based analysis pointing out which human rights violation(s) are related to the case, and they presented the group discussion after 7 minutes of discussion. The session continued with presentations of remaining materials in the module (state obligation and human rights advocacy). To wrap the session, the par-

ticipants were asked to do another (post-session) quiz with the same three questions.

Development Justice

The session was delivered online on Wednesday Evening, 5 August 2023. The participants were asked to fill out a pre-test by scanning QRcode on the screen. The facilitator started the presentation tracing the materials back historically to the industrial revolution and bringing to forth unfair economic system, crises, social inequality, and the response from CSOs, which is Development Justice. The participants were then divided into groups to discuss a case study or social phenomenon and analyze it with a rights-based approach, pointing to existing and relevant social inequalities, and recommending solutions. The session is wrapped by asking participants to fill out a post-test by scanning QRCode.

What is ASEAN?

The session was delivered on-site on Thursday, 10 August 2023. The session started with a presentation from the facilitator on ASEAN, its principles, its pillars, the opportunities, and challenges including the criticism on ASEAN. The presentation is wrapped with a section on CSOs engagement in ASEAN. The second section of the session is an exercise where the participants are asked to simulate the ASEAN meeting. They acted as ASM discussing Rohingya Refugees with this given context. One participant acted as a chairperson providing clear flow how to discuss in the simulation.

Advocacy 101

The session was delivered on-site, on Thursday, 10 August 2023. The session was direct with the presentations, introducing the participants to the definition of human rights advocacy, brief summary of what it is in essence and the main 6 elements of advocacy. For definition, participants are asked to write 2 words related to advocacy on post-it. After presentations, the participants were divided into two groups and act as an “advocacy agency” and try to offer an advocacy plan with 6 elements to the facilitators for scenario 1. They will contest each other to provide better plans. After presentations, they will work as one group offering another advocacy plan for scenario 2 to show that it’s better to collaborate than to compete. The session is wrapped

with a conclusion on slide number 14 that the goal is to not solve every human rights problem and the summary of what advocacy usually looks like.

Discussion with Expert - WWF

The session was conducted on-site, on Thursday, 10 August 2023. We had a guest resource person, from the Data and Transparency of WWF Greater Mekong, coming in and sharing about their advocacy. The session started with the speaker presenting their organizations, plans, and activities. After that, the facilitator facilitated the question and answer sessions.

Human Rights Conventions

The session was delivered on-site on Friday, 11 August 2023. The session started with a presentation about the definition of human rights conventions, the explanation of each existing conventions (only 8), and followed by explanations about relevant International Organizations such as OHCHR, IOM, ILO, and ICJ. The presentation is wrapped with brief discussion around monitoring mechanisms. The second section was a group work where the participants were given case studies and they discussed human rights violations based on UDHR and relevant treaties.

Advocacy in Practice

The session was delivered on-site on Friday, 11 August 2023. The session started with a brief review of 6 elements of advocacy and another exercise to design an advocacy plan based on 6 elements of advocacy together as one group. The facilitator then opens a discussion around the practicality and experience of advocacy from the participants. The session is wrapped with short presentations around advocacy language, advocacy meetings, forms of interventions, raising critical questions, and giving recommendations.

Holistic Security

The session was delivered on-site on Friday, 11 August 2023. The session started with a trigger warning and a brief presentation about Holistic Approach to Personal Security, its concept, personal vulnerabilities, and steps to conduct a security assessment holistically. After the presentation, the facilitator facilitated discussion where participants could share their security concerns, experiences, and challenges.

Meeting Simulation

The session was delivered on-site on Saturday, 12 August 2023. The session started with the facilitator assigned an observing role to participants who are not doing the meeting simulations. The simulating participants will be given feedback and notes by their respective observers, the feedbacks includes what the observers like from the simulation and what can be improved by simulating participants in the future. Each simulation was only for 10 minutes, besides the last one is being cut short to 5 minutes to show that advocacy meetings can be very dynamic and uncontrollable. After each simulation, the assigned observer will talk about their note of observation, followed by feedback from other participants and facilitators. After the simulations, the facilitator presented Dos and Don'ts in advocacy meetings.

Security for Advocates

The session was delivered on-site on Saturday, 12 August 2023. The session started with the presentations from the facilitators on why the knowledge related to psychosocial security is beneficial for activists and advocates alike, how to ensure it, and what an emotional support network could look like (look, listen and link). Throughout the presentations, participants can interrupt and share their experience and knowledge on the discussion. The next section of the session is an exercise. The participants are put into three groups as they would come up with their own real-life scenarios and practice the emotional support network, which they will present in the form of theatrical performance. The session is wrapped up with the conclusion that it needs collective willingness to create a safe environment.

Discussion with Expert - IWRAP Asia Pacific

The session was held on-site, on Saturday, 12 August 2023. A guest resource person came in and shared about advocacy and activism experience, and opinions on global, regional, and national mobilization. The session started with the participants writing in their questions into post-its and the facilitator organized the questions. Then, the speaker presented shortly about their organization and their biggest learning in advocating in a global setting. After that, the facilitator facilitated the question and answer sessions based on the previously organized questions.

Graduation Night

The session was conducted online through Zoom on August 30, 2023. The session started with a reflective session evaluating the program from the participants verbally, and continued with the graduation ceremony where we flashed the certificate one by one on the slide.

4. Participants Reflection on the Program

General Reflection

Many participants view the training as essential for human rights advocates, emphasizing its significance in their roles. They find the training to be applicable to their current jobs, indicating its practicality and relevance in their professional lives. Participants value the practical nature of the training, involving discussions, simulations, and recommendations. The emphasis on critical thinking and logical reasoning resonates with them.

Reasons to recommend the program

The program received a 9.6 rating on how likely the participant would endorse the program to their friends. Participants of SAY-HR-SEA express a strong willingness to recommend the program to others and provide compelling reasons for their endorsement. The program's positive and open-minded environment, combined with the potential for collaboration and personal growth, solidify participants' endorsement of the program. The program is seen as an invaluable space for those who are new to activism or advocacy, providing the necessary tools and knowledge to make a meaningful impact.

Biggest learnings

Participants acknowledge the significance of the intergovernmental approach in human rights, recognizing the need for collaboration across borders. This approach empowers them to influence their target groups and effectively advance advocacy goals. Teamwork emerged as a key takeaway, with many individuals highlighting the importance of collaboration and the skills acquired during advocacy meetings. Participants discovered that they cannot solve every problem in isolation, emphasizing the necessity to establish connections and support alliances.

Several participants particularly appreciated the mock-up activities, which provide a practical understanding of advocating for human rights. The exchange of experiences among peers was deemed invaluable, fostering a sense of shared learning. Moreover, SAY-HR-SEA expands participants' horizons by providing insights into the cultural and legal diversity of Southeast Asian countries. This global perspective enhances their awareness of the interconnectedness of their field within the broader context of human rights.

Program impact to youth activism

The common theme across participants' responses is a strong sense of motivation and empowerment to contribute more effectively to human rights causes in their respective regions. The program equips participants with knowledge and skills that are directly applicable to their local and national activism efforts. They believe that SAY-HR-SEA has not only expanded their understanding of human rights but has also given them the tools and confidence to engage more actively in advocacy activities.

Participants acknowledge the potential for increased participation in human rights activities within their local communities and countries, indicating a renewed commitment to the cause.

SAY-HR-SEA has offered a sense of motivation to keep moving forward in their advocacy work. Participants view their enhanced knowledge as a valuable asset that can be utilized to engage with people and organizations more effectively. This knowledge is seen as a bridge between local and international advocacy efforts, as they believe that the insights gained can be applied on a global scale.

Connections and networking with fellow participants have been particularly highlighted, as they recognize the strength in solidarity and the potential to implement innovative ideas from their peers in their own local advocacy efforts. The expertise and knowledge acquired from experts during the program have further reinforced their commitment to the cause and have provided them with the tools to map out partnerships with local NGOs and organizations that support human rights.



Interactive exercises during the SAY-HR-SEA in Bangkok on 11-12 August 2023.



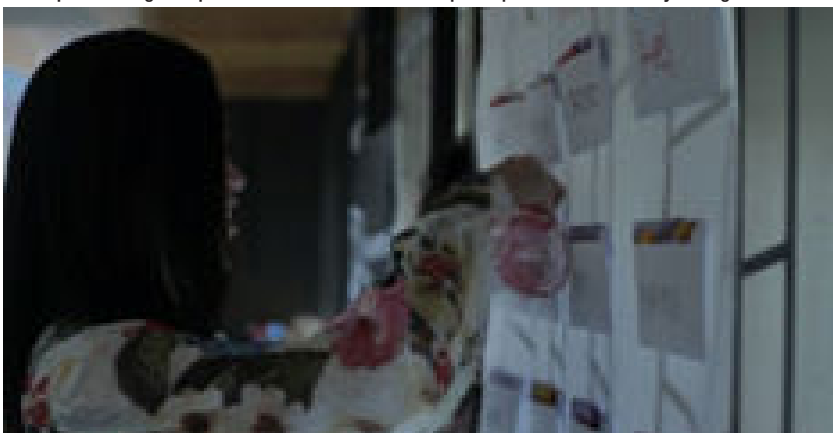
A participant raising an opinion during the session.



Participant stating his opinion.



All participants listen carefully during session.



Activity during the SAY-HR-SEA training.



Rastra Yasland, AYF CODP Manager, facilitates the session.



All participants in group photo.



Participants in a training session.



Participants in various activities.



A participant writes down answers to questions in a game activity.



Organizer explains dedicated open envelope where messages, writings or anything from others are put and brought home.



(Above and next page) AYF activities.



SAY-HR-SEA Impact to the Youth

ASEAN Youth Forum's School of Advocacy for Human Rights in Southeast Asia (SAY-HR-SEA) program has provided an excellent platform for youth in the subregion to become aware of human rights, practice public speaking skills, influence policymakers, engage in advocacy, and build a network.

After three years of implementation, AYF interviewed six youth participants out of thirty-two from the 2021-2023 cohorts across the region. The interviews highlighted several impacts of the program, one of which is the program's influence on participants' work in building community movement (initiating social movements).

What they say:

"SAY-HR-SEA has stimulated my thinking on welfare issues, human rights, advocacy simulation, and youth movements in ASEAN while also allowing me to hear different perspectives from others. Additionally, I learned from the real-life experiences of other participants in activism." - Claudia Emma

"The content made me realize that age is not a barrier to initiating a community group to address environmental or social concerns. Support is available for those who are genuinely committed." - Pascoela

"I am deeply concerned about the impact of peat fires on children in Jambi, which can disrupt their education. Therefore, I sought opportunities to learn more about human rights issues and climate change." - Naba Hesti

Five participants shared how the program inspired them to initiate social movements within their communities and enhanced their ability to manage their existing community groups. Their experiences demonstrate the program's significant role in empowering young leaders to effect positive change and build stronger, more cohesive communities.

For Emma, a 22-year-old student from Kuching, Malaysia, the SAY-HR-SEA program has significantly strengthened her capacity to manage her small NGO, "PAD" (Period Poverty Awareness), which she established four years ago. Emma is deeply concerned about the ongoing stigma surrounding menstrual health. Her organization has been actively raising awareness

about menstrual health in rural areas and distributing menstrual pads to those in need. Realizing that her social movement needed a more strategic approach to have a more significant impact, she sought out an activism education program. This search led her to discover SAY-HR-SEA through the AYF Instagram page.

For her, the biggest takeaway was that anyone, regardless of age, could start a social movement even when they were young. With their resources and energy, they can bring changes to their community.

For Pascoela and Ricardo from Timor-Leste, participating in the SAY-HR-SEA program inspired them to establish a digital campaign community named “Gen Z Talk Timor-Leste.” While Pascoela joined the program in the first batch in 2021, Ricardo enrolled in the second batch in 2022. Gen Z Talk Timor-Leste leverages various social media platforms to advocate for mental health, gender equality, and human rights, specifically targeting young people in Timor-Leste. This online community has garnered thousands of followers across the country who appreciate their inspirational content. Recognizing their impact, Oxfam International has provided support with a grant for gender equality campaigns. The online campaign continues to offer education and advocacy under their guidance and supervision.

Pascoela was particularly impressed with the program’s curriculum, from which she learned that strategic actions were essential for a community group to effectively influence change.

Naba, a 22-year-old final-year student at the Law Faculty of the Indonesian Islamic University (UII), has been inspired by the program to establish a youth community. Concerned about the recurring smoke pollution in Jambi, Sumatra, she founded “Climate Tea Time,” a youth community dedicated to raising awareness about climate change. Each year, Jambi is enveloped in smoke from peat fires, leading to unhealthy air quality due to the combination of dust and smoke particles.

This youth environmental community is actively advocating for the impact of climate change in Jambi. Through regular discussions on social media under the banner of “Climate Tea Time,” more than thirty young people in Jambi can freely share their concerns and ideas on climate change, mainly focusing on the issue of smoke from peat fires. Presently, her community is initiating engagement with critical stakeholders in Jambi to amplify their concerns about peat fires.

Hailing from Laos, Mayu, a young university student, took the initiative to establish a community group for LGBTQ individuals named “Queers and Cheers.” Currently, the group boasts of over twenty members and is dedicated to providing various forms of support, including capacity-building in sexual orientation education, public speaking, safety, digital security, mental health, and overall well-being for LGBTQ individuals across multiple districts in Laos.

Final Thoughts

All in all, the SAY-HR-SEA program has gained recognition as an essential and highly beneficial endeavor for human rights advocates.

Providing safe space for fostering solidarity among young people, building their knowledge and capacity, and influencing the policymaking and decision-making process in the subregion is an important mission of AYF. AYF actively pursues this mission in collaboration with youth networks across the subregion and partners. AYF will persist in pursuing this approach to strive towards a sustainable, inclusive, people-centered, and youth-driven subregional community.

Endnotes

1 See full text of The Yangon Declaration - ASEAN Youth Statement in the Annex below and in this link: <https://aseanyouthforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/AYF-Yangon-Declaration.pdf>.

2 See The Yangon Declaration - ASEAN Youth Statement of the AYF conference in Yangon University, 2014.

ANNEX

The Yangon Declaration

ASEAN Youth Statement

(Approved during the 2014 AYF in Yangon, Myanmar)

One Community! One Strategy! Youth for Unity!

We, the young people of ASEAN, aspire for the promotion of non-discrimination, equality, peace, protection, sustainability, and inclusive development of the ASEAN community that are in line with the principles and values of human rights, democracy, justice and freedom in all aspects of our lives.

We, the young people of ASEAN, strongly call for the creation of a sustainable rights-based, inclusive, people-centered, and youth-driven regional community.

We, the young people of ASEAN, strongly call for affirmative action by our leaders in ASEAN countries to create an enabling environment at regional, national, and local levels that highly addresses the needs, fulfills the aspirations of young people and ensures youth-embracing Post-2015 Development agenda for the region.

To attain our vision, we strongly demand:

1. The full recognition of the ASEAN Youth Forum (AYF) as a youth-based, autonomous and independent regional movement that represents the voices of young Southeast Asians, and to monitor and evaluate the implementation of youth-related policies, agenda, and recommendations;
2. The facilitation and integration of an inclusive, accessible, non-discriminatory, needs-based, evidence-based, human rights-centered approach to formal and non-formal education;
3. The immediate reform and repeal of policies & laws that indirectly criminalize and discriminate young people based on their political views and status, SOGIE (Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression), religion, and Social economic status; and
4. Meaningful participation of youth in all sectors, with emphasis on young vulnerable groups including adolescent girls, LGBTIQ (young people with diverse sexual orientation, gender identities, and gender expression), persons with disabilities, indigenous people, religious minorities, migrants, stateless people, people living in poverty, language minorities, women, pregnant girls, children, people living in the context of war and humanitarian contexts, sex workers, people living with HIV and AIDS, dropouts, drug users and internally displaced peoples; with

genuine democratic consultation, sufficient funding allocation and provision of other resources, and protection on the rights to freedom of expression and assembly

5. Immediate action to fully address and work with young people on the following issues:

– *Role of Young People and Impacts of Peace and Reconciliation:*

- Create and support peaceful dialogues with governments and various stakeholders;
- Initiate youth focused peace education in curriculums and alternative peace building programs;
- Provide safe spaces for youth to meaningfully engage in peace-building efforts such as interfaith dialogues and cross-cultural exchanges at the community, national and regional levels specifically in conflict areas; and
- Provide protection for youth impacted by conflict.

– *Good Governance, Democracy, and Freedom of Expression:*

- Reform and reinforce the existing youth government institutions and youth policies to ensure meaningful participation of youth in all levels of policy implementation;
- Review and repeal all laws and policies that are against the basic principles of democracy and human rights of young people and to promote free, fair, and peaceful elections, free and independent media, transparency, accountability and access to information; and
- Empower existing regional institutions to ensure the promotion and protection of youth rights in ASEAN and accept and support for the regional youth Charter.

– *Ensuring Decent Work and Livelihood for the Youth of Southeast Asia:*

- Implement, monitor and evaluate transparent, youth-friendly, rights- and evidence-based national employment policies that generate decent work for ASEAN youth and adherence to International Labour Organisation (ILO) standard, which is stable, safe, secure, non- discriminatory, and provides decent wage and opportunities for career development;
- Prioritize creation of jobs and a skilled workforce by increased investment including from the private sector through programs that foster youth entrepreneurship and provide internship opportunity and capacity building to young people through trainings, continuing professional education, using formal, informal and non-formal approach, employment counseling, offer social protection, mentoring and

expertise sharing so that ASEAN youth can get the necessary information and skills to access decent work opportunities;

- Invest in building and enhancing the motivation of young people. If so, it may also help in creating an enabling and conducive environment for young people to participate in all stages of decision-making for their livelihood and future;
- Ensure humane and equal access to decent work that free from discrimination, respectful of diversity, and promoting human development for all young people, including vulnerable and migrant youth. ASEAN must also eliminate gender biases in all sectors and at all levels of the workforce; and
- Implement and enforce policies that address discrimination of young people in the labor market.

– Quality education for all Young Southeast Asians:

- Identify and develop relevant and standardized framework, right based educational programmes (formal, informal, and non-formal) designed for and with young people. Quality of Academic staff, infrastructure, teaching and learning materials and facilities must be ensured;
- Allocate and properly distribute funding to ensure non-discriminatory and quality education that focuses on empowerment and capacity enhancement of young people; and
- Establishment of a regional policy that mandates for free, accessible and available education for all.

– Empowering Young People's Sexual & Reproductive Health and Rights (gender, sexuality, access to health, and comprehensive sexual education):

- Fully provide youth-friendly access to reproductive and sexual health services to anyone in the region including all young LGBTIQ, young migrant workers, young stateless person/ refugees, young sex workers—male, female, transgender, transsexuals; and
- Provide Comprehensive Sexuality rights-based information and education for all young people. Teaching strategies must be differentiated and be flexible to meet the differing needs of female and male learners, taking into account the fact that persons with special needs — such as young people not attending school or young married women — have to be taught about sexuality through methods other than formal education.

– Youth in Migration: Assuring Safety, Freedom, and their Rights (trafficking, refugees, statelessness, and migrant workers):

- Implement formal and educational curricula that emphasizes on people-centred history, human rights, migration and cultural appreciation;
- Ensure full access of young migrant people to all levels of formal, skills-based, informal and non-formal education;
- Develop and implement policies that promote and protect the rights and freedoms of young migrant people especially undocumented, stateless, asylum seeking young people; and
- Immediately ratify international labor and human rights conventions that directly affect young migrant people.

– Actualizing and Maintaining a Regional Environment (self-determination, preservation of local wisdom and indigenous culture):

- Facilitate and support youth-initiated green programmes that aim to address local and transnational environmental matters;
- Acknowledge and uphold environmental justice as fair treatment and meaningful involvement of young people with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies to ensure healthy environment to learn, live and work;
- Ensure transparency, accountability and rights to access information on local, regional and transnational development plans;
- Involve young people in all forms of consultations and decision making processes to ensure sustainable and healthy environment; and
- Improve disaster risk-preparedness for young people.

We, the young people of ASEAN, aspire for the promotion of non-discrimination, equality, peace, protection, sustainability, and inclusive development of the ASEAN community that are in line with the principles and values of human rights, democracy, justice and freedom in all aspects of our lives.

Youth Rights are FUNDAMENTAL HUMAN RIGHTS!

Yangon University, Yangon, Myanmar

Source: The Yangon Declaration, <https://aseanyouthforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/AYF-Yangon-Declaration.pdf>