



UNIVERSITY OF THE PHILIPPINES
CENTER FOR
INTEGRATIVE AND
DEVELOPMENT
STUDIES

Asia Europe People's Forum 13

*Converging Alternatives from Asia and Europe towards
Alternative Regionalism and People-to-People Solidarity*

PROCEEDINGS

MAY 18 2021







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Concept Note

The peoples of Asia and Europe need to build an alternative peoples' regional integration beyond state-to-state mechanisms.

The diverse modalities of the global crisis intensified by the COVID-19 pandemic provided a space for communities to demonstrate cross-border solidarity, resistance, resilience, and collective action.

The multitudes of successful people-led alternatives in Asia and Europe deserve substantial attention and support. This Open Space explores the importance of alternative regionalism, one that is rooted in the heterodox yet sustainable practices of communities in both regions. It is hoped that this opportunity will encourage local communities to participate in the lead-up to strategic actions that can strengthen people-to-people cooperation and solidarity between Asia and Europe.

The discussion on local initiatives of various communities actually cuts across the different themes of the Asia Europe People's Forum (AEPF). It builds linkages to establish a convergence among them. And like the rest of the themes, this Open Space will highlight how communities challenge dominant models of development and endeavor to bring these alternatives out of the margins.

The outcome of this activity is to determine ways to establish people-to-people solidarity between practitioners based in Asia and Europe. It will also try to explore recommendations on how European parliamentarians can integrate the principles of alternative regionalism in their policy and development cooperation for the Global South.

Opening Remarks

Raquel Castillo

Sustainability and Participation through Education and Lifelong Learning (SPELL)

Welcome to the thirteenth biennial conference of the Asia Europe People's Forum (AEPF), the first-ever virtual gathering of this platform. The Asia Europe People's Forum is an interregional network of progressive civil society organizations (CSOs) across Asia and Europe. It is committed to fostering people's solidarity for a socially and economically just, inclusive, peaceful, sustainable, and ecologically sensitive development within and across the two regions. The outcome of this conference will take the form of a final declaration that will be presented to the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) of ministers, a summit where our heads of states from Asia and Europe will discuss future priorities and plans.

Our particular session this afternoon, "Converging Alternatives from Asia and Europe towards Alternative Regionalism and People-to-People Solidarity," explores the importance of alternative regionalism within Asia and Europe that is rooted in the alternative practices of communities in these two regions. It is our hope that this opportunity will engender the participation of local communities in the lead-up to the strategic actions that can strengthen people-to-people cooperation and solidarity between Asia and Europe. All of our sessions are recorded and will be made available to the AEPF website, www.aepf.info.

PANEL 1

Alternative Regionalism by Southeast Asian Peoples and People-to-People Solidarity

Dr. Eduardo Tadem

UP Center for Integrative and Development Studies, Philippines

Setting the tone of the session, Dr. Eduardo Tadem discussed regionalism in Southeast Asia. The impetus for alternative regionalism stems from the failure of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to address the issues and concerns of the region's marginalized communities and sectors.

The ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ASEAN Peoples' Forum (ACSC/APF) has been engaging with ASEAN since 2005. Each year, the ACSC/APF has presented an annual statement to ASEAN leaders that reflect Southeast Asian peoples' concerns and recommendations. However, an internal ACSC/APF review from 2005 to 2015 revealed that ten years of engagement with ASEAN had been regularly defined by a prevailing silence and lack of attention and response to ACSC/APF statements. ASEAN and its member governments have consistently resisted and vacillated with regards to civil society participation and engagement. They have been seen to be more comfortable with the private sector and academic and research think tanks than with civil society. Thus, in 2017, the ACSC/APF concluded that the years of critical engagement with ASEAN have not contributed any substantive improvements in peoples' lives and the environment. Issues and concerns raised by civil society continue to

be ignored. As the ACSC/APF points out, there is a lack of meaningful dialogue and the absence of opportunities to interface with ASEAN officials. Both illustrate the shrinking space where civil society can effectively shape the agenda and policies of ASEAN and their respective governments.

What then is the problem with ASEAN and its regional integration model?

Dr. Tadem refers to the ASEAN's model of integration as "integration from above," one that is established, directed, and dominated by the region's elites. Catering to the interests of corporations and political oligarchies, it is defined by state-to-state relations and market-oriented interactions. ASEAN's policies of deregulation, privatization, government and corporate-led trade and investment policies have actually resulted in greater inequalities, and accelerated marginalization, exploitation and inhibition of peace, democracy, development, and social progress. This regional integration model has also bred economic, social, and environmental crises, extensive human rights violations, conflict and violence, and wanton exploitation of natural resources that are overwhelming the region's ecosystem.

What is needed now is an alternative peoples' regionalism.

In its annual gathering held last October 2020, the ACSC/APF proposed the need for an alternative peoples' regionalism. The forum adopted the following resolutions.

1. Develop and adopt a new vision for engagement by civil society with ASEAN based on people-to-people interactions rather than state-to-state relations or purely market-oriented exchanges.
2. This new vision shall lead to the establishment of a new people's regional integration process.
3. The new Southeast Asian people's regional integration process shall be based on, among others, the alternative practices of peoples, networks, and organizations across the region's societies.

In context, grassroots communities, popular organizations, civil society organizations, and social movements have, for many years, been engaged in alternative, heterodox practices. These encompass economic, political, and cultural aspects that directly address the issues and concerns of marginalized classes and sectors.

For four years, the Program on Alternative Development of the University of the Philippines' Center for Integrative and Development Studies (UP CIDS AltDev) has engaged with grassroots communities and civil society organizations. It seeks to promote alternative practices, focusing on their economic, political, and cultural aspects. So far, UP CIDS AltDev has taken these steps in fostering an alternative regionalism:

1. Identify and document, using participatory methods, alternative practices at the grassroots and community level (UP CIDS AltDev has already identified and documented more than fifty alternative practices across Southeast Asia).
2. Establish links between these practices and bring together practitioners so that they can learn from one another and encourage cross-border cooperation (Two gatherings have been held in 2018 and 2019, and the one in 2021 was held online).
3. Hold people-to-people exchanges between practitioners across several countries so that they can share their experiences and knowledge and build networks of trust and solidarity. One has been done in Java, Indonesia, in 2019 and was hosted by the Konfederasi Pergerakan Rakyat Indonesia (KPRI, or Confederation of Indonesian People's Movements), with participants from across Southeast Asia.
4. Establish an alternative to the ASEAN model of regional integration—one based on the existing practices of Southeast Asian peoples across diverse and richly cultured societies. These transcend national borders and are nurtured by the vision of addressing and fulfilling the needs and aspirations of the region's marginalized and excluded populations.

Documented case studies reveal that the practices are primarily imbued by the “principles of solidarity, collectivism, social equality, redistribution, cooperation, mutual benefit, and the commons.” All are mindful of the judicious and responsible use of human and natural resources and the need to establish peace and harmony with nature and other peoples.

When this alternative Southeast Asian regionalism has been established, the mission is to reach out to other areas in the world; identify and link with other alternative regionalisms; and undertake collaborative projects, campaigns, advocacies, and people-to-people exchanges. The grand vision is to confront and challenge at the global level the dominant model of regional integration.

Several alternative practices have been documented. They pertain to the economy, politics, social arrangements, education, and culture.

- Economic practices: people-to-people trade through cooperatives; reviving local markets, social enterprises, sustainable food production systems, organic farming, agroecology, biodiversity, zero-waste production, building forward and backward production and marketing linkages, and community-based renewable energy sources.
- Political practices: expanding networks and international gatherings of CSOs on environmental issues, human rights, peace and human security, and alternative models of popular and participatory local governance.
- Social practices: self-help groups and local networks coordinating their social protection activities: community-based health systems based on primary care, “barefoot” health practitioners, and the development of age-old healing practices using organic and generic medicines.
 - On education: alternative learning practices such as folk schools, nonformal centers, and lifelong-learning advocacies.

- On housing: provisions for a people-oriented shelter program, vernacular architecture, and principles that utilize indigenous designs and technologies.
- Cultural practices: seeing visual artists and performers engage in exchange programs and visits in order to share the richness and diversity of emancipatory Southeast Asian art and culture.

Solidarity Economy and the Urgency of JAMESTA (Universal Basic Income)

Anwar Sastro Ma'ruf

*Konfederasi Pergerakan Rakyat Indonesia
(Confederation of Indonesian People's Movements)*

Anwar Sastro Ma'ruf discussed two crises that have affected Indonesia significantly. The first is the crisis of capitalism. The orientation towards profits has affected workers through the mismanagement of social services, including health care and the economy. This mismanagement was further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020 in which 1 out of 1,000 people were infected. The situation was aggravated by the lack of an adequate response from the Indonesian government. The second crisis pertains to the crisis of democracy. It refers to the repressive policies imposed on workers criticizing the government. The police arrested and imprisoned many such citizens during the pandemic.

The Indonesian government responded to the COVID-19 pandemic by imposing mobility restrictions, which were also used to repress the labor movement. From April to June 2020, it announced a lockdown policy also known as PSBB (Pembatasan Sosial Berskala Besar) or large-scale social restriction. While people complied, they did not receive any support for their basic needs. Unemployment rose because many factories had to close down. Workers were given minimal social assistance, and anyone violating the rules was severely punished. Then, from July to September 2020, the government introduced "new normal" policies, such as physical distancing, wearing of face masks, and regular handwashing. However, behind these health protocols was the suppression of local communities, such as the fishing communities in an island that had opposed a mining project. There also was the forcible dispersal and violent arrest of protesters who commemorated Labor Day. In October, the government issued the Omnibus Law on Job Creation which was deemed controversial, especially since it seriously disregards Indonesian workers' rights. The demonstrations that protested against this law were forcibly dispersed. Protesters were arrested because of health protocol violations.

Between January and February 2021, the Indonesian government administered free vaccines to three million people. But these were only limited to civil servants, the military, and medical workers. The rest of the Indonesian population (183.45 million aged 15–64) had to pay. Even when the total number of COVID-19 cases reached 1.75 million in March 2021, the policies of the Indonesian government did not really change. It imposed its second PSBB.

Despite the situation, KPRI developed its own initiatives. In May 2020, it formulated a mutual aid action program, which encouraged civil society organizations to oversee the distribution of the government's social assistance programs. By taking part in this initiative, they could also participate in social audits. KPRI promoted and strengthened the existing local food system movement, which embodied the solidarity among peasants, fisherfolks, and workers. It also campaigned for a collective, grass-roots, cooperative-based movement. Imbibing the principle of openness and transparency, it protested against the Job Creation Law and advocated for universal basic income and social protection reforms.

Sastro discussed that the fundamental concept of KPRI's solidarity economy stems from its Four Pillars of Economic Development: (1) structuring the base of consumption, (2) structuring production development based on the principles of collectivism and cooperativism, (3) arranging distribution based on the fulfillment of peoples' needs, and (4) building economic institutional sites of cooperation.

Sastro presented the *Konsorsium Pembaruan Agraria* (KPA, Consortium for Agrarian Reform) as an example of an ongoing community-based solidarity economy. KPA distributes rice from peasants to the trade unions. Rice yields from local farmers are brought to the cooperative and then sold to trade unions at an affordable price. This project helps address the farmers' uncertainty over their sales and earnings. KPRI has also developed other grassroots initiatives such as organic farming, public kitchens, and the production of hand sanitizers and disinfectants. It has also studied the development of grassroots-led cooperatives and is now preparing a series of training workshops. The output is a module that the cooperatives will use.

Sastro stressed the importance of social protection. He said that it had been very difficult to campaign for Universal Basic Income (UBI) prior to the pandemic. Only recently has it become more urgent and relevant. In Bahasa, this is referred to as JAMESTA (Jaminan Pendapatan Dasar Semesta, which roughly translates to Universal Basic Income Guarantee). As part of a coalition for JAMESTA, KPRI supports an income model that favors marginalized groups who face discrimination and various socioeconomic problems. JAMESTA also serves as a transition where basic income can be a floor and safety net for citizens who struggle through this crisis and the digitech disruption. It encourages vertical and horizontal synergy in implementing improvements to welfare policy efficiency. The JAMESTA coalition recently had its National Congress. Its activities included building coalitions and formulating concepts, strategies, policy briefs, and position papers. Also, there were a number of public discussions, creative campaigns, peoples' assemblies, and mass actions in online and onsite forums. The KPRI has been working on a module for regions that seek to implement JAMESTA.

COVID-19 Responses of the Philippine Labor Movements and the Role of Women Workers

Judy Ann Miranda

Partido Manggagawa (Workers' Party), Philippines

Representing a workers' political party, Judy Ann Miranda shared the response of the Philippine labor movement to the pandemic and stressed their call for a "workers-first policy." She elaborated that before the health crisis started in the Philippines, the authoritarian rule, the misogynistic character of the Duterte administration, the War on Drugs, and the massive human rights violations had a significant impact on the already shrinking democratic space in the country. With the onset of the pandemic, the surge of COVID-19 cases paralleled the catastrophic response of the government: continuous lockdowns resulting in massive recession, the biggest in Southeast Asia. There also were massive unemployment, hunger, and poverty.

Here are the realities of the government's COVID-19 policies, especially the lockdowns and the continuous disregard of issues affecting labor and women. There were cases of abuse of workers in the manufacturing sector in most of the economic zones, as well as in the different workspaces. The cities of Cebu and Mactan saw the "mother of all layoffs." Four thousand people were retrenched in a garment factory where women comprised 90 percent of employees. Two other apparel factories made an effort to bust unions by retrenching all their leaders and members. A glass factory laid off workers and employed only a skeletal workforce. But the employer actually wanted to bust the union and avoid the collective bargaining agreement. A university and a geothermal plant did not honor end-of-contract obligations. Employers said that because of the COVID-19 pandemic, they could not do so. In these economic zones, the wages and salaries were delayed for months, and were cut by half. Workers were supposed to receive at least US\$10 per day. Employers took advantage of the pandemic to exploit workers and violate labor policies.

The Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) implemented measures and released labor advisories that had many loopholes that

employers could take advantage of. These include wage cuts, extended forced leaves from six months to one year, and suspensions of filing of complaints amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. In this “very crucial period,” Judy pointed out that the actions of the DOLE showed that the agency caters to employers’ interests, not to the struggles for workers’ rights.

The labor movement in the Philippines responded through online and offline protest actions. An online protest took place on Labor Day in 2020, and once quarantine restrictions were relaxed, a rally was held at the Commission on Human Rights and in various freedom areas. The workers then conducted motorcades and protest actions in front of the office of the DOLE. Despite harassment from the police and the military, who used COVID-19 health protocols as an excuse to crack down on workers, they kept protesting. For instance, on March 8, 2021, women workers were able to stage a rally to commemorate International Women’s Day. The police had pushed them back around a Freedom Park and confiscated their streamers.

The Nagkaisa (United) Labor Coalition, convened by Partido Manggagawa together with other organizations such as Sentro, the Federation of Free Workers, the Public Services Labor Confederation, Agila, and United Filipino Service Workers, campaigned around the workers-first policy and sought their protection. Nagkaisa was able to repeal the suspension of rule on filing complaints, leading workers to air their grievances formally against employers. Nagkaisa also stopped the DOLE’s plan to allow the nonpayment of the thirteenth-month pay. As such, labor organizations became more emboldened to criticize the government and the DOLE. Through protests, legal actions, and social media, they were able to voice their concerns and reach out to workers’ federations and organizations.

Women were significantly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Many of them who are solo parents and breadwinners found themselves unemployed, unable to find new jobs. These women have also experienced discrimination. However, they were able to form and lead unions—five from the eco-zones. Despite the health considerations and limitations of online labor education, they consolidated and protested

in front of the DOLE's office. The biggest rally of women in 2021 happened during the commemoration of Women's Month. Around 150 demanded sufficient aid for all workers, a safe-return-to-work policy, free mass testing, safe transportation, pandemic pay, quarantine leave with pay, and vaccination programs.

These protests of first-time women labor union leaders have pressured the DOLE to hold a dialogue involving other government officials. In the dialogue, the women leaders were able to oblige the agency to commit to monitoring cases of union-busting, illegal dismissals, and to comonitoring processes on how workers access justice and return to work. Nagkaisa was also able to get the government to provide sufficient aid for displaced workers, and to demand wage subsidies and income guarantees to all workers affected by the pandemic.

Judy explained that all these initiatives fall within the framework of SOLAR (State of Labor and Its Agenda for Recovery). SOLAR aims to address labor issues beyond the factory level by ensuring a workers-first policy, which calls for a radical transformation that would redound across and beyond this crisis. One of the recommendations is a "wealth tax," or taxing the rich, and to wage a "war against the oligarchy." Nagkaisa also called for a wage increase of PHP100 for all workers amidst inflation and taxes on salaries.

The involvement of women is considered one of the major gains of the labor movement. Judy explained that they always made sure that the demands come straight from the workers themselves. They are empowered through their active participation in meetings and activities. Another major gain is the opportunity to organize and educate these workers, sustaining their activities despite COVID-19 protocols. Judy mentioned that these actions will benefit the call for a just, peaceful, and sustainable world.

Community Resilience in COVID Crisis: Seeds of Rainbow Recovery (Lessons for Justice and Sustainability from India)

Ashish Kothari

Vikalp Sangam (Alternative Confluence), India

Ashish Kothari began his presentation by stressing that India faced a second wave of COVID-19 cases in May 2021. Referring to it as a form of “criminal negligence” and “failure on the part of the Indian state,” he pointed out how it has not applied the lessons from the first wave. His discussion centered on counternarratives: examples of communities’ responses to the pandemic that could have been built upon to deal with the second wave. He added that his presentation is built on many years of effort, including trying to work with the government. But much of the heavy lifting is done on-ground. From across India, such communities and their initiatives have increased throughout South Asia.

Ashish further explained that there are different spheres of life, of meeting basic needs, of meeting aspirations, of going beyond a very inadequate democracy, of tackling issues of social injustice and inequality either in traditional forms like casteism and patriarchy, or new forms of inequality. They have documented almost 2,000 stories, which are available on their website.

The Decca Development Society involves around 5,000 dalit (the outcasts or the untouchable caste) and indigenous women farmers. Because of patriarchy, they are the most oppressed section of Indian society. Facing hunger, malnutrition, and lack of access to education, health, and other social needs, they nevertheless have achieved over the last thirty years what they call “food sovereignty.” They have complete control over everything that concerns food, reviving their traditional varieties of millet, rice, and pulses, among others. Turning completely to organic agriculture, these women formed committees or organizations in each of the villages, joined larger federations, and have fought for women’s land rights. All these efforts have transformed their lives. During the pandemic, they attained food self-sufficiency.

Apart from that, they have provided food relief for their community and have even effectively avoided COVID-19 infections in many villages. For instance, they have distributed 20,000 kg of food grains and 1,000 glasses of millet porridge daily to municipal workers, health workers, and the police.

The Maha Gram Sabha in Gadchiroli, Maharashtra, Central India, is a federation of 90 indigenous villages in the highly forested Gadchiroli area. It aims to stop mining, foster sustainable livelihoods, struggle for forest rights and conservation, establish local governance, and promote women's empowerment and cultural identity. It distinguishes itself from the national government of India by pointing out that: [While there is a] "government in Mumbai and Delhi, we are the government in our village." Villages have worked together over the last few years to form a federation of village assemblies, or what is locally known as gram sabhas, to assert their collective rights to reclaim the forest, their source of livelihood. These indigenous communities established village funds that provided food relief for the hungry and for returning migrant workers who were affected by the pandemic.

Kunariya, a mixed-religion and mixed-pasture village in Kachchh, Western India, implemented its own set of health and safety measures to address the COVID-19 pandemic before the catastrophic lockdown of the Indian government. The measures are still in place. Furthermore, Kunariya insisted on continuing their economic activities within the village, in contrast to many parts of India where the lockdown left people unemployed. Today, the community is trying to become self-sufficient by producing goods (including daily household needs such as soap and footwear) using their local resources. They do not have to buy them outside Kunariya.

Ashish mentioned that Vikalp Sangam has documented in five volumes sixty examples of community resilience initiatives. He then shared lessons that can be drawn from the cases of the Decca Development Society, the Maha Gram Sabha, and Kunariya.

One lesson is the importance of either sustaining or rebuilding community spirit. Ashish mentioned that because of decades of colonization and the development and ways of a centralized governance

after independence, communities in India have somehow lost their practices. Sustaining or rebuilding this community spirit is needed while tackling inequalities.

Another lesson is the importance of (re)establishing collective rights of local communities to natural resources and challenging capitalist hegemony. These resources could be forests, agricultural lands, coastal areas, machinery, tools, and anything that is relevant to production.

The third is the localization of political decision-making and the creation of alternative forms of democracy. These are referred to as *Swaraj*, which means self-rule not just for the country but also for the people. This is about flipping the concept of democracy over, from “rule by the central government” to “rule by every local community in villages and towns.”

The fourth lesson is strengthening localized self-reliance against economic globalization, which, Ashish pointed out, had made more people vulnerable to the global capitalist economy. For communities, this is about their control of at least basic needs such as food, energy, water, production, and manufacturing. It also includes localized exchange, which many Indian communities have practiced to cope with the COVID-19 lockdown. For instance, they sell their produce to nearby local consumers. This sense of self-reliance becomes important, especially since this kind of crisis is going to recur.

Underlying all these is the realization that communities are responsible for and respectful towards nature, which encompasses all species in an ecosystem. Another realization is to continue making the state accountable for the kind of welfare, including health services, that it is supposed to be providing.

Ashish explained that this is a holistic framework for transformation, where changes take place across different spheres—political, economic, social, cultural, and ecological. He discussed the efforts of *Vikalp Sangam* at the national level to bring together movements, organizations, and individuals for collaboration and mutual learning. They can share each other's strengths and go beyond each

other's weaknesses to build a macro-critical mass that will effect policy changes, affect the larger economic and political structures, and create an ideal collective vision of what India should be.

Meanwhile, after learning from this process and other similar initiatives such as those in Southeast Asia comes the need to connect through a "global tapestry of alternatives." This Global Tapestry of Alternatives is trying to create a "horizontal weaving," a confluence of radical movements around the world that challenges the top-down character of hierarchical organizations. This horizontal weaving is becoming critical now to both address the current COVID-19 and future crises.

Recapitulation

Raquel Castillo noted how the JAMESTA campaign in Indonesia had been considered utopian before the pandemic. However, COVID-19 has made it necessary. For her, Judy's and Ashish's presentations showed the importance of workers' collective rights, and of building, rebuilding, and making more communities sustainable. The approach should be holistic. It must include ecological responsibility and holding states accountable for their actions. She noted that these are the elements that underpin the concept of alternative regionalism and people-to-people solidarity.

Open Forum

RAQUEL. One of the questions was “With all these community initiatives. This would really require innovations, of course, and new ways of doing things. How and where do we get the funding for these? How do we come up with resources so that we can push through with these alternatives?”

ED. I actually responded to the person who asked that, and I said that these alternative practices have been going on, and have been around for decades, if not more. And they are actually based on self-reliance. They are communities that do not need much funds to set up these alternative practices because especially in the rural areas, they are able to utilize their principles of solidarity, self-help, utilizing the commons—what is available in their areas—based on indigenous sources.

RAQUEL. To put it out there, and as Ashish said earlier, the communities are becoming self-reliant and pooling their own resources actually to address their own conditions, and also to bring out their own initiatives. That would be one way. Sastro, you are also asked about how it would be feasible to have JAMESTA. How it would be funded?

SASTRO. JAMESTA is still a concept, and further funding from the state budget is needed. I think we can have an alternative based on

people-to-people solidarity. And while still a concept, there are people from many major regions in Indonesia who approached us for assistance in, for example, doing documentation in their district or city. So far, the best practices in realizing Universal Basic Income is still at the local level. And the second, I think it is also very important to respond to assistance. This is the spirit of how to deal with many grassroots initiatives in the world. There is a need for networking where we can learn altogether. And I think UP CIDS (AltDev), which is very good in documentation, can help build a good network while we work together at the grassroots level for the initiatives. The real alternative is in fighting together against capitalism. Thank you.

ASHISH. I agree with Ed and Sastro. I will just make an additional point. Right now, what is happening in India is that we have legitimized the state to take money away from us in terms of taxes and other kinds of revenue generation. And so a lot of the money is actually concentrated in the state. And with the extent that the state exists right now, I think we also need to fight in getting that money back, which is to say that the allocations that are made must be made in these sectors—for livelihoods, for health. I mean, why do we have such a crisis in India right now? Because all of the money is in the government, but they could not even put it into public health, which is what they should have done. In the short run, I think we also need to fight for accountability. In the long run, we should work for self-provisioning. There is no need for funding. And I agree with Ed there. That in fact, with these community initiatives, we do not necessarily need outside funding. But right now, people have been impoverished in many parts of the world because of colonization or the way in which our nation-states have behaved. And I think it also becomes right to demand reparation from the state for the communities.

RAQUEL. Thank you, Ashish, for that intervention. There are a couple of questions here, but maybe we will look at something that cuts across, or is similar to, what others are asking. We are looking right now at alternative grassroots initiatives and people in the community, as well as their responses to the pandemic. How could we sustain this and how could we make this more effective? The questions actually are, “How do we ensure that we are able to surmount the divisions within

communities, among sectors, among trade unions even if others have different beliefs, different ideologies? How can we actually build the prerequisite which is solidarity? How can we go there, but at the same time how can we overcome all these sectarian tendencies?

JUDY. On the question of the labor movement in the Philippines, we are trying hard to work on unity. In the last May 1 Labor Day commemoration, we had the broadest possible unity, working on the calls for jobs, sufficient aid for all workers, the call for free and safe vaccines for all, labor rights, human rights, and national sovereignty in relation to the incursion of the Chinese government in the Philippines and its seas. Using a more popular approach to inform the public on these issues remains a problem among us progressive groups to avoid labels such as “very progressive” or “leftist.” Red-tagging is a challenge among us. Labor leaders are being tagged as “leftists,” and our demands are perceived as too radical to be accepted by everyone. But the reality is that the pandemic has resulted in an economic crisis that exposed the worst conditions of capitalism, the gross neglect of governments across the world, and has shown the capacity of workers who are already at the forefront of the COVID-19 response. These are the people whom we should put first because they are the force who ensure that the economy is going and that things are done despite COVID-19. But workers are already out there being cannon fodder for COVID-19. I think the reality and the radicalization are in place because people are now so discontented with what is happening, which allowed them to open themselves to more radical ideas. But yes, we understand that we have to be more creative by using digital platforms, using social media, and packaging our calls and advocacies to become more approachable. I think that is a very good proposal and assignment for everyone so that workers among the grassroots could embrace our demands and the alternatives for peace, justice, and a better society for all.

PANEL 2

European Perspective about Regional Integration, the EU and People-to-people Solidarity

Alex de Jong

International Institute for Research and Education, Netherlands

Alex de Jong's presentation focused on regional integration from a European perspective and from the experience of the European Union (EU). He mentioned that many of the criticisms hurled at ASEAN applies to the EU to a very high degree. This is a regional integration project that is focused on states, on the cooperation between states and their governments to the exclusion of engagement with grassroots movements and people-to-people solidarity and cooperation.

His second point, from a progressive viewpoint on the EU project, was to keep neoliberal fundamentalism in mind, especially when talking about the role of the Netherlands in the EU project. That project has taken shape in practice but is not built on the theory of a community of value. The EU is a community with a clearly defined core, consisting especially of the Netherlands and Germany, and the peripheral countries in the east and the south of Europe. Given this, the Netherlands has been a relatively important player since the beginning of the EU project, into which it has been deeply and tightly integrated. It was one of the six founding members of the European Coal and Steel Community formed in 1952, which was the precursor to the European Union. The Netherlands is the second-largest exporter within the EU. Around half of its exports remain therein.

The weaknesses of the EU's integration project emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic. It showed the lack of support for the victimized population and the failure to develop comprehensive international guidelines for its member states. Instead, there was a recurring pattern of competition among them. They drew on their own agendas, confounding how people responded to the pandemic, what they should expect, and what kind of support they could rely on from their respective governments.

In the case of the Netherlands, the country first downplayed the threat of the pandemic. And like other European states, it refused to learn from the experiences of the countries like Vietnam and Taiwan that successfully contained the crisis. Instead, the strategy of the Netherlands was not to eradicate the virus but simply to control its spread. This approach was framed partly by neoliberal concerns. Rather than providing social support for workers, the Netherlands focused on maintaining its pre-pandemic economy. At the same time, large parts of the progressive movements and social organizations in The Netherlands and other countries failed to formulate radical alternatives to the situation. Instead, these organizations supported their governments' initiatives without raising the fundamental demands for urgent issues, including the need to lift vaccine patents and address a global pattern of "vaccine apartheid," as the World Health Organization (WHO) deemed it.

The Netherlands has since relaxed COVID-19 restrictions because of a successful vaccination campaign. However, countries such as India have been experiencing surges in COVID-19 cases. For social movements and progressives in European countries, this too is a manifestation of vaccine apartheid. The priority, Alex suggested, is to mobilize against this injustice: to demand the lifting of vaccine patents and regulate vaccine production. Patents limit people's access to vaccines because rich countries hoard them at the expense of the Global South.

Alex also elaborated on the impact and intensification of existing inequalities in the Netherlands and Europe. Women are overrepresented in the health sector, while migrant communities and people of color dominate manual or low-skilled jobs that cannot be performed from home. They need to report for work and endure poor housing conditions.

Interestingly, the Netherlands is one of the most unequal among the developed industrialized countries and the most unequal in the EU. This inequality is reinforced by wealth distribution where 10 percent of the population owns 70 percent of the country's wealth.

Alex ended his discussion by presenting two recently launched alternatives. While some social movements and progressives have supported their governments' COVID-19 approach, the Federatie Nederlandse Vakbeweging (FMV, Federation of Dutch Trade Unions) Trade Union Central has several demands: people's benefits as part of a COVID-19 package and a minimum wage increase. The latter is the first step in fighting against inequality and the adverse consequences of the pandemic. The second initiative is a manifesto, circulated internationally, demanding the lifting of vaccine patents.

Initiatives of Community-Based Medical Front Liners in Border Communities

Ko Gyi Kyaw

Back Pack Health Workers Team (BPHWT), Thai-Burma border

Ko Gi Kyaw discussed the Back Pack Health Workers Team (BPHWT). Founded in 1998, it has worked with health workers from the Karen, Mon, and Karenni areas in the Andaman area in Myanmar (Burma), which was experiencing heavy conflict at that time. The organization has provided healthcare to internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the least stable conflict zones. It aims to ensure that communities can access adequate medical care, acquire knowledge to promote their health, and manage and sustain the provision of these services.

The BPHWT envisions a sustainable, community-based primary healthcare system not only in rural Burma but also across the country. It has two kinds of healthcare services. One is a mobile team with around three to five healthcare workers, and the other type is the station clinic, each with seven to eight workers. There are 57 station clinics. In 2020, the BPHWT had 481 health workers. It handled 61,031 cases and served 311,905 people, including IDPs and indigenous peoples.

Kyaw underscored that Burma is now in a deep crisis. The BPHWT has formulated strategies to address the COVID-19 pandemic since March 23, 2020, when the first case in Myanmar was reported, and during the second surge in August 2020. In the city of Sittwe, Rakhine State in western Myanmar, the BPHWT implemented quarantine protocols and provided services. It formulated “new normal” measures such as travel restrictions between villages (with permits from village authorities); community-based quarantines (which may be either done at home or in camps); provision of sanitary kits and personal protective equipment; clinic renovations for those with fever; COVID-19 awareness training programs for health workers and field volunteers; and assessments of “knowledge, attitude, and practice.”

Since the military coup on February 1, 2021, which detained union and state/region government leaders, university students in Yangon organized protest actions. They were joined by doctors, nurses, government employees, bank employees, monks, and the general public who later participated in the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) in cities and towns throughout Myanmar.

The Burmese military and police have since been arresting CDM protesters, 8888 Generation leaders, bloggers, and entertainment personalities. Human rights violations escalated when the military enforced arbitrary gun shootings, nighttime arrests, and killings of civilians. The junta also violated medical neutrality when a health worker was beaten to death, which earned strong condemnation. It has also committed abuses against pregnant women. These human rights violations occur not only in the urban areas. The military junta also sow terror in border areas such as Mutraw District of Northern Karen State, located at the border of Thailand and Myanmar. They launched airstrikes at night, using Mikoyan MIG29s to attack villages such as Day Bu Nu village in the Lu Thaw Township of Mutraw District in this Northern Karen State. On March 27, 2021, three civilians were killed, seven were wounded, and over 30,000 people were internally displaced. They are still hiding in the jungle.

As the health and political crisis escalated, hospitals and government departments ceased operating. In response, the BPHWT prepared an emergency health plan for political activists and IDPs. This plan included providing medicines, supplies, and equipment; setting up clinics near downtown for urban communities; and promoting primary and secondary health care. These programs have benefited the community, especially pregnant women. The BPHWT has coordinated with local authorities regarding evacuation plans for IDPs and political activists. It has conducted first-aid training for field health workers and volunteers and has provided first aid kits. The BPHWT has also supplied not only medicines and healthcare services but also food, shelter, and WASH (drinkable water, sanitation, and hygiene), which was sourced from in-kind donations.

The BPHWT appeals to international communities to become aware of the humanitarian crisis in Myanmar, to eschew cooperating with the military junta, and to support instead the call to transform the country into a federal democracy. The organization also appeals to international agencies, including the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNCHR), to provide cross-border aid directly to civil society organizations and communities based in Myanmar. There are security issues in bank transactions as a result of military control over the banking system. Kyaw appeals to the international community to become aware of the harsh situation and that the people want to live with dignity and have their rights recognized.

Music Beyond Borders

Bong Ramilo

Asian Music for People's Peace and Progress (aMP3), Southeast Asia

The Asian Music for People's Peace and Progress (aMP3) is a collective comprised of progressive musicians, songwriters, and social activists from Asia. Focusing on establishing links between communities of artists, the organization was founded by Jesus Manuel "Kuyang Jess" Santiago in 2011. He had made contacts during his fellowship visits in different Asian countries and built ties with activist singer-songwriters.

aMP3 has been trying to meet annually over the last ten years. The last meeting took place in Bangkok in 2019, and at the ASEAN Peoples' Forum that year. They have continued to foster solidarity and mutual aid. Translating songs from different Asian communities into other Asian languages, they spread the message of these art works to a wider audience. The organization also engages in cocreating songs and music to establish a convergence of diverse musical and linguistic traditions of Southeast Asia. Bong treats these efforts as "works in progress."

aMP3 conducted a series of online activities via Facebook from March to April 2020. These solidarity activities featured fourteen performances from musical acts, including The Messenger Band (Cambodia), Ae Nitikul (Thailand), Atan Ronquillo (the Philippines), Sandrayati Fay (Indonesia), Ego Lemos (Timor-Leste), Jenny Kuewa (Karen based in Thailand), and Chi Suwichan (Karen based in Thailand). Aside from these performances, aMP3 also held an online discussion, "Sama-Sama: Diskurso," which tackled musicians' responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. The event featured Sandrayati Fay, Chi Suwichan, Jenny Kuewa, Jess Santiago, and Judy Pasimio (the Philippines).

During the lockdown, the organization also had a food exchange program between indigenous rice farmers in the highland communities in Thailand and a fishing community in Phuket. This food exchange program also involved songwriting sessions and several online conversations and meetings to talk about their lives. aMP3 has also

supported fundraising efforts to aid communities, including Babayenihan (organized by Lilak) and Kayakap (which raised funds for working musicians). They also launched a campaign to support fellow musicians who lost their jobs due to the pandemic.

aMP3 has also conducted solidarity campaigns with Myanmar, featuring Ae Nitikul's song, "The Birds Haven't Stopped Calling." They also had discussion with Mon Mon Myat on the role of music as the voice of protest in the country, while The Messenger Band wrote several songs, one especially for the struggling peoples. Meanwhile, Sandrayati Fay collaborated with Damien Rice for a song about Berta Cáceres, the late Latin American ecological activist.

Note: Ae's song "The Birds Haven't Stopped Calling" was played after Bong's presentation as a form of cultural expression of solidarity to the peoples of Burma/Myanmar.

Reactions

Ashish noted the importance of including a European perspective (through the presentation of Alex). After the panel presentation, he also requested that participants express their solidarity to the people of Burma/Myanmar. Through Bong's presentation, he thanked and congratulated all artists who collaborated for the Burma/Myanmar song. He acknowledged the way the arts can be considered a way of expressing solidarity.

Open Forum

ASHISH. One of the questions is for Alex. "What is the policy on migrants in the Netherlands right now?" Maybe you can expand that to the European Union. Alex, can you give a quick response?

ALEX. Most travel into the country is still banned, and that's a policy shared by other European Union countries. There are a few exceptions, but in general, the travel bans are still in place for, let's say non-European Union countries. That is still the situation, and I expect not much change any time soon.

ASHISH. Thank you. Question to Kyaw: "Is your organization getting enough funding and supplies to address the crisis of COVID-19—seeing the people and IDPs fleeing from the fighting in the ethnic areas?"

KYAW. Yes. Thanks for the question. We try to cover those people in the COVID-19 situation. However, the funding does not cover the whole targeted area. The funding only covers the targeted Thai border area and the poorest in the Thai border area because the conflict and the fighting there have escalated.

ASHISH. Thank you. We'll take one final question, which any of you can answer. "How can you assess the level of civil society

cooperation with the ASEAN?" This is something, I think, that Ed also referred to, but anybody is welcome to give a quick response.

ED. Yeah. Very briefly, although I refer to this in my presentation—how about ASEAN's attitude towards CSOs? A major problem here is how ASEAN defines the CSOs (civil society organizations) that it will engage with and listen to. And they define such CSOs as those organizations who will adhere to the ASEAN vision and the ASEAN model of regional integration. In other words, those CSOs that would not subscribe to the ASEAN vision and the ASEAN model of regional integration will not be paid attention to. And they will not be supported in any way. And we have brought out this maldefinition by ASEAN of CSOs because it goes against the universally accepted definitions: "independent and autonomous organizations who are outside the state nexus and therefore cannot be controlled by government organizations."

ASHISH. Thanks, Ed. So I think we'll move now to the final session. I just want to end this by expressing that we have a similar situation with the South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation, or SAARC as it is called. And obviously, as many of those speakers have said, one of the reasons for this is that way too much power is concentrated in our national governments/nation-state, and of course, in all the private corporations that are also running in our countries. We have to fight for much more radical decision-making, democracy, economic localization, and everything else that all the panelists have spoken about. We must continue the fight for solidarity, for justice with affected peoples, including Burma/Myanmar. With that, and with the hope of much more solidarity and cooperation amongst our different regions—Asia-Europe, Southeast Asia, South Asia, East Asia—there's a lot more that we can do together.

SOLIDARITY ACTION

Why Culture of Solidarity?

Khin Sandar

Milk Tea Alliance

The Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) is a movement protesting the military junta's seizure of power in Myanmar. It began with the actions of doctors, nurses, and factory workers on February 2, 2021, a day after the coup d'état. The movement conducted a pans-and-pots campaign every night at 20:00. Following Burmese tradition, it signified the presence of evil (i.e., the junta) and the need to drive it away. People in Myanmar protested in various forms on the streets throughout that February, expressing their dissent.

In March 2021, the Burmese army cracked down on the protesters. There were night arrests, and those arrested were treated brutally. Many were killed. However, the people did not give up. Resistance spread across different sectors, generations, and areas in the Spring Revolution (the CDM).

Though the public could not go out in the aftermath of the crackdown, continuing police brutality elicited opposition in different forms. Solidarity from around the globe emboldened the people of Myanmar to continue protesting, despite fears that they might be shot, arrested, and tortured. More young people joined the CDM. As of May 18, 2021, 781+ people were killed, 4,916+ people were arrested, and more than 50,000 people were displaced.

Khin appealed to the participants to support Myanmar and to lobby states to provide such solidarity through the “three global cut” and “three global support” strategies.

The “three global cut” strategies are:

- Cut money: targeted sanctions against the Burmese military junta
- Cut arms: ceasing support to the Burmese military government
- Cut impunity: considering the filing of cases to the International Criminal Court regarding extrajudicial killings under the Burmese military government.

The “three global support” strategies are:

- Support NUG: supporting and working with the National Unity Government (NUG)
- Support aid: providing aid, especially to ethnic areas whose people are internally displaced
- Support solidarity: expressing solidarity with the Civil Disobedience Movement.

Three months after the coup, the Civil Disobedience Movement in Myanmar established the Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CPRH) and held elections for parliament members. The movement also formed a National United Consultative Council (NUCC) composed of civil society groups, ethnic leaders, and stakeholders. The movement worked on a federal charter aiming to form the NUG. In two years, the NUG envisions the formation of the People Defense Forces to protect people from the brutal threat of the junta even when they are in the safety of their homes.

Khin mentioned that “Myanmar democracy is world democracy.” Considering that the struggle to restore the country’s democracy is part of ensuring democracy in the world, it is therefore important to foster solidarity with the people of Myanmar, who struggle against

dictatorship in the twenty-first century and condemn murder as a means to seize power. Khin also expressed support for solidarity actions everywhere in the globe.

ANNEX

Profile of Speakers

Raquel Castillo is the lead convener of SPELL (Sustainability and Participation through Education and Lifelong Learning), a community-based organization that fosters alternative learning approaches for students.

Dr. Eduardo Tadem is the convener of the University of the Philippines Center for Integrative and Development Studies Program on Alternative Development. He is the former president of the Freedom from Debt Coalition, and an author and editor. He has a PhD in Southeast Asian Studies from the National University of Singapore and is a retired professor of Asian Studies at UP Diliman.

Anwar Sastro Ma'ruf is from Indonesia and is the secretary-general of the Konfederasi Pergerakan Rakyat Indonesia, or KPRI (Konfederasi Pergerakan Rakyat Indonesia or Confederation of Indonesian People's Movements), a multisector confederation and grassroots organization in Indonesia. He was a former labor leader and organizer.

Judy Ann Miranda is the secretary-general of Partido Manggagawa (Workers' Party), a political party for workers in the Philippines. She heads the Women's Committee of the labor coalition, Nagkaisa (United). She was the vice president of Women's Day Off, a nongovernment organization (NGO) for women laborers. She

was full-time worker in social movements while studying at the University of the Philippines Manila, and she was able to finish her bachelor's degree a few years ago. She is now pursuing her master's degree in public administration.

Ashish Kothari is from India. He is an author, an editor, coordinator of Vikalp Sangam (Alternative Confluence) and the Global Tapestry on Alternatives. He is the founder of the Indian environmental group, Kalpavriksh.

Alex de Jong is from the Netherlands and is the codirector of the International Institute for Research and Education. He works with the funding agency, Het Actiefonds, and is a contributor to *Jacobin* magazine.

Ko Gyi Kyaw is an executive board member of the Back Pack Health Workers Team, a community-based organization that provides primary healthcare in conflict-affected and rural areas of Burma, which are otherwise inaccessible. He is also currently the organization's human resources coordinator with over ten years of experience. He has a master's degree in public health (international) in Khon Kaen University of Thailand.

Bong Ramilo is a Filipino musician and member of the Asian Music for Peoples' Peace and Progress (aMP3). It is a collective of progressive and socially engaged musicians from across Asia, which is helping bridge and unite communities of artists into one village—a village of peoples' music and art.

Khin Sandar is a human rights activist and civic educator. She is currently very active as an organizer in Myanmar. She is also the spokesperson of the General Strike Collaboration Committee in that country, and she has actively engaged in the Civil Disobedience Movement against the military junta. She is also one of the conveners of the Milk Tea Alliance.

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