

**YOUNG PROGRESSIVES SOUTHEAST ASIA (YPSEA)**  
**A Proposed Charter of Principles Defining the Framework  
Of a Regional Policy for Young People in Southeast Asia**  
**(Common Agenda 2009-2015)**

Introduction

We, the Young Progressives of Southeast Asia, who are in school- and community-based organizations, youth wings of democratic political parties, non-government and community-based organizations and social movements, representing the Young People of ASEAN Member States of Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand and Timor Leste;

1. Sharing a vision of a more caring, people-centered community of nations in Southeast Asia based on the values of participatory democracy, solidarity, equality, social justice, sustainability, peace, human rights and freedom;
2. Aware of the common problems, interests and aspirations of the young people of Southeast Asia;
3. Affirming the UNESCAP principle that three key issues must be addressed in providing a voice for young people in society and in the region: *access and benefit, ability to influence and equity*;
4. Recognizing the vast disparities in the quality of education throughout the Southeast Asia;
5. Convinced that better access to education is vital for young people's empowerment and for national and regional development;
6. Alarmed by the fact that young people are often left out of policy- and decision-making processes on issues affecting them and most young people have low levels of participation in their societies;
7. Desirous of promoting more opportunities for employment and ensuring safeguards for decent work of young people in the region;
8. Concerned at the extreme levels of gender discrimination and inequality within Southeast Asian societies;
9. Alarmed by the increasing number of health issues affecting young people globally and in the Southeast Asian region and the lack of immediate and coherent action on the part of governments and the social awareness in addressing such issues and conditions;
10. Reaffirming our determination to promote the interests of young people in Southeast Asia,

Propose this document to the ASEAN to formulate the framework of a Southeast Asia Regional Policy on Young People and guide the details of National Youth Policies to be adopted, elaborated, codified and implemented by ASEAN member states in their respective countries and contexts.

## **Basis for Action**

In increasingly complex societies and in a region undergoing ‘deeper integration,’ with its many challenges and opportunities, defining a common frame of principles to promote, guarantee and protect the socio-economic and political rights of young people, as well as to ensure their welfare is increasingly important and urgent.

While a roadmap to an ‘ASEAN community’ by 2015 has been defined under a new ASEAN Charter, the development of specific across-the-board policies within countries and across the region remains difficult. Many issues still have to be sufficiently addressed: the low or token political participation of young people, the lack of employment opportunities and decent working conditions of young workers, lack of access to – and poor quality of – education, health policies that are unresponsive to the needs of young people, the largely uncoordinated or incoherent approaches to young people’s autonomy, among others. Inaction is mainly due to the lack of resolve of governments and leaders, the lack of resources available to young people and the difficulties in defining national and regional priorities that will directly benefit the young population.

The YPSEA – as a Southeast Asian network of young people – proposes measures to overcome such difficulties in the period 2009-2015, with a strong push from ASEAN and the national leaders of each Member State and with the meaningful participation of progressive national and regional people’s organizations. Such increased attention and a more coherent approach to young people’s issues will lead to specific improvements that can be seen and felt by young people, their organizations and communities.

The principles of this Charter are intended to apply to a regional policy for young people in Southeast Asia, to commence specifically with ASEAN member states. These principles shall also constitute a basis for minimum standards and quality measures which should be established in each Southeast Asian country as elements of a comprehensive and coherent national youth policy.

This proposed Charter covers the following priority policy areas:

1. Promoting the Participation of Young People, as Equal Citizens, in National and Regional Policy- and Decision-Making Processes
2. Improving the Access to and Quality of Education
3. Improving the Safeguards to Health
4. Promoting Employment Opportunities and Decent Work for Young People
5. Promoting and Defending Human Rights

*Who exactly are the Young People/ Youth?*

Across the region, there is no common agreement on the definition of who are covered by the category “young people” or “youth.” This presents a number of problems especially when it comes to targeting constituencies for national or regional programs and services for young people, as well as for purposes of demographic mapping. This Charter proposes to set the age range between **15-30 years old**.

## **Our Common Agenda**

### **I. A POLICY FOR IMPROVED PARTICIPATION AND DEMOCRACY**

#### **The participation of young people, as equal citizens, in national and regional policy- and decision-making processes must be promoted.**

Young people represent the best asset for the common future of ASEAN societies and the driving force of our societies today, and should therefore be seen as equal citizens with active roles in creating, implementing, monitoring and evaluating policies that affect them.

There can be no effective policies for young people without the active participation of young people themselves in the policy- or decision-making processes. Policies for young people must be “owned” by them.

To achieve such an objective, it is necessary to implement concrete measures to open up avenues for greater participation, capacitate young people to engender meaningful participation, and empower young people at local, national and regional levels by removing patent hurdles to full participation.

To this end, young people calls on ASEAN Governments to build enabling institutions, mechanisms and processes to foster dynamic participation of young people in national and regional affairs.

1. A **comprehensive, coherent, cross-sector National Youth Policy (NYP)** must be drafted, enacted and implemented in all Southeast Asian countries
  - 1.1. The drafting of the NYP shall be in accordance with the principles and processes identified by the International Council on National Youth Policy (ICNYP). The drafting of and the deliberations on the NYP shall be open, inclusive and pluralistic; all stakeholders, most particularly youth, shall be informed, encouraged and enabled to participate in all aspects of formulating the NYP;
  - 1.2. Young people shall participate the regular review and monitoring of the implementation of the NYP at all levels, i.e., short-and medium-term monitoring and consequent adjustment of programs as the NYP is subjected to periodic reviews;
  - 1.3. Government authorities, in coordination with civil society, must closely identify the impediments to young people’s participation in the drafting of the NYP and urgently address these ;
  - 1.4. As a genuine cross-sector policy on young people, the NYP shall be implemented with high-level harmonization of policies that impact on young people across government ministries or agencies; and an independent body of young people’s representatives (e.g., the NYC) shall pivot this coordination process, in coordination with civil society organizations, with support and additional resources from government agencies or ministries.
  - 1.5. National youth bodies (e.g., national youth councils) shall facilitate the formulation of NYP and the implementation thereof.

2. **Independent and self-governing national youth bodies or platforms** – that may take the form of National Youth Councils or Commissions (NYC) – shall be established in all ASEAN countries through legislation.
  - 2.1. The national youth body or NYC shall be organized with a clear mandate to regularly consult and coordinate with young people – with special attention to disadvantaged and marginalized groups and to young people with specific needs – on the national agenda for young people, monitor the implementation of relevant programs and policies promoting young people’s rights and welfare, regularly evaluate the impact of these, and propose policies and programs to local and national legislative bodies to improve services and young people’s welfare;
  - 2.2. The structure and leadership of the NYC shall be independent and autonomous; it shall not be an ‘attached’ agency to other national offices or ministries to be better insulated from political pressures and patronage;
  - 2.3. There shall be an open, transparent and democratic national process of selection of NYC leaders that shall be participated in exclusively by young people’s representatives, organizations and sectors. National authorities shall provide support for this selection process and ensure that it will be monitored by independent non-government groups.
  - 2.4. Gender balance shall be observed in the selection process of NYC leadership.
  - 2.5. The NYC shall sustain stronger, direct links with its youth constituencies through conducting regular consultations and having clear accountability mechanisms in place;
  - 2.6. The NYC shall have ex-officio functions in national departments or ministries that undertake programs that target or impact on young people;
  - 2.7. The NYC shall have sufficient access to government resources and agencies to be able to undertake its mandate.
  - 2.8. Strategies must be identified to ensure that national youth bodies are transparent and accountable in their representations to the youth consultation mechanisms at the ASEAN and other regional bodies.
  
3. Concrete steps shall be undertaken by national authorities to introduce “**youth budgeting**” as a way of mainstreaming young people in the local and national budgetary process.
  - 3.1. Budget measures and budget lines should be at all levels assessed with young people’s participation and inputs.
  - 3.2. National and local bodies tasked with planning the revenues and expenditures shall at all times consider the aspect of intergenerational solidarity and demographic change.
  
4. ASEAN Governments shall recognize, promote, guarantee and protect young people’s **right to information** as a crucial element in improving young people’s participation, and shall endeavor to codify this right into relevant regional conventions on human rights and fundamental freedoms and in national legislation.
  - 4.1. National legislation on the right of information shall define information services for young people that are consistent with internationally recognized standards on accessibility, affordability and appropriateness.
    - 4.1.1. The equality of access to information for all young people, regardless of their situation, origin, gender, religion, political affiliation or social category shall be

- guaranteed. Special attention should be paid to disadvantaged groups and to young people with specific needs;
- 4.1.2. Information centers that cater to young people should be easily accessible, attractive for young people, free and should have operating hours that suits young people's needs.
  - 4.1.3. States shall provide instruments and resources to ensure that young people shall have access both to information provided via modern information and communication technologies, and the skills required in using them.
  - 4.2. No law shall be enacted to abridge young people's right to information. In instances where this right is abridged in the name of national security, national legislation shall define safeguards and parameters against abuse, ensuring that such right is not permanently reduced.
5. Consistent with the principle of inter-generational solidarity, **ASEAN Governments and the ASEAN regional bodies shall provide services, support and financial resources accessible to young people's non-government or community-based organizations to enable them to actively take part in governance as part of an active and pluralistic civil society.** Supporting youth NGOs and similar formations contribute to further the enhancement of young people's capacities and empowerment to fulfill their role as government's partners in socio-political, economic and cultural development.
  6. **Mechanisms for young people's participation in ASEAN processes shall be made more inclusive** to ensure that young peoples' perspectives, insights and interests, especially those of young people from disadvantaged and underrepresented groups and sectors, are solicited and addressed. The 'new ASEAN' must be a 'Young People's ASEAN' as well.

As the regional integration project gains additional momentum, it will be useful for the regional body to get young people interested in this project. Thus:

- 6.1. Young people and all citizens must be informed of what ASEAN institutions do and why they matter. **Increased familiarization with the ASEAN bodies and decision-making processes** can contribute to the steps toward a meaningful Southeast Asian integration process and the best way of guaranteeing a cross-border debate on issues affecting people's lives.
- 6.2. New coordination structures, to fully involve young people in the design, implementation, review and monitoring of the ASEAN policy agenda for young people, must be designed. A **regional network of young people** composed of representatives from national youth bodies and civil society networks of young people should be regularly convened to discuss and propose policies for addressing and proposing solutions for issues affecting young people in the region and increase their representation.
- 6.3. The youth agenda to be proposed by the regional young people's network shall be made part of the agenda at the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Youth (AMMY)/ Senior Officials Meeting on Youth (SOMY), and other bodies that may be set up with the mandate to resolve the common socio-political problems among the young people of ASEAN member countries.
- 6.4. In ASEAN summits and high-level meetings, an interface with young people's representatives shall be arranged, in coordination with civil society groups.

- 6.5. Both the **young people’s consultative mechanism** and the **regional young people’s agenda** that it shall propose must be introduced and articulated within the ensuing work plans, programs, agreements and declarations related to the Socio-Cultural Community Blueprint of the ASEAN and in other relevant blueprints and work plans.

## **II. A POLICY FOR EDUCATION**

### **The improvement of access to and the quality of education shall at all times be the priority in terms of budget and programs of Southeast Asian countries.**

Education forms the basis for self-development and self-fulfillment of all individuals, which starts from a young age. It is a right, not a privilege. The UNESCO Education for All (EFA) Campaign states: “Education is a fundamental human right. It is the key to sustainable development and peace and stability within and among countries, and thus an indispensable means for effective participation in the societies and economies of the twenty-first century, which are affected by rapid globalization. Achieving EFA goals should be postponed no longer. The basic learning needs of all can and must be met as a matter of urgency.”

To this end, it is incumbent upon national and regional authorities to realize the goal of improving participation and survival levels in schools and the reduction or complete eradication of functional illiteracy. Governments and other stakeholders in the region shall reserve the highest priority in terms of allocating national budgets and programs to guarantee full and equal access to education and to improving its quality.

1. ASEAN Member States shall continue to ensure that at least 6% of gross domestic product (GDP), as set by the World Education Forum in 2000 (adopted as UNESCO EFA target) is allocated to basic education and that the participation rate in schools is increased year per year, with no less than full participation as the main objective.
2. ASEAN governments shall increase national and local spending for tertiary education to improve accessibility in terms of cost and facilities;
3. Governments shall work towards the optimum reach of education to all segments of the population, especially the disadvantaged groups and minorities;
4. Governments must enact laws and exercise a more thorough oversight and regulatory function on the quality of education, including the strategic management of education resources.
5. Where national and regional authorities are responsible for the review and development of the school curricula, they shall ensure that students and student associations are consulted on a continuing basis concerning curricula and their development;
6. Greater support is needed in the area of non-formal education (NFE). There is also a need for legislation to regulate the quality of non-formal education services.
7. All ASEAN Member Governments must enact measures to ensure an education and training policy promoting youth participation. It is essential that young people learn about participation and democracy while in school and that courses on democracy, participation and citizenship are available and properly supported.
8. Schools must be a place where young people experience democracy in action and where their participation in decision-making is supported, promoted and is seen as effective.

Thus, national laws that curtail democracy and the full exercise of the freedom of expression must not be enacted or be repealed.

9. No national law or regulation that fosters fear in students and curtails their freedom of expression and academic freedom shall be passed;
10. National authorities should provide mechanisms as well as financial and other forms of support that enable young people to establish democratic school-based student associations and independent and self-governing bodies where young people can participate actively in decision-making on matters that affect them;
11. All students and young people should be able to exercise the have the right to participate in decisions concerning the management of the school in partnership with the teachers and school authorities.
12. A common agenda on education content, to be adopted by all ASEAN Member States in consultation with young people, should be drafted and enacted to set minimum education standards, which must be met by all Members
  - 12.1. All levels of public and private education must address gender discrimination;
  - 12.2. Education programs shall include among others HIV/AIDS awareness, reproductive health and rights education and counseling, education on the dangers of narcotics, alcohol and abuse of other substances, environmental and historical-cultural awareness of the region;
  - 12.3. Education programs shall also include Active Citizenship Education to increase awareness on individual human rights and fundamental freedoms.

### **III. A POLICY FOR DECENT WORK FOR YOUNG PEOPLE**

#### **National and regional strategies shall be reviewed and adjusted to provide the impetus for creating regular employment opportunities and guaranteeing decent work for young people**

Levels of unemployment across the globe have risen at faster rates and are expected to rise. In regions where the population is generally young, the number of young people entering the labor force continues to outpace the number of new jobs being created. Thus, many young people are feeling insecure about their present and future. The ILO reports on global employment trends show that Southeast Asia and the Pacific has experienced the worst relative change (1995), where youth unemployment more than doubled. In Southeast Asia, the young population remains to be the majority of the unemployed masses of many societies (2004). With jobs sparse and wanting at the home, the recourse is often to go abroad.

In the context of the current global economic crisis, the number of new job vacancies declines, which has resulted in the paradox of rising unemployment even among educated young people, i.e., those with university degrees or technical training certificates. Youth unemployment is high and is expected to rise. Young people are the least responsible for the perennial global economic crises, yet they are among those that suffer most from the negative consequences, such as higher unemployment.

In relation to this, unchecked increase in child labor potentially exacerbates both the supply and demand side of the youth employment problem. Child labor is cheap labor and often

hampers youth employment prospects. Related to this is the fact that child labor is a precursor to the youth employment problem—preventing children from obtaining the necessary education and skills to obtain decent employment later in life, while also potentially exposing them to various hazards.

Thus:

1. The ASEAN Ministers of Labor and Employment should take into careful consideration the concerns of young people when developing employment policies, with stronger commitment to the ILO-defined core labor standards and to the principles of decent work.
2. There is a strong need to develop measures targeted at young people who face the biggest difficulties when trying to enter the labor market and to keep a decent and stable job—or when trying to start up their own business;
3. The need of segments of young people for the development of skills that can foster the transition from education to the labor market shall be taken into account by setting policies and allocating resources that foster entrepreneurship and improve entrepreneurial education;
4. The competencies that young people can acquire through non-formal education and volunteering activities as well as through vocational training shall be promoted and fully recognized.
5. Internships shall be recognized as a valuable step in the transition from education to professional life and quality internships, which must above all have added value to the professional and personal development of the intern, must be made available for young people. Internships however must not replace paid work and shall not hamper access to labor law protection and financial compensation shall remain paramount;
6. ASEAN governments must commit to strong employment support initiatives in view of fostering the transition of young people from education to decent employment;
7. ASEAN Governments shall develop and invest in social security measures that can sufficiently support young people in times of unemployment.
8. ASEAN governments must commit to increased investments in developing young people's skills and competencies, which may form part of some short-term measures and initiatives to deal with the current financial and economic crisis, without de-linking these to social and labor protection.

#### **IV. A POLICY FOR ENGENDERING EQUITY AND BETTER SAFEGUARDS TO HEALTH**

##### **Addressing health inequities and designing better safeguards to health call for the strengthening of linkages between poverty alleviation and health, better investments and participatory approaches**

The health situation in Southeast Asia, in general, is a cause for concern. Investments in comprehensive national health care programs in most countries in the region remain insufficient and uncoordinated, given the increasing population and the problems of governance. Health insurance coverage has been left mainly to individual capacities and private sector initiatives, and public spending for these has been largely dispensed of as another form of political patronage, both at local and national levels, in a number of countries. As one of the region's most vulnerable populations and having no capacity to

ensure their own health insurance and well-being, it is the young people, along with women, children and the elderly who suffer the most.

Overall, a most fundamental challenge to hurdle in the region is health inequities linked to poverty. The World Health Organization (WHO) in a 2009 special report on health inequities says that it is the poor populations who “encounter high rates of illness and premature deaths from preventable causes and are thus more vulnerable to disease.” The report identifies who carries the burden of disease in the current health situation: the less educated, marginalized, women, children and the elderly living in rural areas and urban slums. Young people are in most of these vulnerable sectors. The WHO conclusion speaks volumes on the kind of societies we have to build: “Ultimately, addressing inequities in health requires a **social justice approach** to improve the circumstances of the poor.”

Thus:

1. ASEAN Governments shall address poverty reduction hand in hand with strategic health measures.
2. Better investments shall be made by national health authorities in the areas of preventive public health and effective health delivery systems, addressing accessibility issues, and promoting health awareness and quick response, with special attention to the poor and disadvantaged groups;
3. There shall be national legislation to create or develop institutional local and national machinery for consultation between young people and vulnerable groups, elected representatives and all social and professional groups concerned with social welfare and the promotion of health, especially for marginalized groups and the disadvantaged;
4. ASEAN Governments shall explore concrete measures to insulate the design and delivery of health services from patronage politics, both at the national and local level.
5. Governments shall ensure programmatic investments in basic health education, especially among children, the less educated and out-of-school youth;
6. Investments in capacity building for health professionals and community health volunteers shall be intensified to help build a better infrastructure for monitoring the health situation of poor in hard-to-reach areas;
7. Access to public healthcare systems in ASEAN member countries shall not be denied to migrants and refugees.
8. The high incidence of tobacco, alcohol and drug abuse among young people urgently calls on the ASEAN and its Member Governments share experience and know-how on these urgent issues that impact on young people in the region, and to introduce, develop or promote, together with representatives of youth organizations and of health services, local information policies and counseling facilities for young people affected by these problems, as well as special training skills for young social workers and for voluntary workers and leaders of organizations operating prevention and rehabilitation strategies for young people.
9. In view of the increase in sexually transmitted infections and HIV/AIDS cases among young people, non-discriminatory education and information campaigns and preventive measures aimed at young people must be intensified.

## **V. A POLICY FOR PROMOTING AND DEFENDING HUMAN RIGHTS**

**Towards a more effective protection of young people's rights, ASEAN governments shall take concrete steps to promote and work towards the full adherence to and full implementation of the UN agreements on human rights, specifically the Covenants on Civil and Political Rights, and on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.**

Regional cooperation in Southeast Asia and elsewhere should be based on efforts to deepen a common understanding regarding the implementation of the fundamental values of the respect for human rights, of the promotion of democracy and fundamental freedoms as defined by the UN human rights declarations and conventions.

Human rights are fundamental principles that must be recognized and acknowledged without any form of discrimination based on social status, political beliefs, sexual orientation, gender or age. As one of the more vulnerable populations, young people's rights must be promoted and protected by their governments.

1. ASEAN Member States shall promote and protect human rights at all times, and no law or policy shall be passed that will suspend or violate young peoples' right to information, freedom of expression, right to organize, freedom of assembly, the right to due process, protection against illegal searches, among others.
2. The ASEAN Member States shall undertake strong measures to penalize violations of young people's rights.
3. Key government agencies tasked to ensure that students' rights and welfare are protected and promoted shall be given more support and authority through legislation.
4. ASEAN governments shall ensure and provide for human rights education.
5. ASEAN governments shall push for the enactment of anti-discrimination legislation and laws safeguarding equal opportunities, to address the difficulties faced by women and other disadvantaged sectors.
6. An ASEAN Human Rights mechanism shall be an independent and autonomous body with the authority and mandate to conduct investigations on its own and can act on complaints of human rights violation cases.

We, the Young Progressives, representing young people in Southeast Asia, are committed to engage ASEAN and national leaders to advance the principles identified in this proposed Charter.

We call on ASEAN Members States to adopt this Charter and undertake the steps towards its passage as a regional document as a reaffirmation of our common commitment to establish a regional community of nations where young people's rights and welfare are recognized, promoted and protected, and where the ideals of freedom, equality, democracy, social justice and solidarity are realized in the daily lives not only of its leaders but more importantly its people.

*Bangkok, 5 August 2009*