

PRESS STATEMENT

5th Annual Assembly of the Asian Inter-Parliamentary Caucus on Labour Migration *The Sustainable Development Agenda: The role of parliaments in translating global goals to concrete actions*

Members of the Asian Inter-Parliamentary Caucus on Labour Migration representing Bangladesh, Cambodia, Malaysia, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, South Korea and Sri Lanka gathered in Kuala Lumpur on 13-14 November 2015 for its 5th Annual Assembly to discuss how they could actively engage in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development that UN Member States adopted on 25 September 2015.

In the immediate aftermath, Members of the Caucus strongly condemn the terrorist attacks in Paris and stand in solidarity with the peoples of France. These incidents call for UN member states to “strengthen relevant national institutions, including through international cooperation, for building capacities at all levels to prevent violence and combat terrorism and crime” as outlined in Goal 16² of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The Caucus rejects the scapegoating of migrants in the aftermath of such incidents and highlights the ongoing experience of migrant workers vis-à-vis xenophobia and racial and religious profiling.

The Caucus welcomes the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in particular for finally recognizing migration as an integral part of national and regional development. Migrants and migration play an important role in the development of origin, transit and destination countries. The Caucus, however, would like to emphasise that aside from maximising the development benefits of migration, stakeholders³ must put premium on rights and protection. The fulfillment of all migrants’ rights and the protection and promotion of their well-being, including their families, are essential to maximise the benefits of migration.

Recognising the uneven distribution of wealth among countries in the region and the failure of the current economic development paradigm which created unemployment and a lack of decent employment making the movement of people a necessity rather than a choice, the Caucus calls on governments to commit to implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development that leaves no one behind.

The Caucus also highlights the need to ensure that vulnerable sectors of society should be given paramount importance, in particular migrant workers and women migrants, who because of their status as migrants are discriminated against and are excluded from social and legal protection, social support and welfare programs.

The Caucus calls on parliaments and parliamentarians to work with civil society and stakeholders in monitoring its effective implementation and to ensure that migration is included in national development agenda. Members of the Caucus also commit to strengthening their legislative power and oversight function to ensure governments’ accountability to implementing the Agenda and that policies that respect the human and labour rights of all workers including migrant workers are in place.

In anticipation of the ASEAN Economic Community, the Caucus urges ASEAN Member countries to prioritise a people-centered approach. The Caucus calls upon ASEAN governments to ensure that workers’ rights are protected and promoted and inequality addressed the context of the economic community. ASEAN must hold true to its vision of a sharing and caring ASEAN where the people’s rights and demands stand above markets and profits, and where the benefits of regional integration are distributed fairly among the people. ASEAN Economic Community should not sacrifice peoples’ rights over business and investment interests.

² Goal 16: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels

³ Government, trade unions, employers, employment agencies, private sector, regional bodies.

The Caucus welcomes the proposal for an Agenda for a Social ASEAN initiated by a group of individuals, civil society organisations and trade unions from ASEAN. The Agenda for a Social ASEAN aims to promote a strong social dimension into the current ASEAN integration process to address issues of inequality and race to the bottom. Among the core demands of the Agenda for a Social ASEAN are a region-wide implementation of all ILO core labour standards and access to social protection for all. It also calls for the urgent adoption of the ASEAN Framework Instrument on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers. The Agenda provides a base to democratize ASEAN. As such, it offers a genuine alternative model of development and regional integration.

The Caucus also endorses the draft ASEAN Agreement on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Workers proposed by Law Reform Commission of Thailand and supported by ASEAN Services Employees Trade Union Council (ASETUC). The draft agreement calls for the integration of social and labour policies based on ILO standards in its integration process.

The Caucus discussed the importance of equal treatment of migrant and local workers in bilateral labour agreements between countries of origin and destination and urges governments to make these agreements transparent, public and binding.

Finally, the Caucus calls on the South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation Council (SAARC) countries to develop a concrete plan of action on the implementation of Points 12 and 21 of the Kathmandu Declaration 2014.⁴

⁴ Point 12 of the Declaration states that SAARC will initiate an Inter-Governmental process to appropriately contextualize the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the regional level. Point 21 focuses on the collaboration and cooperation on safe, orderly and responsible management of labour migration from South Asia to ensure safety, security and wellbeing of their migrant workers in the destination countries outside the region.