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FIGHTING TRAFFICKING IN WOMEN AND CHILDREN IN ASEAN

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Background

Since the 1980s, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has placed high priority on integration of women in the development and progress of the region. In an effort

to undertake regional cooperation to uplift the status of women in the region and to meet

their needs and aspirations, the ASEAN Foreign Ministers signed the Declaration of the Advancement of Women in the ASEAN Region in Bangkok in July 1988. The Declaration specifically called for the promotion and implementation of equitable and effective participation of women in all fields and at various levels of the political, economic, social and cultural life of society at the national, regional and international levels.

The ASEAN Ministers Responsible for Social Welfare adopted the ASEAN Plan of Action for Children in 1993. The Plan outlined the -need to address issues of child abuse, neglect and

exploitation, including child prostitution, child labour, street children and abandoned children and child trafficking, among other priorities for child protection.

The ASEAN Heads of State/Government have called for the protection of women and children at the summit meetings. At the 5th ASEAN Summit in December 1995, they reiterated the need to ensure the equitable and effective participation of women in all fields

and levels of society. They called on ASEAN to take firm and stern measures to combat transnational crime, including trafficking in women and children at the 2nd

Informal-ASEAN

Summit in December 1997. They also adopted the ASEAN Vision 2020, which envisioned the evolution of agreed rules of behaviour and cooperative measures in Southeast Asia to deal

with problem that can be met only on a regional scale, including trafficking of women and

children and other transnational crime. At the 6th ASEAN Summit in December 1998, they adopted the Hanoi Plan of Action (HPA), the first in a series of action plans to implement the

ASEAN Vision 2020. The HPA emphasised the implementation of the ASEAN Plan of Action for Children and the strengthening of ASEAN collaboration in combating the trafficking in

and crimes of violence against women and children.

The ASEAN Foreign Ministers, acknowledging the adverse impact of transnational crime on ASEAN'S economic and social development, have reiterated the calls of the ASEAN Heads of

State/Government at their annual ASEAN Ministerial Meetings (AMM). At the 30th AMM in July 1997, the Foreign Ministers underscored the need for sustained cooperation in

addressing transnational concerns including the fight against terrorism, trafficking in people,

illicit drugs and arms and piracy. At the recent 32nd AMM in Singapore in July 1999, the

Foreign Ministers stressed the urgent need to strengthen ASEAN'S regional capacity to combat transnational crime, including trafficking in women and children with the

assistance

of the international community.

ASEAN Bodies Combating Trafficking in Women and Children

Three ASEAN bodies are involved in pursuing initiatives and activities against trafficking in

women and children: the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Transnational Crime (AMMTC), the ASEAN Chiefs of National Police (ASEANAPOL) and the ASEAN Sub-Committee on Women (ASW).

The AMMTC was established in December 1997. It meets once in two years to review the work undertaken by the various ASEAN bodies on transnational crime and to set the pace and direction for regional collaboration on combating such crime. It is assisted by the Senior Officials Meeting on Transnational Crime which meets at least once a year.

The ASEANAPOL meets annually and deals with preventive, enforcement and operational aspects of cooperation against transnational crime. It actively fosters regional police cooperation in areas that include exchange of information and visits, establishing linkages in training and research, and holding regular conferences.

The ASEAN Committee on Social Development established the ASEAN Sub-committee on Women (ASW) in 1976 with the aim to promote and implement activities for the effective participation of women in all fields and various level of the political, economic and social life.

The ASW has been actively involved in promoting public awareness among policy makers, programme planners and implementers on the role of Women in development.

Regional Undertaking Against Trafficking in Women and Children

At its inaugural meeting on 20 December 1999, the AMMTC adopted the ASEAN Declaration on Transnational Crime, which underscored ASEAN'S resolve to adopt a comprehensive approach to fight transnational crime through greater regional collaboration and by forging international cooperation.

The 2nd AMMTC in June 1999 adopted the ASEAN Plan of Action to Combat Transnational Crime. The Plan established mechanisms and activities to extend ASEAN member countries' efforts to combat transnational crime, including trafficking in women and children from the national and bilateral levels to the regional dimension, and strengthen regional commitment and capacity to undertake the expanded task. The Plan will put in place a cohesive regional strategy to fight transnational crime and will encompass information exchange, cooperation in legal and law enforcement matters, institutional capacity building, training and extra-regional cooperation as key programme activities. An ad-hoc working group meeting would be convened to develop and finalise a work programme to implement the Plan.

The establishment of the ASEAN Centre for Combating Transnational Crime (ACTC) has also been agreed, in principle by the 2nd AMMTC. The ACTC is another regional initiative of ASEAN against transnational crime which is envisioned to promote data resource sharing, assist in the implementation of programme activities outlined in the proposed action plan, and be a repository of information on national legislation, regulatory measures and jurisprudence of individual member countries. It is also envisaged that the ACTC will have research capabilities to conduct in-depth analysis of transnational crime activities to recommend appropriate regional strategies to fight these felonious activities. With the establishment of the Centre, ASEAN efforts in combating trafficking in women and children will be further intensified.

The issue of trafficking of women and children is also discussed by ASEANAPOL at their annual conference with a view of enhancing police cooperation in the fight against the crime through existing bi-lateral arrangements. ASEANAPOL has also established its own database system to enable member countries to exchange information on transnational crime in a rapid, reliable and secure manner and to provide further means of accessing the computerised systems at the INTERPOL General Secretariat. ASEAN has been actively pursuing efforts to suppress the supply side causes of trafficking in women by empowering

women and ensuring their participation in all fields and levels of society.

The ASW plays an important role in monitoring the implementation of the Declaration on the Advancement of Women in the ASEAN Region. It has published a report on the advancement of women in ASEAN in 1996 and is preparing to publish the second report in the year 2000. The ASW has developed an activity addressing violence against women in the family, with a view to create a positive policy environment and develop preventive measures against the phenomenon of violence committed against women and children in families. The 18th Meeting of the ASW held in September 1999 agreed that a project proposal to address trafficking in women be developed taking into account the on-going efforts in the region.

One other initiative of the ASW was the pilot project on ASEAN Network for Women in Skills Training funded by UNDP and CIDA. The project sought to equip disadvantaged women in ASEAN with useful and marketable skills. Since economic necessity and poverty are primary motivations for the existence of trafficking in women, skills training and public education on the role of women in society will reduce the crime by providing women alternative economic opportunities and meeting their aspirations.

ASEAN is also pursuing an initiative to combat the commercial sexual exploitation of children in ASEAN with the objectives of identifying areas for cooperation among ASEAN Member countries and other countries to develop an ASEAN Plan of Action for the Protection of Children Against Commercial Sexual Exploitation, Pornography and Trafficking.

Various intergovernmental bodies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are playing an important role in helping the governments of the ASEAN Member Countries to fight these crimes and in assisting the victims of such crimes. UNIFEM and the UN Working Group on Trafficking are collaborating in the Mekong sub-region on a preparatory assistance on trafficking in women and children,

The ASEAN Secretariat has been playing an active coordinating role in ASEAN'S fight against trafficking in women and children and in dealing with domestic violence. It is currently undertaking the following:

- a, It is seeking technical assistance from UNIFEM and UNICEF in developing work programmes for the protection of women and children and to ensure the implementation of the UN Conventions on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAVV) and UN Convention on the Rights of Children (CRC) in tandem with national priorities of ASEAN Member Countries;
- b. It is working with UNICEF to update the 1995 study on children in ASEAN. The updated study will also review the implementation of the CRC in member countries and to provide recommendations for future collaboration;
- c. It is exploring the possibility of developing work programmes with UNIFEM and UNICEF to address the priority areas related to women and children;
- d. The ASEAN Secretariat is coordinating with the ASW to develop a regional project to address trafficking in women.

Future Directions

Under the intermediate plan to achieve the Vision 2020, ASEAN has identified the fight against trafficking in women and children as one of its priorities. It will seek to strengthen

- ASEAN'S collaboration in combating the crime by undertaking the following:
- a. Develop an ASEAN Action Plan for the protection of children against trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation by 2000;
 - b. Establish a regional network among law enforcement and social welfare agencies to

deter

trafficking of women and children and regional mechanism to facilitate the exchange of information and sharing of best practices on legislation concerning women and child protection;

c. Develop a regional programme to share experiences on implementing the Convention on the Rights of the Child and research the abuse of children and women, child labour and trafficking, child abandonment and effective strategies for dealing with domestic violence;

and

d. Continue publication of a report to monitor the progress made by the ASEAN Member Countries in implementing the ASEAN Declaration on the Advancement of Women.

ASEAN welcomes assistance and support to develop the work programme to implement the ASEAN Plan of Action to Combat Transnational Crime and projects addressing violence against women in the family and commercial sexual exploitation of children. ASEAN also welcomes collaboration and assistance in formulating the regional work programmes to address the priorities related to women and children.

Conclusion

ASEAN will actively pursue efforts in implementing policies and initiatives both at the national and regional levels to fight the growing trends in trafficking of women and children.

These will include the formulation of appropriate action plans, work programmes and projects pertaining to women and children. The AMMTC will pursue policies and measures to suppress the crime through regional cooperation while the ASEANAPOL will continue to strengthen police cooperation through information and intelligence exchanges in dealing with the crime. The ACTC will buttress ASEAN efforts by assisting in the implementation of

the regional activities and the enforcement agencies in ASEAN in quelling trafficking in

women and children. The ASW and the ASEAN Secretariat will continue to work towards the reduction of the supply side causes for trafficking in women and children through effective

public education and generating greater public awareness. They will also focus on efforts to

uplift the status of women and to empower them to ensure their effective participation in all

aspects and at various levels of the political, economic, social and cultural life of society at the

national, regional and international levels.

ASEAN has recognised that trafficking in women and children cannot be solve by the national governments alone and that it has to collaborate closely among its member countries, dialogue partners and the international community in combating the crime. ASEAN will continue to pursue regional and international[collaborations to contribute to the

global efforts against the crime. _