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PRESS RELEASE

ASEM Leaders: Respect and Realise the Right to Information

ARTICLE 19 and the Foundation of Media Alternatives, together with a group of Asian and European right to information advocates, recommend leaders attending the 8th Asia-Europe Meeting adopt policies and measures to respect and realise full transparency and the right to information.

During an official side event of the 8th Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM 8 Summit), titled ‘4th Connecting Civil Societies of Asia and Europe Conference: Changing Challenges, New Ideas’, ARTICLE 19 and the Foundation for Media Alternatives conducted a workshop bringing together 19 right to information (RTI) advocates from Asia and Europe to discuss the development of access to information in the two regions.

The workshop participants – representing six Asian countries and six European countries – discussed the benefits and challenges in implementing RTI legislation in transitional states, the development of access to environmental information at the international and national levels, the lack of information disclosure in global development, and their experiences in combating corruption through the promotion of transparency and free flow of information. The participants also identified common challenges in the campaign for greater openness in their respective countries, and exchanged experiences in promoting the right to information at the international, national and grassroots levels.

“Over the past year we have seen much advancement and some setbacks to the right to information across ASEM countries,” says Dr Agnes Callamard, ARTICLE 19 Executive Director. *“We hope to see more ASEM member states adopt policies and legislation to respect and realise the public’s right to information, particularly that held by public authorities.”*

Alan Alegre, Executive Director of the co-organiser, Foundation for Media Alternatives adds, *“If ASEM puts its weight behind the right to information, it will send a clear signal to its member states to strengthen democratic and participatory governance both within the countries and also throughout ASEM’s processes.”*

Workshop participants delivered the following set of recommendations to the head of states attending the ASEM 8 Summit:

1. The right of individuals to access information held by public authorities is essential for civic engagement, holding governments accountable, to ensure sustainable development and for the fight against poverty and corruption
2. ASEM governments should:
 - Recognise and respect the right of the public to seek, receive and impart information by adopting and fully implementing comprehensive national right to information legislation based on international standards
 - Accede to and extend their commitment to international treaties and conventions advancing the right to information, in particular the UNECE Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention)
 - Ensure the fullest transparency and access to information in all bilateral and multilateral negotiations leading to treaties and agreements
 - Require that international institutions adopt transparency policies and in particular proactively provide information needed by the public, especially vulnerable groups, to hold these institutions accountable.
3. ASEM leaders should enable and encourage civil society initiatives in promoting the right to information and facilitate the exchange and sharing of experiences and resources across the ASEM countries to realise this right.

NOTES TO EDITORS:

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- ARTICLE 19 is an independent human rights organisation that works around the world to protect and promote the right to freedom of expression. It takes its name from Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which guarantees free speech.
- The Foundation for Media Alternatives (FMA) is a non-government organization based in the Philippines, seeking to democratize information and communication systems and resources for citizens and communities.