

Democratising Development in the Philippines and South-East Asia¹

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South-East Asia is the focus of much attention as its economies experience great turmoil which has spread to other countries through what is termed the "contagion" effect. At the same time the region has also been the focus of much attention in the debates on "Asian values" and "cultural relativism" which its leaders have said run counter to the view of democracy and human rights promoted by western governments. Some Asian governments have proposed a review of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) because, they argue, it does not reflect the cultural specificities of different traditions, religions and philosophies in the region and is thus not applicable to their countries. However, their economic downturn has undermined their previous position of strength in calling for such a review.

Aurora Parong's article analyses the concepts surrounding "Asian values" and the economies in which they are promoted by assessing the situation of civil society and the impact of the current model of development on poverty in the region. The paper focuses on the opportunities for promoting an alternative approach to development in which all human rights are respected and through which new measures of developmental success are introduced. More than ever, a new paradigm, a new international economic order has to be

worked out to remove the great inequalities in resources and opportunities between rich and poor individuals and nations, and to avert a worldwide recession.

South-East Asia at a cross-roads?

For the past year South-East Asia has been the focus of worldwide concern due to the economic collapse in the region across its major economies including Thailand, the Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia and even Singapore.² In the two decades preceding this the region had been the recipient of concerted attention of another kind. This international attention took the form of plaudits for the region's rapid economic growth. Its economies were called the "Asian tigers" as they attracted large inflows of investment and achieved high export growth.

The Philippines was not part of this elite grouping but on taking office in 1992 then President Fidel Ramos put into place his "Philippines 2000" industrialisation strategy which aimed to rapidly increase the country's industrial and export base. He announced that the Philippines had moved from being the "sick man of Asia" to becoming a "tiger cub". Six years of contagion on global financial markets, particularly in Asia, has hit the Philippines economy hard as the region experiences economic turmoil.

Asian values and cultural relativism – the Asian government perspective

Confident of their economic successes, some South-East Asian governments, have for several years been speaking of a different kind of democracy and human rights. Their comments have in part been spurred by the 1993 declaration of the Vienna World Conference. They have also been influenced by the build up to and commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The terms "Asian values" and "Asian governance" were first popularised by Lee Kuan Yew of

Singapore who spoke of a different brand of democracy, one which did not include individual rights of free speech and freedom of assembly because he said:

Asians, like good Confucians, value order over change, hierarchy over equality, and co-operation and mutual respect over conflict between the elite and the masses. Moreover, Asians have their own forms of governance that do not have the western emphasis on individual rights, electoral competition, the free press, free assembly, and checks and balances. It has also been argued that too much democracy may undermine the "East Asian economic miracle".³

Lee also even went so far as to pinpoint democracy as the culprit for the economic woes of the Philippines during a visit to Manila in 1992. Yet, the brand of democracy in the Philippines which did not pass Lee's scrutiny was an elite democracy, where landlords and big business dominate political decision-making and where ex-generals and military and police officials have major control over a civilian bureaucracy. Not content with the Marcos martial law decrees which remain in place, during his period in office former President Ramos made concerted efforts to further strengthen his autocratic rule through so-called anti-terrorist bills and an overhaul of the constitution purportedly to ensure a climate conducive for economic growth. Without strong opposition from the people's movement such plans could not have been thwarted.

The authoritarian rule of ex-president Suharto, including the Indonesian regime's invasion and its subsequent oppressive governance of East Timor, did not find any opposition in the region. Instead it found support among other Asian countries. For example, the Philippines Government banned José Ramos Horta from the country twice and did not allow foreign participants to attend the conference on East Timor held in Manila in 1994. Malaysia violently broke up a similar activity in Kuala Lumpur in 1996. In July 1997, the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) welcomed Burma to their fold with open arms even as political opposition there was suppressed and gross violations of human rights continued.

Indeed, so weak and unprincipled has the Filipino ASEAN policy been, as Walden Bello has pointed out,⁴ that the Filipino government agreed to serve as the SPDC's (State Peace and Development Council)⁵ ninong or formal sponsor during the ASEAN senior ministers' meeting which finalised Burma's

membership. Bello also noted that the day may not be far off when a conference on human rights in Burma will not be allowed to take place on Filipino or Thai soil and Aung San Suu Kyi will be the next Nobel laureate banned from entering the two countries.⁶

The Asian states have posed “cultural relativism” as an explanation for their different treatment of their respective citizens and as a rationalisation of the violations of human rights in their countries.⁷ Aside from promoting so called “Asian values”, the South-East Asian countries cast a blind eye to each other’s human rights affairs instead of regarding human rights as a matter of international concern wherein all states have a responsibility to point out other countries’ poor performance in this field and to demand action to address such injustices.

A global perspective on the universality, indivisibility and interdependence of human rights

Fifty years ago, the United Nations General Assembly approved the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Articles 2-27 include provisions on civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. Setting these in a global context Article 28 states that “everyone is entitled to a social and international order in which the rights set forth in this Declaration can be fully realised.”⁸ Some contexts in which rights are denied include situations of war and indeed economic crises.

The principles of universality, indivisibility and interdependence of human rights were upheld in Vienna in 1993, 45 years after the UDHR was approved as “a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations”.⁹ While the Universal Declaration hails from another generation and was born in the wake of World War II, the Vienna Declaration is of our time.

At Vienna after intensive debates and discourse, it was asserted that every human being has a claim to human rights, regardless of place and time, and that no person should have less rights than another. Despite the existence of two covenants instead of one, which according to some, suggests the difference and the independence of the two sets of rights from each other, it was

also reiterated that the fulfilment of one right is dependent on the fulfilment of others. In short, progress is needed on all fronts.

Asian perspectives on human rights: the state versus civil society

In the Philippines, José W. Diokno, a staunch human rights defender and critic of the Marcos dictatorship, examined the concepts of human rights and justice by studying the Filipino language.¹⁰ Diokno analysed the words *katarungan* (justice), *karapatan* (right) and *batas* (law). He noted that the word *katarungan* is used to mean both justice and fairness, and also is interpreted as meaning justice and equity.

Drawing together his conclusions Diokno declares that:

In summary, our language establishes that there is a Filipino concept of justice; that it is a highly moral concept, intimately related to the concept of rights; that it is similar to, but broader than, western concepts of justice, for it embraces the concept of equity; that it is a discriminating concept, distinguishing between justice and rights, on the one hand, and law and argument, on the other; that its fundamental element is fairness; and that it eschews privilege and naked power....¹¹

Diokno also examined Philippine history and studied the writings of Filipino heroes, such as Apolinario Mabini, Emilio Jacinto and Andres Bonifacio of the Katipunan¹² and the Philippine revolution of 1896. From his research, he notes that the history of the peoples in the Philippines is a history of struggle to create a just society; where there is independence; the people are sovereign; the freedom and the equal dignity of all are respected; the workers and tenants are protected; where oppression, exploitation and abuse are opposed and the objective is to eliminate poverty and achieve self-reliance.¹³

It is very evident that the concepts of democracy and human rights flaunted by Marcos and Ramos and the other leaders in the region are different from those imbedded and institutionalised in the Filipino language and history. But, not only that – these leaders misrepresented the core values that date back to the historical struggles of the Filipino people for nationhood and self-determination. Today these core values are shared by

Filipinos together with other peoples of the Asia-Pacific and the rest of the world as legitimate aspirations.

Taking a religious perspective on human rights Chandra Muzaffar has studied different religions in Malaysia. One of his key findings is that almost all the Malaysian religions, Islam, Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Hinduism, Christianity and Sikhism, to some degree focus on the dignity of the human being. Although their scriptures do not speak the same language as the UDHR, they are concerned with rights and responsibilities and with the duties and obligations of each person to one another, to nature, to God and indeed to the whole of creation. Muzaffar goes on to say that "it may not be that formidable a task to evolve a set of ideas and ideals pertaining to human rights which are acceptable to all the spiritual philosophies that have made Malaysia their home"¹⁴

Abdullahi A. An-Na'im, a Muslim and professor of international law, has examined Islamic beliefs and the Shari'a legal system in Pakistan and India. He found tension points like the Shari'a's discrimination against Muslim women and non-Muslims as well as its restrictions on freedom of religion. Nevertheless, when he looked at the historical context of how the Shari'a was formulated, he declared that Islamic law may be reformed such that the generally accepted norm of equality is upheld, through "enlightened construction" of fundamental Islamic sources, without losing its religious legitimacy for Muslims.¹⁵

Furthermore Asia-Pacific non-government organisations (NGOs) and peoples' organisations, meeting in Bangkok prior to their participation in the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna undertook extensive studies and debates on "Asian values" and "cultural relativism". At the end of their meeting, they declared that:

We can learn from different cultures in a pluralistic perspective and draw lessons from the humanity of these cultures to deepen respect for human rights. There is an emerging new understanding of universalism encompassing the richness and wisdom of Asia-Pacific cultures... Universal human rights standards are rooted in many cultures. We affirm the basis of universality of human rights which afford protection to all humanity... While advocating cultural pluralism, those culture practices which derogate from universally accepted human rights, including women's rights, must not be tolerated.¹⁶

The Asia-Pacific NGOs and other human rights advocates put forward an alternative concept of “cultural relativism” which focuses on the positive aspects of Asian cultures and examines different religions, traditions and philosophies around the world as possible sources for the further enhancement of human dignity and the development of human rights globally.¹⁷ Thus “Asian values” and the diversity within Asian and other cultures must not be used as an excuse for human rights violations. Rather, it should serve to enhance human rights policy and practice. Those looking at Asia from the outside-in should distinguish always between the autocratic values promoted by the authoritarian leadership and their associated culture of authority in various countries, and the truly Asian (and universal) values of solidarity, equality and justice advocated by civil society in Asia.

Some cases of “Asian governance”

Documentation by various human rights organisations in the Philippines, in other South-East Asian nations and in various parts of the world shows that the poor do not participate in decision-making on most issues affecting their lives. Moreover, they may be arrested without warrant, detained unjustly and killed while they merely exercise their rights to peaceful assembly or assert their freedom to organise or struggle for their economic or cultural rights.

For example, in the Philippines, three leaders of the Suminao Higaonon Tribal Association (SUHITRA) were killed by members of the 1st Provincial Mobile Force of the Philippine National Police (PNP) in a violent demolition in Impasug-ong, Bukidnon in Mindanao on 20 July 1997. Five others were also wounded while more than a hundred families were forcibly evicted from their homes when they asserted the right to stay in their ancestral domain.¹⁸ In their bid for ever more rapid economic growth, South-East Asian governments have restricted workers’ rights in order to enforce industrial peace. In Indonesia, independent unions are denied recognition and workers are intimidated, harassed and imprisoned for peaceful union activities. Only one union is allowed, the all Indonesia Workers’ Union and 26 trade unionists were arrested in July 1997 for holding a meeting without police authorisation. In south Korea, teachers and public service workers are denied the

right to form trade unions while leaders of militant unions have been arrested while fighting against very restrictive labour legislation.¹⁹

The inclusion of economic, social and cultural rights into an integrated approach to human rights

From the aforementioned examples, the interdependence of human rights is clearly seen. In the region, as in other parts of the world, the efforts of NGOs with regard to the defence, protection and promotion of economic, social and cultural rights remain very inadequate. This situation is not helped by the fact that even at the UN level, attention to these rights has been minimal.²⁰

The nature, scope and content of the economic, social and cultural rights have yet to be clearly defined. Human rights organisations, like Task Force Detainees of the Philippines (TFDP), which had earlier focused on civil and political rights due to historical circumstances, e.g. martial law in the Philippines, have recently started including economic, social and cultural rights in their concerns and thus have to gain expertise in monitoring and asserting such rights. Moreover, international human rights organisations, especially the larger ones with broad influence, still have to take bigger steps in addressing these rights and to support the efforts of national and regional organisations working in this area.

Collective rights and the third generation of rights

Article 28 of the UDHR embraces six rights:

the right to political, economic, social and cultural self-determination; the right to economic and social development; and the right to participate in and benefit from “the

common heritage of mankind” (shared earth-space resources; scientific, technical and other information and progress; and cultural traditions, sites and monuments)... the right to peace, the right to a healthy and balanced environment, and the right to humanitarian disaster relief...²¹

Clearly, the recognition of individual and collective rights has been incorporated in the UDHR. Despite this, some human rights advocates argue that only individuals can claim human rights. This is understandable given the historical evolution of human rights concepts and principles. However, of late the recognition of collective and group rights has gained more support although there is still a big gap in the legal system for such rights as well as major shortcomings in the monitoring and advancement of such rights, even by human rights organisations.

The six rights set down under Article 28 of the UDHR are of particular significance in Asia where economic development and prosperity were used by governments to rationalise failures in ensuring democracy and in eliminating violations of certain human rights.

On 19 September 1997 Stanley Fischer, First Deputy Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) exalted the Asia “miracle” economies in his statement: “East Asia, propelled by an astonishing record of sustained economic growth, has within less than two decades improved the living standards of more people, more rapidly, than at any other time or place in history”.²² Whether the already marginalised poor in the region benefited from the claimed prosperity is put to question by NGOs and even by the United Nations Development Programme.

The export oriented economic growth success of the Asian tigers has been used to justify similar approaches to development being adopted in other developing countries. Taking this broader perspective Professor Michel Chossudovsky who has conducted country-level research in many developing countries on the impact of the economic reforms brought about under the IMF and World Bank programmes has pointed out that:

Since the mid-1980s, the impact of structural adjustment, including the derogation of the social rights of women and the detrimental environmental consequences of economic reform, have been amply documented... the IMF – World Bank policy prescriptions (now imposed in the name of “poverty alleviation”) have become increasingly harsh and

unyielding... In the South, the East and the North, a privileged social minority has accumulated vast amounts of wealth at the expense of the large majority of the population. This new international financial order feeds on human poverty and the destruction of the natural environment... Moreover, these reforms – when applied simultaneously in more than 100 countries – are conducive to a “globalisation of poverty”, a process which undermines human livelihood and destroys civil society in the South, the East and the North. ...many of the clauses of the structural adjustment programme (e.g. trade liberalisation and the foreign investment regime) have become permanently entrenched in the articles of agreement of the WTO.²³

In the 1997 *Human Development Report* the UNDP concluded that the entry of the poorest countries in the global market has made them the losers because even as they are plagued by big foreign debts, they also face international trade rules that are biased against them. Structural adjustment policies implemented as a means of repaying foreign debts have led to budget cutbacks on health expenditure and reductions in food subsidies to the poor.

The General Agreement on Tariff and Trade (GATT) and the World Trade Organisation (WTO) have also made governments play a more passive role as their responsibility in promoting the common good was delegitimised. Moreover trade liberalisation has impacted negatively on the poor. For example, the flooding of domestic markets with imported produce, including agricultural products, due to the agreements entered into by the Filipino government when it joined the WTO, deeply hurt local agriculture and business. Hence NGOs and civil society groups face a key task in highlighting the human rights impact of WTO decisions, their governments' role therein, and to the inequitable outcomes of trade practices to date.

In so doing they face a difficult environment as the development model of the Asian tigers is primarily aimed at economic growth and centred around strategies such as trade liberalisation, business deregulation and privatisation. During the period of very rapid economic growth, violations of human rights have occurred on a massive scale in various countries in the region. These included suppression of the union activities of workers; the displacement of agricultural workers, peasants and the urban poor for land conversion; the harassment, arrest and killing of

workers and peasants, especially their leaders; and environmental destruction. Thus even in cases where dictatorships are ended or there is political change civil society's capacity to demand socio-economic rights is often limited as its leadership base and structures to do this have been damaged.

The right to self-determination

The right to self-determination is a big issue among the East Timor people since they have, until now, escaped only fleetingly in 1975 from the clutches of colonialism. When Portugal finally acquiesced, Indonesia seized the opportunity to impose its control on the East Timorese and their land through its invasion of the island in December 1975. Indonesia annexed East Timor to itself, which Australia immediately recognised. As part of the Indonesian regime's gross violations of human rights in East Timor, where an estimated 200,000 of the indigenous population have been murdered, the transmigration programme has further marginalised the East Timorese economically, socially and culturally.²⁴

In the Philippines, the right to self-determination is also especially important among the indigenous and the Moro peoples. Except for a minority elite the majority have been deprived of meaningful participation in the electoral processes and literally pushed to the peripheries of the country where their rights to food security and their basic sources of subsistence are blatantly disregarded.

The right to a healthy and balanced environment – the case of the mining industry in the Philippines

In Boac, Marinduque, large scale mining by a Canadian Company, Marcopper has resulted in the death of two rivers and the displacement of more than 15,000 families in 14 villages. There are a number of documented cases of aplastic anaemia, believed to be due to exposure to toxic wastes dumped in the Boac River and Calancan Bay.²⁵ Recently children were treated for mercury poisoning which was traced to pollution caused by

Marcopper.²⁶ Yet to date the local people have not been resettled and the two rivers which were their source of food, water for agriculture and household use have not been rehabilitated. Moreover, the government has not learned the lessons from the destruction of its people's sources of subsistence because it is currently processing applications for mining exploration covering almost 8.25 million hectares, or more than 27% of the total land area in the country. Since the passage of the Mining Act of 1995, natural resource exploration is now open to 100% foreign owned companies.²⁷

Recently, 17 multinational mining companies linked up with local companies have been given mining contracts by the Department of Energy and Natural Resources (DENR) under questionable circumstances. Explaining this, the Department noted that the industry would help bring dollars into the country which were particularly needed in light of the currency crisis.²⁸ Included among the companies awarded contracts are ones with very poor environmental records in other countries. Moreover, a significant portion of the land which has been zoned for mining exploration and operations are ancestral domain areas of the indigenous population who will be displaced from their homelands.

The right to social and economic development

Despite the much heralded economic growth which was deemed to have led to significant improvements in the lives of peoples in the region over the past two decades, there has been no drop in the number of overseas contract workers (OCWs) from South-East Asian countries like Thailand, Burma and the Philippines, the majority of whom are women. This was despite the already well-known risks of abuse by employers, of ending up in prostitution, of being murdered or executed and the break-up of families. This shows that even with rapid economic growth, there were inadequate decent jobs that would allow people to earn the income required to meet families' basic needs and to live in dignity.

In the Philippines, the Kanlungan Centre Foundation reported serious human rights violations of such workers. For example in the 10 months January-October 1996, 17,000 overseas contract workers, mostly women, suffered human rights

violations: 4,305 from arrest and detention, 59 from maltreatment and 3 from rape while 17 were forced into prostitution. According to one Philippine newspaper, at least two Filipino overseas contract workers return home in coffins every day.²⁹

Even in 1996, when Ramos was proclaiming the economic growth brought about by the Philippines 2000 industrialisation strategy, unemployment and underemployment remained very high. Moreover, the main reason for the rapid growth in GNP that year was a rise in remittances from OCWs along with portfolio investments. At the same time the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) reported that about 3.7 million children aged 5-17 are forced to work to augment their family income. Two million of these children are exposed to dangerous work environments and suffer extreme physical stress.³⁰ Thus the whole basis of family and social life in the Philippines remained highly fragmented.

The ongoing economic crises plaguing Indonesia, Thailand, the Philippines and even Singapore and South Korea have primarily affected the poor. The prices of basic commodities and transport have risen while wages and salaries have not increased in proportion to the cost of living. Millions of lowly paid Indonesians have been impoverished by massive job losses and rising prices. This has even led to food riots.³¹ There has also been a rise in violent crime. Many small businesses are closing down as the demand for their products and services no longer exists and this is resulting in further large lay-offs.

The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT)-Uruguay Round Agreements in 1994, which the Philippines has entered, has resulted in increased importation of beef, poultry and corn leading to losses among local livestock and poultry traders and threatens the jobs of workers.³²

The ongoing possibility of US airstrikes on Iraq continues to threaten the jobs of 500,000 Filipinos who are OCWs. Other migrant workers have also been deported including Burmese workers in Thailand who had gone there to support their families and to flee a repressive regime.

At the same time the plunder and destruction of the environment which is the people's means and source of subsistence, continues on a massive scale. People have to swallow a number of bitter pills: high oil prices, increased foreign debt and more taxes.³³ Currently, the enjoyment of human rights and the full development of individuals and their communities are more difficult than ever. Indeed mere survival is proving to be a constant battle.

Challenges ahead: an agenda for action

The adherence to international human rights standards and the achievement of genuine democracy is the major challenge to be addressed by human rights organisations and broader NGOs today if we do not want achievements to date in human rights to be reversed or cancelled out. This need is especially strong in the context of the Asian economic crisis. The main fear of the poor is that they will pay the brunt of the cost imposed by what is a private debt crisis without ever having got any of the gains.

In light of this situation there are some specific challenges that need to be addressed in South-East Asia though their relevance is not only limited to this region.

1. There is a need for more concerted action by Asian NGOs in using the richness of different cultures and traditions in the regions to enhance rather than diminish the meaning and practice of human rights and democracy. The use of "cultural relativism" as an excuse or justification for human rights violations must be denounced and eliminated.
2. Co-operation and co-ordination among Asian NGOs to uphold, protect and promote human rights and democracy must be further strengthened. On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the UDHR, massive human rights education efforts among grassroot communities along with capacity building among human rights advocates and defenders must be undertaken to strengthen and expand the human rights movement at local, national and regional levels. The development of a popular culture of human rights among the peoples of South-East Asia may be achieved through common endeavours and struggles, like regional campaigns and co-ordinated lobbying at government level or at international fora. Through comprehensive and broad-based human rights education, organising and struggles, peoples' networks for human rights in the different countries of the region may be established.
3. There is a need to establish regional conventions and structures. In Europe, the Americas and Africa, there are regional mechanisms which improve the monitoring and implementation of human rights in the different countries of these regions. NGOs working together could spearhead the formulation of a regional convention to be presented to the

regions' governments for discussion and adoption. The elimination of concepts and practices that negate the dignity of the human person and peoples should be strongly and urgently addressed.

4. Deepening our understanding and respect for economic, social and cultural (ESC) rights and the third generation of rights is essential. This leads to a variety of approaches at different levels. International NGOs, especially those which have the resources, the network and the capacity to work in these fields must actively participate in national and regional efforts in this regard. As part of this, there is an urgent need to devise effective measures for the prevention and redress of violations of ESC rights. In all of this the reorientation of governments and groups which hold a narrow view of human rights (as only incorporating civil and political rights) is vital. The divide between civil and political rights and ESC rights must be removed.

To improve the work of NGOs on these rights the linkages between human rights organisations (most of which have expertise primarily in civil and political rights) and people's and development organisations (most of which have been doing work on economic and development rights but not necessarily using human rights language, instruments and mechanisms) must be strengthened.³⁴

5. NGOs must actively participate in the search for and evolution of alternative models of development, which incorporate democracy and human rights, put the human person at the centre of all development processes and sustain a balance between people's sources of subsistence and within the whole ecosystem. This becomes more significant in situations where human rights are violated in the name of development and where the sources of subsistence and the environment are destroyed in the name of development.
6. While asserting collective rights in addition to individual rights requires investment in educational and promotional activities, at the same time, more efforts should be made to challenge governments regarding their failure to protect individuals and peoples from the impact of the actions and policies of big business, multinational companies and international financial and trade institutions like the IMF, World Bank and the WTO. In addition NGOs need to focus on the creation of new global structures which would make these international organisations accountable.

Conclusion

Global responsibility compels us to evolve and establish a new international order wherein all the rights embodied in the UDHR are respected. Each one of us is asked to take up these challenges so that the peoples in the South-East Asian region and the whole world shall enjoy the fullness of life. Global suffering calls for global responsibility.³⁵ Pope John Paul II, in his Encyclical Letter, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* notes that:

Collaboration in the development of the whole person and of every human being is in fact a duty of all towards all... Interdependence must be transformed into solidarity, based upon the principles that the goods of creation *are meant for all*. That which human industry produces through the processing of raw materials, with the contribution of work, must serve equally for the good of all.

Surmounting every type of *imperialism* and determination to preserve their *own hegemony*, the stronger and richer nations must have a sense of moral *responsibility* for the other nations, so that a *real international system* may be established which will rest on the foundation of *equality* of all peoples and on the necessary respect for their legitimate differences. The economically weaker countries or those still at subsistence level, must be enabled, with the assistance of other peoples and the international community, to make a contribution of their own to the common good with their treasures of *humanity and culture*, which otherwise would be lost forever.³⁶

This challenge has become even greater for the peoples of South-East Asia who under the current crisis will face economic hardship, major job layoffs, loss of savings, slow economic growth and significant rises in both rural and urban unemployment. Moreover, the crisis is not only an Asian one. Serious destabilisation has occurred in Latin America, Eastern Europe and is now impacting on Europe, the US and Japan. This has the potential to be a global or at least a Southern crisis like the debt crisis of the 1980s. Hence there is an urgent need to ensure that the socio-economic rights of the poorest and most vulnerable groups in society will be protected. In a largely authoritarian region where people's participation in decision-making has been limited, the road ahead will be difficult. However, the growing role of civil society in some countries is a

window of hope for this crisis to become an opportunity for change.

Footnotes

1 A great number of changes have happened in the region since the time of writing. After a series of riots in Jakarta, President Suharto resigned after 32 years in power. He was replaced by former general Habibie but the political situation in Indonesia continues to be fragile with unrest in Jakarta and other cities. The fundamental power structure is unchanged and Habibie still has to show he is different from his predecessor. Peoples struggling for democracy and self-determination in West Papua and East Timor are met with bullets and repression by the Indonesian military while still suffering from the economic crisis in Indonesia.

In Burma, political repression continues. In mid-July, 79 Aung San Suu Kyi's party colleagues were detained unlawfully without any protest from the ASEAN governments. In the Philippines, Joseph Ejercito Estrada became president; he has close ties with the former Marcos regime. One of his first decisions on taking office, to give a hero's funeral to the deposed dictator Marcos, was only thwarted by massive public protests. His appointment of a military officer implicated in summary execution of 11 persons, the return of a Marcos crony, Danding Cojuangco and the positions taken regarding the Marcos wealth are some of the human rights issues hotly debated in the country. Estrada intervened in a major labour dispute which grounded Philippine Airlines. The terms of the re-opening included a 10 year wage freeze and the suspension of other labour rights. He has also intervened in the case of Ibrahim Anwar in Malaysia, thus breaking the ASEAN tradition of non-interference. It remains to be seen whether Estrada's campaign slogan "Erap para sa mahihirap" (Erap for the poor) will be put into practice.

Over a year after the currency crisis set-off by the devaluation of Thailand's baht, the South-East Asian countries including Indonesia, Thailand, South Korea and the Philippines are not yet on the road to steady recovery as they experience further rises in unemployment, very slow economic growth, and increasing levels of human misery and poverty including hunger and starvation. Most of these governments, including the Philippines, have turned to the IMF to bail them out of the crisis despite some criticisms of the IMF solution. These criticisms come not only from economists and others who have long objected to IMF structural adjustments and the oppressive conditions imposed on debtor countries but also from within the IMF and the World Bank

- 2 Walden Bello, "Overview of current economic, strategic and political developments in South-East and South Asia", *Focus on the Global South*, October 1997, p.1
- 3 Walden Bello, "Democratic expansion and democratic deepening in South – East Asia: the fateful connection", *Trocaire Development Review 1997*, pp.26-27
- 4 *Ibid.*, pp.25-38
- 5 The SPDC was formerly known as the SLORC (the State Law and Order Restoration Council). The change of name has been cosmetic as the regime's reign of terror continues unabated
- 6 See Walden Bello, *Trocaire Development Review 1997*, op.cit., p.35
- 7 Cecilia Jimenez, "Contemporary human rights discourse: a continuing challenge", *Philippines International Review, Human Rights Issues and Challenges*, Pilot Issue, Winter 1997, p.12
- 8 United Nations General Assembly, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 10 December 1948

- 9 World Conference on Human Rights, "The Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action", June 1993, p.30
- 10 Diokno was also detained by the Marcos regime. He founded the Free Legal Assistance Group (FLAG), an association of lawyers that gives legal services to victims of human rights violations
- 11 José W. Diokno, "A Filipino concept of justice", *A Nation for Our Children*, pp.16-21
- 12 Katipunan is also known as KKK (Kagalanggalang na Katipunan ng mga Anak ng Bayan) which is an armed organisation that fought Spanish colonisation in the Philippines in the 1890s
- 13 José W., Diokno, op.cit., pp.20-24
- 14 Chandra Muzaffar, "Ethnicity, ethnic conflict and human rights in Malaysia", *Asian Perspectives on Human Rights*, pp.135-6. For a Christian view on human rights see: *Human Rights*, Linda Hogan, Christian Perspectives on Development Series, Trócaire/Veritas/CAFOD, October 1998. This paper is one of a new series published as part of Trócaire's 25th anniversary reflections on key development issues. Other booklets in the series look at *Land* (Denis Carroll) and *Famine* (Michael Drumm); further booklets will be published in the series
- 15 Abdullahi An-Na'im, "Islam, Islamic law and the dilemma of cultural legitimacy for universal human rights", *Asian Perspectives on Human Rights*, 1990, pp.31-49
- 16 Bangkok NGO Declaration on Human Rights, 27 March 1993, pp.1-2
- 17 Jimenez, op.cit., p.12
- 18 Task Force Detainees of the Philippines (TFDP), *Philippine Human Rights Update*, May - June 1997, July - August 1997
- 19 Amnesty International, APEC, *Human Development and Human Rights*, November 1997
- 20 International Service for Human Rights, *Human Rights in the World Community, Issues and Action*, 1989, p.18. It is also worth noting that although the oldest organisation in the UN system is the International Labour Organisation which has existed for almost 80 years, it remains the case that limited attention has been focused on second generation (ie socio-economic and cultural) rights as opposed to the first generation of civil and political rights
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