

May Day 2020 Statement by Southeast Asian Left — Build a better future for the working people in times of multiple crises

Friday 1 May 2020, by [Left parties and labour organisations \(Southeast Asia\)](#) (Date first published: 1 May 2020).

This statement is prepared by Left parties and labour organisations in the Southeast Asia, and endorsed by groups from within and outside the region.

In recent months, the world has been severely affected and paralyzed by the spread of the coronavirus pandemic. The countries of Southeast Asia are not spared. This health crisis affecting the masses, is part and parcel of the deeper crisis of global capitalism which has bred social inequalities and injustices in all areas of life. The pandemic has erupted in the midst of the climate crisis, and is set to unleash another crisis - an economic crisis with possibly the worst recession in our time.

The working class and the poor are the most impacted by the current coronavirus pandemic. Besides threatening the health and lives of ordinary people, the pandemic has also led to income loss and unemployment for the working class and the poor in the region. Workers face the risk of being retrenched or laid-off, and taking wage cuts. Meanwhile workers in the gig economy risk their lives being made to work without proper protection from the pandemic. Migrant workers, refugees, informal workers, daily-waged workers and many others are among the groups bearing the brunt of the incapacity of the ruling class in dealing with this crisis. Various social assistance programs being introduced by governments in countries affected by the pandemic, are far from enough in alleviating the plight and suffering of the working people and the poor.

The neoliberal policies that facilitated the privatization and commercialization of public goods as well as deregulation of finance capital, have wrecked our societal immunization against social crisis. The massive dismantling of public healthcare over the past four decades, has severely disadvantaged governments in dealing with the current crisis effectively.

During this pandemic crisis, we have witnessed governments in a number of countries make use of the crisis to increase their repression against the working people and the vulnerable, by enhancing the powers of the army and police. There is also the threat of increase of state surveillance to enhance the authoritarian nature of these governments. We should not allow the pandemic to be used as an excuse by repressive governments to curtail our democratic space and suppress people's movement.

As multiple crises unfold at the international level, it will not be "business as usual" for the capitalist economy. This is a time for us to rethink and challenge the current economic model, which has created a massive gap between the rich and the poor, and made the working class totally vulnerable to the worst effects of the pandemic. It is time for us to build solidarity among the working people across the national boundaries to push for a meaningful change in socio-economic direction to

ensure and improve the quality of lives of everyone.

This year May Day, takes place in the midst of this global crisis, which reminds the working class across the world that the fight for a just, safer and better world for all is impossible without the solidarity, organization and mobilization of the working people to demand for genuine social change.

We, the undersigned organisations, call for the following:

1. The governments of ASEAN must **put to use all public and private resources in the healthcare sector effectively to control and alleviate the effect of the coronavirus pandemic**, with special focus on the working people and the poor. **Ensure the access of free universal healthcare for all**, including migrants and refugees. The governments must also ensure proper protection for health workers and support workers who are at the frontline of this battle against the coronavirus pandemic.
2. **Strengthen the public services**, including public health system, education, social housing, power supply, clean water, public transport and other social infrastructure, through progressive taxation of big corporations and the super-rich. Ensure free education for all. The ASEAN governments must work towards a progressive taxation regime for the region. These public services should be nationalised and democratised under public control.
3. **Guarantee jobs and working people's income**, through government investment in productive sectors, like building and maintenance of social infrastructure, sustainable agriculture and food production, generation of renewable energy, provision of social housing etc. We need job and income guarantees for millions of working people in the region. The profit-oriented capitalist system is not able to do this. We need meaningful government intervention. The governments of ASEAN must work together for a "New Deal" for Southeast Asia to build an economy that works for the improvement of people's lives not corporate profits.
4. The governments of ASEAN countries must establish **a regional decent wage mechanism** to stop cheap labour policies and suppression of wages, in order to allow the working people across the region to enjoy a fair share for labour.
5. Develop **a comprehensive plan to enhance food security**, in order to deal with shortages of basic food in times of crisis and protect the livelihood of small farmers.
6. **Repudiate all odious debts** imposed on governments, in order to enable more funds to be allocated for the implementation of social programs for the people in times of crisis.
7. **Stop all evictions**. Governments must ensure the basic right to adequate housing for all. Freeze rent and mortgage payment for the poor to ensure the security of tenancy and reduce the burden of the people. Build more social housing.
8. **Release all political prisoners**. Other prisoners not convicted of violent crime or who do not pose a threat to society should be released or paroled because overcrowded jails are contributing to the spread of the pandemic.
9. Recognise that measures of quarantine, distancing and lockdown can only be effective in combating the pandemic with public cooperation. **Governments must refrain from abusing lockdowns, tracking of infected persons, etc, as a cover to bring in repressive laws or strengthen state coercion**. Implementation of measures against the pandemic should be directed by health authorities under democratic oversight, not by the military and police. There shall be no military intervention in politics and governance under the pretext of containing the pandemic. There

shall be caution towards the state heading towards authoritarianism.

10. ASEAN governments must pay **special attention to the increase in domestic violence against women and girls** as a consequence of the lockdown and provide adequate funding and necessary backing to the support services to monitor and assist the victims of domestic violence.

11. **Oppose the unilateral criminal sanctions** imposed by the imperialist forces (especially the United States) on countries not in line with their interests, including Cuba, Venezuela and Iran.

Our resistance and struggle for our immediate demands must be linked to providing an alternative to the capitalist system - a socialist alternative - based on prioritising human survival and the protection of the environment, instead of capitalist profits. The core of our socialist vision must be based on solidarity, a necessity for surviving catastrophes, which are a challenge to the existing order.

In the spirit of working class internationalism, we call for solidarity and mutual support among the working people of the region and the world, in our effort to build a better world.

Signed by,

1. Partai Rakyat Pekerja (PRP), Indonesia
2. Sedane Labour Resource Centre (LIPS), Indonesia
3. Parti Sosialis Malaysia (PSM), Malaysia
4. Jaringan Rakyat Tertindas (JERIT), Malaysia
5. Partido Lakas ng Masa (PLM), Philippines
6. Bukluran ng Manggagawang Pilipino (BMP), Philippines
7. Sanlakas, Philippines
8. Partido Manggagawa (PM), Philippines
9. Laban ng Masa, Philippines
10. Socialist Workers Thailand Group, Thailand
11. Socialist Party of Papua (PSP)
12. Socialist Alliance, Australia
13. Borderless Movement, Hong Kong
14. Japanese Revolutionary Communist League (JRCL), Japan
15. Nava Sama Samaja Party (NSSP), Sri Lanka
16. Europe solidaire sans frontières (ESSF), France

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