

PRESS RELEASE

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ASEAN HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSIONS CONVENE IN MANILA

The Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines (CHRP) will chair the 4th Consultative Meeting and Conference of the ASEAN National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) at Traders Hotel on January 29-31, 2008.

CHRP Chair Purificacion C. Valera Quisumbing said the Human Rights Commissions of Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines and Thailand are taking a united stand to pursue the establishment of the human rights body as provided for in the newly signed ASEAN Charter.

“We will convene the Chairs and Commissioners of the four Human Rights Commissions to discuss what we as national human rights institutions can do individually and collectively to ensure that the human rights body is created in the ASEAN,” said Chair Quisumbing. (HR Commissions complying with the principles established under the United Nations accreditation system are called National Human Rights Institutions.)

“We will be fleshing out the details of the Declaration of Cooperation we signed at our 3rd meeting in Bali, Indonesia last year”, she added.

In June 2007, the ASEAN Four NHRIs entered into a cooperation agreement to support the work on the establishment of the ASEAN human rights mechanism. They also agreed to collaborate on five thematic issues that are inter-border concerns: terrorism, trafficking in persons, migrant workers, right to development, and human rights education.

“At our Bali meeting, we agreed on a draft cooperation framework and we had identified several activities under each of those thematic concerns. With the new developments in the ASEAN, we will further review this framework to prioritize and finalize our program of activities and joint projects,” the CHRP Chairperson explained.

With their involvement in the activities of the Regional Working Group on the Establishment of the ASEAN Human Rights Mechanism, the four NHRIs are expected to contribute in the formulation of the Terms of Reference of the human rights body, one of the many organs provided in the ASEAN Charter.

“The Human Rights Commission of Malaysia will present a working paper on the TOR or the modalities of the human rights body and we will discuss and agree on a common proposal of the ASEAN four,” the CHRP chair stressed.

She also said they have invited human rights experts in the ASEAN as Lead Discussants in the conference topics. They include Mr. Marzuki Darusman of the Regional

Working Group on the Establishment of the ASEAN Human Rights Mechanism and Mr. Enny Soeprapto, a former commissioner of the Indonesian Human Rights Commission.

The ASEAN Four NHRIs will also discuss how they could help other ASEAN countries to establish their own national human rights institutions, such as Cambodia. Cambodian Prime Minister Samdach Hun Sen has already announced his government's commitment to establish the Cambodian Human Rights Commission. There are also similar initiatives of non-governmental organizations in Vietnam and Laos.

The four HR Commissions are encouraging the establishment of national human rights institutions in the six other countries of the ten-member ASEAN.

The meeting and conference of the ASEAN four NHRIs is being supported by the European Commission under the project, "Enhancing the Role of National Human Rights Institutions in the Development of the ASEAN Human Rights Mechanism."

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