



SUMMARY REPORT

LAUNCH OF THE AICHR THEMATIC STUDY ON THE RIGHT TO PEACE

1 July 2025
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Introduction

1. On 1 July 2025, the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights ('AICHR') launched its new thematic study titled *The Right to Peace: ASEAN Perspectives and Prospects* ('Thematic Study'). The Thematic Study examines the meaning of Article 38 ("Right to Peace") of the ASEAN Human Rights Declaration ('AHRD'), which provides that: "Every person and the peoples of ASEAN have the right to enjoy peace within an ASEAN framework of security and stability, neutrality and freedom, such that the rights set forth in this Declaration can be fully realised. To this end, ASEAN Member States should continue to enhance friendship and cooperation in the furtherance of peace, harmony and stability in the region."

2. Recognising the need for greater clarity in the implementation of the AHRD, AICHR commissioned thematic studies on several of the rights contained in the AHRD, including the right to peace. To initiate the study, AICHR conducted a workshop in October 2012 based on a concept paper that had been adopted a few months earlier. Lao PDR and Cambodia agreed to coordinate the preparatory work. That workshop endorsed the terms of reference and methodology for the study, and Association of Southeast Asian Nations ('ASEAN') Member States (collectively, 'AMS') nominated national focal points to support information-gathering for the study. The first coordination meeting for the Thematic Study was held on 18 July 2014, followed by the second on 5 April 2017. A final AICHR workshop on the outcome of the Thematic Study on the Right to Peace was held on 7 December 2018. The Thematic Study was finalised for publication in 2025 under Malaysia's tenure as Chair of AICHR and launched on 1 July 2025.

3. The launch event was chaired by H.E. Edmund Bon Tai Soon, the Chair of AICHR for 2025 and Representative of Malaysia to AICHR. It provided AICHR an opportunity to bring together AICHR Representatives, together with a range of ASEAN stakeholders, to reflect on and discuss the concept of the right to peace through a series of presentations by the AICHR Representatives and academic experts on human rights, conflict prevention, and peacebuilding.

4. Participants included AICHR Representatives, officials from relevant ASEAN sectoral bodies, ASEAN Secretariat staff, representatives from Timor-Leste, representatives from selected

national human rights institutions, members of civil society organisations (‘CSOs’) with consultative relationship with AICHR, as well as regional and international experts, including representatives from the Australian Human Rights Commission, UN Women, and academic institutions with experience in human rights, peacebuilding, and women, peace and security.

5. The ‘Intersection Between Conflict and Human Rights: Pathways and Approaches to Peace in ASEAN’ workshop was subsequently held on 2 July 2025. It was the first in a planned series of six workshops aimed at supporting AICHR to consider more deeply how it can utilise its mandate to assist ASEAN in strengthening the protection and promotion of human rights across the region, including through more deliberate and systematic engagement in activities focusing on conflict prevention and peacebuilding across the region.

Welcome Remarks

6. The launch event began with **H.E. Edmund Bon Tai Soon**, AICHR Chair 2025 and Representative of Malaysia to AICHR, welcoming fellow AICHR Representatives, representatives from other ASEAN sectoral bodies, and the many civil society representatives, academics, and experts in attendance. He highlighted that the *ASEAN Community Vision 2045 “Resilient, Innovative, Dynamic, and People-Centred ASEAN”* (‘*ASEAN Community Vision 2045*’) along with its Strategic Plans state that our future ASEAN will be an ASEAN Community that is an inclusive and cohesive Community that respects political, social, religious, cultural, and ethnic diversities, which upholds the principles of democracy, rule of law, and good governance; respects fundamental freedoms; and promotes and protects human rights and social justice. Achieving this requires ASEAN organs, bodies, and mechanisms that are more decisive, responsive, and timely as well as future-ready in addressing global and regional challenges.

7. He highlighted that, in this context, AICHR has focused on developing a better understanding of the right to peace. He noted that regional peace is a sub-national, national, and regional challenge — and even an international challenge, at times. He underscored that in order to meaningfully discuss peace and human rights, it is necessary for ASEAN to be willing to discuss conflict. While such discussions may be sensitive, it is increasingly recognised that internal conflicts can spill over into the region, and should therefore not be beyond discussion. He emphasised the importance of creating and enlarging a safe civil space for dialogue on issues such as conflict and peace. Given AICHR’s overarching mandate as ASEAN’s Charter body, it is well-placed to address issues relating to conflict, human rights, and peace.

8. He pointed out that the AHRD differs from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights because it includes three ‘add-value’ rights: the right to development (Articles 35, 36, and 37), the right to a safe, clean and sustainable environment (Article 28f), and the right to peace (Article 38). These rights reflect ASEAN’s unique priorities. After almost 13 years since that right to peace was adopted, the Thematic Study serves as an indispensable springboard for action. The report was adopted at AICHR’s 40th Meeting and Retreat held from 11 to 14 February 2025, and aligns with Malaysia’s ASEAN 2025 theme of ‘Inclusivity and Sustainability’, which includes the agenda of protecting and promoting human rights to peace and development.

9. Drawing on the research findings in the Thematic Study, he stressed the need for ASEAN to ensure both negative peace (i.e. the absence of war) as well as positive peace (which requires countries to address the root causes of conflict by ensuring inclusive and sustainable development, protecting human rights, and fostering societies where individuals can thrive with dignity and security). He suggested that AICHR support efforts to refresh ASEAN's consensus on the right to peace in order to enable ASEAN to be more responsive and timely in addressing challenges posed by conflict. He observed that there is an opportunity to proactively turn ASEAN's aspiration to be a people-centred, caring, and sharing community into a structured reality so that every person can live free from fear and want, and secure the peace necessary to enjoy their human rights. The welcome remarks appear as **Annex A**.

10. Speaking on behalf of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Malaysia, **Raja Intan Nor Zareen**, Director, High-Level Task Force for the *ASEAN Community Vision 2045*, ASEAN-Malaysia National Secretariat, extended thanks to the experts who produced the Thematic Study. She highlighted that ASEAN has deep experience of the significance of peacebuilding from which valuable lessons can be drawn, noting that the organisation was born out of a desire to prevent conflict. Peace, she observed, has always required patience, dialogue, and good leadership. She noted that the Thematic Study analyses what the right to peace means in the specific context of ASEAN, challenging reflection beyond the mere absence of war and inviting consideration of how ASEAN and its people can truly build structures, habits, and cultures that enable people to live in dignity and security. Reflecting on recent world events, she stressed that peace is not just about avoiding war, but about creating the conditions to avoid conflict.

11. She emphasised three key points from the Thematic Study: (1) peace is a right but also a responsibility, requiring action, institutions, and leadership willing to listen, compromise, and take action through good governance and respect for the dignity of every person in ASEAN; (2) there is a need to shift from a focus on negative peace, namely the absence of fighting, to positive peace, where people feel safe, are treated fairly, and have real opportunities to improve their lives; and (3) peace must be taught, nurtured, and defended, especially in the minds of younger generations, to develop a culture of peace founded on empathy. She underscored that Malaysia has long believed in multilateralism, and believes that international law must be applied and peace must be pursued even when that may be difficult.

12. **Cristina Fernández Escorza**, Programme Coordination Specialist, ASEAN Women Peace and Security, UN Women, acknowledged the very positive contribution the Thematic Study makes towards the complementary agenda of women, peace, and security. She observed that it provides both a conceptual and normative framework to translate the vision of the right to peace into reality through regional action. She endorsed the reflections of previous speakers that peace is not only the absence of conflict but also requires the presence of justice, inclusion, and resilience, supported by accountable governance, social justice, and regional solidarity. She highlighted that, in this context, global evidence shows that peace cannot be sustained without the full and meaningful engagement of women: the inclusion of women is not optional but essential to lasting peace. UN Women is

committed to ensuring that peace is realised not only as a principle but also as a lived reality, including for women, girls, and all those affected by exclusion.

13. The final welcome remarks were delivered by **Ambassador Tiffany McDonald**, Head of Mission, Australian Mission to ASEAN, through a pre-recorded message. She commended AICHR for exploring the right to peace as a foundation for sustainable development and inclusive growth. She noted the Thematic Study's finding that peace and human rights are interdependent and mutually reinforcing: peace cannot exist without respect for human rights, and human rights can only be enjoyed under conditions of peace. She noted that Australia is working closely with ASEAN to support conflict prevention, including through a series of workshops on the ASEAN-led regional architecture for conflict prevention, which will culminate in a meeting with senior officials in late 2025. She also noted Australia's renewed grant support to AICHR, which will extend the partnership until January 2028.

Opening Remarks

14. **H.E. Ambassador Yong Chanthalangsy**, Representative of Lao PDR to AICHR, delivered the keynote address, in recognition of his role as the lead proponent of the Thematic Study when it was conceived in 2012. He noted that the Thematic Study was drafted over an extended period, and thanked both his predecessors and the current Chair for their efforts in bringing the work to completion. He reflected on the Cold War years, during which AMS were caught up in conflict as a consequence of superpower rivalries. Sustainable peace was eventually achieved not only as a result of the absence of conflict between AMS, but also because individuals in AMS enjoyed peace within their own borders. He highlighted that the right to peace articulated in Article 38 of the AHRD — which was promoted by Lao PDR — represents a major advancement in recognising that peace must be cultivated in the hearts and minds of the people of AMS.

15. He also noted that existing regional peace programmes require extensive national-level social and political transformation to ensure that people — individually and collectively — can meaningfully realise the right to peace. While underscoring the importance of respecting global norms and standards, he emphasised that this work will also benefit from the rich national experiences across ASEAN, which affirm that enduring peace emerges not merely from strict legal frameworks but from fostering a vibrant and protective culture of inclusion that respects human dignity and human rights.

16. He affirmed that AICHR will continue to strive to make the region more peaceful, stable, and liveable. He highlighted the importance of human rights and peace education, noting that the development of a culture of peace is an essential component of the ASEAN way of life. He suggested that AICHR can be both a forum and a channel to enhance peace, prosperity, and progress for all the peoples of ASEAN. He expressed the hope that, in particular, as AICHR moves forward with implementing the *ASEAN Community Vision 2045*, the Thematic Study would help inform further deliberations on regional approaches to peace. He noted that AICHR's role as an intergovernmental charter body gives it a strong platform for mainstreaming human rights across all ASEAN Community pillars, including by proactively contributing human rights insights to the

development of the *ASEAN Community Vision 2045*, along with its Strategic Plans. AICHR will also work more closely with other ASEAN sectoral bodies to promote better coordination and enhance effectiveness, including in the context of peacebuilding.

17. Following the keynote address, the authors of the Thematic Study joined the AICHR Representatives on stage, and the publication was officially launched.

Panel Discussion 1: The Right to Peace in ASEAN

18. The panel discussion that followed explored the relevance of the right to peace within the ASEAN context and examined ways in which the right could be promoted and upheld. The session was chaired by **H.E. Eugene Tan Kheng Boon**, Representative of Singapore to AICHR. In his introductory remarks, he noted that the *ASEAN Community Vision 2045*, launched in May 2025, addressed building cohesive communities, upholding democracy and the rule of law, ensuring good governance, respecting fundamental freedoms and human rights, and promoting social justice.

19. In discussing the Thematic Study, he observed that the right to peace enshrined in Article 38 of the AHRD was a commitment to facilitating the necessary conditions for the enjoyment of peace. The right had been described as a ‘third generation’ right, coming after civil and political rights and economic, social and cultural rights. As a ‘solidarity right’, the right focused on the wellbeing of a collective as a whole — in this case, the peoples of ASEAN. While the existence of such a right under international law was contested, within ASEAN it was accepted as part of the framework of norms in the AHRD.

20. He noted that Article 38 of the AHRD effectively asserted a link between the enjoyment of human rights, peace, and development, a claim borne out by data indicating that 9 of the 10 countries with the lowest human development indicators were in a state of armed conflict. The Representative of Singapore raised several questions for consideration by the panels during the two sessions for the afternoon, including:

- a) What is the definition of ‘peace’ for ASEAN’s purposes?
- b) Is the right to peace a collective right, an individual one, or both?
- c) Who are the rights holders and duty bearers (bearing in mind that it is important to understand whether any individual or entity has an obligation to respect and protect the right)?
- d) Is Article 38 of the AHRD concerned with intra-state peace, inter-state peace, or both?
- e) Can the right to peace be enforced under the AHRD, even though the AHRD does not include any explicit enforcement mechanisms?
- f) Is this right contrary to the United Nations (‘UN’) Charter, in relation to the UN right to collective self-defence?

21. The first speaker was the Lead Consultant of the Thematic Study, **Professor Sam Blay**, Adjunct Professor, Faculty of Law, Universitas Airlangga, Surabaya. He reflected that some years had passed since the study was first drafted, during which a number of significant developments

have helped inform ASEAN's understanding of peace. He stressed that peace should be seen as an 'enabler' (whether defined as negative or positive peace), serving as the foundation without which other rights cannot be fully realised. Peace can be promoted through two self-reinforcing approaches: a) peace architectures, namely the policies, rules, and procedures that a state or community has in place to promote and enhance peace; and b) peace infrastructures, which is a term referring to the actors (both governmental and non-state) whose work advances peace.

22. Rather than discussing the Thematic Study's findings in detail, he highlighted three issues he considered were overlooked, and which AICHR and ASEAN should keep in mind when moving forward with efforts to strengthen their peace strategies and mechanisms. Firstly, the study lacked a gender lens, including limited attention to the role of women as peace actors in ASEAN. He encouraged AICHR to examine how it could enhance coordination with women's groups, in particular, by supporting efforts to operationalise the ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on Women, Peace and Security ('RPA-WPS') endorsed in 2022. AICHR could also explore collaboration with the ASEAN Women for Peace Registry, which offers a pool of women experts to AMS.

23. He noted that secondly, the Thematic Study failed to consider the role of the private sector and its potential contribution to peacebuilding. Businesses can contribute not only to economic growth but also serve as champions for stability. Thirdly, the Thematic Study did not adequately address the role of the public sector. Consideration could be given to developing specific budget lines for peace-related activities, requiring the public sector to develop peace impact assessments (similar to environmental assessments), or introducing key performance indicators on peace.

24. **H.E. Ambassador Yong Chanthalangsy** offered further observations on conflict and peace in ASEAN, drawing on his personal experiences as a citizen of Lao PDR and later as a war refugee as a result of the American War fifty years earlier. This experience underscored his view that ASEAN must safeguard the solidarity it fought hard for, and avoid being drawn into the political games of powerful states. ASEAN has previously suffered from polarisation arising from geopolitics, and must avoid this at all costs. He cautioned that losing the peace ASEAN has strived for would place ASEAN's economic development and the livelihoods of its people at risk. ASEAN, he emphasised, should avoid taking sides in conflicts and maintain its neutrality. It has to be cautious and smart, by uniting to manage new political challenges, while allowing for national differences where necessary. He also stressed that AMS must avoid interfering in each other's internal affairs, while still promoting the peaceful resolution of disputes when they occur. He urged the adoption of consensus-based approaches.

25. He noted that ASEAN is very attractive to other major partners, and that managing this requires ASEAN to stick to its values. He also noted that AMS have considerable experience in conflict and peace, and could learn from each other before looking to others for lessons and guidance. In this regard, he encouraged AMS to share their experiences with the next generations through specific peace education activities.

26. Building on Professor Sam Blay's earlier observation regarding the absence of women's perspectives in the Thematic Study, **Professor Maria Lourdes Veneracion**, Associate Professor,

Department of Political Science, Ateneo de Manila University, spoke about the importance of recognising women as peace agents in conflict prevention and mitigation, peacebuilding, and post-conflict reconstruction. She emphasised that there can be “no peace without women”. ASEAN now has a Gender Mainstreaming Strategic Framework 2021–2025 and an RPA-WPS, but although gender equality in ASEAN has been institutionalised, it has not yet been internalised. More collaboration across ASEAN bodies is required, as gender equality is not just the work of the ASEAN Committee on Women (‘ACW’), and the ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children (‘ACWC’), but of all ASEAN bodies. In the specific context of peace, it is critical that women’s participation and leadership are recognised and supported in both formal and informal peace spaces at national, sub-national, and community levels.

27. She added that the RPA-WPS provides a strong starting point for how the right to peace can be implemented in a gender-responsive manner. It identifies specific actions in relation to the role of women in conflict prevention and crisis response, the protection of the rights of women and girls, and the participation of women in peace processes, institutions, and decision-making. She shared a case study from the Philippines, highlighting the inclusion of women leaders and women’s perspectives in the Bangsamoro peace process, as well as the laws and institutions that guided the transitional government. Bangsamoro even developed its own Regional Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security. Despite this, the Philippines’ national report that informed the Thematic Study made no mention of the role of women peace actors, and the regional study turned out to be gender-blind, with only Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Malaysia including any references in their national reports. She suggested that this gap be addressed by AICHR as it moves forward with practical action.

28. The final panellist was **Sreang Chenda**, Member of the Cambodian Human Rights Committee and Director of International Human Rights and the United Nations Department, Cambodia, who also served as a National Focal Point and Country Contributor for the Thematic Study. He agreed with the previous speakers that human rights and peace are interdependent, and endorsed their calls for more action to ensure gender mainstreaming in peace efforts. Reflecting on Cambodia’s experience of conflict and peacebuilding, he observed that the Cambodian people have a strong understanding of the high cost of war, and are very conscious of their hard-earned peace. Cambodia has had 26 years of uninterrupted peace, primarily as a result of the ‘win-win’ policy designed by former Prime Minister Hun Sen and launched on 11 February 1996. The success of the approach demonstrated that peace must come from within and be grounded in the local context, history, and interest of all stakeholders. The policy aimed to reduce fear and uncertainty among ex-combatant Khmer fighters through three core guarantees: a) ensuring their safety — no retribution; b) ensuring their profession and livelihood — guaranteeing their jobs; and c) ensuring their property rights — no confiscation of lands.

29. While acknowledging that the Cambodian experience cannot be replicated as the context is critical, he noted that the underlying principles could still be adapted. He concluded that the right to peace must be seen both as a goal and a guiding principle. It is essential to work collectively across government, civil society, communities, and regional bodies to ensure that peace is built on the

foundations of human rights, justice, and inclusion, and in accordance with regional and international mechanisms and norms.

30. The first panel discussion concluded with comments and questions from the participants. One participant observed the need to consider how the right to peace was linked to emerging security issues such as climate change. Given that Southeast Asia was very vulnerable, analysis was needed on how climate change might affect security, and how that threat could be managed. Another participant asked how ASEAN can support the right to peace in countries where there was internal conflict leading to human rights violations, including in West Papua, Myanmar, parts of the Philippines, and even Malaysia, where issues of race and ethnicity can give rise to conflict within communities.

31. In closing the panel, the Representative of Singapore observed that the Bangkok Declaration 1967 was emphatic that peace was of fundamental importance to AMS and the salience of human dignity as integral to peace and to development. He commended the Thematic Study as an important baseline, comparative study that shared principles, approaches, and experiences on peace across ASEAN.

Panel Discussion 2: Peace — Reality or Illusion?

32. The second panel discussion was chaired by **H.E. Ambassador Nguyen Trung Thanh**, Representative of Viet Nam to AICHR, who opened the session by sharing some personal reflections on living through the American War on Viet Nam. He reflected on the incredible progress made since then, including the fact that ASEAN includes countries that were previously on different sides of the conflict. His critical lesson from his experience of war is that peace can never be taken for granted, a fact highlighted by the current conflicts decimating societies around the world. He expressed shock that these are being allowed to occur on such a scale. He reiterated the observation of H.E. Ambassador Yong Chanthalangsy that ASEAN should tap into insights that countries like Viet Nam and Cambodia have on the right to peace. He highlighted that “from the silence of guns, we need to listen to the voices of the unheard” as countries seek to move from negative peace to positive peace. While most countries are not grappling with conflict in the form of bombing, AMS nonetheless need to reflect on how to build peace where serious tensions and conflict exist.

33. He identified a number of threats to peace in ASEAN, including major power rivalries, polarisation, militarisation, border disputes, intra-state civil conflicts, social fragmentation, the digital divide, climatic and environmental stress (noting that Viet Nam has some of the lowest-lying areas in the world), identity tensions, ethnic discrimination, the politics of fear, populist clamour, mistrust, exclusion, and social withdrawal. As ASEAN’s economies develop, the social and economic divide may grow, which could also threaten peace. These numerous issues demonstrate that ASEAN’s peace remains fragile. He therefore encouraged the panellists to reflect on what ASEAN should do to ensure the practical promotion and protection of the right to the enjoyment of peace across the region.

34. **Dr. Muhadi Sugiono**, Senior Lecturer, Department of International Relations, University of Gadjah Mada, Yogyakarta, who served as a National Focal Point for Indonesia and was a Country Contributor for the Thematic Study, provided participants with a quick summary of some key concepts relating to peace. He referred to Johan Galtung, the so-called ‘father of peace studies’, who coined the terms negative peace and positive peace. Galtung posited that there are two forms of violence to be addressed: a) direct violence, such as assaults, riots, and terrorism, the absence of which constitutes negative peace (the absence of personal violence); and b) indirect violence, such as structural poverty, hunger, discrimination, apartheid, and social injustice, the absence of which constitutes positive peace (the absence of structural violence). He also mentioned Martin Luther King, who stated that “true peace is not merely the absence of tension, it is the presence of justice”. He pointed out that negative peace usually involves reactive measures to stop violence, whereas positive peace requires more deliberate efforts to promote harmony, justice, equity, and social cohesion, alongside the pursuit of strategies for transformation.

35. He further referred to key UN peace reports, namely *An Agenda for Peace* launched in 1992 by then-UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, which focused more deliberately on positive peace, and the *New Agenda for Peace* launched by UN Secretary-General António Guterres in 2023, which emphasises the ongoing importance of conflict prevention and peacebuilding. The latter report also highlights the importance of national ownership in prevention efforts, inclusivity in peace processes, and the need to address emerging threats such as climate change and the weaponisation of technology. He noted that the UN is seeking to shift the understanding of peace towards positive peace, rather than remaining reactive to conflict and deploying peacekeeping missions.

36. He drew attention to the Global Peace Index, a set of data published annually by the Institute for Economics & Peace, an Australian non-governmental organisation. The 2025 data shows that 74 countries experienced improvements in peacefulness, while 87 countries experienced deteriorations, with the average level of peacefulness regressing by 0.36 per cent. One positive aspect of the data was that Southeast Asia mainly demonstrated good results. Singapore and Malaysia are among the most peaceful countries in the Global Peace Index, with Singapore in the top 5 countries, and Malaysia in the top 20. However, other AMS enjoy varying levels of peacefulness, with Myanmar ranking quite low. He argued that ASEAN has played a role in these levels of peacefulness, by promoting stability through diplomacy and cooperation. He cautioned, however, that the region still faces many challenges, including the rise in global power rivalry, geopolitical tensions, and internal challenges arising from non-traditional security issues such as human trafficking.

37. The final presentation was delivered by **Associate Professor Dr. Ayesah Uy Abubakar**, Lecturer, Albukhary International University and Member, ASEAN Women for Peace Registry (Malaysia Representative), who reflected on the realities of peace within the ASEAN community. She noted that peace is not simply about ideas such as social harmony, but involves the acceptance and normalisation of peaceful conflict in the public domain. Conflict will always exist due to historical antecedents, power imbalances, and socio-economic imperatives. What matters is therefore how countries, communities, and people deal with conflict — “peace by peaceful means”,

as she noted. Peace is both a goal and a process, and even conflicts can be harnessed to bring about transformative change in terms of social and economic justice.

38. She then reflected on the development of ASEAN's peace research networks across the region, led by so-called scholar-practitioners of peace and conflict studies, including the establishment of the Southeast Asian Conflict Studies Network as far back as 1999. She referred to a wide range of national and regional peace studies networks that can be tapped into by AICHR, other ASEAN sectoral bodies, and AMS. She shared examples of good practice from the work of civil society and local peace actors engaging in conflict settings, to mediate issues and build the foundations for successful future peace actions, including in Aceh, Indonesia (e.g. Flower Aceh, the women's peace movement), the Philippines in relation to the Bangsamoro peace process (e.g. Mindanao Peace Weavers, Miriam College in relation to peace education, and Mindanao News) and Southern Thailand (e.g. Universities for Peace that supports peace education, Deep South Watch that monitors violence, and the Peace Resource Centre that serves as a safe space for discussion and education).

39. She highlighted that many communities and CSOs across ASEAN are working on peacebuilding. Peace is being advanced by CSOs, students, researchers, religious leaders, Indigenous groups, youth, women, and marginalised groups who support a range of initiatives, including conflict prevention, mediation, peace education, and peacebuilding. These actors work across different sectors of society, as well as engage with governments, and even with non-state armed groups at times. She encouraged AICHR to not only engage with government peacebuilders but to also pave the way for civil society to become partners in operationalising the right to peace. For ASEAN to be relevant, it needs to be fully engaged with its communities, including by ensuring that women, young people, and other groups are included in peace efforts. It is the ASEAN people who have invested, and will continue to invest, the courage and time needed to achieve peace, and it is therefore critical that they are proactively engaged in this work.

40. The panellists then took questions and comments from participants. **A participant** endorsed the reflections of the last speaker that conflict will always exist but must be better managed. She noted that conflict has multiple root causes, including not just power imbalances between elites and others, but also problems rooted in economic, cultural, and social issues. She appreciated the recognition of the role of civil society in conflict prevention and peacebuilding, and highlighted the value of peace education as an approach to conflict prevention. In response, the Chair of the panel discussion concurred that prevention is a key issue, noting that ASEAN should not only respond to conflict but also engage more actively in preventive diplomacy.

41. **A participant** drew attention to the value of the Thematic Study as a comparative report that provides a baseline on the right to peace across ASEAN while showcasing various national approaches to peace-related work. He also endorsed the analysis that peace is an enabler of other rights, noting that if peace is the 'operating system' (as in a computer), then the other 'apps' (such as development and human rights) cannot work without it.

42. **A participant** offered a comment, noting that he found the academic views shared to be too complicated and preferred to learn practical lessons from experiences of war and peace within ASEAN. He observed that in Lao PDR, advice from foreigners was considered, but peace processes were led domestically. He contrasted this with Africa, where decolonisation is incomplete and the involvement of foreign powers in peace efforts has arguably been detrimental. He stressed that peace processes must be homegrown.

43. In response, **another participant** noted the importance of reflecting on theoretical concepts in relation to peace, which can serve as a compass to help AICHR navigate forward. He emphasised the need to understand how peace can be achieved and how peace does not regress, and how to do so in ways that protect human rights.

44. **A participant** commented on the need to more deliberately consider youth perspectives on peace. She pointed out that ideally, ASEAN or AICHR should consider setting up a mechanism to listen to young people more systematically. She encouraged AICHR to amplify diverse voices, including those of young persons, refugees, stateless persons, undocumented communities, persons with disabilities, and persons with diverse gender identities. It is important to understand the challenges they face in exercising their right to peace at the family, community, and societal levels. She also emphasised the importance of adopting a gender lens in peace efforts, prioritising the reduction of gender inequalities, and addressing gender-based violence and child protection. She further highlighted that climate change is an emerging threat that will increasingly impact the peace agenda.

45. The panel discussion concluded with final reflections from the panellists. **Associate Professor Dr. Ayesah Uy Abubakar** stressed that peace, human rights, and development are self-reinforcing, with all three being critical to building stronger, resilient societies. She also underscored the importance of national action plans on women, peace, and security, which can provide opportunities to incorporate the views of marginalised groups more systematically, provided they are inclusive and participatory so as to truly tap into a diverse range of perspectives.

46. **Dr. Muhadi Sugiono** noted that the perspectives on negative and positive peace were not intended to complicate the discussion, but to highlight that there are more dimensions to peacebuilding than just the absence of war. He used the example of the Aceh peace negotiations, which, although formally concluded by high-level officials, were supported by a cross-section of civil society whose long-term engagement informed the peace agreement. They set in place the foundations for building positive peace over time, confirming the value of community peace agents. In contrast, in the current Ukraine-Russia context, an externally imposed ceasefire or peace agreement will struggle to hold if it does not also facilitate ownership across a broader cross-section of society.

47. **H.E. Ambassador Nguyen Trung Thanh** ended the session by stressing that peace and human rights are indivisible, and encouraging ASEAN to view these challenges as opportunities to transform how the region builds sustainable peace.

Closing Remarks

48. The Chair of AICHR for 2025, **H.E. Edmund Bon Tai Soon**, delivered the closing remarks, thanking all participants for their contributions. He noted that the Thematic Study demonstrates the complexity of the issues but also provides a strong foundation to inform future AICHR discussions, including the ‘Building Peace — From Conflict Prevention to Sustainable Peace’ workshop scheduled for the following day. The workshop will offer an opportunity to drill down into the report’s findings and ideas, as well as to draw on the experiences of the numerous human rights and peacebuilding experts present. He expressed his commitment to using these discussions to help develop an ASEAN-specific understanding of peace and identify the common pathways to peace that are aligned with the *ASEAN Community Vision 2045*.

ANNEX A

WELCOME REMARKS DELIVERED BY THE CHAIR OF THE ASEAN INTERGOVERNMENTAL COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS (AICHR) AND REPRESENTATIVE OF MALAYSIA TO AICHR, H.E. EDMUND BON TAI SOON, AT THE LAUNCH OF THE AICHR THEMATIC STUDY ON THE RIGHT TO PEACE

**1 JULY 2025
KUALA LUMPUR, MALAYSIA**

Representatives of the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights ('AICHR'),

Raja Intan Nor Zareen binti Raja Khairul Anuar, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Malaysia,

Ambassador Tiffany McDonald, Head of Mission, Australian Mission to ASEAN (who is joining us online),

Ms Cristina Fernández Escorza, Programme Coordination Specialist, ASEAN-Women Peace and Security, United Nations Women ('UN Women'),

Ms Joanna Mansfield, Team Leader, International Engagement, Australian Human Rights Commission ('AHRC'),

Excellencies, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

Salam sejahtera and good afternoon.

On 26 May 2025, ASEAN Leaders made history by signing the Kuala Lumpur Declaration on ASEAN 2045: Our Shared Future and correspondingly adopted the *ASEAN Community Vision 2045 "Resilient, Innovative, Dynamic, and People-Centred ASEAN"* ('*ASEAN Community Vision 2045*') along with its Strategic Plans. It is stated that our future ASEAN will be an ASEAN Community that is an inclusive and cohesive Community that respects political, social, religious, cultural, and ethnic diversities, which upholds the principles of democracy, rule of law, and good governance, respects fundamental freedoms, and promotes and protects human rights and social justice. The Community will be anchored on ASEAN Centrality with enhanced institutional capacity and effectiveness, with ASEAN organs, bodies, and mechanisms that are more decisive, responsive, and timely as well as future-ready in addressing global and regional challenges.

Regional peace is a challenge. It is a sub-national, national, and regional challenge. At times, it is an international challenge.

The reality is that there are continuing conflicts and threats to peace in ASEAN due to a host of reasons. We cannot hide or run away from this fact. And to discuss peace and human rights, we need to discuss conflict. Spillover conflict issues that become region-centric issues cannot always be considered internal affairs of ASEAN Member States.

This is reflected in the *ASEAN Community Vision 2045* and ASEAN's initiatives on conflict prevention, and civilian and human rights protection. Further, to ensure that the text of the 2007

ASEAN Charter will mean something to us in our lived experiences and realities, we need to create and enlarge a safe civil space to discuss and confront complex issues, including conflict and peace, deeply. Given AICHR's overarching mandate as ASEAN's Charter body, it is well-placed and sufficiently flexible to platform and address peace and peacebuilding efforts.

The right to development, the right to peace and the right to a safe, clean, and sustainable environment are the three 'add-value' rights distinguishing the ASEAN Human Rights Declaration 2012 ('AHRD') from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948. These rights reflect the unique regional context and priorities of ASEAN nations, emphasising the interdependence of peace, development, and environmental protection in the promotion and protection of human rights.

After almost 13 years after the right to peace in Article 38 of the AHRD was declared, this thematic study on the right to peace in ASEAN is an indispensable springboard for action.

Peace cannot last without both negative and positive peace. Positive peace requires addressing the root causes of conflict, ensuring inclusive and sustainable development, protecting human rights, and fostering societies where individuals can thrive with dignity and security.

To achieve a culture of peace, positive peace must also be promoted, and it must be concrete, achievable, and integral to ASEAN's policies on security, development, and human rights.

While efforts to promote peacebuilding, preventive diplomacy, and community resilience are ongoing, economic disparities, and differing cultures and political systems within ASEAN continue to pose significant hurdles. Without mechanisms able to provide early warning signs and rapid responses, and at the same time, enhanced remedy and grievance channels through which affected people and communities can invoke the right to peace directly — the right risks becoming 'illusory'.

I trust that AICHR can enhance ASEAN's capacity to operationalise the diplomatic and interlocutor tracks by undertaking strategic initiatives to advance the right to peace. Through its strength, AICHR can also provide safe spaces for dialogue while enacting collaborative measures with ASEAN actors and stakeholders. These possible forms of human rights practices are aligned with the *ASEAN Community Vision 2045* to refresh processes to be more resilient, innovative, agile, adaptive, responsive, and decisive in addressing increasing cross-cutting issues.

We at ASEAN are challenged to proactively turn ASEAN's aspiration to be a people-centred, caring, and sharing community into a structured reality so that every person can live free from fear and want, and secure in the knowledge that the promise of peace underpins — and never undermines — their equal, fundamental, and inalienable human rights.

On behalf of AICHR as its Chair this year, I commend this report to rights holders, stakeholders and all those interested in this subject, aiming to provide substance to ASEAN's broad promise of peace and respect for human rights. The data support existing frameworks for ASEAN Member States to translate promise into practice.

I applaud the persistence of the Representatives of Lao PDR in leading this study, and particularly Excellency Ambassador Yong Chanthalangsy for completing it during his time, and in supporting this launch event. The report was adopted at the AICHR 40th Meeting and Retreat held from 11 to 14 February 2025 in Langkawi and aligns with Malaysia's ASEAN 2025 theme of 'Inclusivity and Sustainability' that includes the agenda to protect and promote human rights to peace and development.

I thank the research team, writers and all the AICHR Representatives who have throughout the years supported the study.

Finally, I acknowledge UN Women for providing resources for this launch programme, and the Australian Human Rights Commission on behalf of the Australian Government for making the publication and printing of the report possible.

As we move forward in the face of regional conflicts and challenges, ASEAN and AICHR must robustly continue their quest to find common ground to smoothen and deepen our pathways to peace. It will not be easy. But if we know that what we are doing is right, we need to be strong, brave, and courageous to do it.

I want to thank the team led by Malaysia's AICHR Assistants — Toh Nyon Nyin, Nurul Aliaa Azman, Valen Khor, Umavathni Vathanaganthan, and Nurkamelia Ghazali — for putting together this programme, and the staff from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Malaysia for their invaluable support.

Once again, I welcome you to this launch event and trust you will actively participate in the panel discussions.

Terima kasih.