



Press Release:

Regional Asia Seminar on the “Role of Truth in Strengthening Peace in Asia”

Banda Aceh, 11 October 2017

More than 100 policymakers, academics, civil society and survivors from Indonesia, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Myanmar, Timor-Leste and South Korea are gathering in Banda Aceh on 12 October 2017 to discuss the role of truth commissions in strengthening peace in Asia.

Many Asian countries have faced a history of mass human rights violations, paired with weak mechanisms for judicial accountability. In response, non-judicial mechanisms such as truth commissions have been established in several countries during periods of transition. Recent peace processes in Aceh, Mindanao, Sri Lanka and Nepal have included the establishment of truth commissions. Truth commissions also ushered regime change in Timor-Leste (both a national process and a bilateral commission with Indonesia), South Korea and Thailand. Truth commissions have an impactful role in revealing past violations, clarifying history as well as strengthening peace and democracy.

Galuh Wandita, AJAR’s Executive Director reaffirms the positive contribution that truth commissions are bringing to peace in the region. “Here in Aceh and Indonesia, we have much to learn about being courageous enough to look at our past conflicts. Truth commissions in many places in Asia are contributing to peacebuilding, providing a holistic framework to care for victims, seek the truth, push for justice and reform. They can play a role in setting the foundation for complex transitions to democracy, identifying root causes of conflict, and allowing a process to address historical injustices and grievances. It is important that the stakeholders for peace, local and international actors put their trust and resources into truth commissions,” she said.

This regional seminar aims to gather the experiences and lessons learned from truth commissions, and to encourage ongoing truth-seeking efforts in order to strengthen peace and promote accountability in Asia. These discussions are to take place in Aceh, a province that saw a peace process between the Government of Indonesia and the Free Aceh Movement on 2005. The Aceh peace agreement mandated efforts to resolve past human rights violations through a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (KKR) and human rights courts.

The Governor of Aceh’s opening remarks, delivered by the Governor of Aceh’s Expert Staff in Human Resources and Stakeholder Relations, Dr. Abdul Karim, MSi, emphasised that “[t]he Aceh TRC is a commitment of the GAM and the Republic of Indonesia as mandated in the Memorandum of Understanding in Helsinki. The Government will focus on empowering the Aceh TRC, “both in terms of institutional capacity and human resources.” The Governor stressed four important elements in his statement, “First, the commissioners must develop a high quality and professional institution. Second, [commissioners must] collect existing data from all places or institutions as a start and basis for future statement-taking efforts. Third, truth-seeking and statement-taking efforts



must not be conducted before preparing the institution and its personnel for their tasks. Fourth, all institutions committed to the Aceh TRC must mutually protect and support the TRC in the journey to realise justice for victims and to maintain peace.”

Afridal Darmi, the Chair of Aceh TRC states, “The Aceh TRC has started its work this year. We hope this commission can reveal the truth about massive human right abuses in Aceh and provide historical clarification on the dark times in our history. This regional seminar is a good opportunity for the Aceh TRC to introduce our work, receive support from experts and learn from their experiences. We can gather their successes and failures as lessons learned for the Aceh TRC.”

This regional seminar is hosted by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Aceh (KKR Aceh) together with Asia Justice and Rights (AJAR), KontraS Aceh, ICAIOS, Kata Hati, LBH Aceh and the Transitional Justice Asia Network (TJAN). TJAN is a network of organisations engaged in pursuing transitional justice initiatives in Asia, including AJAR and KontraS Aceh (Indonesia), ND-Burma (Myanmar), Suriya Women’s Development Centre (Sri Lanka), Alternative Law Groups (Philippines) and the Cross Cultural Foundation (Thailand).

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Agenda

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| 09.00 – 09.30 | Quran Recital National Anthem: Indonesia Raya Welcome ceremony: Dance of Ranup Lampuan Aceh |
| 09.30 – 10.00 | Welcome: <i>Galuh Wandita</i> , Director of AJAR, Representative of TJAN Opening remarks: <i>Afridal Darmi</i> , Chair of Aceh TRC Keynote speaker: <i>Government of Aceh</i> |
| 10.15 – 10.15 | Break |
| 10.15 – 13.00 | Truth Commission and Peace Process: Opportunity and Challenges <i>Hugo Fernandez</i> , Director of the National Chega Commission, former Head of Research and Investigation of CAVR, Timor-Leste <i>Atty. Cecilia Jimenez</i> , Former Government Commissioner of the Transitional Justice and Reconciliation Commission in the Philippines; UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons <i>Munawar Liza Zainal</i> , Former Free Aceh Movement (GAM) Negotiator Team in Helsinki <i>Patrick Burgess</i> , Expert of Transitional Justice in Asia and President of AJAR Moderator: <i>DR. Saiful Mahdi</i> , Universitas Syah Kuala, TJAN Indonesia |
| 13.00 – 14.00 | Lunch |
| 14.00 – 16.00 | Role of government, CSOs, Women and Survivors in Truth Commissions |

Sarala Emmanuel, Director of Women Development Centre, Sri Lanka
Romadon Panjor, Editor of Deep South Watch, South Thailand
Devi Riansyah, Head of the Secretariat Office of Aceh TRC
Scot Stevens, Transitional Justice Working Group, South Korea
Moderator: *Atty. Melanie Pimentel*, Senior State Solicitor, Office of the
Solicitor General in the Philipines