

# The Ethics of **ASEAN**



**Dr Bob Aubrey**  
with the ASEAN University Network Research Team





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## About the Author

Dr Bob Aubrey has published 14 books on different aspects of human development and leadership. He is an advisor to companies, associations and governments on human development where he has worked in more than 25 countries across six continents. Dr Aubrey is founder of the ASEAN Human Development Organisation (AHDO) and is Academic Advisor for the Universiti of Malaya International Master in Human Development.



## Note to the reader

Writing the first book specifically on the ethics of ASEAN has been a humbling but rewarding experience. The purpose of this book is to provide a reference for readers interested in ASEAN – both working professionals and students alike. You may wonder if there is indeed an ethics for this diverse region, how those ethics have evolved and what ASEAN institutions and organisations are responsible for ASEAN ethics. Also, you may wonder why, on some issues, the region seems unable to agree on an ethical decision or take ethical action. I try to answer those questions in this book.

Part of what you can expect to find in this book is best explained by saying what it is not. It is not a textbook on ethics. Textbooks are meant to cover all ethical topics but current ethics textbooks in English are often dominated by Western philosophy and issues, never mentioning any ethical sources at all from Southeast Asia. This book fills that gap. The second thing this book is not is an encyclopaedia of all the ethical ideas and values of Southeast Asia. It is about ASEAN as a community of nations, an economic, social and cultural entity rather than the vast and diverse mix of ethnic groups, religious doctrines and changing social trends. Third, this book is not a comparison of ASEAN ethics with that of neighbouring countries, global superpowers or other regional organisations like the European Union. I tried to stick to ethical issues and discussions about the region and in the region. Finally, this book is descriptive rather than prescriptive. I have not made pronouncements on where ASEAN is right and wrong, or what ASEAN should do. That said, the book is not ethically neutral. I do not fall back on the ethical relativism of describing right and wrong as just a point of view. Ethical judgments are made in describing cases that violate or contradict ASEAN's Human Rights Declaration or are clearly detrimental to the human development of ASEAN citizens and residents.

What is new in this book? You will find a description of ASEAN's ethical evolution and a model of types of ethics at work in ASEAN in Part One. This includes case studies where ASEAN has become paralysed because of conflicting ethical types. Also new in Part Two are the 44 ASEAN ethical explanations and perspectives of representatives on 8 topics. The full dialogues are also available in video webinars. Part Three provides a new description of ethical risk for ASEAN and an analysis of how ASEAN can successfully develop its ethical capability in the future.

For the reader, it should be clear that this book is a kind of beginning for understanding the ethics of ASEAN. It is not the final word. There will certainly be more to come from ASEAN ethics thought leaders.



## **Introduction by Dr Choltis Dhirathiti, Executive Director of the ASEAN University Network**

This book is the result of a series of dialogues on ASEAN ethics co-organized by the ASEAN Human Development Organisation (AHDO), the Foundation for International Human Rights Reporting Standards (FIHRRST), and the ASEAN University Network (AUN) Secretariat. The dialogues were conducted in the form of webinars known as the “ECAAR Dialogue Series”, also referred to as the “Ethics Webinar Series”. ECAAR functioned as a cover brand for the collaboration among AHDO, FIHRRST, and the AUN Secretariat, intended to represent a loosely formed “Ethics Council and Advisory for the ASEAN Region”. The webinar series comprised a total of eight webinars with different themes held from January 2021 to January 2023. The combined duration of these eight webinars was 1,275 minutes, with a total live audience or viewership of 8,017 counted, not including those who accessed the content in “watch-later” mode. As AUN is the network of leading universities in the ASEAN region, its Secretariat is delighted to offer support for both the ethics dialogues and the publication of these discussions, for the benefit of the general public and in service to the delivery of education within higher education institutions. After all, we firmly believe that the university serves as the natural habitat for cultivating the values of diversity and inclusiveness, including ethics.

Diversity and inclusiveness are practical principles that need to be cultivated if we want them to become part of the core values and everyday practices in our society. To achieve this, the correct standpoint is required, and it appears that the standpoint of pluralism is compatible with contemporary values of diversity and inclusiveness, in contrast to egoism, which is not. As human beings, we all make judgments in our everyday lives. We make judgments about what the true facts are, what things we can call beautiful, and what kinds of behavior towards other human beings we can deem right or righteous. We disagree with, or even condemn, what we perceive as lies or untruths, the ugly, and wrongdoing or immorality. Everyone has his/her own standards for judging the world around us, whether it be the real, the beautiful, or the righteous. It is part of our existence as humans, shaped and practiced throughout our lives. An egoistic person makes judgments based on the belief that he/she has a better understanding, taste, or moral superiority than others. A person with a pluralistic worldview or mindset sees the need to explore different understandings of the facts, different aesthetic judgments, and different ethical points of view; for the world is greater than what one thinks within one's own mind.

This book is about ethics. It concerns the judgment of right and wrong that each of us makes in our daily life, in different situations and circumstances. It could be said that ethics are related to the dilemmas in our actions. In other words, without dilemmas, there would not be ethical problems. It is about choices in our actions as well as the consequences for which we are accountable, even punishable, when choosing those actions. That is to say, ethics are the principles of right actions. They are the principles each of us upholds or believes in, guiding us in making decisions on how to act when facing dilemmas in a variety of situations. And this book is about ethics in the ASEAN region, which is, in the words of Dr. Bob Aubrey, who is both the author and the editor of this book, "ASEAN ethics is a work in progress" (Chapter 3). This presents both excitement and problems, with one of the challenging questions being "can ASEAN be a respectable ethical community of diversity?" (Chapter 1).

Due to its easy-to-follow style and not excessively high level of abstraction, the contents of this book are most suitable for classroom seminars as well as for supporting real-world research exercises or fieldwork studies, in addition to its appeal to general readers who want to explore the complex amalgamation of value judgments from different sources, standpoints, historical backgrounds, and different kinds of dilemmas. Without compromising the controversies surrounding the ethical issues discussed in each chapter, the book presents many kinds of ethics. In Part 1, we have virtue ethics, Asian values, rules-based ethics, results-based ethics, leadership ethics, and so on, with the expectation that many more ethics will emerge as the ASEAN region is constantly facing new problems, new priorities, and new geopolitical situations. In Part 2, we have a multitude of themes represented by various thought leaders and stakeholders from different socio-economic sectors, including young people. These themes include ethics of diversity, corporate ethics, ethical leadership, ethics of the digital world, ethics of the future of work, ethics of freedom, ethics of sustainability and biodiversity, and ethics of human development.

This multitude of ethical issues and various types of ethical thinking reflect what has been mentioned earlier, that ASEAN ethics is still a work in progress within the geographical region of diverse cultures, different politico-economic settings, and varying paths of development. Consequently, we can also expect diverse ethical dilemmas facing the people of ASEAN in their daily lives. As a work in progress, we can anticipate that the dialogue and the sharing of diverse viewpoints on ethical issues will never cease. Indeed, it can be asserted that this book may serve as the inception of a profound, inclusive, rational, and systematic discourse on ASEAN ethics.



## Preface by Dr Marzuki Darusman, Human Rights Activist and Founder, Foundation for International Human Rights Reporting Standards (FIHRRST)

This admirable book on ethics in Southeast Asia entitled the Ethics of ASEAN, by Dr Bob Aubrey comes out at a crucial moment in the development dynamics of the region. Never before has the need to construct an ethics perhaps been so urgent to cope with the scale of diversity - and the bewildering speed of its diversity-driven flourishing - as deeply felt as now.

The coverage of themes and format of presentation promises the book to be of lasting contribution. Its pioneering and first entry into the seeming beginnings of a somewhat neglected conversation in this area assures that.

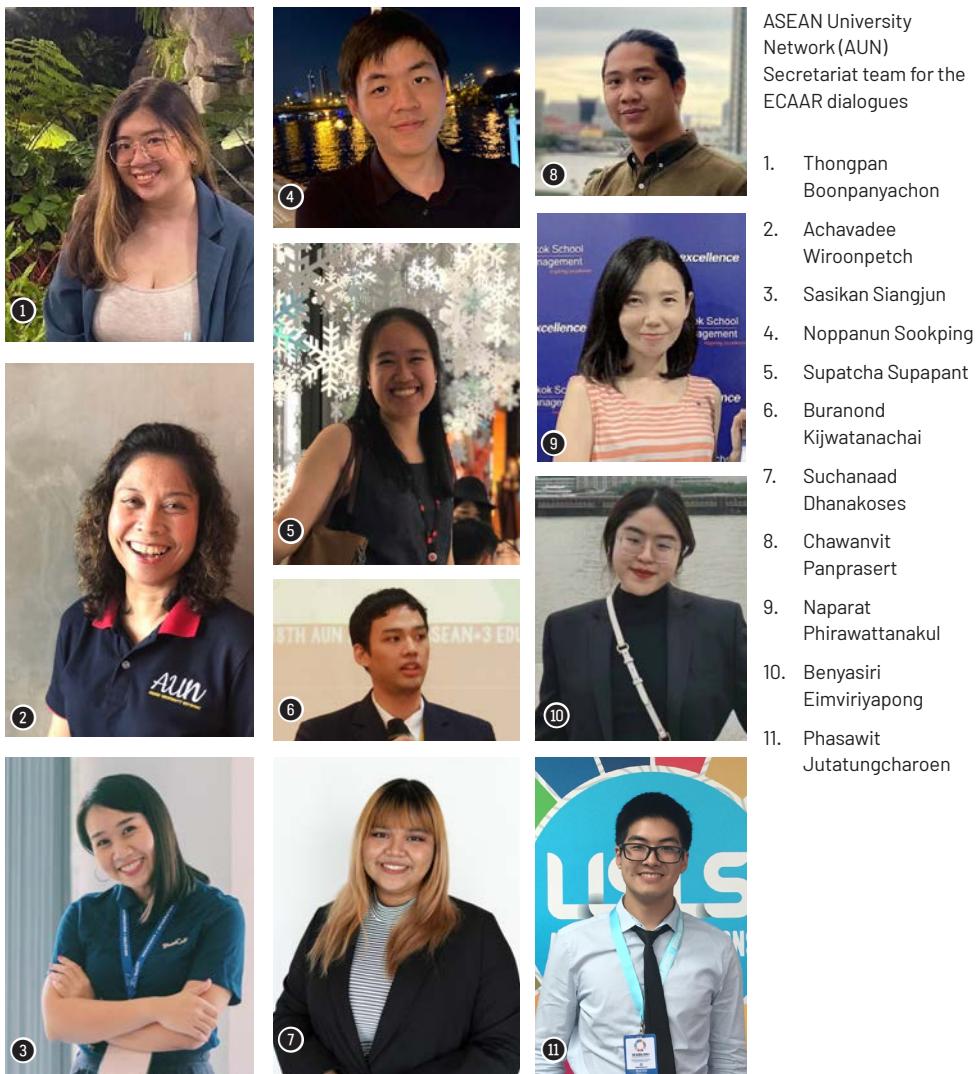
Southeast Asia, a more than six thousand year historic and cultural region, currently overlain by a few decades long - for the most part peaceful - statist structure known as ASEAN, is home to the whole range of distinctive human values, social norms and world views interactively mingling with one another.

As the region seeks to navigate within an ever more planetary existence, it has become even more critical that - while engaging in its traditional and spiritual pursuits - it is equipped with a firmly grounded motivational ethics to enable the widest scope of cooperation among its varied fellow citizens.

May I humbly express my appreciation for the privilege of jointly embarking with both Dr. Bob Aubrey, Human Development expert par excellence, and Dr Choltis, President, ASEAN University Network, on this remarkable intellectual journey.

## Acknowledgements of AUN contributors

This book would not have been possible without the strong contributing partnership and coordination by Achavadee Wiroonpatch of the ASEAN University Network Secretariat for the 8 ECAAR webinars that make up the content of Part 2 of the book. As the moderator of these webinars and representative for the ASEAN Human Development Network, I worked closely with the organising team at AUN in setting the ethics themes, identifying and briefing the 44 speakers in the discussion, and running the online events.



I would especially like to thank two researchers who briefed speakers for the themes and summarised the recorded ECAAR discussions



**Phasawit Jutatungcharoen (nickname John)**

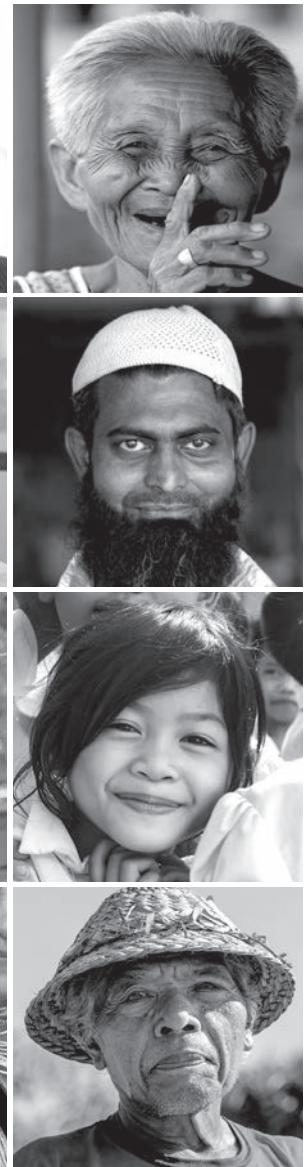
Former Programme Officer and Writer at the AUN Secretariat, Phasawit has a Master in International History, the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Geneva, and a Bachelor's Degree in Politics and Public Administration, University of Hong Kong. His past contributions to AUN included his role as interviewer and writer for the "Management and Strategy: How AUN-HPN Became a Driving Force for Regional Health Promotion" book, initiation of the AUN Thematic Network News Series for the AUN E-newsletter, as well as supervision over a number of research projects at the AUN Secretariat. Following his career at the AUN Secretariat, Phasawit worked AMR Awareness and Communications Specialist for the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations. He also served as Young Leader for the EU-ASEAN Young Leaders Forum 2022 and Representative at the EU-ASEAN Youth Forum 2022 and is now a Volunteer Podcast and Interview Editor at the Student Think Tank for Europe-Asia Relations. Currently, Phasawit works as a consultant at LightBlue Consulting.

**Noppanun Sookping (nickname Pleum)**

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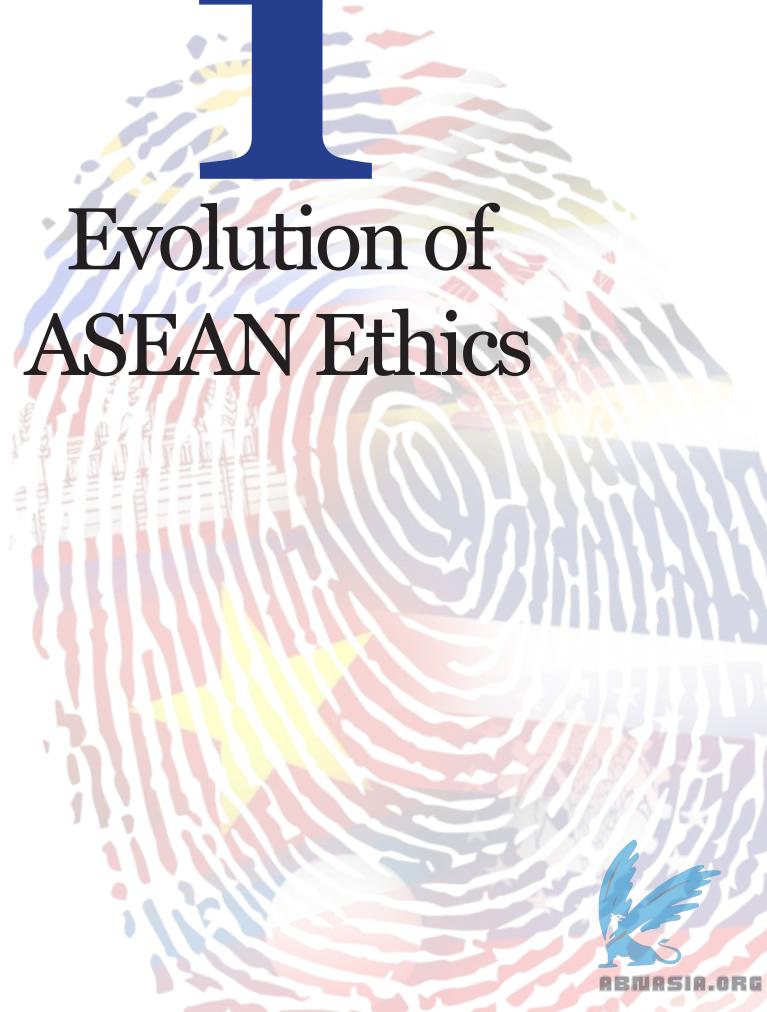


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# Part 1

## Evolution of ASEAN Ethics





# CHAPTER

# 1

## The Founding Ethical Enterprise

The regional association that would become the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) can be traced back to 1961 when three nations Thailand, the Philippines, and the Federation of Malaya came together to form what they initially called the Association of Southeast Asia (ASA). From this seed an aspirational ethic of collaboration and an ideal of human development took root. The founding ideal was eloquently stated by Emmanuel Pelaez, Vice-President and Foreign Secretary of the Philippines:<sup>1</sup>

*Long life to ASA. May it not only keep alive the hopes of the Malay in the kampong, the Thai by the riverside, and the Filipino in the barrio - but, beyond that, may it help bring about the realisation of these hopes in order that the millions of people in our countries may find a sense of true brotherhood, not in suffering but in contentment, not in the degradation of poverty but in the dignity of an ample life, not in the darkness of ignorance but in the sunlight of education, not in the affliction of disease but in the virility of good health - not in the despair of a stunted life but in the exhilarating and exultant environment of limitless opportunity for the development, enrichment and fulfilment of the human personality.*

### Is an Ethics of ASEAN Possible?

How is it possible for a region to have its own ethics? We need to start by defining ethics before coming to the question of regional ethics.

In English there are actually two words for the same thing, ethics and morals. The Encyclopaedia Britannica declares that the two terms are used interchangeably and most

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in the May 1962 letter from Gayl D. Ness to Richard Nolte of the Institute of Current World Affairs. Downloaded 8 November 2021 from the ICWA online archive <http://www.icwa.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/GDN-14.pdf>

ethicists (specialists in ethics or moral philosophy) consider the terms as more or less interchangeable.<sup>2</sup> The simple explanation for this is because “ethics” is derived from the ancient Greek *ethos* while “morals” is derived from the Latin *moralis*. English often has these duplications. For example, the Greek-derived word *pedagogy* and the Latin-derived word *education* refer to the same thing: in fact, the Roman philosopher and statesman Cicero had to invent the Latin word *educare* since there was no equivalent in the language for the Greek concept of *paideia*.

Fundamentally ethics is about making decisions or acting in a way that can be judged as right or good. The core assumption is that we humans make conscious and responsible decisions in how we act, how we live our lives and how we organise society.

What is the opposite? Unethical is the word we attribute to those who make decisions without principles or without consideration for others. In the context of ASEAN, political leaders or governments that do whatever it takes to gain and hold power for themselves without providing an even playing field for other political representatives would be called unethical. In business, companies or leaders that knowingly profit from destructive environmental practices or treat their employees without justice or dignity would be called unethical. And religious or ethnic groups that allow only their doctrines or culture to be practiced in public while repressing the beliefs or way of life of others would be called unethical.

What unethical means is debatable of course. For example, emerging ethical values such as freedom of sexual orientation can be considered unethical by traditionalist or conservative standards. We shall see many examples of debatable ethical issues in our dialogues in Part Two of this book.

So now the question is: how does a region become ethical? For ASEAN it began when the aspirational ideals of the founders were agreed as foundational pillars for regional institutions. Looking at early ASEAN declarations you see aspirations and values that have evolved into the institutions and commitments of the present day. This evolution of ideals into founding principles is common in national ethics, such as the American Declaration of Independence principle that “all men are created equal.” Actually, foundational aspirations and values are present more or less explicitly in most national founding declarations and constitutions.

When it comes to the regional ethical enterprise made up of sovereign nations, ethical foundations are much more complex. ASEAN ethics exists today as a rare example of a multinational organisation, of which the best-known examples are the United Nations and the European Union. All of these organisations have started with foundational principles but their success comes from a capability to evolve ethically.

## Aspiration meets Reality

By 1967, only six years after the founding of ASA, a metamorphosis took place. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations added two more nations, mixing the cultures,

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2 What's the Difference Between Morality and Ethics? by Cydney Grannan, online Encyclopaedia Britannica: <https://www.britannica.com/story/whats-the-difference-between-morality-and-ethics#:~:text=Both%20morality%20and%20ethics%20loosely,certain%20community%20or%20social%20setting.> Downloaded 29 January 2021.

religions and politics of Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand. Further expansion reaching today's ten nations significantly added further political complexity with the communist states, military regimes and an absolute monarchy in admitting Brunei, Burma (Myanmar), Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam. An 11<sup>th</sup> nation, Timor-Leste, is on a fast track for official inclusion at this writing.

These additions made ASEAN less like the European Union and more like the United Nations in terms of ethical diversity. We shall explore the strengths and weakness of this diversity in describing the ethics of ASEAN and its ability to make decisions and take action.

These eleven nations constitute both a geographical region called Southeast Asia as well as a fully regional community of nations, ASEAN. In this book, I shall use "the region" to mean Southeast Asia and ASEAN to refer to the organisation.

There is another dimension to the ethical mix of ASEAN which was predominant at its founding and which has recently resurfaced as a major dilemma. That is the political relationship of Southeast Asia to Cold War superpowers whose ethics are different and compete in bidding for ASEAN to take sides.

Before the 20th century the experience of colonisation by European powers, going back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century, had a strong influence on today's ethics. The map below is a 19th century snapshot of the mosaic of Southeast Asian colonies: you have British Burma, Borneo, Malaya and Singapore (red), French Indochina (blue), Dutch East Indies (orange), Spanish East Indies<sup>3</sup> (yellow) and Portuguese Timor (green). Only Thailand (dark grey) had avoided becoming the colony of a European power.

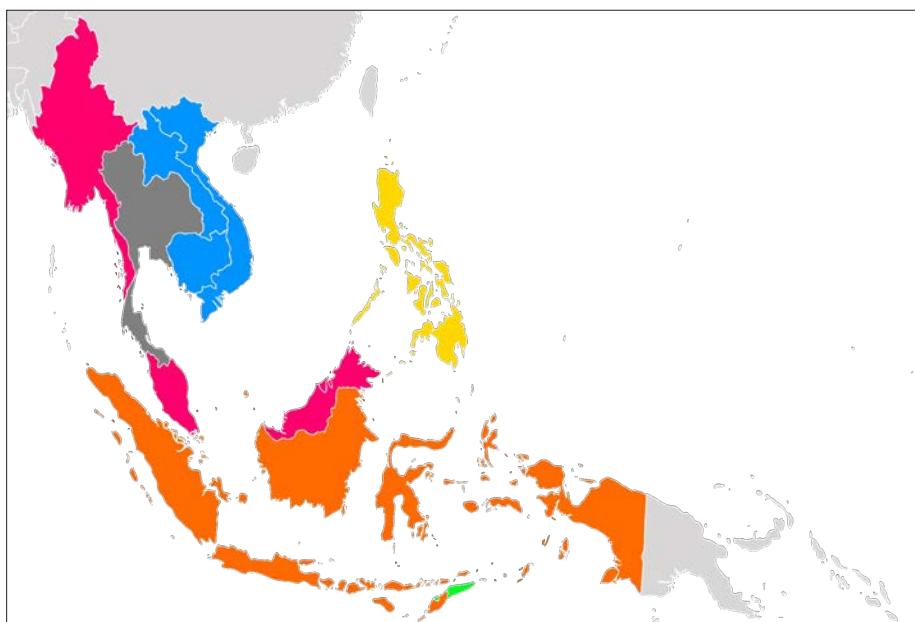


Figure 1: European colonisation of Southeast Asia (Wikipedia creative commons)

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<sup>3</sup> The Spanish East Indies was the name given to the Spanish Empire in Asia and Oceania, governed from Manila from 1565 to 1901.

European ethical systems and institutions influenced their Southeast Asian colonies differently: you can still see the traces today in use of European languages, institutions, religion, sports and cuisine. Southeast Asia cannot be said to have a regional ethical or political identity of its own during the colonial period. Then in the twentieth century a fundamental change came to these countries in the aftermath of World War Two. Following a brief Japanese colonisation during the war, the Southeast Asian colonies seized the opportunity for independence and declared themselves sovereign nations. As a result, the national ethics of recently sovereign nations in ASEAN play a very important role in the ideals, values and institutions of the different member states.

Today's modern layers of ethics sit atop earlier layers reaching back more than two thousand years, when the various Southeast Asian kingdoms traded with China, the Indian subcontinent, the Arabian Peninsula, Somalia, Egypt and Europe. Migrations are also part of the ethical blending. Southeast Asia has an ongoing history of migration going back tens of thousands of years and active today with one-third living in an irregular status in their country of destination according to the Migration Portal on Southeast Asia<sup>4</sup>.

Religious expansions create layers that make up an ethical archaeology, sweeping quickly or spreading peacefully in successive religious adoptions. In today's religious mix we can see the sediments from movements started more than two thousand years ago, from India with Hinduism, then Buddhism. From China with Confucianism. Then in the 10<sup>th</sup> century Islamist expansion through trade routes spread peacefully, eventually becoming the most widely adopted religious faith in Southeast Asia. European maritime exploration and trade starting in the 16th century brought Christianity that became imposed through colonisation by different European cultures.

However, the dominant religions do not make up the whole story of ethical influence. Local religious variations, syncretism, continuing practices of animism and ethical values inspired by indigenous leaders continue to influence belief and behaviour in Southeast Asia today. No less than 37 different religious doctrines or belief systems exist in Southeast Asia, according to a recently published encyclopedia of faiths and cultures in Southeast Asia.<sup>5</sup> So it is really impossible for any ASEAN country to embrace only one ethical system today and Southeast Asia is the richer for it.

When it comes to ethics, religious and political influences are not necessarily aligned. To take the example of political democracy, the world's largest democratic country is India, which is mostly Hindu and Muslim with many other religions represented, while the second largest is the United States which has largely Christian foundations, and the third is largest Indonesia which according to the latest census is 86.7% Muslim.

ASEAN ethics are not only defined by a diversity of religion and politics but also by historical experience, such as the values of national founders. Ethics stems even from business and economic strategies based on growth of a middle class and the management of work. As a regional community ASEAN ethics are hyper-diverse compared to other

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<sup>4</sup> Migration is not only widespread today across Southeast Asia but has its own ethical problems with human trafficking and human rights violations, as well as political oppression. Over one million Rohingya's have migrated from Myanmar as refugees. Data and explanations can be found on the Southeast Asian Migration Portal <https://www.migrationdataportal.org/regional-data-overview/south-eastern-asia> downloaded 30 January 2021

<sup>5</sup> Religion in Southeast Asia: an Encyclopedia of Faiths and Cultures edited by Jesudas M. Athyal, ABC-CLIP 2015.

regional communities like the European Union which is predominantly Christian and requires that its member states remain constitutional democracies.

As an ethical community, a hyper-diverse association of nations like ASEAN can only function through respect for differences and an ability to cooperate across cultures, religious beliefs and national politics. But this has been the historical experience of Southeast Asia for many centuries. The knack of communicating across cultures and the ability to establish trust in diverse contexts has made Southeast Asians champions in cultural intelligence, cooperative management and hospitality. Communication, cooperation and collaboration is an ethical foundation of ASEAN, best expressed as *gotong royong* used by Indonesians and Malaysians. Respect for differences and ability to collaborate in diversity is what made ASEAN an unlikely success during the geopolitical pressures of the Cold War – a recent book on ASEAN even called it a miracle<sup>6</sup>.

## ASEAN's Ethics in the Cold War

At the time of its founding in 1967 ASEAN represented a pact against communism, similar to NATO in Europe with military support by the United States. As ASEAN expanded its members this alignment became an ethical problem. American presence in Vietnam was escalating into a regional war with massive daily bombings in North Vietnam – all shown daily on television screens around the world- while in the American-controlled South the number of war refugees reached more than two million. ASEAN never became an American aligned regional organisation.

Stronger than the ethical ideologies of Cold War politics was the specifically Southeast Asian ethic of *merdeka* – the word used in Malaysia and Indonesia during the political struggle from colonial independence and later adopted at the creation of an independent Singapore in 1965. The word also resonates in the Philippines with the Tagalog cognate *maharlika* used in the Philippines' struggle for independence. As an ASEAN ethic, *merdeka* designates the primacy of sovereignty and political independence in the face of pressures by world powers to align.

The spirit of *merdeka* as liberation from European colonies did not wait for the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Perhaps the best example of a full-blown revolution is the one associated with the Philippine national hero and writer José Rizal. His movement failed and Rizal was executed in 1896, two years before The United States formally acquired the Philippines from Spain at the end of the Spanish-American war. Rizal himself wrote that independence should be granted by Spain after political freedoms were introduced and transition to an autonomous government was secured. None of the European powers were ready for that. *Merdeka* in what was then called the Indies did not yet reach the scope of Southeast Asia as a region, much less an Association of autonomous states. Yet, as the modern map of ASEAN shows, the boundaries between modern states are very much the same as the 19<sup>th</sup> century European colonies.

Returning to ASEAN, although it was founded in 1967 by five non-Communist countries, it did not become a Communist-free region. The American war in Vietnam failed to prevent Communist nations Vietnam and Laos from joining ASEAN in the 1990s.

6 The ASEAN Miracle: A Catalyst for Peace, by Kishore Mahbubani and Jeffery Sng, NUS press 2017 ISBN 9814722499



Figure 2: Contemporary map of ASEAN Member States (Wikipedia creative commons)

More than fifty years later, the ethic of *merdeka* persists as ASEAN carries out an ambiguous dance of non-alignment with China, as it expands its influence through the Belt and Road strategy, opposed by the American Indo-Pacific strategy supported militarily by the Quad powers of USA, India, Japan and Australia.

## Three Ethical Pillars

Many ethical dilemmas in ASEAN stem from the diverse political mix of its member states today. They represent the widest possible variety of political systems: you have military regimes, a Sultanate, Communist governments, one-party systems and a couple of multi-party democracies.

Added to the political diversity are huge economic differences between, say, Singapore with a per capita income of 59,797 USD according to World Bank figures for 2020, compared to Cambodia's 1,512 USD figure or the Indonesian part of Borneo, Kalimantan, with its 583 USD per capita – representing less than 1% of the income of Singaporeans.

As ASEAN evolved, its activities broadened and so did its ethics, eventually separating into three pillars<sup>3</sup>:

1. The ethics of security and political cooperation belong to the first pillar, called the ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC).<sup>7</sup> ASEAN declared itself a nuclear weapon-free region in 1995 affirming its ethic of peace.

<sup>7</sup> A description of the APSC can be found on the ASEAN website <https://asean.org/our-communities/asean-political-security-community/> downloaded 30 January 2022

2. The value of development constitutes the second pillar of ASEAN. The ASEAN Economic Community (AEC)<sup>8</sup> was described in the ASEAN Charter of 2007/8 and was launched in 2015. The AEC is characterised as a single market and production base, a highly competitive economic region, a region of equitable economic development, and a region that is fully integrated with the global economy.
3. To preserve ASEAN's remarkable diversity of cultures and social communities, as well as ensuring human development, ASEAN's third pillar is called the **ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community** (ASCC)<sup>9</sup>. Ethics declared in the ASCC are adherence to agreed principles, spirit of cooperation, collective responsibility, promotion of human and social development, respect for fundamental freedoms, gender equality, the promotion and protection of human rights and the promotion of social justice.

In 2015, the "Kuala Lumpur Declaration" provided a statement, in a rather long sentence, of an ethics of ASEAN as a community that is people-centred, rules-based, socially responsible and human development oriented.<sup>10</sup>

**WE HEREBY AGREE TO: Continue establishing a people-oriented, people-centred and rules-based ASEAN Community where all people, stakeholders and sectors of society can contribute to and enjoy the benefits from a more integrated and connected Community encompassing enhanced cooperation in the political-security, economic and socio-cultural pillars for sustainable, equitable and inclusive development.**

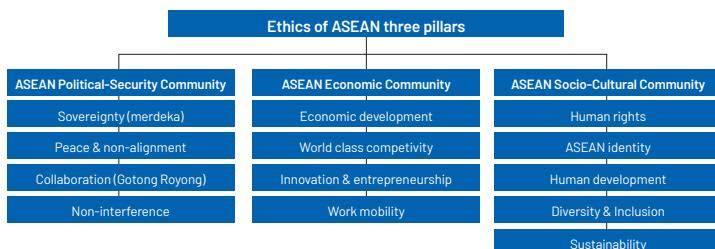


Figure 3: Ethical concepts related to the three ASEAN pillars

In the Figure 3, I list some of the key ethical concepts that apply to the three pillars. This is not an official ASEAN representation, but based on words found in ASEAN declarations.

8 A description of the AEC can be found on the ASEAN website <https://asean.org/our-communities/economic-community/> downloaded 30 January 2022  
 9 A description of the ASCC can be found on the ASEAN website <https://asean.org/our-communities/asean-socio-cultural-community/> downloaded 30 January 2022  
 10 KUALA LUMPUR DECLARATION ON A PEOPLE-ORIENTED, PEOPLE-CENTRED ASEAN 27 April 2015. <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/26th-KUALA-LUMPUR-DECLARATION-ON-A-PEOPLE-ORIENTED-PEOPLE-CENTRED-ASEAN-Final.pdf> downloaded from the ASEAN Secretariat website 11 November 2021

## Ethics of the ASEAN Way

An ethic for a region is a common project, a work in progress that changes with history. In modern regions like the EU and ASEAN, ethics develop through dialogues and meetings rather than by the domination of any one country.

How do ASEAN's political, legal, economic and socio-cultural differences come together to make up ethical principles and values? Developing applied values and responding to issues in action is a process. It can take time. In ASEAN, the process of consensus-building to reach agreement, preferably by unanimous consensus, takes place in informal as well as formal discussions. This came to be called the "ASEAN Way." In 2008 the term actually became the title of the ASEAN anthem. Here is a description of the ASEAN Way.<sup>11</sup>

*A working process or style that is informal and personal. Policymakers constantly utilise compromise, consensus, and consultation in the informal decision-making process... it above all prioritises a consensus-based, non-conflictual way of addressing problems. Quiet diplomacy allows ASEAN leaders to communicate without bringing the discussions into the public view. Members avoid embarrassment that may lead to further conflict.*

Critics of the ASEAN Way point to its tendency to reach agreement on general statements of principle and weak declarations rather than deciding on enforceable policies and effective action.

The European Union is often compared to ASEAN as both are considered the only successful regional governments today. But in the EU, decisions concerning ethics and rights are legally binding and implementation is enforced. EU ethics, however, are based on commonly shared Christian values and democratic republics while ASEAN is multi-religious and politically quite diverse. Implementation of EU ethics are more legal and policy oriented such as the "four freedoms" (free movement of goods, services, capital, and people) and are protected from invasions by non-democratic regimes thanks to the military might of NATO. ASEAN, on the other hand, has declarations and roadmaps and implementation depends on a nation's will to respect and enforce what has been generally agreed.

Is the ASEAN Way an ethic in need of revision? It is a question hotly debated and not limited to diplomatic summits as we shall see in Part Two.

## Ethics of Civil Society

For ethical issues, given the difficulty of the ASEAN Way of decision-making by consensus, much of the heavy-lifting for identifying issues and taking action on the ground has fallen to civil society organisations (CSO). A report on the occasion of ASEAN's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary underlines the recent influence and growing importance of these ethics-based social enterprise organisations.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> The "ASEAN Way": The Structural Underpinnings of Constructive Engagement by Logan Masilamani and Jimmy Peterson, Foreign Policy Journal October 15, 2014

<sup>12</sup> "Non-state Actors' Engagement with ASEAN: Current State of Play and Way Forward" summary by the Habibie Centre Alexander C. Chandra, A. Ibrahim Almuttaqin ASEAN@50 Volume 4 page 222 published 22 September 2017

**Gone are the days when the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) was the sole business of national leaders, high-level officials, and the intellectual elites of the region. ASEAN has come a long way from being an entirely elitist, ‘top-bottom’ Association to a regional organisation that is more accommodative – albeit slowly – towards a genuinely ‘people-oriented’, ‘people-centred’ and/or ‘people-driven’ regional community (...) It was only in the late 1990s, however, that the Association began its engagement with the wider civil society organisations (CSOs).**

There are many types of CSOs that are involved in ethical action:

- Foundations created by the ASEAN Secretariat directly such as the ASEAN Foundation and the ASEAN University Network
- ASEAN entities such as the ASEAN Business Advisory Council (ASEAN BAC), the ASEAN Human Development Organisation (AHDO), the ASEAN Corporate Social Responsibility Network (ASEAN CSR), or the Ethics Council and Advisory for the ASEAN Region (ECAAR)
- Think tanks such as the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute in 2015 and the Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA)
- International organisations involved with ASEAN ethics from the United Nations and for-profit ESG investment consultancies, with many non-government organisations involved in a multitude of ethical issues from human rights groups to support for migrant workers
- Unofficial people-to-people organisations from women’s leadership mentoring for business to student cross-border “milk tea” networks for human rights and democracy.

Many of these CSOs will be present in the ECAAR Dialogues that make up the second part of this book.

## ASEAN Business Ethics

Given the diversity of governance in the 10 ASEAN nations and the explicit agreement not to interfere in what happens in member countries (an ethic under criticism with the Myanmar putsch as we shall discuss later), it is important to understand the other ethical drivers of ASEAN integration. The strongest non-government driver in terms of resources is business. Companies need to manage across the region with common values and policies, and they want to draw on ASEAN’s immense talent potential. Both ASEAN-based companies and international multinationals are pushing for cross-border business ethics in line with international reporting standards and progressive workplace practices of equity, inclusion and human development in the workplace.

Seeing ASEAN as an integrated region has only recently become common for multinational companies. For example, at GE when Stuart Dean took over his regional CEO role in 2002, it was called the Southeast Asia region. Seeing that an integrated ASEAN

offered more opportunities for GE, Dean called together his team and they agreed to change the name to GE ASEAN. Here is how Stuart Dean describes the advantages.<sup>13</sup>

**The name Southeast Asia described the region as 10 different markets, some of which were strategic and some not so strategic. We thought that naming the region ASEAN better communicated our vision that, instead of 10 countries, ASEAN should be seen as an economic bloc of 600 million people. The second reason is that we wanted headquarters to understand the potential that the region had for GE, to change the mindset of our leaders from seeing 10 countries opportunistically to seeing the region strategically. Third, we wanted to be consistent with Governments' vision of ASEAN since we did business with them. An unexpected benefit was that the ASEAN approach brought the country teams together. So, instead of competing, we started working more collaboratively for the region's success by sharing leads and best practices across borders.**

## ASEAN's Ethics on the World Stage

Born out of a mosaic of colonies that had gained independence, coveted by cold war powers and buffeted by a hot war in Vietnam, it is not obvious that a loose federation of young nations would become a success story. As a region, ethics are hyperdiverse and insufficiently developed in rules-based institutions. As with many regions made up of lower and middle-income countries, the assumption was made that economic development should come first, then questions of governance, human rights and sustainability could be addressed. Yet during this time, ASEAN has come to realise that economic growth without ethical maturity takes the region down a road that doesn't lead to a good place.

There were no longer any ASEAN countries in absolute poverty, until the 2021 Myanmar military coup which sent the country's development into sharp reverse. Even so, the vast majority of the region's population are in the lower or upper middle-income economic categories. A host of fundamental ethical issues have emerged that require leadership. These range from good governance to inequality to thought leadership. Unmet ethical challenges put the region's credibility into question. Effectively dealing with climate change and regulating technology with ethical standards are two examples. Dealing with the 2021 putsch in Myanmar is another, one that has called the centrality of ASEAN as a regional organisation into question.

In today's world ASEAN must develop a more integrated ethics as the region takes on the responsibility of leadership. The region cannot adopt the ethics of one side or other in the new geopolitical struggle that pits China's Belt and Road expansion against American and EU influence on democratic governance and human rights. Nor can it waffle in non-decision dressed up as consensual politics. Ethics is just as essential to the future of ASEAN as economics.

But what kind of ethics? How does ethics translate into action? What takes priority? In the next chapter we will tackle these fundamental questions.

<sup>13</sup> Stuart Dean, former CEO of the ASEAN region at GE, interview with the author 3 April 2016.

# CHAPTER 2

## A Model of ASEAN Ethics

If the possibility of a regional ethics is answered by an aspiration rather than an anthropological description of cultures in a geographical region, it does not follow that a common aspiration is a sufficient ethical foundation. In ASEAN there are different types of ethics that compete with each other when an ethical issue arises that requires making a declaration or taking action.

### Understanding the different types of Ethics in ASEAN

In explaining ASEAN ethics, I will propose a model of five different kinds of ethics represented in the chart below.<sup>1</sup> These different types of ethics are the sources of fundamental debates and those making the arguments are often not aware that they are not using the same ethical logic.

The first advantage is gaining clarity about the different forms of logic in ethics and how ethical arguments are constructed. The second advantage is understanding double standards in ethics. For example, why do some ASEAN countries promote gender equality but also condemn gay rights? The third advantage of the model is that it helps understand how ASEAN as a community has evolved in its ethics.

These five types of ethics in the model are: virtue ethics, rules-based ethics, results-based ethics, leadership ethics and emerging ethics.

In philosophy, some of these ethical types are identified with the ideas the founding philosophers. For example, rules-based ethics is linked to the universalism of Emmanuel Kant while results-based ethics is linked to the utilitarianism of Jeremy Bentham. This book does not explore the archaeology of philosophical ethics which can be extremely abstract. In any case the ethical insights of its founding philosophers require considerable

<sup>1</sup> This model was first published in a LinkedIn article on 7 May 2022 "A Model for ASEAN Ethics" <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/model-asean-ethics-dr-bob-aubrey/?trackingId=CFV9%2BZt90Dmp47uzqJlyRw%3D%3D> retrieved 12 August 2023

modifications in today's context to overcome historical biases on women, slavery and racism, as well as their lack of knowledge of contemporary science and practical ethical applications.



Figure 1: Model of Five Types of ASEAN Ethics

The purpose of the ethical types model is to help the thinking person make sense of ASEAN ethical issues for understanding, discussion, policy-making and decision-making. In defining the contents of the model, I start with virtue ethics, then turn to rules-based and results-based ethics before turning to leadership ethics and emerging ethics.

## ASEAN's Virtue Ethics

The Greek philosopher Socrates captured the virtue of ethics for a meaningful human life in his famous statement "The unexamined life is not worth living."<sup>2</sup> This type of ethics representing a philosophy of how to live and be a responsible person (one's identity) is called virtue ethics. In the development of ASEAN, virtue ethics constitute the foundations.

ASEAN's virtue ethics go back hundreds of years and have been influenced by multiple migrations of ethical systems. An example is the virtue ethics of Confucius, taught to disciples in China two thousand four hundred years ago. Confucius defined the superior person as one who continuously self-develops through learning<sup>3</sup>. He called this ethic the Way and underlined that ethics are in harmony with the universe. The Confucian value set on education has influenced cultures, family values and educational systems worldwide. Confucianism migrated across ASEAN, becoming the dominant ethical system in Vietnam and Laos but present through Chinese immigration in all ASEAN countries.

The Indonesian-born Singaporean historian Wang Gungwu described in his book *Home is Not Here*<sup>4</sup> how Southeast Asians actually possess multiple anchors for identity and ethics. The book is illustrated by his personal sense of rootlessness and confusion as an ethnic Chinese in building what became a very cosmopolitan career. Wang's

2 The statement is found in Plato's *Apology* (38a5–6). Socrates is sentenced to death for impiety and corrupting youth because he taught and debated philosophy publicly

3 Confucius discusses the ethics of learning throughout the four Confucian classics and especially in the *Great Learning*. These books can be consulted online in English in the MIT collection <http://classics.mit.edu/Confucius/learning.html> retrieved 3 January 2023

4 *Home is Not Here* by Wang Gungwu, NUS Press 2018 216 pages, ISBN: 978-981-4722-92-6

historical research describes Southeast Asian ethics historically as multicultural, open and autonomous. The ASEAN Way, he claims, is a political ethic of dialogue and peace in managing regional power politics rooted in the Southeast Asian experience.<sup>5</sup>

Regional ethics as a system becomes possible when a group of nations agree to define together what is right and wrong, good and bad for themselves. With ASEAN, the cultures of a geographical region are defined as a community and ethics becomes an institutional enterprise. In using the word “enterprise” I underline that systematic ethics constitutes an initiative that the ethical stakeholders of the region are in continuing dialogue as ethical issues emerge.

Historically, Southeast Asian ethics were fragmented along the boundaries of colonisation and ethics were alienated because Western powers halfway across the world defined what was right and wrong, good and bad. Under colonial regimes, ethical dialogue with locals as equals was eliminated and in some ASEAN colonies it was even forbidden to speak the language of the Western masters.

Fighting for freedom from colonial domination became a shared experience in establishing the virtue ethics of the new nations. But defining a common virtue ethics for ASEAN was difficult.

## The Debate over Asian Values

In the 1990s, at a time when membership of the ASEAN community reached ten countries, the region was experiencing high economic growth. Some ASEAN leaders, notably Singapore's Lee Kwan Yew and Malaysia's Mahatir Mohammed, proclaimed a form of virtue ethics by arguing that their economic success was due to "Asian Values." These values were supposedly different from the West and assumed to be consistent across Asia's diverse cultures, religions and political systems.

In order to portray these values as especially virtuous, it was also claimed that the West was in decline due to excessive individualism and lack of moral discipline. The Asian ethic, they claimed, was more effective for developing prosperity and social harmony. In 1993, Tommy Koh, Singapore's former ambassador to the USA, wrote in the *New York Times* that East Asians in particular valued the virtues of frugality and hard work.<sup>6</sup> He further claimed that East Asians had a different social contract from the West: they accept that ethics should be "ensured" by the state and that freedom of the press should not be an "absolute right."

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5 Wang Gu Wu was active in the first ASEAN think tank established in 1968, the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute where he served as Director, then Chairman from 1997-2019. In his keynote lecture for the 50th year celebration of the Institute's founding, Wang explains why no regional structure was set up before the twentieth century and how the ethical characteristics of Southeast Asia evolved into a regional construction: <https://www.iseas.edu.sg/media/video-gallery/50th-anniversary-public-lecture-before-southeast-asia-passages-and-terrains-by-prof-wang-gungwu-2/> downloaded 2 February 2022 downloaded 2 February 2022

6 Tommy Koh described 10 East Asian values in an article for the *New York Times* published 11 December 1993: "East Asians do not believe in the extreme form of individualism practiced in the West; East Asians believe in strong families; East Asians revere education; East Asians believe in the virtues of saving and frugality; East Asians consider hard work a virtue; East Asians practice national teamwork; there is an Asian version of a social contract between the people and the state; In some Asian countries, governments have sought to make every citizen a stakeholder in the country; East Asians want their governments to maintain a morally wholesome environment in which to bring up their children; good governments in East Asia want a free press but, unlike the West, they do not believe that such freedom is an absolute right."

This provoked an international debate about Asian ethics among academics and political commentators. Amartya Sen, who at the time was working on the United Nations human development programme, became the champion for the other side. In a 1997 defense of universal ethics at the Carnegie Council on Ethics and International Affairs in New York, Sen readily accepted that regional differences exist but argued that the virtues claimed as Asian Values do not represent the diversity of Asia, and certainly not two of the world's largest democracies, India and Indonesia. He also argued that regional or national values do not replace universal human rights.<sup>7</sup>

***In this context, the idea of "human rights" has to be properly spelled out. In the most general form, the notion of human rights builds on our shared humanity. These rights are not derived from the citizenship of any country, or the membership of any nation, but taken as entitlements of every human being. They differ, thus, from constitutionally created rights guaranteed for specified people (such as, say, American or French citizens). For example, the human right of a person not to be tortured is independent of the country of which this person is a citizen and thus exists irrespective of what the government of that country—or any other—wants to do.***

The Asian Values debate of the 1990s died quickly with the Asian economic crisis which brought into question Asian economic superiority (even though Southeast Asian economies recovered in two years). The debate provided two important lessons for ASEAN in defining its virtue ethics. First, virtue ethics should promote a positive human good rather than claiming superiority defined as a competition with other cultures. Second, virtue ethics for a region should have universal validity while recognising its cultural roots.

How can virtue ethics be both regional and universal? In the early 1990s, the anthropologist Donald Brown showed that cultural beliefs and behaviours are often universal. He reversed the perspective of anthropologists who study cultural differences in human groups and focused on what is shared by all. He ended up listing four hundred traits found in all the human cultures ever studied by anthropologists, many of them ethical concepts such as fairness, honesty and social responsibility.<sup>8</sup>

Universality applies to the virtue ethics of religions like Islam, Buddhism and Christianity which grew out of specific cultural and historical contexts. You do not need a passport or a certain social status to follow their ethical prescriptions.

In 2020, the ASEAN Human Development Organisation published a list of virtue ethics for human development professionals in the region.<sup>9</sup> Unlike the ethics of Asian Values of the 1990s, these virtues have the ambition to define an ASEAN ethic as well as to improve human development at work in ASEAN. They also represent universal behaviours in human

7 The full text of Amartya Sen's speech on Human Rights and Asian Values in the 1997 Sixteenth Morgenthau Memorial Lecture on Ethics & Foreign Policy at the Carnegie Council on Ethics and International Affairs can be found here: [https://www.carnegiecouncil.org/publications/archive/morgenthau/254/\\_res/id=Attachments/index=0/254\\_sen.pdf&lang=en](https://www.carnegiecouncil.org/publications/archive/morgenthau/254/_res/id=Attachments/index=0/254_sen.pdf&lang=en). Retrieved 25 February 2023

8 *Human Universals* by Donald Brown, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1991

9 *Leading Human Development in ASEAN: Using Management Concepts from ASEAN Countries to Create an Authentic Model of Human Development* by Bob Aubrey with Founding Members of the ASEAN Human Development Organisation, McGraw-Hill Education, ASEAN Human Development at Work Series, 2020

culture even though they are built upon the widely recognised humanistic strengths of Southeast Asian cultures.

Survey results of human development professionals enrolled in the AHDO certification programme showed that they overwhelmingly believe that ethics is the most important foundation for a human development professional. Surveys also show that professionals believe that AHDO's ethics should be based both on internationally agreed universal values as well as regional cultures.<sup>10</sup>

These ethical virtues constitute an ethical enterprise: they indicate a way of thinking and acting in the workplace as ASEAN goes forward.

- **Merdeka:** is the word used in the political struggle from colonial independence in Malaysia and Indonesia and in creation of an independent Singapore. The cognate word *maharlika* in Tagalog was used in the Philippines' struggle for independence. In today's ASEAN, *merdeka* means that people expect to exercise freedom in their working lives and demand to be respected as equals.
- **Gotong royong:** *Gotong royong* is an Indonesian concept, also used in Malaysia and Singapore, that means "mutual cooperation" (*gotong*) and "working together" (*royong*). It is a strong capability in the ASEAN workplace as well as in politics and for its effectiveness in making social harmony productive.
- **Malasakit:** is a Filipino word translated as "care", "compassion" or "empathy." In Philippine culture. As an ASEAN ethic for work, *malasakit* means that leaders take care of workers, but also that workers take care of the company. *Malasakit* leaders think of how decisions will affect others. They are humane and self-sacrificing for the team and the organisation. *Malasakit* defines ASEAN's empathetic humanism.
- **Sanook:** this Thai word is translated as "fun", but in Thailand it is an intrinsic value. To *sanook* (the word is a verb as well as noun and an adjective) means building fun into all kinds of social contexts. It is an ethic for life and work. As an ASEAN ethic, *sanook* means doing work that is interesting, enjoying relationships and generating good feeling.
- **Kiên cường** is a Vietnamese word, pronounced "kyen kwong", translated as "resilience". It is an ASEAN capability for dealing with change. The composite word's roots are *kiên* meaning "determined" and *cường* meaning "strong" – taken together they illustrate Vietnam's historically tested capability to step up to the challenges of change and demonstrate a powerful determination to succeed. It is an ASEAN ethic for persistence in overcoming obstacles and adapting to change.
- **World-class:** this English language term represents ASEAN's ethic of excellence and leadership on a world scale. In the book *Leading Human Development in ASEAN*<sup>11</sup> I had described this as a capability that Singapore had mastered as a nation. As an ethical concept, it has become more than just an aspiration for developing nations. As a virtue it constitutes a competitive mindset and a vision of ASEAN's position in the world.

10 Survey results from the two founding cohorts of participants in the AHDO human development certification programme in 2021 representing 38 individuals.

11 *Leading Human Development in ASEAN* by Bob Aubrey, McGraw-Hill (2019) ISBN: 9789814821308

Virtue ethics are often used in founding institutions since they can be both aspirational and philosophically grounded. To take an example, the Ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle famously identified the goal of ethics to be the “Good Life” and listed its components as virtues (virtue ethics is so named because of Aristotle). Aristotle was explicitly referenced by Amartya Sen as the foundational philosophy in defining human development for United Nations in the 1990s, where freedom is the necessary condition for people to “achieve the kind of lives they have reason to value.”<sup>12</sup> His important concept of potential was transformed into capability (which is more measurable) in UN human development approach by Martha Nussbaum who had written a book about Aristotle’s Good Life.<sup>13</sup>

When it comes to applying virtue ethics in practice, we must keep in mind that espoused ethics are not necessarily ethics in practice. In other words, announced values do not automatically translate into behaviour. This is true of individuals, families, politics and even religions: people don’t always “practice what they preach” and they may fail to “walk the talk”. The word “hypocrisy” can be applied when the disconnect is conscious between espoused ethics and ethics in practice. In business, the expression “virtue-signalling” refers to corporate marketing of the company’s purpose, products or business practices that are presented as “purpose driven”, “sustainable” or “green” – when in fact they aren’t. Criticism of the virtue ethics of the ASEAN Way and the principle of non-interference in violation of ASEAN-agreed rules-based ethical declarations on human rights, democratic process and sustainability show that ethical coherence can be a challenge for organisations.<sup>14</sup>

## ASEAN's Rules-Based ethics

Another kind of ethics of importance for ASEAN is rules-based ethics. You find rules-based ethics in law, in policies, in guidelines, in religion, in military rules of engagement and even in social etiquette.

Over the years, ASEAN has been developing as a more rules-based organisation. You can see this in the 2007/8 publication of the ASEAN Charter<sup>15</sup> with its list of Principles. In the list you find formal commitments to the rule of law, good governance, the principles of democracy, constitutional government, upholding the United Nations Charter and adherence to economic commitments. In the ASEAN 2015 Declaration you find the ethical commitment to develop an inclusive community with high quality of life, human rights, equitable access to opportunities for all, education, cultural flourishing, poverty eradication and social welfare<sup>16</sup>.

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12 Development as Freedom by Amartya Sen (1999) Oxford University Press.

13 The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy by Martha Nussbaum (2001). Cambridge University Press.

14 ASEAN's ethic of non-interference principle, which has purposely never found an official definition, is discussed in this article as either a conscious avoidance of taking action against a member state because as an ethic or in as a practice. Two cases of the overthrow of governments in Cambodia and Myanmar are discussed. “Norm or Necessity? The Non-Interference Principle in ASEAN” by Tram-Anh Nguyen, Cornell International Affairs Review 2016, VOL. 9 NO. 1

15 The ASEAN Charter can be found in ASEAN documents online <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/21069.pdf> retrieved 1 February 2022

16 ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Blueprint 2025 was published in 2015 <http://carum.um.edu.my/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/ASCC-Blueprint-2025.pdf> retrieved 1 February 2022

A term used today representing rules-based ethics in international policy is “Rules Based Order” (RBO). The United Nations is considered the leading institution representing RBO but there many others.<sup>17</sup>

**As demonstrated since the formation of the United Nations following the Second World War, a rules-based international order is the only alternative to international coercion by competing great powers, spheres of influence, client states and terrorist organisations. Moreover, global development through the achievement of the sustainable development goals (SDGs) can only occur within a rules-based international system based on commitment and respect. An effective rules-based international order depends largely on the professionalism and neutrality of the United Nations, and the effectiveness of the United Nations depends mostly on the commitment by its Member States.**

The first foundational declaration of the United Nations is the Declaration of Human Rights proclaimed in 1948. Although ASEAN was founded nearly twenty years later, it took quite some time before its own declaration of human rights was agreed to in 2012. The ASEAN version has forty articles compared to the UN's thirty. Included are many of the same rights as in the UN declaration but you also see human development ethics such as “the right to work in just, decent and favourable conditions” and encouragement of Member States to adopt development programmes.

Having rules-based ethics in ASEAN does not mean, however, that all ASEAN member states enforce them in their individual countries.<sup>18</sup> The ASEAN human rights declaration leaves the door open for its Member States to ignore implementation of the rules, representing a very different setup compared to the European Union whose declarations apply to all members and are enforced by powerful institutions.

An important test case of ASEAN rules-based ethics came in 2020 when the Myanmar military Tatmadaw arrested leaders of a democratically elected government, fired on peaceful protesters killing more than a thousand, banned or jailed reporters and tortured prisoners. This triggered an intense debate about the ASEAN ethic of non-interference and in 2021, for the very first time, Myanmar was not invited to the ASEAN Summit even though it is a Member State. It sent a message that ASEAN rules-based ethics cannot be completely disregarded. How this prioritisation of a rules-based ethical action over the virtue ethic of non-interference plays out in ASEAN was not clear at the time of writing this book.

## ASEAN's Results-Based ethics

As a philosophical category, results-based ethics do not generally enjoy the prestige of virtue ethics and rules-based ethics. Called “utilitarianism” as formulated by Jeremy

<sup>17</sup> The United Nations and the Rules-Based International Order published in 2016 by the United Nations Association of Australia [https://www.unaa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/UNAA\\_RulesBasedOrder\\_ARTweb3.pdf](https://www.unaa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/UNAA_RulesBasedOrder_ARTweb3.pdf) retrieved 1 February 2022.

<sup>18</sup> The ASEAN Human Rights declaration can be found here <https://asean.org/asean-human-rights-declaration/> downloaded 10 February 2022

Bentham in the 19th century, the idea was to calculate the greatest good for the greatest number. But the broader “consequentialist” idea of results-based ethics can be traced back to Mozi, a contemporary of Confucius, who advocated acting for the benefit of all based on results, famously formulated by the pragmatic leader of China Deng Xiaoping: “It doesn’t matter if the cat is black or white as long as it catches mice”.

With advances in mathematics, the social sciences and business management methods we are far more capable of measuring the results of an ethical decision or policy than in the past. For example, in the area of human development, results-based ethics are measured in the ethical treatment people of people in companies, in assessing government labour policies and in projects targeting disadvantaged populations. In 2019 the Nobel Prize in Economics was awarded to Michael Kremer, Abhijit Banerjee and Esther Duflo for their research on methods and field experiments that test and measure different human development interventions.<sup>19</sup>

One technique, called A/B testing, was derived from controlled experiments in medicine and marketing and then was applied to human development. In its simplest form, you test a project with group A and compare results with a control group B. The 2019 Nobel Prize laureates measured results for improving children’s education, reducing poverty and improving health.



Figure 4: Abhijit Bannerjee, Esther Duflo and Michael Kremer received the Nobel Prize in Economics for 2019 for their work on results-based human development methods- photo courtesy of The Nobel Foundation

A typical results-based ethical problem concerns risk. With the Covid pandemic of 2020–2022, the world witnessed the power of CRISPR gene editing to make vaccines. But what about the ethical question of using CRISPR to modify human genes that are reproduced in the next generation (called germline editing)? We now have the potential to do so and it is even technically “easy” compared to older gene-editing technology. Ethically, scientists and ethicists have reached a consensus today that the results of germline editing must be considered “safe” before being used. In practice, this means that the ethical result must

<sup>19</sup> The Nobel Prize announcement for Economics for 2019 <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/economic-sciences/2019/press-release/>. This contains a link to a popular science description of their work on poverty <https://www.nobelprize.org/uploads/2019/10/popular-economicsciencesprize2019-2.pdf> downloaded 8 February 2022

be tested and assessed before germline editing of the human genome becomes legal. Of course it is only a question of time until CRISPR research reaches the point where the risk is considered "safe".

As with rules-based ethics, ASEAN has adopted results-based ethics to improve its efficacy. For example, the AEC and ASCC now use "blueprints" with objectives that include workplans and strategic measurement of results.<sup>20</sup>

## ASEAN's Leadership ethics

Despite its different categories, ethical thinking remains a deeply personal enterprise. It is why members of the same family differ in their life decisions. It is why friends go their separate ways after a fundamental ethical disagreement.

Individual ethics are developmental: we improve our ethics as we go through stages in life (although this does not happen automatically). Individual ethics are also situational: new and different social contexts put our ethical thinking to the test. Experience of ethical situations in the real world is what Aristotle called practical wisdom.

Ethical leadership is about taking action on the basis of our ethical thinking. It starts from "leading ourselves" in an internal dialogue over an ethical choice or action. However, leadership is more often associated with its social dimension, when we lead others and are joined by them in action.

ASEAN has been undeniably shaped by ethical leaders. This is true of the very founding of ASEAN when leaders representing nations decided on an organisation based on agreed regional principles.

Regional ethics would bring Southeast Asia's new and politically disparate countries together. One of the "founding fathers" of ASEAN in 1967, S. Rajaratnam representing Singapore, described this as a new level:<sup>21</sup>

***We must now think at two levels. We must think not only of our national interests but posit them against regional interests: that is a new way of thinking about our problems. And these are two different things and sometimes they can conflict. Secondly, we must also accept the fact, if we are really serious about it, that regional existence means painful adjustments to those practices and thinking in our respective countries. We must make these painful and difficult adjustments. If we are not going to do that, then regionalism remains a utopia.***

Other ethical leaders in ASEAN were thought leaders. Indonesian statesman and writer Soedjatmoko was awarded the Ramon Magsaysay Award for International Understanding in recognition of his writing and diplomatic work to make life more decent and satisfying for the poorest 40 percent of people in Southeast Asia. He argued that freedom is

<sup>20</sup> The AEC Blueprint 2025 can be found here <https://asean.org/book/asean-economic-community-blueprint-2025/>. The ASCC Blueprint 2025 can be found here <https://www.asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/8.-March-2016-ASCC-Blueprint-2025.pdf> Downloaded 2 February 2022.

<sup>21</sup> The Founding of ASEAN, from the ASEAN website <https://asean.org/about-us> downloaded 8 February 2022

foundational and must go beyond the nationalist meaning of *merdeka*. His statement published in 1985 about the need for an ethical shift in the meaning of freedom remains a challenge for ASEAN today.<sup>22</sup>



Figure 5: ASEAN's 5 founders in 1967 (Rajaratnam is at the far right)

***The nation state still represents to many in the Third World the largest unit of political organisation in which it is possible to identify and the most effective vehicle for the pursuit of the aspirations of its people. Still, it would be unrealistic not to observe a generational shift in value orientation away from the preoccupation with national independence and nation building of the older generation to the concern with freedom, justice and the entire populations' participation in the process of social, economic and political restructuring of the nation. This ongoing enterprise in developing nations is one which must be completed in order for freedom to unfold in its full dimensions.***

Ethical leadership can also be heroic, meaning that an individual or group of individuals decide to confront powerful institutions and even a whole government to advocate for an ethical cause. ASEAN has its share of heroic ethical leaders of which probably the most obvious examples are its three Nobel Peace Prize laureates.

The first is Aung San Suu Kyi, leader of the National League for Democracy in Myanmar, who received the Nobel Prize in 1991 and played the essential role in Myanmar's transition from military junta to partial democracy in the 2010s. She spent 15 years in house arrest after the NLD won 81% of the seats in Parliament and the military refused to hand over power. She survived an assassination attempt in 2003 and continued to lead the NLD in

<sup>22</sup> Soedjatmoko, *The Primacy of Freedom in Development*, University Press of America 1985, page 4. His writings are a precursor to the model of human development created at the United Nations in the 1990s.



Figure 6: Aung San Suu Kyi



Figure 7: Jose Ramos-Horta



Figure 8: Maria Ressa

the 2015 election, winning a landslide victory with 86% of the seats in the Assembly of the Union. As State Councillor and leader of her party Suu Kyi won another landslide victory in the November 2020 Myanmar general election but was arrested on 1 February 2021 following a coup d'état by the Military junta and remains in prison at the writing of this book.

The second is Jose Ramos-Horta, who was the exiled spokesman for the East Timorese resistance during the years of the Indonesian occupation of East Timor (1975-1999) and who received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1996 along with fellow Timorese Bishop Ximenes Belo for their "sustained efforts to hinder the oppression of a small people". He was elected Timor Leste President in 2007 and was shot the following year in an assassination attempt that nearly took his life. He continued to be active with the United Nations and the Global Leadership Foundation and was re-elected as President of Timor Leste for a second time in 2022. His views on ethics are presented by himself Part Two of this book.

The third is the journalist Maria Ressa of the Philippines who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2021 jointly with Russian Dmitry Muratov for "their efforts to safeguard freedom of expression, which is a precondition for democracy and lasting peace." Both winners work in countries that are among the most dangerous for journalists. Ressa is co-founder of the online news service Rappler and is a global advocate for freedom of speech and freedom of the press and a leading analyst of fake news and distortions of truth in social media. As an outspoken critic of human rights abuses by the Duterte government, Ressa faced multiple court cases brought by the government that could have put her behind bars for the rest of her life. She is the first ever Nobel laureate from the Philippines and has participated in our ECAAR dialogue on freedom in Part 2 of this book.

Ethical leadership is not always about having followers or taking heroic action. Leaders in everyday life have to be ethical: managers in companies, government employees, teachers, parents, community workers. In a sense we are all leaders since we lead ourselves. And of course, ethical leaders do not always agree on what is the right thing to do. One of the challenges today for the ASEAN socio-cultural community is to promote the education and networking of ASEAN's ethical leadership as part of the mission of the ASEAN Foundation, as we shall see in the chapter on ASEAN ethical leadership.

## ASEAN's Emerging Ethics

Regional ethics are in constant evolution. Some ethical priorities today were not present at the founding of ASEAN. Because they are important priorities, I have formed a category to include sustainability, biodiversity and technology. These are the most prominent but there are others and the list will inevitably get longer over time.

Sustainability and biodiversity are now primary ethical responsibilities for ASEAN in managing its vast and unique heritage of life on earth. A hundred years ago, the Southeast Asian region was a mosaic of colonies whose importance for Western powers were their natural resources. For hundreds of years the Spice Islands were a huge attraction for trade, exploration and war. In the second world war, ASEAN's oil reserves made it the primary objective of the Japanese invasion. After the war came tourism. Today, ASEAN represents one of the three main centres of biodiversity on the planet, together with the Amazon in South America and the Congo in Africa.

What makes this ethical? In the twenty-first century mankind's development on our planet has become the dominant influence on the environment and climate and now in its own geological age, the Anthropocene.

At age 93, natural scientist, author and BBC broadcaster David Attenborough summed up his personal testimonial of life on the planet in a 2020 documentary and book by describing how in his lifetime the planet has gone from a seemingly vast wilderness, with wonderful species for explorers like himself to discover, to an ecosystem in which the living world is collapsing.<sup>23</sup>

Sustainability and biodiversity are no longer questions of virtue ethics. They are existential ethical responsibilities. ASEAN's tropical rainforests are home to a staggering number of species as well as producing oxygen and reducing carbon in the atmosphere. Southeast Asia also has the world's largest maritime territory with huge wealth in biodiversity and urgent sustainability issues.

Another unavoidable emerging area for ethics is technology. ASEAN as a world power is confronted with competing technological pressures, notably China and the United States, with very different ethical rules for the use of artificial intelligence, surveillance, personal data privacy and bioethics. ASEAN as a non-aligned region cannot simply be a follower, or wait until a crisis happens. ASEAN needs to develop its own cross-border ethics for regulating how technology companies operate in the region and how ASEAN's own technology champions assume their role in using ethics standards globally.

This model of five ethical types does not say which one should take precedence on a given issue. That several types of ethics compete for priority is the source of many of ASEAN's ethical dilemmas because ethical stakeholders take the perspective that their preferred type should dictate the position that the ASEAN region should take. It is precisely this entanglement of types that makes ASEAN ethics interesting. And it is the disentanglement of the knots created by mixing ethical types that make ethical thinking so important in ASEAN.

<sup>23</sup> David Attenborough with Jonnie Hugues, *A Life on our Planet: my Witness Statement and a Vision for the Future*, Grand Central Publishing 2020

# CHAPTER 3

## Building ASEAN's Ethical Dialogue

**A**SEAN ethics is a work in progress. The development story starts from the early aspirations of the Association of Southeast Asia to create a region of brotherhood and human development, leading to the creation of an institutional pillar supporting a people-centred socio-cultural community.

There have been successes. The most important has been the task of preserving peace between Member States and avoiding invasion by global powers, with a commitment to peace in declaring ASEAN as a non-nuclear region. Another has been the ASEAN declaration of human rights and an Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR). A third has been the rise of ASEAN countries in the Human Development Index (HDI) measurements of life expectancy, education and per capita income<sup>1</sup>. A fourth has been the ASEAN use of blueprints to achieve ethical goals such as cross-border business ethics, human mobility, reduction of inequality, sustainability and biodiversity.

However there have also been disappointments. The most prominent during the writing of this book is ASEAN's paralysis faced with the coup d'état by the military Tatmadaw on 1st February 2021. It clearly violated ASEAN's agreed ethical declarations on democratic governance and human rights. The Tatmadaw was responsible for intentionally killing demonstrators, torturing prisoners and bombing entire villages. ASEAN's ethic of human development was put into reverse, plunging nearly half of Myanmar's 55 million population into poverty. ASEAN was unable to agree on its virtue ethics of freedom and social progress, its rules-based ethics on human rights, its results-based ethics on human development and its leadership ethics in taking action.

### A new ASEAN voice for ethics

As founder of the ASEAN Human Development Organisation (AHDO), I was aware of the need for a space or forum of open discussion of ASEAN's ethical issues. Human

<sup>1</sup> United Nations Development Report <https://hdr.undp.org/en/content/latest-human-development-index-ranking>

development professionals in ASEAN have agreed that ethics is foundational. But they needed an ethics committee. Ethics committees are common for professional bodies, from medicine to finance. They define ethical behaviour for their members and give guidance on emerging ethical issues. They also advocate for improving ethical practice in their domain. For AHDO, the mission of developing people at work needed a guiding ethical philosophy, and the many emerging ethical issues in the world of work required awareness, research, discussion and guidance.



Figure 9: ASEAN Human Development Organisation signing ceremony of 5 countries, September 2019

As working professionals, AHDO members are bound by the institutions of their work. They cannot speak out publicly on ethical issues without weighing the implications as representatives of their company, university, consultancy, NGO or national government. Besides, what constitutes unethical behaviour can vary in different cultures and social contexts. To take an example, what constitutes corruption in business practice can be seen as wrongdoing or as the way business is done, depending on cultural acceptance of the practice and maturity of legal anticorruption enforcement in a given country.

The Myanmar crisis provided a case study of an ethical dilemma for professionals. At AHDO all the founders agreed that the military putsch violated human development ethics, especially in the capability of citizens to work for a better life. We received a call from our Myanmar founder saying that she would be cut off from communication, and were left in the dark about her situation for months before creating a new Board.

At the same time, however, we were not all in a position to make public declarations implicating our organisations and governments. Companies operating in Myanmar in the early stages of the Tatmadaw regime, did not know whether pulling out would lead to even more suffering if the economy collapsed. They wanted to ensure the livelihood of their employees during the crisis and wanted to be open for business when the crisis was over.

In real-world ethics, it is often not obvious what the right thing to do or say really is, or when to take action. This is why at AHDO we all agreed that we needed an ethics committee.

## Dr Marzuki Darusman: ASEAN needs a forum for ethics

I suggested that we invite Marzuki Darusman as our advisor in setting up the ethics committee. He was well-known in Indonesia for his role as Attorney General in the Suharto corruption cases at the end of that regime. He was internationally appreciated for his role at the UN Human Rights Council for his investigations and reports on human rights violations in Sri Lanka, the assassination of Benazir Bhutto in Pakistan, and human rights violations in North Korea. He was also Chair of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Myanmar Rohingya human rights violations in 2019.



Figure 10: Marzuki Darusman at the United Nations

Pak Marzuki was not only well-versed in all the aspects of ASEAN ethics, but represented ethical leadership for his courage and energy. When investigating highly political issues at Indonesia's Attorney General, he had been one of the most heavily guarded persons in the country. He knew ASEAN well, having been the first Chairman of Human Rights Resource Centre for ASEAN in 2010.

In July 2020 I organised a video meeting with Marzuki Darusman to discuss our invitation to be an advisor. Present at the meeting were Pambudi Sunarsihanto, AHDO Chair for Indonesia and Le Hong Phuc, AHDO Chair for Vietnam, as well as our regional Executive Director Eddie Lee.

During that meeting, Pak Marzuki shared with us his vision for a broader scope of ethical dialogue in ASEAN. Concerning human development, he said that AHDO had an important role to play in rebalancing the predominant notion that ASEAN countries should focus on economic development first, and only when that was achieved to consider "higher level" issues like expanding individual freedom and human rights. Our organisation was built on the ethical foundational that considered them interdependent from the start.

Marzuki went further. Ethics, he said, was not limited to human rights issues but extends into politics, business and society. He pointed out that in ASEAN there was no organisation devoted to the entire spectrum of ethical dialogue and proposed that we create it together.

After some discussion, we concluded the conversation by promising to contribute to the larger ethical project proposed by Marzuki. For AHDO, this had the advantage of not limiting ethics to workplace issues only. But then came the question: who can represent the other ethical dimensions?

## Dr Choltis Dhirathiti: ASEAN universities need ethics for ASEAN



Dr Choltis Dhirathiti, Executive Director of the ASEAN University Network (AUN)

Thinking about the larger project, it became clear to me that the most important contributor to a forum for ASEAN ethics is higher education. Not only are universities present in all ASEAN countries but they provide ethics courses. They also do research and foster thought leadership.

Fortunately, ASEAN had the ideal organisation. The ASEAN University Network (AUN) is an arrangement for linking 30 leading universities in all ten ASEAN countries. The governance of the ASEAN University Network (AUN) is made up of one Representative from each of the ASEAN Member States working with the Secretary-General of ASEAN, the Chairman of the ASEAN Senior Officials Meeting on Education (SOM-ED), the Director of Southeast Asian Ministers of Education (SEAMEO), the Chairman of the AUN Board of Trustees, and the AUN Executive Director.

I agreed to float the idea of an ethics forum to the AUN Executive Director, Choltis Dhirathiti. Knowing the workload of the secretariat in dealing with the many projects among its member and associated universities, I was not optimistic about the AUN's willingness to take on a new initiative that was still largely aspirational and risked being politically sensitive.

Dr Choltis surprised me by immediately understanding the idea and agreeing to consider it. He got back to me later saying that he would like to contribute. He set up a team to work on organising ethics webinars since there was no option for in-presence meetings during the Covid pandemic.

The team that Dr Choltis brought together ended up making the webinars successful beyond our expectations. They contributed essentially to this book by writing up the ECAAR dialogues in part two of this book and researching ASEAN sources.

### ASEAN Institutions responsible for ethics

The three founding organisations represented human development, human rights and higher education. But we were still far from covering the whole scope of ASEAN ethical portfolio. So Marzuki, Choltis and I reached out to other ASEAN organisations to contribute to our ethics dialogues.

We started with the ASEAN Secretariat, communicating this statement about how an ethics forum is needed for ASEAN:<sup>2</sup>

***With the speed of innovation and social change, the ASEAN Secretariat would benefit from input concerning issues, as well***

<sup>2</sup> The text is from an internal note to promote the benefits of our enterprise in informal conversations with various contacts at the ASEAN Secretariat

**as a CSO providing resources for dialogue and recommendations in establishing positions, policies and guidelines having an ethical content aligned to the scope of the Secretariat. Examples are the need for ethical guidelines in managing new issues arising from the Covid-19 pandemic, or discussing what is acceptable in tracking citizens using certain applications of artificial intelligence.**

We then reached out to the other ASEAN organisations making up a veritable ecosystem of ethics stakeholders in ASEAN. These were:

- **ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR):** AICHR was inaugurated in 2009 and participated in the promulgation of the ASEAN Human Rights Declaration (AHRD) adopted in 2012. The purpose of AICHR is to be ASEAN's overarching institution responsible for the promotion and protection of human rights in ASEAN. AICHR national representatives are nominated by their respective Governments and decision-making is based on consultation and consensus. Keo Remy, president of the Cambodian Human Rights Committee (CHRC) is chairman of AICHR from 2022-2024.
- **Human Development Directorate:** in the ASEAN Secretariat, a directorate of the ASEAN Socio-Economic Community is responsible for a wide range of ethical issues including health, labour, poverty, civil service, poverty eradication and gender equality. Rodora Turalde-Babaran is the current Director.
- **ASEAN Foundation:** created by ASEAN leaders in 1997, the Foundation promotes awareness and identity of ASEAN and supports the interaction and development of people across ASEAN. Dr Yang Mee Eng is currently the Executive Director.
- **ASEAN Business Advisory Council (ASEAN BAC):** established in 2001 by ASEAN heads of state, this organisation identifies ethics areas for the consideration of ASEAN leaders on cooperation, integration, business ethics and governance. The Executive Director is Gil Gonzales.
- **ASEAN CSR Network (ACN):** established in 2010 and accredited as an ASEAN entity in 2016, the ACN mission is to promote and enable responsible business conduct in ASEAN including sustainability, equity, social inclusion, equality and development. Its Chief Executive Officer is Thomas Thomas.
- **ASEAN Youth Organisation (AYO):** established in 2013 and accredited as an ASEAN Entity in 2018, the AYO promotes international understanding and goodwill among ASEAN Youth with 200 team members and 16 chapters and networks. Senjaya Mulia is the founder of AYO.

Many of representatives from these organisations will appear in the dialogues later in this book.

## **Creating an Ethics Council and Advisory for the ASEAN Region (ECAAR)**

Marzuki, Choltis and I defined the mission for an Ethics Council and Advisory for the ASEAN Region (ECAAR). The council function would identify ethical issues of sufficient importance to be addressed at the level of the ASEAN regional community and provide a space for dialogue. The advisory function would be for expert conference and white papers, fact-finding missions and research.

We were not thinking of ECAAR as an actual building with a round table for seating eminent persons wearing long capes like you see in the space movies. ECAAR was not meant to be a legislative body. Nor was it intended as a debate club for opposing political or religious doctrines. We wanted this space to be as participative as possible in order to allow the general public to dialogue with stakeholders, experts and thought leaders on a given ethical topic.

ECAAR would not shy away from addressing difficult but important ethical themes for the ASEAN region including human rights, democracy, diversity, leadership, business ethics and sustainability. We would not limit ourselves to the politically correct issues while at the same time the forum would be responsible for respecting truth, diversity and fairness.

We thought that ECAAR should serve as a think tank for emerging ethical issues of interest to ASEAN and for collaborating with international bodies such as the United Nations on ethical issues.

We clearly saw ECAAR as an ASEAN voice for ethics in education and professional training, given that many university ethics courses or training programmes rely on Western textbooks and manuals which have no content on ASEAN or even Asia.

### **A surprising early success**

One thing you learn when managing new enterprises is to pay attention when successes exceed your expectations. The co-founders of ECAAR wanted to get started during the Covid pandemic so the only logical way forward was to go online. The ASEAN University Network team working with Dr Choltis was particularly well-organised for managing large scale webinars.

We decided to test the waters right away. With my business background, I was well aware that ethics can be seen as an esoteric topic, disconnected from the real world and a waste of time for people who believe that doing something right is what matters – not asking yourself if you are doing the right thing. Practical people don't generally like to spend time on theory and speculation. They prefer to deal with the ethics of a real situation when it comes up. We decided to highlight real ethical questions in ASEAN.

To my surprise, our first webinar had several hundred participants. The next one was over a thousand. Some university professors were even assigning the webinar to their students in ethics classes. I asked Dr Choltis if there were many ethics courses in the ASEAN universities he represented and he said that not only were there many but they represent a growing academic subject with large classes.

We found ourselves with a first unexpected success. My agreement to write this book stems directly from our discovery of the growing interest for authentic ethical thinking in ASEAN.

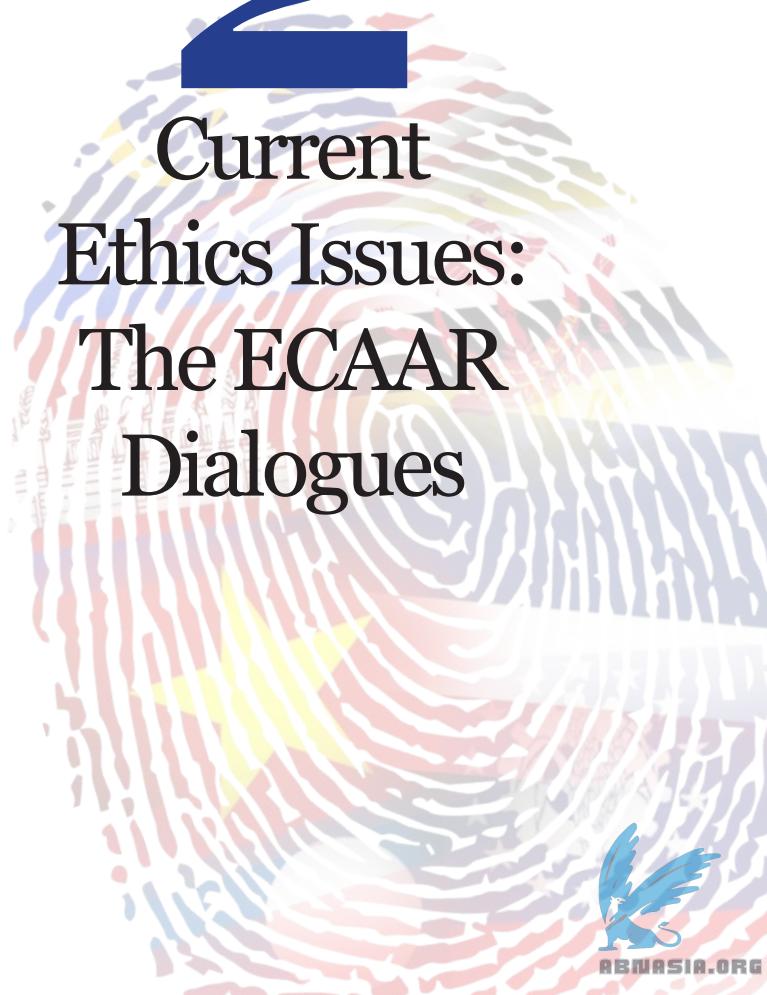


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# Part 2

## Current Ethics Issues: The ECAAR Dialogues



This part of the book offers the reader deep dives into eight dialogues on the important ethical issues of ASEAN: the ethics of diversity, the rise of corporate ethics, ethical leadership, ethics of our digital world, ethics of the future of work, ethics of freedom, ethics of sustainability and biodiversity and the ethics of human development.

Thanks to the AUN team of researchers and organisers we reached out to contributors across the region and across sectors for the webinars, and they also ensured the recording and transcription of the dialogues. As moderator for all of the dialogues, I learned a great deal about the ethics of ASEAN by listening to 44 speakers during the period who all contributed perspectives and insights.

These dialogues were organised over a two-year period by ECAAR and were hosted online as 2 ½ hour webinars from January 2021 up to January 2023. Each dialogue has from four up to nine speakers representing different perspectives and institutions from ASEAN. Hosted by the ASEAN University Network, we systematically included students and youth in the ethical discussions.

In this book, we summarise the presentations by the different speakers in each dialogue. We do not provide the exchanges among speakers, which can be viewed in the webinars but often had to be reduced due to time limitations. We believe that the dialogues can continue in the mind of the reader with the historical perspective of how particular issues have evolved. Or if the book is used for an education or training course, the dialogues would naturally be those of the participants.

We have left the sequence of chapters in the order of the webinars themselves and introduce the speakers with their titles at the time. With input from the AUN researchers, I summarise the themes and key points made by the presenters in the form of takeaways at the end of each chapter. I avoid adding later references, facts or perspectives to the dialogues except in a few cases for reasons I explain.

# CHAPTER

# 4

## Practical Ethics in a Diverse ASEAN

**A**SEAN does have an ethic of diversity. The different cultures, religions, and political systems of ASEAN would simply be a mosaic of national preferences if there were no ethics bonds creating a foundation of agreement through ASEAN declarations and institutions as well as consensus on new issues.

On the other hand, the virtue ethics of each nation as well as other ethical foundations such as culture and religion create a great deal of disagreement. This principle of diversity is what allows ASEAN institutions to work as a forum for discussing issues and reaching common agreement before taking action. Practical ethics is about taking action on the basis of an ethical decision. This may be individual or collective. In a highly diverse multinational community, practical ethics is difficult when each nation preserves its autonomy and there is no basis for sharing resources and capabilities. At the very time we held the first ECAAR dialogue, ASEAN faced two major tests of its practical ethics.

In January 2021, ASEAN countries experienced the first wave of the Covid-19 epidemic at it reached more than 15,000 cases daily. By August ASEAN would record more than 38,000 deaths in a two-week period at the peak of contagion. How should ASEAN coordinate decisions during the pandemic? Who should receive vaccines and who would be left out?

At bottom, would the national ethics restrict more effective results-based ethical decisions for the region?

# PRACTICAL ETHICS IN A DIVERSE ASEAN: NEW CHALLENGES AND PRIORITIES FOR ACTION

28 JANUARY 2021 AT 09.00 A.M. – 11.30 A.M. (GMT+7)

## DISTINGUISHED SPEAKERS

### DR. MARZUKI DARUSMAN

Co-Founder and Chairman of Foundation for International Human Rights Reporting Standards ("FIHRRST")



### MS. DORA HENG

A Master Student in Public Administration in International Development at Harvard Kennedy School of Government, US



### PROF. DR. EKO SUWARDI

Chairman of ASEAN University Network for Business and Economics (AUN-BE) Network



### DR. ANTONETTE PALMA-ANGELES

Professor at the Ateneo de Manila University, a former Ateneo's Vice President for the Professional Schools and Academic



### DR. PAUL LIM

Lecturer of Organisational Behavior & Human Resource, Lee Kong Chian School of Business, Singapore Management University



### MR. SENJAYA MULIA

Founder ASEAN Youth Organisation (AYO)



**Disclaimer:** The views expressed by speakers do not necessarily represent the view of the host and co-host organisations.

Link to Video Recording <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1XNzLx72r14>

## Marzuki Darusman: the Ethics of Diversity is about living as a regional society

Dr Marzuki Darusman has been involved in practical ethics most of his career. He is the Chairman and Founder of The Foundation for International Human Rights Reporting Standards (FIHRRST), an international association dedicated to the respect, protection and fulfilment of human rights. He was the former Attorney General of Indonesia and Cabinet Secretary, serving under Indonesia's first democratically elected President Abdurrahman Wahid in 1999–2001. In 2009, he was appointed by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to a three-member UN Commission of Inquiry to investigate the assassination of former Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto. He would continue to serve as a Special Rapporteur on human rights in the DPRK from 2010–2016. He is currently the chairman of a UN Human Rights Council mission in Myanmar since 2017 and is currently the Director-General of the Human Rights Resource Centre for ASEAN.

Dr Marzuki discusses ethics not just as a set of rules but a moral orientation for how societies live together. He notes that while ASEAN aims for “unity in diversity” there is still a fundamental issue regarding the degree to which integration is desired and how much ASEAN citizens have genuinely internalised an ASEAN identity.

For him, issues like political conflict and the ethics are part of a dynamic of change that societies go through. Even business as a social institution is affected by ethical considerations of their obligations to the state and society.

Despite ASEAN’s vision, there is an acknowledgement that the region is facing dilemmas that hinder ethical action. The first is the dilemma of “diversity vs. unity”: ASEAN finds itself challenged to reconcile various norms and cultures and its aim to integrate them into a harmonious society. Second is the dilemma of “paradigm vs. ideologism:” this as a push-and-pull between state ideologies and beliefs and scientific and evidence-based approaches. Conflicts between the traditional and the modern would have to be resolved. Lastly is the dilemma of “humanism vs. religiocentrism”, one that ASEAN countries have approached differently. Some have placed religion as a core part of its national philosophy, while others lean more towards individualistic humanism.

Dr Marzuki believes that by having conversations on the place of ethics in ASEAN, these dilemmas could be better reconciled.



Figure 1. Dr Marzuki Darusman, Chairman and Founder of the Foundation for International Human Rights Reporting Standards (FIHRRST) and founding member of ECAAR.



Figure 2: Dora Heng is Manager of Strategic Initiatives at Visa and past consultant for Economic Research and Regional Cooperation at the Asian Development Bank

## Dora Heng: ASEAN's ethical paradoxes need to evolve

The ethics of diversity can create ethical values that are contradictory where people hold conflicting beliefs. An example in ASEAN is the conflicting ethics of aiding vulnerable peoples like migrant workers, something that Dora Heng has tried to untangle.

According to Dora, paradoxes and contradictions in ethics commonly arise in our increasingly globalized world. Using her home country of Singapore as an example, she discusses how her society seems to have simultaneously conflicting views about migrant workers. The ILO in 2019 reported that 78% of Singaporeans supported better labour conditions for domestic workers, yet 60% also believed that the same workers should not receive equal pay and benefits policies compared to Singaporeans themselves. During the early part of the COVID-19 pandemic migrant workers were forced to live in cramped dormitories without social distancing, leading to 95% of Singapore's cases coming from the migrant worker population.

Migrant workers in Singapore are largely disenfranchised and have little possibility to take collective action or have a voice. This leads to questions regarding the practical ethics of a moral community where people have an obligation towards each other. In a rational society, citizens are bound by a common set of ethics for everyone, and how one's ethics can affect another member of society.

Dora Heng proposes ways in which these issues could be addressed. She notes that civil society organisations (CSOs), for example those involved in advocacy for migrant workers, can play an active role in raising public awareness and assisting in taking action about their needs and living situation. Through public scrutiny, there can be pressure on local ministries to take action to improve such standards.

According to Dora, ASEAN has recognized the importance of improving labour migration governance and suggests more international cooperation in ASEAN in the practical application of the rights of migrant workers in order to bring ASEAN's contradictory ethical values into coherence.

## Prof Eko Suwardi: ASEAN Diversity means that businesses must cooperate

The COVID-19 pandemic has seen many businesses close down and millions struggle to stay financially secure. While government policy is key in tackling this crisis, Dr Eko Suwardi believes that businesses themselves need to make ethical choices regarding their influence on all people in such a crisis.

Dr Eko Suwardi is the former Chairman of the ASEAN University Network for Business and Economics (AUN-BE). He was also the Dean of the Faculty of Economics and Business in Universitas Gadjah Mada, Indonesia (2016–2021) and a lecturer at the Department of Accounting. His teaching and research interests include business ethics, auditing, and public sector accounting.

Dr Eko discussed how governments attempted to tackle the Covid-19 pandemic with lockdowns and their effects on economic activity resulting in a drop in growth of 5.4% for the region. Dr Eko underlined the ethical role that businesses will play for the recovery, from pharmaceuticals producing vaccines in the region to directly influencing the number of people who remain employed.

Ethically, businesses need to consider how their decisions affect society at large and what the results of ethical action are. He notes four important practical ways in which businesses have an ethical influence on society: policies, health, employment, and culture. Ethics encompass various issues including fair work and rights of migrant workers. Beyond this, businesses contribute to progressive ethical norms, including working conditions, fighting corruption, promoting education, respecting human rights and managing social conflicts.

Dr Eko discussed the ethics of economic recovery, such as supply chains, information access, and the environment. ASEAN should rely on its ethic of cooperation when dealing with such a crisis. Just as governments, communities, and academic institutions can come together to solve common problems, Dr Eko believes that businesses should also cooperate with each other to contribute to the resilience as well as development of the region.



Figure 3: Prof Eko Suwardi is the former Chairman of the ASEAN University Network for Business and Economics (AUN-BE) and Dean of the Faculty of Economics and Business at Universitas Gadjah Mada, Indonesia



Figure 4: Prof Antonette Palma-Angeles teaches Ethics and Leadership at Ateneo de Manila University, Philippines

## Prof Antonette Palma-Angeles: Education helps young people to become ethical

Dr Antonette Palma-Angeles is a Professor of Ethics and Leadership at Ateneo de Manila University, with research interests in Filipino leadership. She has occupied various leadership positions at Ateneo, including Academic Vice President and Vice President for the Professional Schools. She is also a regular lecturer in Kyoto University's Asian Business Leadership programme.

During emergencies and crises like the COVID-19 pandemic, the focus of ethics is on practical measures for dealing with the immediate situation. In Prof Antonette's view, however, the immediate practical ethics of a crisis can divert attention away from longer-term ethics and change ethical priorities in society. During the COVID-19 pandemic, for example, she observes what she describes as "wicked" ethical issues.

The first of these wicked issues is individualism and familialism. The nature of the pandemic led to the shutdown of public spaces and public life became "individualism-promoting". Measures and practices focused on the priority of individuals and their families to take care of themselves. Prof Antonette saw the impact in how this may gradually change the ethical priorities of societies in ASEAN where the common good and community code are the priority now coming into conflict with increasing push for personal freedom and insular familialism.

A second wicked issue concerns "big government" and nationalism. The COVID-19 pandemic brings with it an increasing reliance on government initiatives since civil initiatives such as community action do not have the resources and system required to tackle such a big crisis. But this can bring its own problems, as governments prioritise health measures according to their own ethics which may undermine other ethics. How to deal with old people in nursing homes during the pandemic is an example. Another example is the exclusion of foreigners in favour of local citizens for vaccinations. Prof Antonette believes that an ethical society relies on and must be able to collectively determine the "common good" in a crisis beyond simple utilitarian measures.

The foundation for discussing the ethics of the common good is education and the first thing that ASEAN higher education needs to look at when it comes to ethics in education is what should be taught. She also advocates for teaching

critical thinking to combat issues like “group-think” and unregulated social media.

Second, Prof Antonette advocates for the role of civil society in engaging with powers such as governments or social media platforms. Prof Antonette believes that beyond navigating the crisis, clarifying and integrating values can make for a more ethical society.

## **Dr Paul Lim: We should not be afraid to let youth show the way forward**

In ASEAN societies, ethical practices in society are often directed by senior government leaders and policymakers. For Dr Paul Lim, the way of the future may also depend on the younger generation.

Dr Paul Lim is a Lecturer of Organisational Behaviour and Human Resources (OBHR) at the Lee Kong Chian School of Business, Singapore Management University (SMU). He worked for 10 years in marketing and brand management for various organisations and enterprises before switching to a career in academia. He has a Doctorate in Business Administration from Grenoble École de Management (France), an Executive MBA from the Helsinki School of Economics (Finland), and undergraduate degrees in Commerce and Economics at the University of Toronto (Canada). He has also trained with Harvard Law School's Program on Negotiation.

Dr Paul believes that ethics should guide decision-making, but asks who should lead in those decisions. He believes that the youth should play a part in that process. In his SMU-X course, an experiential learning framework for students to tackle real-world challenges, the teaching approach allows students to take ownership of their own learning as opposed to a teacher-centred approach and encourages internal and external collaborations. In the three-month course students from various disciplines come together to work on their projects with gruelling hours and sleepless nights. This baptism of fire often creates strong friendships among the participants. Students from different cultures bridge their differences and share good ideas, an effective pedagogy for creating practical ethics in a diverse society.

When it comes to ethical leadership, Dr Paul feels that ASEAN decision-makers are too resistant to youth leadership. Despite the traditional value of maintaining stability, norms are evolving every day. Dr Paul calls for leaders to shed their



Figure 5: Dr Paul Lim is a Lecturer of Organisational Behaviour and Human Resources at Singapore Management University (SMU)

preconceptions and fears that youth do not possess the necessary ethical baggage compared to senior leaders. He calls for leaders to be more curious about the youth and seek fresh input on issues which may bring ideas that they have never thought of. In a diverse and changing society the ethical duty for today's ASEAN leaders is to have an open ethical mind for the ideas of young people and provide opportunities for them to show the way forward in practical ethics.



Figure 6: Senjaya Mulia is founder of the ASEAN Youth Organisation

## **Senjaya Mulia: ASEAN youth are committed to doing good for the region**

Following the discussion of youth in showing the way forward by Dr Paul Lim, Senjaya Mulia underlines that ASEAN youth are already setting a direction for the region.

Senjaya Mulia is the founder of the ASEAN Youth Organisation and AYO Social Enterprise. He started out in 2011 with an ASEAN Community Page, then co-founded the ASEAN Youth Organisation along with fellow Cambodian Vanna Hay. Since then, he has actively engaged in social activities and empowerment programmes for youths in Indonesia. Throughout this process, he has done collaborative projects with local governments and international institutions for social and entrepreneurship programs. The ASEAN Youth Organisation started out as an ASEAN community Facebook Page before being established in 2013 as an international non-profit and non-governmental organisation. It now has over 35,000 volunteers and at least 450,000 members. The AYO Community also works with over 100 partners, including the European Union and the ASEAN Human Development Organisation.

Senjaya talks about what AYO has done since its establishment in 2013 from humble beginnings to help young people to learn English. It now runs over 250 projects and programs to empower youth and youth communities in ASEAN including social volunteerism, seminars, conferences, advocacy, and campaigns for action on topics such as sustainability. Throughout these activities, AYO maintains five ethical values in its operations: accountability, integrity, diversity, innovation, and teamwork.

Senjaya emphasises that while there are differences in how older and younger generations think and work.

Collaboration between generations creates a sustainable society. He reminisces about a time where he joined a forum

at the International Labour Organisation as the youngest participant; recently he joined another forum as the oldest and discussed the different communication styles across generations.

Youth activism is practical ethic in a diverse society because it overcomes the mutual negative preconceptions of different generations and works to establish common ethical practices and solutions to ethical issues.

## Ethical Takeaways

This discussion of ethics showed several examples where different ethical types clash, leading to poor policies and lack of action. Taking place during the first wave of a pandemic, several speakers noted the need for collaboration and described the obstacles to taking action. Reflecting on this dialogue we can see that the Covid-19 pandemic created a perfect example of emerging ethics during a crisis and results-based ethics concerned with how to deal ethically with a pandemic.

Dora Heng's example of Singapore's neglect of migrant workers during the first wave of Covid-19 infections led to a government's re-evaluation, less on the basis of human rights than based on the pragmatic need for fair treatment because non-treatment was the main cause of transmission of the virus. Worldwide, different countries reacted with different ethical priorities, from the refusal by many Americans to wear masks in order to demonstrate individual freedom to the Chinese government physically sealing entrances to apartment buildings without consulting the inhabitants. A virus has no ethics and no borders, but the response to a pandemic is full of ethical lessons for how society deals with it.

What can we learn about the ethics of ASEAN from the Covid-19 pandemic? As a test-case for ASEAN's ethic of cooperation *gotong royong*, it largely failed. ASEAN did not immediately create a high-level task force, unlike with earlier successful responses to the avian influenza and SARS pandemics. Each ASEAN Member State managed its pandemic independently without consulting its neighbours, and called on China, Russia or the United States for vaccines. Results-based ethical lessons were learned. Following the immediate crisis ASEAN created a Centre for Public Health Emergencies and Emerging Diseases and promoted investment in building vaccine research and production capability across the region.

The perspectives and concrete examples coming out of this dialogue were not actually focused on the Covid-19 pandemic. The dialogue was about diversity and building ASEAN ethical capability to apply in practical situations.

Dr Marzuki Darusman discusses the ethics of ASEAN as a moral orientation for how diverse societies live together. He describes three current dilemmas, "diversity vs unity" concerning the degree of regional integration, the "paradigm vs. ideologism:" concerns rules-based ethics compared to state ideologies and virtue ethics, and finally "humanism vs. religiocentrism", where a more secular humanism allowing for a diversity of virtue ethics conflicts with placing religious doctrine at the core of national ethics.

Dora Heng described the ethical paradoxes and contradictions as the source of ethical dilemmas, using the example of immigrant workers in Singapore. She underlines

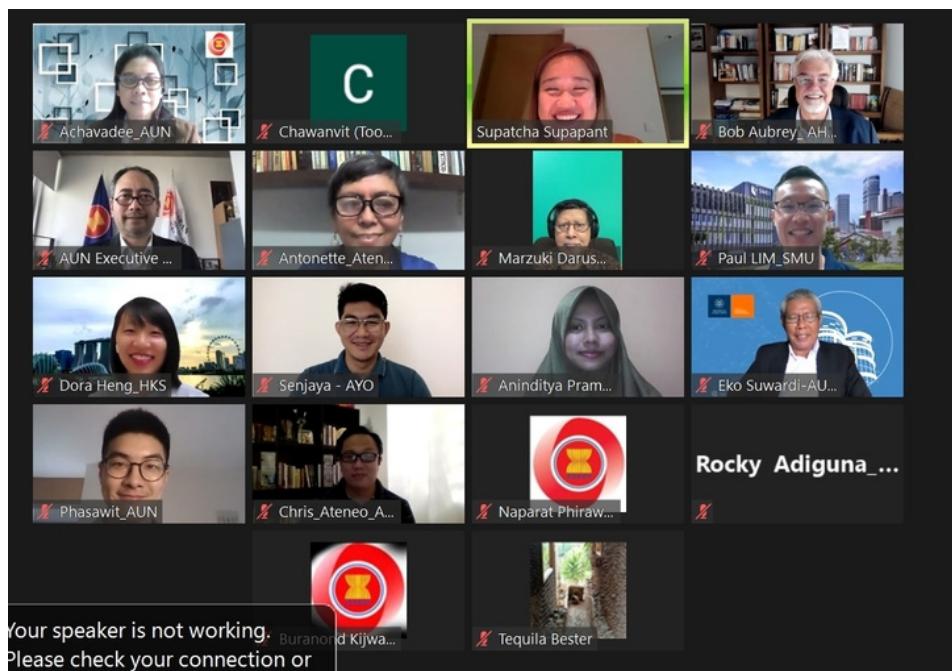
the importance of civil society organisations in advocating for ASEAN-wide ethics beyond the paradoxical ethics of national policies.

Dr Eko Suwardi underlined the ethical challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic where many businesses were closed down and millions without work struggled financially as an opportunity for businesses to make ethical choices regarding their employees and stakeholders across ASEAN.

Dr Antonette Palma-Angeles described the “wicked issues” that arise when dealing with a short-term crisis has long-term consequences that change ethical priorities. She also made an eloquent statement about the role of educating students in ethics in today’s world where critical thinking is needed to counter the rise of “group think” and social media.

Dr Paul Lim makes the point that ASEAN senior decision-makers are too wedded to the value of tradition and maintaining social stability with certain ethical norms, making them resistant to the emerging ethics of ASEAN youth. He advocates for leaders to shed their preconceptions and fears and allow youth to show the way forward in ASEAN.

Finally, Senjaya Mulia describes how the ASEAN Youth Organisation is building ethical dialogue and taking practical ethical action with its 35,000 volunteers and 450,000 members. He believes that youth activism is a practical ethic in a diverse society.



## CHAPTER 5

# The Rise of Corporate Ethics in ASEAN

**O**ur second ECAAR dialogue is about the ethics of corporations and business. It begins with the question of the purpose of a business organisation.

The shareholder-only ethic of responsibility was championed in the 1970s by Nobel Prize economist Milton Friedman of the University of Chicago when he declared that a corporation has no social responsibility to the public or society; its only responsibility is to its shareholders. This has a consequence not only for the stakeholders of a corporation who are not shareholders but also for employees and governments.

ASEAN business ethics have not culturally been so capitalistic and indeed ASEAN businesses were largely born in a post-colonial world after the second World War. But the ethics of business have risen in importance with corporate social responsibility (CSR) and ethical investing which require companies to report on their progress in environmental, social and governance (ESG) matters.

In this dialogue, we invited representatives of ASEAN institutions as well as business leaders to share the realities and ethical principles of what could be called the ASEAN model for business as distinct from the ethical models of companies from other regions operating in ASEAN as a market.

Three short opening remarks provided an introduction to institutions working on ethics in this area: Gil Gonzales provided an overview of the ASEAN Business Advisory Council (ASEAN BAC), Le Hong Phuc gave an overview of the ASEAN Human Development Committee (AHDO) and Thomas Thomas described the activities of the ASEAN Corporate Social Responsibility organisation.

# THE RISE OF CORPORATE ETHICS

*How companies in ASEAN are balancing Purpose, Profit and People*

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Executive Director of  
ASEAN Business Advisory Council



**LE HONG PHUC**

Chairman of  
ASEAN Human Development Organisation



**THOMAS THOMAS**

Chief Executive Officer of  
ASEAN CSR Network

"ASEAN' Companies in  
International Corporate Ethics  
Rankings"

**DR. WIT SOONTARANUN**

EVP, DTGO



**MUN CHING YAP**

Executive Director of the AirAsia Foundation

"How ASEAN Companies  
Support Social Entrepreneurship  
and Equal Opportunity"



"New Ethical Roles in  
Corporate HR."

**C.RAJASHREE MOGAN**

CHRO at FLOW



**SHARMINI LOHADHASAN**

Ethics and Compliance Manager - S&S -  
Ethics and Compliance - bp

"Corporate Responsibility  
for Ethics and Compliance"



"Rising Ethical Investment  
Challenges for ASEAN  
Companies"

**MIKKEL LARSEN**

Chief Sustainability Officer, DBS Bank



**ARYA DWI PARAMITA**

VP CSR & SMEPP Management at Pertamina



"How an Energy SOE  
Contributes to UN Sustainable  
Development Goals"

Link to Recording <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jwTS08xYdCE&feature=youtu.be>

## Dr Wit Soontaranun: “business-social” organisations operate ethically while maintaining business success

Dr Wit is currently the Executive Vice President at DTGO in its Social Contribution Office. He initially began his career with an academic and chemical engineering background, receiving his doctorate from Imperial College London in 1997 and teaching at Chulalongkorn University for 10 years. He would later take on a senior management position at Banpu Public Company Limited, with his responsibilities surrounding occupational health and safety. In 2013, he joined Thai Union Frozen Products PCL, with focus on sustainable development and stakeholder engagement. He would join the Executive Committee of DTGO two years later, focusing on social contribution. Dr Wit professed his gratitude to be in such a role, saying “I don’t have to get a headache about running the business but rather to think more about creating the impact.”

DTGO was founded in 1993 as a “business-social” organisation, with the goal of operating ethically while maintaining business success. From its beginnings in philanthropy and rural land and properties, it has now expanded into several industries like property development, technology, design and construction, finance and investment, and entertainment and communication. The company’s mission involves being ethical and socially responsible while contributing to good causes, a goal incorporated into its business model through dedicating 2% of top line revenue to social causes. Dr Wit adds that this model is so important to the company that it contributes to charity even in periods of downturn.

The company has made numerous efforts to maintain its ethical practices, not only from a societal but also a global standard. It is a participant in the UN Global Compact and maintains its principles of human rights, labour, anti-corruption, and sustainability. This “business social” enterprise has also won numerous awards for its ethical practices. In 2019 and 2022, DTGO was recognized by the Ethisphere Institute, a US-based firm measuring corporate ethical standards as one of the *World’s Most Ethical Companies*. It is recognised for Excellence in Corporate Social Responsibility by Amcham Thailand, and has various *Special Recognition* awards from Thailand Property, notably in Sustainable Development and CSR.



Figure 1: Dr Wit Soontaranun, Executive Vice President at the Thai-based company DTGO and head of its Social Contribution Office

Dr Wit points out that their current business model is not an easy one. From the very beginning, DTGO's objectives include the nurturing of children's education for its foreign contract workers. In terms of property development, Dr Wit discusses supply chain challenges in ensuring that the families and children of contract workers are documented and given a decent education. He also discusses how DTGO is not simply doing charity work but is working to ensure that the people in need could be supported in the long term. Dr Wit explains, "if you are talking about a student who is in Grade 1 and you would like to support that child until they reach university, it means we are talking about 15-16 years from now."

Despite the planning and difficulties, Dr Wit still believes that it is compassion that matters most in sustaining ethical practices in companies. When it comes to ethics, he says, "we use our heart rather than our heads". In other words, it is "doing rather than planning" that makes a company ethical. It is good for companies to incorporate ethics into their strategy and comply with ESG requirements. It is even better when ethics IS the company.

## Mun Ching Yap: ASEAN Companies create Foundations to support ethical causes

Ms. Mun Ching Yap is the Founder and Executive Director of the AirAsia Foundation, as well as the Head of Sustainability of the AirAsia Group. Her background was initially in journalism, writing as a columnist for the Malaysian newspaper *The Sun Daily*, with focus on socio-political developments. Her first encounter with AirAsia was as a journalist interviewing Tony Fernandes, the founder of the Malaysian low-cost airline company, AirAsia. Mun Ching would emerge as its route planner and later its Head of Strategic Planning. She would spend a brief time working for the Malaysian government before meeting Tony Fernandes again, this time to discuss how to take action for social responsibility. The result was the AirAsia Foundation.

The AirAsia Foundation was founded in 2012, and calls itself "the philanthropic arm of AirAsia Group". Its corporate ethics focus on supporting social entrepreneurship and small businesses through grants, mentorship, networking, and sale of social enterprise products through AirAsia. According to the AirAsia Foundation, they have funded 28 social enterprises in 7 countries with over 3,000 direct beneficiaries. Aside from providing grants, they also run Destination GOOD, a flagship social enterprise shop that serves to retail over 400 ethically produced goods from 50 different social enterprises.



Figure 2: Mun Ching Yap is Founder and Executive Director of the AirAsia Foundation and Head of Sustainability of the AirAsia Group.

The approach by the AirAsia Foundation placed emphasis on achieving real impact. Mun Ching discussed how various angel investments for social enterprises tend to collapse and fail within a short amount of time. She concluded that the cause for this failure was that the funding had mostly been focused on the startup phase but rarely on maintaining growth. As such, the AirAsia Foundation is more selective in their grant programme, focusing on organisations that have operated for at least two years and have a potential for growth. The Foundation also assists enterprises in maintaining financial sustainability through self-sustainability rather than solely relying on grants.

Revival of ASEAN's disappearing cultural heritage is also a key objective for the Foundation. It supports businesses that produce locally-made products in various countries, ranging from Vietnam to the hill tribes of Thailand. Another ethical mission is gender diversity.

Beyond financial support through grants, the AirAsia Foundation recognizes that many small enterprises in ASEAN struggle to achieve branding and marketing success. Thus the Foundation offers AirAsia resources to generate media attention for their Foundation businesses and links them to their own supply chain and business partners.

## **Sharmini Lohadhasan: changing a company's ethics is a leadership challenge**

Sharmini Lohadhasan has had an extensive career with BP Singapore since 1997. She has a background in law and worked as an adviser in Trademarks and Copyright. In 2021, she became the Ethics and Compliance Manager for BP Singapore.

BP is a multinational energy company headquartered in the UK operating in almost 80 countries with more than 70,000 employees. While its business is rooted in fossil fuels, it aims to become a net-zero company by 2050 and has committed to a transition programme to sustainable and renewable sources, with focus on low-carbon technologies.

Sharmini points out that large organisations and multinationals often require effort and ethical leadership to create new ethical foundations outside their core business. The question is whether BP will be able to adopt the new ethics of sustainability or practice "greenwashing" by simply reporting compliance for ESG. For Sharmini Lohadhasan, a shift in such ethics must be embraced and led by its leaders or it will not succeed.



Figure 3: Sharmini Lohadhasan, Ethics and Compliance Manager at BP Singapore



Changing ethics is not easy and Sharmini described the challenges in getting leaders to understand and adopt ethical values at BP. Some business leaders do not understand the expectation that they must lead in ethics beyond regulations and compliance. She gave the example of zero tolerance for bullying and sexual misconduct as an ethical challenge in ensuring a safe environment for female employees.

Sharmini described how BP is making its ethical transition with five culture change programmes: 1) Values made easy, 2) Be clear for what you stand for, 3) Lead by example, 4) Trust me, show me, prove to me, and 5) Make integrity a habit. BP implements this programme through annual training for all employees, issuing accessible guidelines and codes of conduct. The leadership programmes encourage personal integrity, teach how to build trust and they provide guidelines for ethical transparency.

In a business, building an ethical culture has to show how it links to the business. Sharmini discusses ways in which ethics can pay off and gave the example of how BP won a bid for a large project thanks to trust in the company's transparency and integrity.

## **Shree Mogan: Becoming an Ethics Advocate is a big change for HR**

Shree Mogan was previously involved in various non-profit initiatives including a directorial role at SYINC, a youth non-profit organisation in 2009, as well as the UNLEASH programme in Singapore, a global innovation hub aimed at fulfilling the UN SDGs. She worked in HR at Barclays, J.P. Morgan and GoJek before her current position as Chief Human Resource Officer at FLOW.

While Sharmini Lohadhasan described the importance of leaders in exemplifying and managing ethics, Shree Mogan takes up the question of whether the Human Resource function really has an ethical role in companies.

Shree makes the case that HR professionals should not only be the executors of ethics policies and regulations, but should be active leaders and advocates of ethics. For this to happen in ASEAN companies and in the mindset of HR professionals, the HR function needs to evolve beyond its role as people administrator and business support. In its new ethical role, HR can help businesses identify social commitments and contributions to society beyond just the company employees.



Figure 4: C. Rajashree Mogan is Chief Human Resource Officer at FLOW with experience in multinationals and ASEAN unicorns, as well as social enterprises.

This rise in ethics in the HR function is in fact the trend in companies and Shree identifies three ethics areas that HR did not exercise before: 1) Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Justice (DEIJ), 2) Sustainability, and 3) Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR).

Despite growth in corporate responsibility and more progressive labour policies in ASEAN, redefining the role of HR as ethics advocate and expert is a challenge. Corporate leaders often see HR as purely administrative and as reactive to directives given to them rather than as leaders. HR professionals themselves often lack training in ethics and social policy. When it comes to thinking about what is the right thing to do in the ASEAN workplace, HR professionals lack a network of peers in other countries or experience working outside their home country.

In fact the ASEAN workplace needs HR leaders in ethics because the practice in companies does not always protect employees and is not used to reaching out to the vulnerable or disenfranchised such as workers with disabilities or immigrant workers. Too often, leaders in our ASEAN corporate culture still view policies like diversity and social justice as being “western” ethics.

Shree believes that HR professionals in ASEAN should become more connected and it may require a push in companies for HR to be strategic rather than the administrative, and advocate for emerging ethics like sustainability, DEI, and CSR. Shree also hopes that the younger generation will be able to bring a more ethical mindset to the corporate world, especially those who will or already are starting their own businesses.

## Mikkel Larsen: Ethical investors want companies to make a real impact

Mikkel Larsen is based in Singapore and worked for DBS Bank for nearly a decade before becoming CEO of Climate Impact X (CIX) in 2021. Mikkel believes in “practicing what you preach” and personally engages in an environmentally-conscious lifestyle.

Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) is a growing discussion topic in business and finance. Mikkel Larsen notes that there has been more “talk” than “walk” when it comes to impact.

For example, he mentions the US\$ 2.5 trillion shortfall each year in carrying out the United Nations Sustainable



Figure 5: Mikkel Larsen,  
Chief Sustainability Officer  
DBS Bank

Development Goals (SDGs). As for investors, companies are not neglecting the need to report on ESG in annual reports, but the reality is that most still focus mostly on shareholder return on investment rather than the targets that ESG investments are meant to solve.

Another problem Mikkel emphasizes is where corporations invest their ESG budgets. Rather than allocating investment where it will have the most impact, called "impact investing", most investment goes to developed countries rather than the ASEAN countries or Africa. Furthermore, most of the ESG finance is coming from public funds and pension funds as opposed to private investors.

How can investment be more ethical? Mikkel suggests several directions. For example, DBS bank has focused on "transition finance" to shift "brown" industries that generate a lot more carbon to a "decarbonized" economy, such as shifting from coal and petroleum to renewable energy. In Singapore DBS set up a platform with Singapore Exchange, Standard Chartered and Temasek called Climate Impact X (CIX) for the exchange and auction of carbon credits.

Concerning ethical investors themselves, Mikkel recommends that we all consider where our investment can make a real difference and a real impact.

## Arya Dwi Paramita: State-Owned companies have an ethical mission

Arya Dwi Paramita has worked at the Indonesian State-Owned Company Pertamina since 2013. In 2019 he became Vice President of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) as well as Pertamina's Small and Medium Enterprise Partnership Program (SMEPP).

When it comes to corporate ethics in ASEAN, Arya Dwi Paramita notes that one type of company should be highlighted in this discussion: state-owned or state-linked corporations.

Pertamina is Indonesia's largest company and has historically been a national oil and gas conglomerate because of Indonesia's extensive reserves in hydrocarbons. Now, Pertamina is looking to increase the percentage of new and renewable sources of energy in line with global sustainability targets.

Arya describes the importance of sustainable development in "meeting the needs of the present without compromising the future". He also explains that for Pertamina,



Figure 6: Arya Dwi Paramita  
Vice President of Corporate Social Responsibility at Pertamina

the definition of development cannot be separated from sustainability and social responsibility. As such, Pertamina is a stakeholder company under the mandate of the Indonesian Ministry of State-Owned Enterprises. Recently the Ministry announced its 2030 action plan based on 10 of the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals. These are (1) No Poverty, (4) Quality Education, (5) Gender Equality, (7) Affordable and Clean Energy, (8) Decent Work and Economic Growth, (12) Responsible Consumption and Production, (13) Climate Action, (14) Life Below Water, (15) Life on Land and (16) Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions.

Pertamina's social responsibility includes providing energy cost efficient services while reducing the impact of greenhouse gasses. In its transition to renewables, Pertamina is looking into sustainable solutions like geothermal energy, biofuels and solar energy as well as supporting the transition to electric vehicles in Indonesia. As the world's largest archipelago nation, transition to new forms of energy is challenging due to Indonesia's size and its thousands of islands. To this end, Indonesia will maintain fossil fuel production while keeping carbon emissions low.

In addition to "E" of ESG, Pertamina's "S" engagement for social responsibility will shift from a core business-based approach to a community development-based approach. Pertamina has an opportunity to provide community services like waste-water treatment and waste reduction programs, environmental preservation by sustaining forests, improving public welfare and community development.

Arya believes that ESG is inseparable from Indonesia's development. The corporate ethics of Pertamina can have a measurable development impact for the country by reducing its negative impact on the environment.

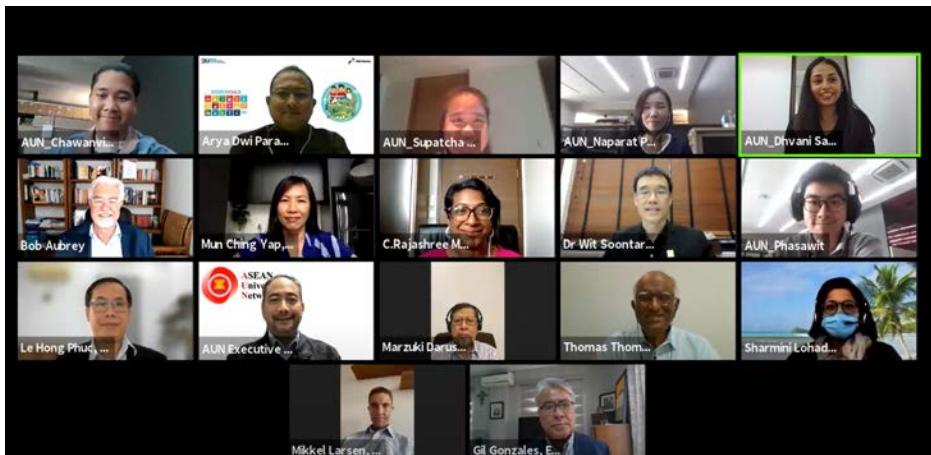
## Ethical Takeaways

For all our speakers, the rise of corporate ethics represents a shift from shareholder capitalism to stakeholder capitalism. Under shareholder ethics, the duty of those responsible for managing a company is to deliver maximum returns to shareholders in the form of dividends and an increased share price.

Contrary to the shareholder ethics espoused by the economist Milton Friedman, stakeholder ethics was formulated in 1984 by American philosopher and professor of strategy Robert Edward Freeman in his book *Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach*.<sup>1</sup> The stakeholder approach clearly states that managers should be ethical. They should influence stakeholder behaviour and create policies that encourage people to make the world a better place. In stakeholder ethics every individual (business owner, executive, employee, supplier, customer, and even competitor) is an actor whose duty is to contribute to the common good.

Stakeholder ethics represents an emerging ethic as well as a shift to a more responsible rules-based ethics, as described by our speakers. They provide a good understanding of the different perspectives of ASEAN's change in business ethics.

<sup>1</sup> Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach (1984) by R. Edward Freeman, Boston: Pitman. ISBN 978-0273019138.



Dr Wit represents the perspective of a business leader who has purposely joined a “business-social” company with the goal of operating ethically while maintaining business success. He believes that ethics in business is about “doing rather than planning” and that ethics comes from the heart. He explains how DTGO is working to ensure that the people in need will be supported in the long term.

Mun Ching Yap describes how companies create foundations to focus on a specific ethical purpose. The AirAsia Foundation that she leads is focused on supporting social entrepreneurship and small businesses through grants, mentorship, networking, and sale of social enterprise products. It is particularly exemplary in preserving cultural heritage products in small businesses across ASEAN.

Sharmini Lohadhasan represents the perspective of large multinationals that are taking ethical leadership to transition outside their core business to become more ethical. The company in question is B which has adopted the new ethics of sustainability in compliance with ESG. Sharmini shares her BP experience that such a shift in ethics must be embraced and led by its leaders or it will not succeed.

Shree Mogan takes the perspective of an ASEAN HR professional and makes the case that HR can no longer be on the execution side of ethics policies and regulations. HR professionals need to be active leaders and advocates of ethics as they are responsible for people as well as profits in their companies. She points out the specific ethical needs in the ASEAN workplace where companies do not always protect employees and are not used to reaching out to vulnerable or disenfranchised workers.

Mikkel Larsen of DBS bank notes that there has been more “talk” than “walk” when it comes to the actual impact of ESG. Mikkel recommends that we should all consider how our own investments can make a real ethical impact.

Arya Dwi Paramita notes the particular ethical responsibilities in one type of company, state-owned or state-linked corporations. In Indonesia SOEs make up about half the economy, so they have an important place in the ethical corporate landscape. As Vice President of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) at Indonesia’s largest SOE,

Pertamina, he believes that the company's ethics in ESG are inseparable from Indonesia's development as a nation. Like Sharmini's description of BP, the corporate ethics of a major energy company engaged in producing fossil fuels is a challenge reducing the negative impact on the environment.

As Shree Mogan reminds us, for business leaders in ASEAN, corporate ethics like diversity and social justice is often still viewed as being "western" ethics. There will be considerable challenges if ASEAN companies take a distrustful view of the increased emphasis on ethics. However, when even in a small company you cannot get a loan or sell your products without ESG compliance, the ethical preference quickly becomes concrete. Also, with the fact that around half of the ASEAN workforce is already composed of Gen Z and millennial workers, the generational shift in ethics will be a consideration for any company.



## CHAPTER 6

# Ethical leadership of ASEAN and in ASEAN

**A**s the ASEAN region takes a larger role on the world stage, ethical issues require leadership from inside ASEAN. This ECAAR dialogue is about leadership ethics and our speakers are all from the region and each has a different leadership role to play.

ASEAN's international political, economic and social issues are under pressure from external forces as issues internal to the region. ASEAN youth grow up in a more uncertain world and see ASEAN's ethical role differently from past generations.

This dialogue took place three months after the coup d'état in Myanmar when the democratically elected members of the country's ruling party, the National League for Democracy, were arrested by the military Tatmadaw. How should ASEAN react to clear violations of its Charter and Human Rights Declaration by a Member State? The Myanmar dilemma constituted a perfect starting point for discussing ethical leadership in ASEAN.

# ETHICAL LEADERSHIP

## OF ASEAN and IN ASEAN

Developing responsible leaders on the world stage

27 May 2021, 09.00 - 11.30 AM (GMT+7 Jakarta Local Time)



**Dr. Bob Aubrey**

Moderator

## DISTINGUISHED SPEAKERS



**Dr. José Ramos-Horta**

Former President of Timor-Leste and Nobel Peace Prize Laureate



**Gil Gonzales**

Executive Director of ASEAN Business Advisory Council



**Dr. Marzuki Darusman**

Co-Founder and Chairman of Foundation for International Human Rights Reporting Standards (FIHRRST)



**Dr. Yang Mee Eng**

Executive Director of ASEAN Foundation



**Raudhah Nazran**

CEO and Founder of Accelerate Global



**Jamesun Wacnang Bejarin**

Student, Loyola Schools, Ateneo de Manila University



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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DyUrvwhStww&t=423s>



## José Ramos-Horta: leadership of ASEAN and in ASEAN can help a diverse region make ethical decisions.

The keynote speaker of our dialogue is Dr José Ramos-Horta, one of the founders of Timor-Leste, ASEAN's newest state and a Nobel Peace Prize Laureate. He served as President of Timor-Leste from 2007 to 2012 and would again be elected in 2022. An outspoken advocate for freedom, peace, and human rights, Dr Ramos-Horta gives an overview of leadership ethics in Southeast Asia.

First of all, the main ethical challenge to ASEAN is the Myanmar situation. Ramos-Horta explains the difficulty for ASEAN leaders trying to come to an ethical decision about a Member State based on differing relations with Myanmar and different political views. Political ideologies, economic investment and military relationships have affected each nation's response to the crisis. For example, Indonesia, a country that successfully transitioned to democracy in the Indonesian Reformation of 1998, is taking a clear stance to resolve this Myanmar political and humanitarian crisis immediately. Thailand, on the other hand, is not willing to condemn the coup because of its elite military links to Myanmar and benefits of sharing a long border and extensive trade and investments with the country.

What has impressed Ramos-Horta is the united movement of the people in taking to the street to demonstrate. This shows the ironclad will of the people in Myanmar to resist the regime and the power of the visionary leadership of Aung San Suu Kyi, also a Nobel Peace Prize laureate, who had democratically won the mandate of the people in the 2015 landmark elections and again captured an even greater majority in the November 2020 election that led to the coup.

A five-point consensus was announced by ASEAN Leaders the month before this dialogue took place.<sup>1</sup> It called for Myanmar's military regime to immediately cease all forms of violence, allow humanitarian aid and special envoys to meet all parties, and to participate in a mediation process. Unfortunately, the Myanmar Tatmadaw ignored these requirements and continued to brutally repress all opposition in the country. The five-point plan was not followed by action from the ASEAN Member States.

<sup>1</sup> ASEAN Secretariat (April 2021). *Chairman's Statement on the ASEAN Leaders' Meeting*. Retrieved from <https://apnews.com/article/only-on-ap-united-nations-thailand-myanmar-indonesia-21128b761ef13e31465f0a537a1b0b18> on 1 May 2023



Figure 1: Dr José Ramos-Horta, current president of Timor-Leste and Nobel Peace Laureate

For Ramos-Horta, the ethical leadership of ASEAN and in ASEAN would be expected to overcome political divisions when the ethical thing to do is so obvious. He points out that ASEAN leadership should be expected to translate its words into action. In the case of Myanmar, Ramos-Horta concludes that lack of coordinated ethical leadership not only paralyses ASEAN's ability to handle a regional crisis like Myanmar, but also undermines ASEAN credibility in the world.

During the dialogue, President Ramos-Horta also shared his own values about what makes a good leader in ASEAN. He describes five qualities: humility, compassion, passion, integrity and communication.

- Humility

In his personal view, the quality that makes for a great leader in any society, culture and institution is humility. A humble leader will listen and learn from their mistakes, leading to improvement in terms of management and leadership styles. Genuine humility also means that the leader is against arrogance, confrontation and temptation to hold onto power at any cost.

- Compassion

Another quality connected to the value of humility is compassion. A compassionate leader understands the suffering and difficulties the people are facing. They are willing to go outside their palace, throne and office of power to see people in their location and conditions. Listen to them, talk to them.

- Passion

You have to be animated, motivated. The opposite is boring or lazy. You are an individual, passionate to serve those who are less fortunate and willing to fight to do the right thing.

- Integrity

Integrity means being consistently honest, clean and consistent in serving society.

- Communication

This last quality, communication, is more of a necessity. Even if a leader possesses all prior qualities, they must be able to communicate with clarity and be understood by the people that they serve.

## Gil Gonzalez: ASEAN business leadership should contribute to governance and development

Mr. Gil Gonzalez is Executive Director of the ASEAN Business Advisory Council (ASEAN BAC), a private sector body mandated by the ASEAN Secretariat. It provides private sector feedback and guidance on economic cooperation and integration. Gil's expertise is in corporate governance, risk management, strategic and corporate planning and advocacy for reforms.

According to Gil Gonzales, ASEAN business leadership experienced a highly positive economic growth of 5 percent before the Covid pandemic but also faced mounting pressures on regional integration with the rise of protectionism across the world. Global governance has been weakened worldwide and there is a pullback from global dialogue and collaboration.

Business governance in ASEAN faces the same internal stumbling blocks as political leadership. ASEAN business leaders rarely make declarations going against traditional infrastructure, policy and the status quo. In addition, there is also the matter of bureaucracy. As ASEAN is a consensus-oriented regional association, everything has to be ratified in a lengthy process by a complex structure of summits, councils, sectoral bodies, meetings, working groups, etc. Combined with ASEAN's consensus-oriented and non-interference ethics, ASEAN encapsulates traditional ethics of business leadership rather than creating strong and collaborative regional governance.

The COVID-19 pandemic made business leaders more inclined to explore new governance methods and practices. But ASEAN is hindered by the lack of strong executive leadership: the Chair of ASEAN rotates annually among the ten Member States, making governance prone to inconsistency. Gil Gonzalez proposes a high-level Special Commission within ASEAN's regional governance structure that functions like an executive committee in a company.

Concerning business leadership itself, ethics often depends on the individual's own perspective and culture. For Gil, ethical leadership in ASEAN is not only about making tactical ethical decisions. An ASEAN ethic of leadership should collectively improve the governance and development of the region. This would fundamentally be a self-correcting process for governance ensuring that leaders will be held accountable for their ethics.



Figure 2: Gil Gonzalez,  
Executive Director of the  
ASEAN Business Advisory  
Council (ASEAN BAC)

## Dr Yang Mee Eng: Ethical leaders cultivate positive relationships among stakeholders

Dr Yang Mee Eng is Executive Director of the ASEAN Foundation. Starting in media, her early career was in business development at the Malaysia Digital Economy Corporation. She later became CEO of GameView, the largest mobile game publisher in Malaysia, and Senior Vice President at Alphacap.

ASEAN's economic growth is driving a more integrated regional community and enhances ASEAN's status as one of the world's leading development hubs. The COVID-19 pandemic greatly accelerated the sense of the ASEAN community, connectedness and need for resilience and sustainability.

For Dr Yang the concept of ethical leadership is becoming increasingly important in ASEAN's own culture. She highlights five leadership ethics principles that the ASEAN Foundation supports: honesty, justice, respect, community, and integrity. She sees these principles at the individual, team and organisation level. In ASEAN companies, ethical leadership should ensure a people-centred and positive work environment for employees as well as contributing to ESG standards valued by ethical investors.

The ASEAN Foundation contributes to programmes supporting young leaders with ethics. Examples are the ASEAN Leaders' Programme, the ASEAN-China Young Leaders Programme and the ASEAN Young Climate Leaders Programme.

## Dr Marzuki Darusman: After the Cold War a great ethical shift took place in ASEAN

Dr Marzuki Darusman is a co-founder of ECAAR and currently working with the UN Human Rights Council chairing the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar (IIFFMM). A leading ASEAN human rights campaigner, Dr Marzuki founded and chaired the Indonesian National Human Rights Commission from 1993-1998. In 1996, he was on the ASEAN Regional Human Rights Working Group, which led to the formation of the current ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission for Human Rights (AICHR).

As a leader in ethics internationally and founder of human rights institutions, Dr Marzuki has direct experience of ASEAN's evolution in ethics. He reminds us that historically ASEAN was established more than fifty years ago on the basis of fear of communism. Southeast Asia had been destabilized by



Figure 3: Dr Yang Mee Eng, Executive Director of ASEAN Foundation



Figure 4: Dr Marzuki Darusman, current Chair of an Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar (IIFFMM) under the UN Human Rights Council, Indonesian lawyer and human rights campaigner

occupation, war and genocide and the non-alignment principle was strategically used in several Southeast Asian countries to deal with internal conflicts as well as superpower rivalry. The lasting impact of the Cold War actually delayed the early development of Southeast Asia after the Second World War.

In the mid-1980s, with the passing of the Cold War many Southeast Asian countries shifted their focus to export-oriented industrialization and rapid economic growth. Law during this period of time became more of a tool for maintaining social order rather than improving social justice. Human rights were viewed as an ideal rather than a policy to enforce. In this context, ethics had no place in ASEAN's regional politics and was considered more of an obstacle than a need.

From 2007 onwards, however, a great shift in ASEAN took place. It was more open to ethics and the ASEAN Charter called for the establishment of a human rights body. In 2009 the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) was created with the mission to strengthen regional cooperation on human rights based on consultation and consensus.<sup>2</sup>

The question now is how much progress has actually been made in developing ethical leadership from and in ASEAN? According to Dr Marzuki, there are three challenges for ASEAN leaders.

First is the challenge of balancing inclusiveness and diversity in ASEAN as a regional community. Dr Marzuki described it as going from "unity in diversity" to "diversity in unity." In other words, ASEAN is not a melting pot but more like a mosaic.

Second, the region needs to reimagine solidarity. Echoing Ramos-Horta's comments on leadership ethics, Dr Marzuki sees the ethics of compassion as a leadership trait which encourages goodness but the collective ethical commitment is with each other as a community.

Third, we the need for ASEAN to reimagine its future and build the ethical leadership that will make it happen. Over the past fifty years since its foundation, there is an impression that ASEAN has produced generations of people and leaders who struggle to break their silence and express their concerns for their fellow human beings, especially in crisis where there is human suffering.

<sup>2</sup> ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (NA). Structure, Work and History of the AICHR. <https://aichr.org/about-aichr-2/> retrieved 6 May 2023

Dr Marzuki's message for young people in this dialogue is that ethical leadership through regional governance, business and economy is not enough. The ASEAN younger generations are more positively ethical through empathy and concern for others and will ensure a better future as leaders from and in ASEAN.

### **Raudhah Nazran: You cannot be an ethical leader if you are not ethical yourself**

Ms. Raudhah Nazran is CEO and Founder of Accelerate Global, a social enterprise aimed at tackling youth unemployment issues. She is also on the board of AHDO Malaysia as a representative of the youth generation of ASEAN leaders. She was a government scholar in law at the University of Essex in Britain where she started her work in social enterprise.

Ethical leadership for Raudhah is about fighting against injustice. In her experience it is difficult to find older generation leaders committed to doing what is right for ASEAN society and the community. In the case of the Myanmar crisis Raudhah points out that ASEAN's lengthy and indecisive approach to the conflict and the ongoing civil violence is unethical. To be neutral and silent is ethically siding with the oppressor.

But is the future generation of ASEAN different? Ultimately, for Raudhah, it comes down to the region's young generations to develop ethics on a personal level first, then to apply your ethical convictions in real life. According to Raudhah, it is, after all, their responsibility to observe their own ethics to ensure a better future of ASEAN and to be a part of sustainable change.

"When we talk about ethics and rights, as complicated as it gets, it is actually also very simple. Ethics begins with us, it begins at home. You cannot be an ethical leader if you are not ethical yourself in your personal life."

### **Jamesun Wacnang Bejarin: Students are pressured to thrive but also need to choose.**

Mr. Jamesun Wacnang Bejarin represents the student perspective on ethical leadership. He is a student at Ateneo de Manila University, in Political Science and Public Management. He is also the student government President and has led various community and socio-political initiatives.

According to Jamesun, the current situation of ethical leadership for ASEAN students is shaped by opportunities to take action and the ability to speak out. On the one hand, ASEAN students have tremendous passion and commitment to participate in social movements. On the other hand, students in ASEAN higher education experience what he calls “pressure to thrive”.

There are limited spaces in ASEAN for youths to speak out or to take part in decision-making on policies at national and regional levels. Especially in politics, clashes of ideology and values often occur between leaders from older generations and youth activists.

Over time, we have been seeing the region's young people getting directly involved in major social and political movements. In 2020, for example, we saw the rise of the online “Milk Tea Alliance” which consisted of thousands of proactive youths from Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Thailand who pushed for democratic values, human rights and equality in their respective countries<sup>3</sup>.

Concerning the situation in Myanmar, youth with democratic aspirations have been joining protests and militant groups in hope of returning their nation to democracy<sup>4</sup>.

Another area of student ethics concerns the awareness of inequality of access to resources and education that have hindered vulnerable groups in ASEAN from participating in society. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the sudden shift to online learning required students to have access to devices and internet connection but those who live in rural areas as well as those who cannot afford such devices fell behind in education.

ASEAN young people are being overwhelmed by the demand to do better on all fronts. The ethics of youth leadership is to channel energy and ideas into initiatives that create impact. Leadership is focused on proactive youth engagement.

Fortunately, we are seeing increased efforts by the public and private sector in promoting positive and ethical leadership development among the region's young people through official



Figure 6: Mr. Jamesun Wacnang Bejarin, political science student at Ateneo de Manila University

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- 3 Yamahata, Y. (January 2022). Towards Intersectional Solidarity In The Digital Age: The Milk Tea Alliance. Retrieved from <https://www.humanrightspulse.com/mastercontentblog/towards-intersectional-solidarity-in-the-digital-age-the-milk-tea-alliance> on 9 May 2023
- 4 Falise, T. (March 2023). Rebel youth risk life and limb in Myanmar's cruel war. Retrieved from <https://asiatimes.com/2023/03/rebel-youth-risk-life-and-limb-in-myanmars-cruel-war/> on 9 May 2023

initiatives, programs, and platforms. The following are a few examples of platforms where youths in ASEAN are brought together for learning, dialogue and participation in policy making.

- ASEAN Youth Forum (AYF)<sup>5</sup>  
AYF is geared as a platform for ASEAN youths to voice their concerns and strategies on ways to achieve a better ASEAN that is sustainable, inclusive, people-centred and youth-driven. The network works to institutionalize its national chapters working together on local issues affecting the youth, and consolidate policy proposals and agenda and send them to relevant ASEAN offices.
- ASEAN Student Leaders Forum (ASLF)<sup>6</sup>  
Organized by the ASEAN University Network, ASLF is an annual event that brings together student leader groups and associations under AUN Member Universities together for an opportunity to network and collaborate.
- ASEAN Youth Organisation (AYO)<sup>7</sup>  
Founded in 2013 and accredited by the ASEAN Secretariat in 2018, AYO is a non-profit and non-governmental organisation with the aim to raise awareness and interest among youths in ASEAN and its vision, identity and value.

## Ethical Takeaways

This ECAAR dialogue was directly focused on leadership ethics, but other types of ethics were mentioned by the speakers, notably virtue ethics and rules-based ethics.

Dr Ramos-Horta explained the emerging ethical challenge to ASEAN with the Myanmar crisis. ASEAN leaders have failed to come up with an ethical decision about a Member State based on the rules-based ethics of ASEAN institutions. The national virtue ethics and political priorities of each country have led to paralysis. During the dialogue, President Ramos-Horta also shared his own virtue ethics for political leadership: humility, compassion, passion, integrity and communication.

Gil Gonzales underlined the limits of ASEAN's consensus-oriented regional process leading to a complex structure of summits, councils, sectoral bodies and working groups. For Gil, ethical leadership in ASEAN is not only about making tactical ethical decisions in working groups but should be a collective commitment to improving the governance and development of the region where leaders are held accountable.

Dr Yang Mee Eng sees ethical leadership as increasingly important for ASEAN's own culture. She highlights five virtue ethics principles promoted by the ASEAN Foundation: honesty, justice, respect, community, and integrity. She also described how the ASEAN Foundation contributes to programmes supporting young leaders with ethics.

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5 ASEAN Youth Forum (NA). Retrieved from <https://aseanyouthforum.org/about-asean-youth-forum/> on 9 May 2023

6 ASEAN University Network (NA). ASEAN Student Leaders Forum, [Retrieved from https://www.aunsec.org/au-naction/our-flagship-project/asean-student-leaders-forum](https://www.aunsec.org/au-naction/our-flagship-project/asean-student-leaders-forum) on 9 May 2023

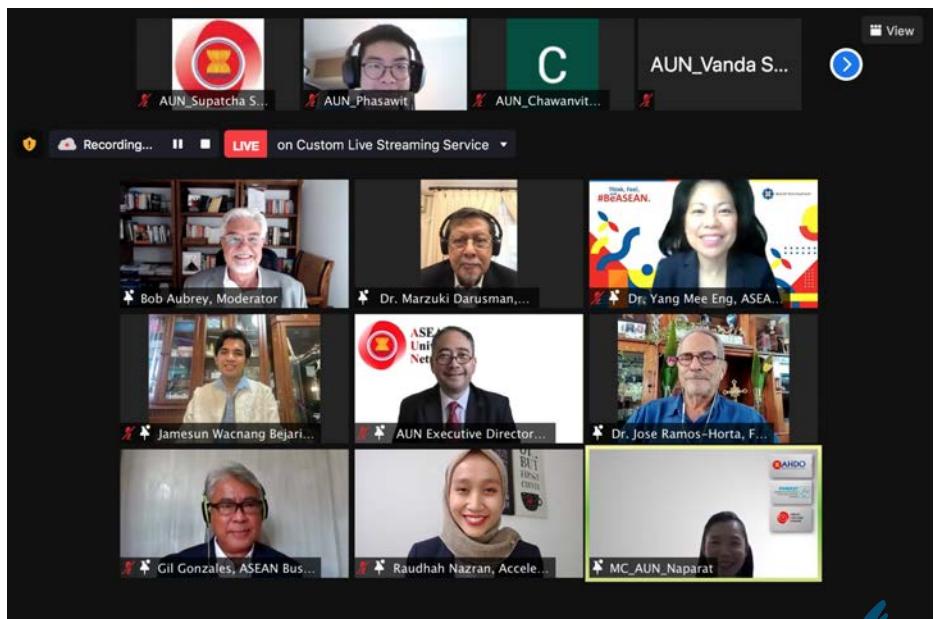
7 ASEAN Youth Organisation (NA). Retrieved from <https://aseanyouth.net/about/> on 9 May 2023

Dr Marzuki Darusman describes ASEAN ethics as a historical evolution which experienced an important shift in 2007 to rules-based ethics. This led to the creation in 2009 of the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR). He described three ethical challenges for ASEAN: balancing inclusiveness and diversity beyond the slogan “unity in diversity”; reimagining solidarity which is a collective ethic for what Ramos-Horta calls the ethics of compassion; finally the challenge for ASEAN to develop leaders who can break their silence and express their concerns for their fellow human beings, especially in a crisis such as Myanmar.

Ms. Raudhah Nazran represents youth leadership and believes the next generation of leaders should develop ethics on a personal level first, then to apply your ethical convictions in real life.

Mr. Jamesun Wacnang Bejarin represents the student perspective on ethical leadership and underlines the tension students experience in the current situation which, on the one hand, is a pressure to thrive economically and on the other hand not finding enough space to speak out and participate in institutional change. He notes that ASEAN students are acutely aware that inequality is an ethical challenge in ASEAN, illustrated by unequal access to learning during the Covid-19 pandemic. On a positive note, student platforms for expression and solidarity are growing across ASEAN with movements such as the “Milk Tea Movement.”

The main takeaway from these presentations is that ASEAN has a deficit of leadership ethics and that youth and older generations agree that this is a major challenge in making ASEAN successful in the next generation. Young leaders need to learn the lessons from the current situation and manage emerging ethics and rules-based ethics in order to take effective collective action at the regional level.





# CHAPTER

# 7

# Ethical Challenges of our Digital World

**D**igital technologies and automation are increasingly changing how we work, learn and live. Rapid changes also bring ethical challenges on the use of these technologies.

There are many ethical issues arising in a world that is fast becoming digital and especially the following:

- Challenges for workers in reskilling and upskilling to keep pace with faster technological changes;
- Challenges for educators to redefine the ethics of learning and use of information;
- Dealing with inequalities in access to digital resources and tools;
- Youth experience and ethics for ASEAN's next generation

The poster features a light beige background with a geometric pattern of overlapping circles at the top. The title "ETHICAL CHALLENGES OF OUR DIGITAL WORLD" is prominently displayed in red and black text. Below the title, a subtitle reads: "HOW ASEAN SHOULD MANAGE PERSONAL DATA, SOCIAL MEDIA, ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE, AND THE AUTOMATION OF WORK".

**Keynote Speaker**

**DR. NGUYEN TRUONG THANG**  
Director of Institute of Information Technology  
Vastnet, Associate of Science and Technology  
(VAST) Viet Nam and Chair of ASEAN Sub-Committee of Microelectronics and Information Technology (ASEAN SCMIT)

**Moderator**

**DR. BOB AUBREY**  
Managing Director of Bob Aubrey Associates and Strategic Advisor to the ASEAN Human Development Organisation (AHDO)

**Distinguished Speakers**

**KELLY FORBES**  
Co-Founder and Director of AI Asia Pacific Institute

**PHILIPPA PENFOLD**  
Head of AHDO Technology Committee

**DR. RAN BAIK**  
Professor of Hanyang University and Director of AI-Big Data Institute

**ERICA LESMANA**  
Graduate from Bachelor of Accounting, Universitas Gadjah Mada

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Figure 1: Dr Nguyen Truong Thang, Director of Institute of Information Technology Vietnam Academy of Science and Technology (VAST) and Chair of ASEAN Sub-Committee of Microelectronics and Information Technology (ASEAN SCMIT)

## Dr Nguyen Truong Thang: ASEAN institutions tackle the ethical use of technology

According to Dr Nguyen, digital technology innovations can – and will – shape the future of ASEAN, so we should start with an overview of the ASEAN vision, policy and strategic work plan on Science, Technology and Innovation (STI). A Digital Masterplan<sup>1</sup> for 2025 was formulated for ASEAN Economic Community that includes the following goals:

1. Stimulating economic growth
2. Enhancing community well-being
3. Advocating for regional integration

Design of policy is mostly done by the Committee of Science and Technology and Innovation (COSTI) and focuses on areas like public-private collaboration, people-to-people connectivity and inclusiveness and enculturation. Several ASEAN departments and organisations work together in order to coordinate, support and integrate STI across the region: the ASEAN Secretariat, the ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC), the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) and the ASEAN Community and Corporate Affairs (ACCA). New policies or strategies are approved by Ministries for Science and Technology in the ASEAN Member States.

The ASEAN ethics of a human-centred community are imbedded in a number of ASEAN policies and work plans. However, Dr Nguyen reminds us that the speed of technological advancement constantly requires ethical discussions on emerging technologies and applications that are not covered by rules-based ethics. Many kinds of technological disruptions such as big data, cloud computing, Internet of Things and robotics create new ethical challenges. For example, obtaining customer data by businesses and governments can lead to violations of data privacy. Another is the ethics of a widespread transition to AI in ASEAN economies which strongly impacts work and employment.

These ethical challenges require that governments, researchers and companies collaborate to create or update ethical codes of conduct in ASEAN. It is the work of ASEAN committees to raise awareness of ethical issues and collaborate on responsibility, accountability and security related to the use of digital technology and AI.

<sup>1</sup> ASEAN Digital Masterplan 2025 retrieved 9 July 2023 <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/ASEAN-Digital-Masterplan-EDITED.pdf>

## Kelly Forbes: In ASEAN, AI ethics are about human centricity, privacy, fairness, explainability/transparency and accountability

Kelly Forbes draws on her expertise in international law to discuss the ethics of "Trustworthy AI" in ASEAN. The concept is that in order to trust a decision made by an algorithm, we need to know that it is lawful, ethical and robust.<sup>2</sup> Trustworthy AI has been adopted by various nations, regions and intergovernmental organisations. For example, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) includes Trustworthy AI as a part of its principles for investing in AI research and development. The European Commission published *Ethics Guidelines for Trustworthy Artificial Intelligence (AI)*, as early as 2018.<sup>3</sup>

Ms Forbes explained the five ethical principles she uses in advocating for Trustworthy AI in ASEAN: human-centricity, privacy, fairness, explainability and accountability.

- Human Centricity: this refers to a human-centric approach which places human experience at the centre of AI technology development design and intended outcomes. Human centricity in AI development, which focuses on its use in our society, can foster confidence and trust while respecting the ethics of human rights.
- Privacy: this covers the evolving issue of data protection and individuals' rights and authority in using one's digital information, profile and visibility. To be Trustworthy, the use of AI in surveillance systems, data collection, analysis and commercialization must ensure that personal data is protected, and control over access and personalization of data remains in the hands of the people.
- Fairness: in the context of AI, this refers to so-called 'AI bias' which can generate systematic discrimination of specific populations based on age, gender, race and ethnicity. Such errors reflect actual human biases in our society, leading to the machines making wrongful predictions and outcomes.
- Explainability & Transparency: this means that an AI system must be able to explain clearly why it makes its



Figure 2: Kelly Forbes, Co-Founder and Executive Director of AI Asia Pacific Institute (AI API)

2 Trustworthy AI Report in the Asia-Pacific Region 2021 <https://aiasiapacific.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/2021-Trustworthy-Artificial-Intelligence-in-the-Asia-Pacific-Region.pdf> Downloaded on January 16, 2023

3 Ethics Guidelines for Trustworthy AI [https://ec.europa.eu/futurium/en-ai-alliance-consultation\\_1.html](https://ec.europa.eu/futurium/en-ai-alliance-consultation_1.html) Retrieved on January 17, 2023

decisions in a manner understandable to humans. Transparency is required to make it visible.

- Accountability: this is the most important ethical principle as it refers to who is responsible when negative impacts occur. AI development and regulation is not confined to a singular state or jurisdiction, so it can be challenging to create and maintain accountability and practices in a cross-border AI use. That is why Kelley Forbes advocates for ASEAN-wide ethics in AI policies and regulation.

In recent developments from all over the world, we can observe how these principles play into the development of any policy and strategy framework related to AI and digital technology in general, and to varying degrees depending on the context of governance. In several cases, the development of these documents, frameworks and policies not only establish regulatory conditions to address aforementioned challenges, but also bridge the gap in AI innovation and framework development between different countries, regions and international organisations.

In 2018, the European Union used a legislation-based approach and enacted the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) to address issues of data privacy, protection, and commercialization by organisations in the region<sup>4</sup>. The general scope of GDPR imposes obligations onto organisations anywhere whose digital operation concerns the collection of data of the people of the EU Member States. The aim of this law is to ensure more transparency from companies and businesses which operate in this digital area, as well as offer platform users and consumers more authority over their own privacy and visibility on the digital platforms. This policy eventually led to a global movement in which social media giants rolled out a new, more user-friendly, user agreement policy with conditions in adherence to the new policy. This approach by the region emphasizes on the strong ethical foundation in individual rights and privacy widely shared by member states of the EU.

Interestingly, in terms of privacy and data protection, China, as one of the central figures of AI development and applications, and well-known for its AI-enabled state surveillance, has enacted three major laws to regulate cyberspace and technology. The first is China's Cybersecurity Law (CSL) enacted with emphasis on the country's regulation of cybersecurity, use and infrastructure. The second, the Data Security Law (DSL) was enacted to broadly define protection of data security from a national security perspective. The third, China's Personal Information Protection Law (PIPL) is similar to the EU's GDPR in asserting the country's extraterritorial jurisdiction over regulation of companies or individuals using the personal information of people in China. The ethical principles emerging from China's regulatory laws and frameworks place more emphasis on social and community responsibility and relatively less on individual rights compared to Western laws.

ASEAN does have documents, guidelines and principles specifically developed for a digital society and economy. Dr Nguyen has already mentioned the first, ASEAN Digital Master Plan 2025. A second is the ASEAN Cyber Security Cooperation Strategy whose purpose is to achieve a safe and secure cyberspace.<sup>5</sup> A third is the Asia-Pacific Information

<sup>4</sup> What is GDPR, the EU's new data protection law? <https://gdpr.eu/what-is-gdpr/> Retrieved on January 16, 2023

<sup>5</sup> ASEAN Cybersecurity Cooperation Strategy (2021-2025) [https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/01-ASEAN-Cybersecurity-Cooperation-Paper-2021-2025\\_final-23-0122.pdf](https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/01-ASEAN-Cybersecurity-Cooperation-Paper-2021-2025_final-23-0122.pdf) Downloaded on January 18, 2022

Superhighway (2022-2026) prepared by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) whose purpose is to reduce the digital divide and accelerate region-wide digital inclusion.<sup>6</sup> Individual Member States have also set up national initiatives such as Singapore's Personal Data Protection Commission (PDPC) and Thailand's Digital Economy and Society (DES) Ministry.

Despite these initiatives, Kelly Forbes underlines that ASEAN is facing challenges positioning itself as neutral and non-aligned in the face of intense AI competition between China and the US which have very different AI ethical principles, especially in the areas of privacy and transparency.

Kelly believes that although it is challenging for ASEAN laws and policies to keep up with fast-paced technology innovation and uses, having a working ethical framework for AI regulation provides a legal space to assess emerging ethical issues as they arise.

### **Philippa Penfold: ASEAN governments, companies and education need to ethically manage the AI-human experience of work**

Philippa Penfold heads the AHDO Technology Committee and is also a university lecturer, start-up mentor and HR advisor for digital policy. Philippa talks about three areas of ethics concerning the future of technology and work:

- Government policies and initiatives in ASEAN;
- Company workplace design and worker experience in ASEAN;
- Tertiary education to prepare students for lifelong digital reskilling and upskilling.

According to Philippa, the national and direct foreign investment across ASEAN impacts decisions made by Member States in shaping employment opportunities and skill development. She compares four countries: Singapore's investment in its "smart nation" development, Malaysia's encouragement of corporate partnership and establishment of cyber towns, Vietnam's investment in Research and Development and stated ethical policy that AI should be concerned with socio-economic development, and Indonesia's public statement that AI is safe



Figure 3: Philippa Penfold, CEO and Co-Founder of People Collider, Head of AHDO Technology Committee

6 Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway (2022-2026) <https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/event-documents/Action%20Plan%20for%20Implementation%20of%20the%20Asia-Pacific%20Information%20Superhighway%20%282022-2026%29.pdf> Downloaded on January 19, 2023

and widely beneficial. So, although we are in early stages in the use of AI, we see that ethics is imbedded in how governments define their AI policies.

Choices made by business impact employment and the work experience as they adapt their business models, operations, work designs and employee interactions to AI. Philippa pointed out how algorithmic management, where algorithms are responsible for decisions and execution of human labour, has an overwhelmingly negative impact on humans at work in terms of perceptions of unfairness, low trust, breaking the psychological contract of work, low job satisfaction, lower life satisfaction and reduced engagement in work. Companies need people capable of making ethical decisions that influence work design, behaviour and human interaction.

Ultimately, we have to remember that no matter how much technology appears to be cognitive, algorithms do not think the way humans do. AI remains a mathematical formula – though a highly complex one. According to Philippa, such impacts raise ethics concerns over the rapid development of technology in work management. From a human resource perspective, the AI- human interaction is an important challenge to get right. Philippa suggests that perhaps the best way to approach digital transformation in the ASEAN workplace is to not replace or displace workers by algorithmic management but to design AI-human complementarity and AI-enabled work processes.

Apart from the influence from the policy sector and the business sector, tertiary education is the third area impacting ASEAN's regional career and work dynamics. Businesses and companies are changing so regional work opportunities are shifting. Low-skilled workers are especially at risk as their work is displaced by technology and high-skilled talent is increasingly in demand. Higher education needs to prepare students for lifelong reskilling and upskilling in a digital ASEAN.

ASEAN Member States are generating new education and workplace initiatives to promote technology and future-oriented human capital. But the focus on tech is not just to equip the ASEAN workforce with skills. Philippa notes that the top skills in demand are actually human skills. What is essential from the ethical perspective is how we can ensure that ASEAN workers have the knowledge and understanding needed to work effectively and safely with artificial intelligence in their respective professional space. In the end, ethical standards and frameworks regarding the use of such technology in the ASEAN workspace are needed. This requires multidisciplinary efforts from the governmental sector, the business sector and the education sector to create AI laws and policies guided by human centricity and ASEAN ethics.

## Ran Baik: AI itself can be educated to respect human ethics

Dr Ran Baik discussed how technology has shifted the landscape of higher education. Looking into the patterns of industrial history, we can see that the primary focus at the beginning is focused on the economy while ethics is developed later. It takes time and effort for society to learn from the issues and impact to build an ethical dialogue and guide leadership.

The example Dr Ran uses of an unavoidable ethical consideration is the concept of AI Singularity: this refers to the point at which artificial intelligence is superior to that of humans at the scale of society and becomes uncontrollable by humans. According to Dr Ran, to avoid technological singularity, human developers of AI play an integral part in making ethical decisions with human centricity at the core of innovations. Instead of complete human substitution, AI and technology become a component of the human society, augmenting human creativity, understanding and experience.

To ensure such a future, education is essential. Dr Ran describes the model in South Korean higher education which is pioneering technology-enhanced educational methodologies. SMART education helps build the essential skills of 21st century life using problem-solving and communication among the students. This pioneering project also has enabled researchers and educators to identify key challenges for education, including the need to reinforce ethics such as information copyright and abuse of human communication behaviour.

Dr Ran outlined the concept of AI being "educated" to follow desired ethical principles, resulting in better machine learning processes and outcomes. This rejoins the concept of Trustworthy AI described by Kelly Forbes. Apart from promoting ethics for human technology developers and users, AI ethics combats problems such as AI bias.

## **Erica Lesmana: social media ethics and issues for ASEAN youth**

Erica describes the landscape of social media usage by ASEAN youth, one of the world's highest when measured as time spent online daily. She illustrates the risks using a recent case in Indonesia where the personal data of at least 279 million Indonesians was allegedly leaked and sold on the hacker platform called the Raid Forums site.<sup>7</sup>

An ethical issue that does great damage to youth is cyberbullying, an area where Erica has been an active volunteer.

***According to the United Nations International Children's Emergency Funds (UNICEF), cyberbullying is defined as bullying with the use of digital technologies. It can take***



Figure 4: Dr Ran Baik, Professor, Department of Digital Engineering, Honam University, South Korea, and Computer of AI-Big Data Institute



Figure 5: Erica Lesmana, youth representative from the Faculty of Economics and Business/Accounting, Universitas Gadjah Mada, Indonesia

<sup>7</sup> Indonesian government blocks hacking forum after data leak (2021) <https://therecord.media/indonesian-government-blocks-hacking-forum-after-data-leak/> Retrieved January 30, 2023

**place on social media, messaging platforms, gaming platforms and mobile phones. It is repeated behaviour, aimed at scaring, angering or shaming those who are targeted.**

Social media and networks provide the opportunity to connect but also enable unethical behaviour such as trolling and targeted bullying. The anonymity of the platforms contributes to escaping accountability by the perpetrators who hide behind fake or alternate profiles.

On a positive side, ASEAN youth are also capitalising on social media to promote social dialogue and support movements for ethical causes such as sustainability. On a regional level, we have youth initiatives such as Young SEAkers<sup>8</sup> that establish collaborative youth spaces and communities.

As young women are vulnerable to cyberbullying, Erica describes how young social media stars and influencers, such as Sarah Ayu and Titan Tyra in Indonesia use their platforms to promote body positivity and break stigmas on beauty standards.

A large-scale example of using social media for an ethical cause is the “Milk Tea Alliance”, a democratic movement formed during the protests of Hong Kong youth in late 2019 and early 2020, that was joined by youth across ASEAN. Such popular cross-border movements illustrate an effective and highly accessible empowerment tool for ethics among youth.

Ethics using social media has a downside which our AUN researcher Pleum discussed with Erica, called “Slacktivism”: this is idle online engagement in social media dialogues and campaigns that fails to translate into ethical action.

According to Erica, using social media for ethics requires three elements: Awareness, Advocacy and Action.

- **Awareness** is being mindful of current ethical challenges and issues in ASEAN;
- **Advocacy** encourages use of digital platforms to inform, influence and inspire others for change;
- **Action** uses social media to make ethical decisions or create ethical guidelines and principles.

Erica Lesmana believes that on balance ASEAN youth are using social media positively as a process to build ethical awareness, advocacy and action that cross national borders and integrates the diversity of ASEAN experience and perspectives.

## **Ethical Takeaways**

Our fast-changing digital world throws up almost daily ethical questions in deciding who benefits from the progress, what protections from potential harms are needed and how to manage the transition for an ethical society. As Darren Acemoglu and Simon Johnson conclude from their analysis of a thousand years of technological transformations, ethics is a choice.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Young SEAkers <https://www.theyoungseakers.com/> Retrieved January 30, 2023

<sup>9</sup> Power and Progress: Our Thousand-Year Struggle Over Technology and Prosperity Hardcover, by Daron Acemoglu

**A thousand years of history and contemporary evidence make one thing clear: progress depends on the choices we make about technology. New ways of organizing production and communication can either serve the narrow interests of an elite or become the foundation for widespread prosperity.**

In ASEAN, digital technologies create emerging ethical issues but at the same time research institutions, policy makers and civil society organisations strive to ensure human-centric and equitable rules-based ethics for innovations and applications.

Dr Nguyen Truong Thang's overview of ASEAN Science, Technology and Innovation policies and work plans show the interaction between rules-based ethics and emerging ethical issues which are constantly being created in multiple technology areas. He points out that ASEAN's consensus type of collaboration can be a drag for policy-making when it comes to emerging ethics. However, he also demonstrates the benefit of ASEAN's rules-based ethics committees that raise awareness and collaborate across borders.

Kelly Forbes comes at digital ethics from another angle. Her background in international law provides foundational rules-based ethics under the heading of "Trustworthy AI". This means that any decision made by an algorithm in ASEAN should be human-centric, protect privacy, ensure fairness, be explainable and clearly define who is accountable. She also describes how ASEAN is in a difficult ethical position as a neutral and non-aligned regional community that must deal with the intense rivalry between China and the US in the field of AI, both having different ethical principles, especially in the areas of privacy and transparency.

Philippa Penfold takes the worker perspective on AI ethics. She notes that AI is not just a tool to equip the ASEAN workforce with increased productivity. With AI, notes Philippa, the top skills in demand are actually human skills. What is essential from the ethical perspective is how we ensure that ASEAN workers have the knowledge and understanding to work effectively and safely with artificial intelligence in their respective professional space. In the end, she concludes, ethical standards and frameworks are needed for the use of AI in the governmental sector, private sector and the education sector. Using results-based ethics, Philippa recommends designing AI-human work processes rather than simply replacing workers by algorithmic management of human labour which research shows has an overwhelmingly negative impact on people.

Dr Ran Baik of South Korea's Honam University describes the ethical goal of the university's SMART education initiative to help students build the essential skills of 21st century life. Dr Ran describes "educated AI" where ethical principles are imbedded for better machine learning processes and outcomes.

Erica Lesmana, representing ASEAN youth in this dialogue, addresses the ethics of social media and networks. ASEAN youth are experiencing the vulnerability of unethical use of social media, as in the case of cyber-bullying, which has resulted in a form of leadership ethics where youth groups are learning how to use awareness, advocacy and action to counter unethical use of social media. She returns however to a deeper reflection on ASEAN youth which was raised in our leadership ethics dialogue by student leader

Jamesun Wacnang Bejarin of the Philippines. It is that ASEAN students are growing ethical awareness through social media but the use of cross-border activism and movements such as the "Milk Tea Movement" in support of Hong Kong youth have created a form of ethical "Slacktivism", meaning online media engagement that stops short of taking ethical action.



## CHAPTER 8

# Ethics of the ASEAN Human-Centric Workplace

**H**ow will ASEAN develop an ethical and sustainable workplace for future generations? The question is timely for two reasons. First, because the Covid-19 pandemic changed how companies manage their workforce as employees used communication tools to be productive while staying isolated at home. When this dialogue took place a year into the pandemic, it was already clear that traditional ways of working would change over the long term. Timely also because the ASEAN workplace is changing its identity, from a low-cost execution-based workforce to a more skilled, fast-developing and entrepreneurial workforce fuelled by foreign investment and ASEAN youth creating their own companies.

The ethics of the ASEAN workplace relates to the architecture of ASEAN where work spans two pillars. In the ASEAN Economic Community pillar, work is largely understood as human capital. In the ASEAN Socio-Economic Community pillar, where work ethics reside along with human rights, ASEAN is committed to a people-centred workplace as declared in the 2015 Kuala Lumpur Declaration:<sup>1</sup>

***WE HEREBY AGREE TO: Continue establishing a people-oriented, people-centred and rules-based ASEAN Community where all people, stakeholders and sectors of society can contribute to and enjoy the benefits from a more integrated and connected Community encompassing enhanced cooperation in the political-security, economic and socio-cultural pillars for sustainable, equitable and inclusive development.***

This dialogue is also important because the ASEAN Human Development Organisation discusses its vision of the future of work as a human development experience, ideally for everyone.

<sup>1</sup> KUALA LUMPUR DECLARATION ON A PEOPLE-ORIENTED, PEOPLE-CENTRED ASEAN <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/26th-KUALA-LUMPUR-DECLARATION-ON-A-PEOPLE-ORIENTED-PEOPLE-CENTRED-ASEAN-Final.pdf> retrieved 12 July 2023

# ETHICS OF THE ASEAN HUMAN-CENTRIC WORKPLACE:

How will ASEAN develop an ethical and sustainable workplace for future generations?

2 December 2021 09.00 - 12.00 GMT+7

## DISTINGUISHED SPEAKERS



LE HONG PHUC

Chair of AHDO and Founder & President of Vietnam Human Resources Association



DATO' J. PALANIAPPAN

Chair of ASEAN Future Workforce Council

## MODERATOR



BOB AUBREY

Managing Director of Bob Aubrey Associates and Strategic Advisor to AHDO



NADIAH TAN ABDULLAH

Chair of AHDO Malaysia and Chief Human Resources Officer at S P Setia Berhad



ADRIAN TAN

Strategist at Future of Work at Institute for Human Resource Professionals



SIZS JERRY

Group Leader, Social Investment, PT Freeport Indonesia



KALIANE TEA

President of Yuvachun and Chief Marketing Officer at Soma Group and Advisor of Soma Initiative Program



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## Le Hong Phuc: human development defines people at work as an end as well as a means of production

What is human development exactly? Le Hong Phuc, the Chair of ASEAN Human Development Organisation (AHDO) opened the session with a definition from the AHDO founding declaration.

**Human development defines people as agents and not resources. This means the human resource management function is to not manage people as a resource. Instead, human development in the workplace means people are an end as well as a means of production. Human development organisations ensure freedom, support, and opportunity to develop capabilities for their people and even to stakeholders.**

This is in contrast to the traditional term “human resources” which regards humans or people as a resource for the organisation to manage, basically a means of production. Human development in the workplace regards humans not only as a resource in the pipeline of work production but more importantly as agents of their work, capable of autonomy, growth and aspirations whose humanity as an end rather than a means is protected by universal human rights ethics.

According to Mr Phuc, in order to fulfil the region’s need for developing people we need the collaboration of world-class companies and stakeholders following rules-based

work ethics with the perspective of long-term workforce sustainability.

Besides rules-based ethics, AHDO has defined a regional work culture using the virtue ethics of shared values coming from different ASEAN countries. These virtues can be divided into three dimensions: freedom, leadership and change.

In terms of freedom, we have the word *Merdeka* used commonly in Malaysia and Singapore, which refers to the way people expect to have freedom and to be respected as equals at work. Together with the Thai word *Sanook*, which means “to have fun at work”, it means that work in the ASEAN ecosystem should be free and engaging.

In terms of leadership, we have exemplary humanism using the word *malasakit* in the Philippines which means humanity, care or compassion; and for social collaboration we have *gotong royong*, an Indonesian word.

Lastly, in terms of change, Mr Phuc describes the core values of learning, resilience, and innovation. He explains the Vietnamese word *kien cuong* meaning resilience and underlines the region’s strong capability of change through learning and innovation.

Together, these ethical virtues explain what makes leadership work in ASEAN organisations.

Mr Phuc adds that the region seems to be taking a more active stance in addressing ethical issues related to work and its ecosystem. At the level of law and policy, several Member States have pushed for better regulation of workforces and codes of ethics. An example are the policies on sexual harassment and fair opportunities for women.

However, Mr Phuc points out that whether such ethics are practiced or not stems from existing culture and values as well as increasing awareness of the ethical and moral dimensions of work in ASEAN.

## Nadiyah Tan Abdullah: ASEAN's complex virtue ethics must be balanced by rules-based ethics

According to Ms. Nadiyah Tan Abdullah, Chair of AHDO Malaysia and Chief Human Resources Officer at SP Setia Berhad, the reality of the ASEAN work environment is that you see such behaviours such as speaking out or disagreeing with superiors being suppressed in favour of respect and harmony for hierarchy and seniority. The concept of “face,” which refers



Figure 1: Mr Le Hong Phuc, 2022 Chair of ASEAN Human Development Organisation (AHDO)



Figure 2: Ms. Nadiyah Tan Abdullah, Chair of AHDO Malaysia and Chief Human Resources Officer at SP Setia Berhad

to personal dignity and preserves a sense of collectivism, is part of a face-saving culture in the ASEAN workplace. From outside ASEAN, we understand why ASEAN work ethics can be judged as passive and lacking courage when disagreement and speaking out against injustice is required. This is an area where ASEAN's virtue ethics in the workplace need to change in favour of a rules-based ethics of work and human development.

Nadiah takes the example of sexual harassment used by her AHDO colleague Phuc to explain that while there are improvements in ASEAN laws and code of practice in dealing with ethics issues such as undesirable behaviour in a workplace, to take ethical action inside the organisation requires concrete and meticulously sourced evidence to prove that harassment has actually happened. Otherwise, there is a risk of placing blame on the harassment victim, which then creates a culture where future victims are discouraged and don't make complaints inside the company out of fear. Hence, it can be difficult to apply a rules-based code of ethics in practice without changing the company culture.

Nadiah concludes that for human development professionals, there is more work to be done in raising awareness to where universal ethics are actually applied in the ASEAN workspace. In order to ensure a smooth process of establishing a rules-based work ethics that actually works in ASEAN cultures, a strong public-private relationship between the region's policy sector and the business sector is needed.

Human development in ASEAN needs to address the larger issues related to inequality and sustainability. This will require education and training for workers and leaders to enable them to learn, adapt and make work a life-long experience of human thriving for individuals.

### **Sisz Jerry: human development with indigenous communities requires direct engagement**

Ms. Sisz Jerry, is Superintendent of Community Economic Development in Papua for Freeport. She brings to the ethics of the ASEAN workplace the perspective of her company's copper and gold mining operations in Papua, Indonesia, which is home to 255 indigenous tribes with 268 local languages.

With more than 25,000 employees worldwide, Freeport directly engages with indigenous communities where they operate. Human development is crucial because contractually



Figure 3: Ms. Sisz Jerry, Superintendent of Community Economic Development in Papua for Freeport

they must ensure that they enrich the lives of local workers and communities in their areas of operation in return for pursuing their mining productions. As a member of the International Council for Mining and Metals (ICMM), Freeport follows their ten ethics principles which are considered the global standard:<sup>2</sup> ethical business, decision-making, human rights, conservation of biodiversity, responsible production, social performance and stakeholder engagement.

In Papua, Sizs Jerry encounters many ethics issues when overseeing how Freeport improves the working and living conditions of indigenous communities according to Indonesian government regulations. She also carries out human development in partnership with public sector bodies and with non-government civil society organisations. For example, in the area of health and security during the Covid-19 pandemic for example, 85 percent of local workers were vaccinated and the company provided humanitarian relief for local communities. In terms of economic development, the company has social investment programs that promote local SMEs as well as improving education, safety and infrastructure.

## Dato' Palaniappan: ASEAN work policies are creating ethical dilemmas

Dato' Palaniappan is Chairman ASEAN Future Workforce Council (AFWC), an ASEAN Civil Society Organisation started in 2018 with the objective to promote future skills development in the Region through Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) where business drives learning and policy for work.

Disruption and transformation of work with the introduction of new technologies is not new in the history of work. Using steam engines to replace man power and horse power was a big driver of the first Industrial Revolution. But now the speed of transformation using algorithms is set to permeate many sectors at once.

Dato' Palaniappan sees four major drivers impacting the ethics of work in ASEAN: the legal and regulatory framework, rapid usage of artificial intelligence and automation, changes in workforce composition and finally the pressure of external stakeholders.

<sup>2</sup> International Council for Mining and Metals <https://www.icmm.com/en-gb/our-principles> retrieved 13 July 2023



Figure 4: Dato' Palaniappan, Chairman ASEAN Future Workforce Council (AFWC)

**How businesses mix people and machines, govern the human-machine work combination and operationalise work will be at the heart of ethical concerns**

If we consider traditional work ethics and working conditions in ASEAN, we can expect fundamental questions about the assumptions underlying how work is valued and managed. For example, in ASEAN we have some of the longest work hours in the world with averages still up to around 40-45 hours per week. This compares to Europe where working time has shrunk to around 34-35 hours per week.

We still have industrial era values deeply rooted in ASEAN work policies that are leading to the problematic situation where human workers are forced to work ever longer hours and increase their productivity while machines increase productivity using algorithms.

What this means for the ASEAN work ethic is that personal time and work-life balance are being sacrificed. Governments and organisations need to consider the ethics of human outcomes, results-based ethics, in the design of work using artificial intelligence and automation.

### **Adrian Tan: NGOs and CSOs are needed to address future of ASEAN work ethics**

According to Adrian Tan, Future of Work thought leader at Singapore Institute for Human Resource Professionals (IHRP), the introduction of high technology production and AI-assisted production will have a huge impact in reorganising work in businesses.

In ASEAN the cost of labour is increasing while the rate of birth in many countries is shrinking. Businesses know that they need to develop technology, robotics and algorithms in their business models in order to increase productivity. The ethical question is not if but how displacement of the human workforce should be done.

Adrian illustrates with a recent example of the versatility of work performed by AI. Who would have thought that we would so quickly see AI producing art? While we may have got used to algorithms and advanced technology used in data analysis, the AI in the artistic space comes as a shock, and raises ethical



Figure 5: Adrian Tan, Future of Work thought leader at Singapore Institute for Human Resource Professionals (IHRP)

questions in terms of copyright infringement of existing artworks, rights of artists and whether artwork generated by AI equates artwork produced by humans.

Adrian provides an example of productivity in the world of coffee with a robotic barista developed by a company called Café X.<sup>3</sup> In its 2018 version, the robot could already make 120 cups of coffee per hour, compared to a human barista who can produce about 20 cups per hour. This is a relatively easy ethics case in deciding whether to replace the human barista.

Adrian describes another case that is not so easy. A delivery company in China runs the real-time monitoring of the delivery riders to evaluate and optimize their performance and productivity. While delivery riders traditionally required 40 minutes per delivery, the monitoring algorithms gradually reduced the average time to 30 minutes. This time pressure led delivery riders to experience high stress and take more risks in driving.

AI learning can also lead to bias in the human workforce. Adrian takes the case of Amazon's recruitment AI system which actually led to only white males with specific degrees being accepted as candidates.<sup>4</sup> The system was not biased, it learned to select based on the goals set for recruitment by humans which led to an unacceptable results-based ethical choice. This is an example of how human resource professionals in companies now need to take on new ethical responsibilities for managing work.

The use of technology-based business models by platform companies does not only have negative ethical consequences. According to Adrian, we are now moving away from the traditional management of work where gig workers have more independence and flexibility to work according to their lifestyle choices and aspirations. Adrian points out that Singaporean youth choose employers based on flexibility and independence in the workplace.

The downside of the gig economy is, of course, the lack of benefits and what is counted as work compared to traditional employment. In Singapore, for example, the government,

<sup>3</sup> Usually operating in kiosks on the streets or in shopping malls, Café X's robotic baristas use its single robotic arm to make a variety of coffee using predetermined movements for different orders received via the company's app. You can find out more about Café X on their website at <https://cafexapp.com/> retrieved 6 May 2023

<sup>4</sup> "Amazon scraps secret AI recruiting tool that showed bias against women" by Jeffrey Dastin. Published on Reuters on October 11, 2018. Link is <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-amazon-com-jobs-automation-insight-idUSKCN1MK08G> Retrieved 15 October 2022

employers and the worker union collaborate in tripartite collaboration to push forth new policies and laws relating to worker rights, legislation and protection. These policies are extended across ASEAN with Regional Centre for the Future of Work under the Ministry of Manpower.

Concerning the future of ethics at work in ASEAN we can expect an evolution of rules-based ethics in managing work and workers, results-based ethics with new business models and emerging ethics from the technology disruptions of AI. It is important to include the perspectives of youth as the voice of the future ethics when in any dialogue on the future of work.

### **Kaliane Tea: ASEAN youth should be encouraged to find their voice and choose their careers**

Kaliane Tea is President of Yuvachun, a volunteer youth group committed to bringing Cambodians together through art and cultural activities. She believes that ASEAN youth should be encouraged to pursue a career of their choice in contrast to the perspectives of older generations who encourage them to pursue careers considered with job security and social status. These differing points of view contribute to a change in work ethics in ASEAN.

Kaliane reminds us that older Cambodians remember vastly social circumstances after the Khmer Rouge genocide of 2 million deaths between 1975 and 1979. Today Cambodia has a median age of only 26 years old, an employability rate of 85 per cent and a minimum wage of 194 USD. As a consequence, Cambodian youth have ideals and dreams for their future careers. We should therefore not expect a one-size-fits-all ethics of work even inside one country.

For Kaliane ASEAN is steadily becoming a more ethically integrated region and the values of respect, inclusion, collaboration, empathy, and communication are fundamental despite the region's diversity. She believes that the region's public and private sectors need to promote lifelong development of employability and create a regional work environment with opportunities and inclusion of all kinds of workers.



Figure 6: Ms. Kaliane Tea, Marketing and Communication Manager at the Soma Group, Cambodia, and the President of Yuvachun

## Ethical Takeaways

By definition, when we are talking about the future of work, there can be no definitive ethical “answer” about how it should be managed. However, our speakers all underline that ASEAN is experiencing a particularly fast transformation of work ethics because of issues in machine management of work and different values of youth in choosing how they want to work.

In terms of ethical types, the traditional virtue ethics of work are no longer adequate to manage a free and fair workplace which relies more on rules-based and results-based ethics. Our speakers also point out that the traditional virtues of work in ASEAN clash with the virtue ethics of youth.

Le Hong Phuc leads off the discussion with a long-term statement on work as a human development experience, reflecting the aspirational ethics of the ASEAN Human Development Organisation. This represents a different ethic of work than a purely economic view of humans as a means of production and supports ASEAN declarations about a people centric workplace in the region. Phuc adds to this emerging ethical ideal a description of ASEAN virtue ethics in three dimensions: freedom, leadership and change.

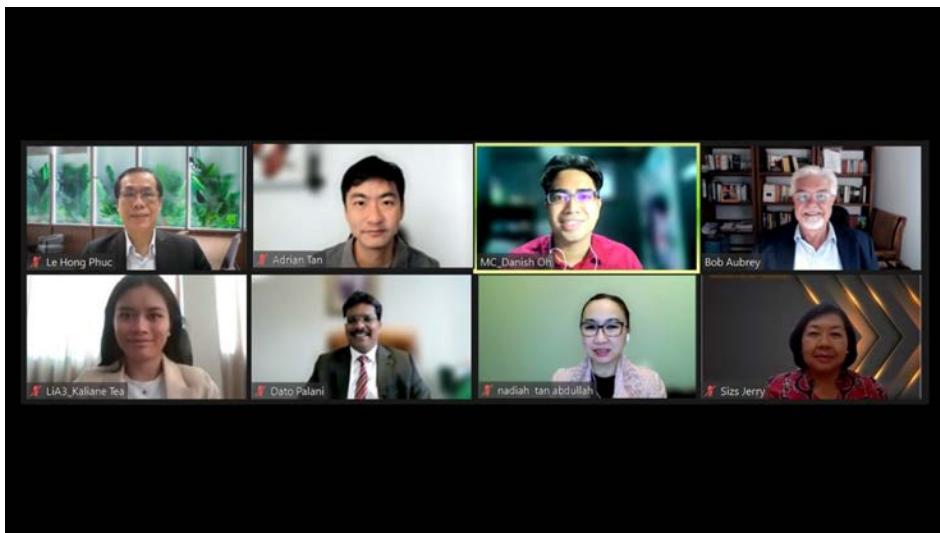
Nadiah Tan Abdullah, also of AHDO, takes the practical perspective of ASEAN work ethics where the traditional values and behaviours of not speaking out against injustice or disagreeing with hierarchy needs to change in favour of a rules-based human development ethics of work. She underlines the need for professionals to raise awareness and ensure ethical behaviour in the workplace by reinforcing the relationship between the region’s policy and business practices.

Szis Jerry brings to the discussion a very different perspective, that of a practicing professional in community economic development working with indigenous tribes in Papua Indonesia where her company has copper and gold mining operations. She describes the rules-based ethics of the International Council for Mining and Metals which ensures that these tribes have rights in decision-making and the company is required to respect stakeholders, as well as the conservation of biodiversity and positive social impact.

Dato Palianapan explains the perspective of ASEAN Future Workforce Council working with governments and companies, where different ethical sources create policy contradictions. His example of policies which force people to work ever longer hours is dysfunctional in the context of increased productivity by machines. The consequence is that personal time and work-life balance for workers is sacrificed. He calls for governments and companies to adopt results-based ethics to improve human outcomes.

Adrian Tan describes several cases where the management of work by algorithms leads to unethical practices such as bias in human selection and creation of inhuman work practices. He describes the growing attraction of gig work for youth because it offers independence and flexibility. From his perspective as expert in the future of work at the Singapore Institute of Human Resource Professionals, Adrian advocates for taking on new ethical responsibilities for managing work.

Keliane Tea takes the ASEAN youth perspective on work ethics, pointing out that youth have different values from their parents' generation when it comes to choosing a career. The experience of the older generation, especially in Cambodia, with the priorities of job security and social status clash with the aspirations of youth for freedom and self-development.



# CHAPTER 9

## Ethics of Freedom in ASEAN

### ECAAR DIALOGUES: Freedom in Southeast Asia

A Dialogue on the Reality of Freedom with  
Nobel Laureates and Thought Leaders in Southeast Asia

#### Speakers



Maria Ressa

Co-Founder & CEO of Rappler  
Nobel Peace Prize Laureate



H.E. José  
Ramos-Horta

Former President of East Timor  
Nobel Peace Prize Laureate

#### Panelists



H.E. Yuyun  
Wahyuningrum

Representative of Indonesia to  
ASEAN Intergovernmental  
Commission on Human Rights



Dr. Surachanee  
Hammerli Sriyai

Lecturer at the Faculty of  
Political Science,  
Chulalongkorn University



Vincent  
Carlo Legara

Political Science Student,  
Ateneo de Manila University



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#### Moderator



Dr. Bob  
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Founder of AHDO &  
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Link to webinar [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VK2xxz\\_cb00](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VK2xxz_cb00)

**E**arlier in this book we discussed the word *merdeka* as a founding virtue of freedom for ASEAN, born out of the liberation of the new Southeast Asian nations after colonialism. However, freedom ethics in ASEAN are not limited to *merdeka*. ASEAN also has a rules-based list of 40 articles on freedom and human rights declared in 2012 by the heads of the Member States.<sup>1</sup>

The ethics of freedom in ASEAN are very much in question across the region. Which freedoms should be guaranteed by law and who decides? Should citizens have the right to demonstrate and create organisations to promote freedoms? The reality is that ASEAN

<sup>1</sup> ASEAN Human Rights Declaration November 19, 2012 <https://asean.org/asean-human-rights-declaration/> retrieved 16 July 2023.

nations are not highly rated in international rankings on freedom of speech, free courts of justice, press freedom, religious freedom, freedom of sexual orientation and free access to education and work.<sup>2</sup>

Mynamar is ASEAN's test case for preserving freedom among its Member States. Numerous credible sources have documented continuing violations of freedom by the military junta since February 2021: they include overthrowing free elections, arbitrary arrests and detention of civilians, use of torture and sexual violence on prisoners, bombing of civilians in conflict areas and blocking delivery of humanitarian aid.<sup>3</sup> These violations have not been condemned by all ASEAN Member States and implementation of the ASEAN 5-point process of peaceful resolution had not really moved forward during the two years in which this book was written.

The ethics of freedom is also highly personal. Should I stand up for freedom or advocate for specific freedoms? For this ECAAR dialogue, we invited activists for freedom at the level of political leadership, the press, human rights, education and youth who provided their perspective on these questions.

We have the honour of welcoming two globally recognised champions of freedom, laureates of the Nobel Peace Prize: Jose Ramos-Horta and Maria Ressa. Maria Ressa participated in this webinar only five months after being recognised by the Nobel committee along with Dmitry Muratov of Russia for freedom of expression in the face of authoritarian governments. And the very day of our webinar, Ramos-Horta was elected as President of Timor-Leste for a second time.

## **Jose Ramos-Horta: Freedom ethics includes willingness to fight for it**

José Ramos-Horta served as the President of Timor-Leste from 2007 until 2012 and was elected again as President in 2022. He and Timorese Bishop Carlos Ximenes Belo were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1996 for their work toward a just and peaceful solution to the conflict in East Timor. Ramos-Horta played a key part in the Timorese resistance movement during Indonesian occupation from 1975 to 1999. As the resistance exiled

2 Of the national freedom watch organisations, a well-known ranking is provided by Freedom House. This is a non-profit organisation headquartered in Washington, D.C. whose ethics are based on the core conviction that freedom flourishes in democratic nations where governments are accountable to their people. In their 2022 index on political rights and civil liberties, no one country among the 10 members of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) was ranked as free while Timor-Leste was ranked as free, and Singapore, Malaysia, the Philippines and Indonesia were ranked partly free <https://freedomhouse.org/search?key=ASEAN> retrieved 16 July 2023. Another ranking is the US-based Global Economy website which collects data for researchers, academics and others. It provides a ranking of countries based on how well fundamental rights and freedoms of people are observed and respected by the state. [https://www.theglobaleconomy.com/rankings/human-rights\\_rule\\_law\\_index/South-East-Asia/#:~:text=Human%20rights%20and%20rule%20of](https://www.theglobaleconomy.com/rankings/human-rights_rule_law_index/South-East-Asia/#:~:text=Human%20rights%20and%20rule%20of) retrieved 16 July 2023.

3 International Rights Organisations condemning Myanmar include the United Nations report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human right in Myanmar <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/country-reports/a77494-report-special-rapporteur-situation-human-right-myanmar> as well as organisations such as Amnesty International <https://www.amnesty.org/en/> and Human Rights Watch <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023>. The 2021 ASEAN Five-Point Consensus on the situation in Myanmar can be found here <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/Chairmans-Statement-on-ALM-Five-Point-Consensus-24-April-2021-FINAL-a1.pdf>

spokesman, he was appointed Foreign Minister at the age of 25 and after independence played a leading role in building the institutional foundations for democracy in Timor-Leste, identified today as the only full democracy in Southeast Asia in the US-based Freedom House rankings.

In opening his talk with Maria Ressa, Ramos-Horta emphasises his commitment to democratic principles, justice, and freedom. Being raised with Christian principles developed his ethics of social justice. His advice to the ECAAR audience is that freedom to speak out should not be sacrificed by falling into the accepted “pragmatic mindset” that eventually allows political bullying and elimination of freedom. On the other hand, when you speak out as a leader it is not enough to defend your own freedom. Your ethics must be balanced with “a strong dose of compassion” especially for minorities and marginalized groups. These are the ethical principles, he says, that have been the basis of his life. He adds that he feels especially proud that Timor-Leste has remained a thriving, dynamic, and peaceful democratic country.

Ramos-Horta underlines that democracy in ASEAN is facing more difficulty in recent years. There have been failures in ASEAN to protect democratic principles and we have seen backsliding on defending freedom and human rights, especially in Myanmar. On the global stage there are similar failures including the United Nations Security Council’s inability to resolve conflicts in Syria and Yemen. Another challenge is when authoritarian governments take advantage of new technologies to entrench their power and sow misinformation. Ramos-Horta expresses the urgent need for ASEAN to avoid the militarisation of a nation dominating civil society and governance. He sees a test for ASEAN in Myanmar after the military staged a coup to completely overthrow a democratically elected government.

Despite these setbacks, Ramos-Horta believes that there is room for hope that democracy will again be on the rise, citing past transitions in Europe, Middle East, and Latin America which have recovered from previous democratic setbacks. He points out how young people in Southeast Asia are coming together and advocating for democracy. ASEAN needs to stand up for its youth so that they are not betrayed.

Ultimately, he advises that you don’t fight for democracy with radicalism but with “praise for others, wisdom, and a great deal of humility”.



Figure 1: José Ramos-Horta: President of Timor-Leste and Laureate of the Nobel Peace Prize 1996



Figure 2: Maria Ressa: co-founder and CEO of Rappler and Laureate of the Nobel Peace Prize 2021

## Maria Ressa: There is no better time to be a journalist and fight for truth

Within the sphere of freedom in civil society, no contemporary person in ASEAN is better known for taking a stand than Maria Ressa.

She is a Filipino-American journalist who co-founded Rappler, an online news website based in the Philippines where she serves as CEO. As a child, Maria left the Philippines with her mother under the regime of Ferdinand Marcos. In the USA, she excelled in her studies and graduated from Princeton University where she was awarded a Fullbright Scholarship and continued her studies at University of the Philippines Diliman. In the late 1980s, Ressa established and led CNN's Manila bureau following the People Power uprising that toppled the Marcos presidency led by civil disobedience leader Corazon C. Aquino. In 2012 with social media becoming more prominent, Maria Ressa co-founded Rappler and as lead investigative journalist exposed President Rodrigo Duterte's abuse of power, murderous anti-drug campaign, use of social media to spread fake news, harassment of political opponents and manipulation of public discourse.

The Nobel Peace Prize recognises Maria Ressa as a fearless defender of freedom of expression and willingness to fight the numerous legal cases and revocation of Rappler's revoking of their operating license by the Duterte government. Subsequently, Ressa and Rappler were acquitted in Philippine courts.

Maria Ressa reminds the ECAAR audience that she still has much to say. She agrees with Ramos-Horta that there is a sort of "roll back" in democracy and notes the significant challenges to democracy worldwide. She is especially clear about the dangers to democracy in using social media to spread misinformation and the unethical use of algorithms that generate the user's emotions of anger and hate. She also warns of the unethical practice of acquiring and using personal data by social media companies, citing the case of Facebook and Cambridge Analytica. These practices embolden more overt abuses of power by leaders and make users grow indifferent to the necessity for truthful information.

Despite these worrying trends, Ressa says she will continue to promote the freedom and integrity of the press and calls upon ASEAN leaders to promote ethics in their country as a duty to building ASEAN ethics.

Her message to youth in the ECAAR audience is this:

***Figure out what your values are and what you are willing to fight for. Preserve your own free will and agency no matter how difficult.***

In answer to a student's question about whether it's a good idea to study journalism, she says there has never been a better time to become a journalist.

### **Yuyun Wahyuningrum: freedom depends on human rights ethics in ASEAN**

H.E. Yuyun Wahyuningrum is currently serving as the Indonesian Representative to the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR). She graduated from the University of Indonesia followed by a Master of Arts in Human Rights and Development at Mahidol University in Thailand. She is currently pursuing her PhD at the International Institute of Social Studies (ISS) of Erasmus University in Rotterdam. Since 1998 she worked with various governmental and non-governmental organisations in Indonesia and Thailand and in January 2019, was appointed Indonesian Representative for Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR), an appointment that has been renewed until 2024.

The issue of human rights and freedoms continue to be debated within ASEAN, though the organisation itself has made progress in addressing it. For Representative Yuyun Wahyuningrum, her role is an essential part of ASEAN ethics that is growing in importance.

AICHR was established on 23 October 2009 at the 15th ASEAN Summit as a statement of ASEAN's commitment to human rights. Its role became more central with the 2012 ASEAN Human Rights Declaration to promote and preserve human rights in the ASEAN region through a consultation and consensus process. ASEAN Member States nominate representatives who serve up to two three-year terms. AICHR also publishes 5-year Work Plans and responds to human rights emerging issues in the region.

After explaining the institutional role of human rights in ASEAN, Ms Wahyuningrum discussed her concerns about the state of democracy and human rights in the region.



Figure 3: H.E. Yuyun Wahyuningrum, Indonesian Representative to the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR)

Citing a recent Democracy Index published by the Economist Intelligence Unit she notes that all ASEAN countries have been classified either as “Flawed Democracy” or “Authoritarian”. Most ASEAN national constitutions make reference to human rights, with the exception of Brunei, but it is often difficult to enforce or discuss human rights in practice. Even AICHR itself faces difficulties in addressing human rights issues since the non-interference principle can make it impossible to take action, even for widespread civil violations such as in Myanmar.

Despite AICHR’s weak enforcement mechanism, Ms Wahyuningrum stresses the progress made in the existence of a human rights body at the regional level rather than each nation deciding which human rights ethics are in their interest. AICHR has been especially important for young people concerned about human rights in the region.

Beyond the issue of freedom in human rights Ms Wahyuningrum joins Maria Ressa in regarding social media as a factor for the backsliding of democracy. One of the biggest challenges to freedom, she says, is the information disorder of what is false, with the ability to fuel “hate and fake” among the populace. Where misinformation and state-run manipulation of media is coordinated, the danger to democracy can become fatal. The ethics of journalism and fact-checking must be preserved and journalists must avoid extremism and combat the proliferation of hate and intolerance.

Ms Wahyuningrum gives an example of how AICHR workshops respond to such problems through discussions of legislation and freedom of expression. The balance between restriction and freedom is a constant challenge for governments, something that requires an ethics of critical thinking and media literacy.

### **Surachanee Hammerli Sriyai: the ethical lines of free speech have been blurred with social media**

Surachanee Hammerli Sriyai is a Lecturer and Lead for the Digital Governance Track at the School of Public Policy at Chiang Mai University. She graduated from West Texas A&M University before receiving her MA and PhD at Texas Tech University with a focus on Government, Comparative Politics, and International Relations. She was a researcher at the Asia Peace and Reconciliation Council (APRC) before acting as Research Coordinator for the Asia America Initiative. She was lecturer at Chulalongkorn University before teaching at Chiang



Figure 4: Surachanee Hammerli Sriyai, Lecturer and Digital Governance Track Lead at the School of Public Policy, Chiang Mai University, Thailand

Mai University. She has written in various publications on the topics of global politics, political movements, and the role of digital technologies. She is also a YouTube content creator at Pretty Politics.

Dr Hammerli's particular interest in politics focuses on the role of digital technologies and social media in the 21st century. During its early emergence in the early 2000s the hope was that such platforms promoted freedom of speech and liberal society. Now, social media has penetrated deeply into daily social life and revealed significant downsides. These platforms are not only channels for misinformation but also are perfect echo chambers, strengthening the cohesion of like-minded groups while excluding opposing opinions. This has important implications because the lines between what should or should not be permissible has become blurred. What counts as "hate speech" depends on your perspective. For Dr Hammerli a practical ethical line can be drawn: freedom ends where it starts to infringe on the freedom of others.

A large impact that social media like Facebook does to the spread of information and misinformation is its speed. Hammerli provided an anecdote about someone working on the US Election, tracking misinformation, and reporting it to partnered social media platforms. She noted that the average time from reporting to removal is approximately 6–8 hours, a sufficient amount of time for that information to be spread and digested to millions of people. Beyond swinging an election, the effects can be quite deadly, as Hammerli notes how Facebook's role in disseminating hate speech has facilitated the violence against Rohingya people in Myanmar. Additionally, she discussed how the current landscape, even in a fully democratic society, makes it difficult to regulate media companies, with its transnational reach making legal obligations complicated and making ambiguous the extent to which governments, social-media companies, or third parties should be involved in regulation.

Dr Hammerli gives examples where misinformation can successfully be dealt with. Taiwan has established a "fake news centre" where people can report political and non-political misinformation. Their system of processing is judged as a solid model. This contrasts with Thailand's "Anti-Fake News Centre" which ostensibly looks at issues of mental health and information during natural disasters. In practice it became more politically oriented especially after the dissolution of the Future Forward Party. These two examples show how institutional

credibility can be weakened by governmental intervention, as opposed to a neutral and transparent third party.

In conclusion, Dr Hammerli provides advice for dealing with misinformation at a personal level. As a university lecturer, her role is to help youth stay vigilant and able to identify the filter bubbles in the media they use. She believes it is important for youth to develop their digital literacy and navigate through media without being trapped by their own pre-existing biases. It is important to teach children to process information and develop their critical thinking at a young age since they use internet a lot. She encourages all media users to fact-check information before posting it. Finally, she encourages people to understand how social media can dissociate from reality, by avoiding, for example, to not say things online that they would not say in real life.



Figure 5: Vincent Carlo Legara, graduate in political science at Ateneo de Manila University, Philippines

## **Vincent Carlo Legara: the older generation is less keen on protecting the ideals of freedom**

Vincent Carlo Legara is a graduate in political science at Ateneo de Manila University in the Philippines. His areas of study were comparative politics, international relations, security, and popular culture. His graduate thesis is on the 2022 Philippine presidential election with a focus on popular and meme culture. In 2021, he presented a paper he co-wrote at the International Association for Political Science Students World Congress on ethnic repression in Myanmar and the Philippines. At Ateneo de Manila University Vincent was active as a student leader, participating in student movements and writing on Myanmar and ASEAN's non-interference principle.

In this ECAAR dialogue, Vincent describes the political situation of today's ASEAN youth. Concepts like human rights, free speech, and democracy are taught as principles that must be upheld in a free and functioning society but then they see the contrast with their social reality where state power and repression clashes with these ideas. Vincent believes youth today are disillusioned with patronage politics, entrenchment of politicians in nondemocratic governments and an unchanging political climate. This disconnect has led to student movements in universities and conflicts with state institutions. Youth see the older generation as less keen on protecting these ideals.

The role of social media has also become much more prominent in the daily lives and political engagement of youth. Vincent notes the benefits of social media that reach beyond

national boundaries and allow student movements to organize and coordinate themselves. At the same time, he acknowledges the polarisation of political discourse on social media and how internet “trolls” and even “troll armies” target and distort free speech.

Vincent specifically notes the mismatch between communication and ethical action in today’s youth. Social media algorithms divide rather than unite people and are used by forces that increasingly control and limit political discourse and the ability of youth to coordinate and organise themselves. Vincent has personally studied misinformation campaigns like “troll farms”, where large numbers of “users” disseminate false information and banned users simply reappear under a different identity.

Vincent reflects on the comments of Maria Ressa noting that in Philippines, information on atrocities are not well-documented and historical narratives are distorted to fit a state agenda. He advocates in order to combat these practices and hopes that media literacy and critical thinking will be taught in education.

## Ethical Takeaways

The takeaways from the statements of individual speakers are the following.

Ramos-Horta declares that his commitment to democratic principles, justice, and freedom have not diminished since his days as Foreign Minister at the age of 25 for Asia’s newest nation. His advice to ASEAN youth is that freedom to speak out should not be sacrificed by falling into a “pragmatic mindset” of passive acceptance that ends up encouraging political bullying and the elimination of freedom. He sees democracy facing more difficulty and in a reverse trend. In ASEAN he sees the example of Myanmar and the inability of Member States to agree on concerted communication and action as a failure to protect ASEAN democratic principles. His basis for hope is the observation that young people in Southeast Asia are coming together and advocating for freedom and human rights and believes that ASEAN must support its youth so that they are not betrayed.

Maria Ressa agrees with Ramos-Horta that there is a global “roll back” in democracy. As an expert and a victim, she is very clear about the dangers in using social media to spread misinformation and the unethical use of algorithms that generate the user’s emotions of anger and hate. These practices embolden overt abuses of power from leaders and she defends freedom of the press to ensure truthful information. Her message to youth is to figure out what their values are and what they are willing to fight for. She encourages them to preserve their own free will and agency no matter how difficult. In answer to a student’s question about whether it’s a good idea to study journalism, she says there has never been a better time to become a journalist.

Yuyun Wahyuningrum, Indonesian Representative to the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) explains the role and evolution of this institution for freedom and human rights but notes it needs to do more. She notes that all ASEAN Member States are currently classified either as “Flawed Democracy” or “Authoritarian” by international rankings of nations on freedom and democracy. The disconnect is explained by the fact that while all national constitutions refer to human rights, with the exception of Brunei, they do not enforce certain rights and freedoms in practice. Ms Wahyuningrum stresses that real progress has been made by the human rights body at the regional level

and points out that AICHR is especially committed to supporting young people who are concerned about human rights in the region.

Dr Surachanee Hammerli Sriyai of the School of Public Policy at Chiang Mai University explains how social media in the early 2000s were seen as an instrument of hope for promoting freedom of speech and liberal society. Now these platforms are not only channels but echo chambers of misinformation, strengthening the beliefs of like-minded groups while excluding opposing opinions. The ethical lines between what should or should not be permissible have been blurred. As a university lecturer, she sees her role as helping youth to develop their digital literacy and navigate through media without being trapped by their own pre-existing biases. She encourages all media users to understand how social media can dissociate people from reality.

Vincent Carlo Legara describes the political background of the youth growing up in the 21st century. Concepts like human rights, free speech, and democracy are taught as principles that must be upheld in a free and functioning society but youth also see the contrast with their social reality where state power and repression clash with these ideas. For Vincent, the youth of today are disillusioned with patronage politics, entrenchment of politicians in nondemocratic government and the unchanging political climate. This disconnect has led to student movements in universities and conflicts with state institutions. Youth see the older generation as less keen on protecting these ideals.

Takeways from this dialogue on ethics of freedom in ASEAN are, first, freedom has its champions but also its challenges. What was called by several panellists the rollback of democracy and freedoms in ASEAN is proof that the region is not moving in a direct line towards an agreed goal. Nor do all ASEAN Members agree when challenged by violations of their own ethics as the Myanmar crisis shows. A year after this dialogue took place, our panellists would be no more optimistic in their observations on the contemporary situation.



A second point is that each and every speaker in this dialogue mentions as an emerging challenge how social media has disappointed those who hoped to see this new technology as a platform for freedom of speech. The consensus is that social media presents real dangers for ethics through its algorithms that push online information that feeds prejudices and hate in order to keep people on the platform. Worse still, websites pushing fake news manipulate the choices of people in the democratic process. A year on, what these panellists observe has continued and new technologies have become even more challenging.

On the bright side, what we can observe over a longer period of time is the continuing work being done by the ASEAN Secretariat to move the region towards a more integrated rules-based ethics of freedom, despite the steps forward or backward of individual nations. We can also see that what Ramos-Horta called the “pragmatic mindset” of ASEAN’s older generation is less acceptable to the young generation, even though there seems to be a gap between communication and taking action as youth representatives had already observed in previous dialogues. While ASEAN’s youth may be disappointed with the mindset of the older generation, this dialogue also presents living examples of leadership ethics championing freedom and human rights.



# CHAPTER 10

## Ethics of Sustainability and Biodiversity in ASEAN



The poster for the ECAAR Dialogues event. At the top, it says "ECAAR DIALOGUES: Sustainability and Biodiversity Emerging Ethics". Below that is the date and time: "6 Sep 2022 | 09.00 - 12.00 (GMT+7)". The poster is divided into three sections: "SPEAKERS", "PANELISTS", and "PANELIST / MODERATOR". Under "SPEAKERS", there are two circular portraits of young people, Anjolie Razak and Ian Mia Benedict. Below their portraits is their name and affiliation: "ASEAN Master Students in Sustainability Management, Universitas Gadjah Mada". Under "PANELISTS", there are two circular portraits: Dr. Mary Kristerie Baleva and Julius S. Bulo. Below their portraits are their names and affiliations: "External Relations and Policy Specialist, ASEAN Biodiversity Center" and "Operation Director, Pertamina Foundation / Senior Liaison Officer to ASEAN, AHDO". Under "PANELIST / MODERATOR", there is one circular portrait of Dr. Bob Aubrey. Below his portrait is his name and affiliation: "Founder & Chair of Advisory Board, ASEAN Human Development Organisation (AHDO)". At the bottom of the poster, there are logos for ECAAR, AHDO, FIIHRSI, and ASEAN University Network.

Link to webinar <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UzEr0CeqmCg&t=3920s>

The best example currently in ASEAN of emerging ethics is the awareness that the region must take a position on sustainable atmospheric emissions and management of pollution and waste. ASEAN is described as being one of worst affected regions by the United Nations. The issue is no longer emerging but has become existential as floods, typhoons, heat waves, and rising sea levels across Southeast Asia impact populations. As for preserving biodiversity in ASEAN, the region has one of the planet's richest concentrations of diversity of life on land and under the sea.

What our speakers discuss are the obstacles to reaching strong commitments and taking action. The dilemma for ASEAN as for the developing world elsewhere is that we want to maintain fast economic development but now see how that development is



destroying the sustainability and biodiversity of the life we depend on. The only option is to reconcile the ethic of economic growth with the emerging ethics of preservation of life on the planet.

Our dialogue begins with a speech recorded for this dialogue by a representative of the United Nations Secretariat for the Convention on Biological Diversity. This is followed by an overview of challenges across ASEAN by two students from the AUN supported Master degree in Sustainability from Gadjah Mada University in Indonesia. We then turn to ASEAN policy from a representative of the ASEAN Biodiversity Centre headquartered in the Philippines and wrap up with the perspective from ASEAN business represented by the Foundation of Indonesian's largest State-Owned company.

## Bianca Lisboa de Camara Brasil: the UN convention on biodiversity preserves and shares the resources of life

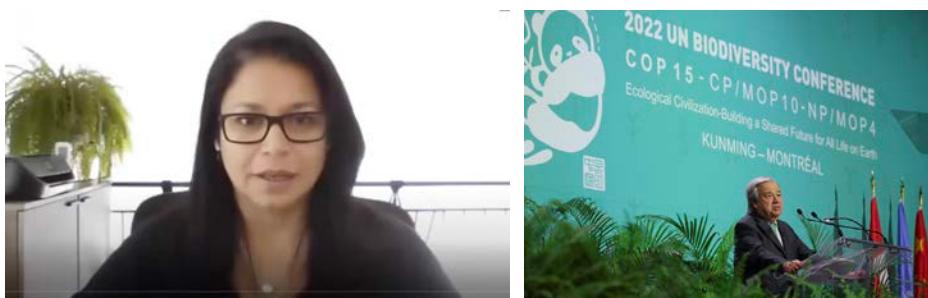


Figure 1: Bianca Lisboa de Camara Brasil, program manager for business engagement at the UN Secretariat for the Convention on Biological Diversity.

The global perspective on this ethical issue is given by Ms Lisboa de Camara Brasil of the UN Secretariat for the Convention on Biological Diversity. This new UN body has three goals:

1. the conservation of biological diversity (biodiversity);
2. the sustainable use of its components;
3. and most important from the ethical perspective, a fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from genetic resources.

The Convention on Biological Diversity convened in Montreal in December 2022 for the 15th Conference of the Parties (COP15) resulted in an international agreement to protect 30% of land and oceans by 2030. It also adopted a global biodiversity framework with the goal of safeguarding our livelihoods, our health, and the health of the planet.

Concerning the specific situation of ASEAN, the UN representative points out that Southeast Asia occupies only 3% of the earth's surface but has 20% of plant and animal biodiversity of the planet. So, from an international perspective, ASEAN has a responsibility beyond the sheer size of its territory to reverse the destructive effects of development that make the life support systems of our planet unsustainable.

The United Nations COP 15 has good news for ASEAN. With the ethical commitment to protect biodiversity comes a concrete financial incentive: nations will receive a large

share of the benefits of biodiversity. This comes in the forms of financial support for research and innovation, investment in knowledge and training, and direct economic compensation for preserving its wealth of plants, animals, genetic material and ecosystems.

Ethically, the UN message balances the virtue of doing the right thing with a results-based ethics incentivised by concrete benefits for taking action.

## **Dr Marie Kristerie Baleva: regional ethics are essential because biodiversity has no borders**

Representing the ASEAN Center for Biodiversity based in Phillipines, Dr Baleva notes that all the ten ASEAN Member States are parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

Southeast Asia's astounding biodiversity has been described throughout history and was put into numbers by Bianca Lisboa de Camara Brasil. Of this biodiversity 37% is classified as endemic which means that these species only exist within the region. In fact, this is just the tip of the iceberg. Many more species are expected to be discovered in the future.

That is why protection and preservation of wild areas are so important. Within ASEAN alone, there are 2587 protected areas, making up 804,000 square metres, and 40 heritage parks in total.

The ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity facilitates cooperation and coordination among the ten ASEAN Member States and with regional and international organisations with the mission of conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity and a fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the use of such natural treasures.

Following the Convention of Biological Diversity (CBD), Dr Baleva helpfully defines biodiversity as variability among living organisms from all sources, including terrestrial, marine and ecosystems. An ecological complex is the diversity within species and between species.

Biodiversity itself is studied at three component levels: the genetic, species, and ecosystem level. One form of life is dynamically related to others.

Ecosystem services are the benefits that people derive from ecosystems—the air we breathe, the water we drink, the



Figure 2: Dr Mary Kristerie Baleva External Relations and Policy SpecialistExternal Relations and Policy Specialist ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity

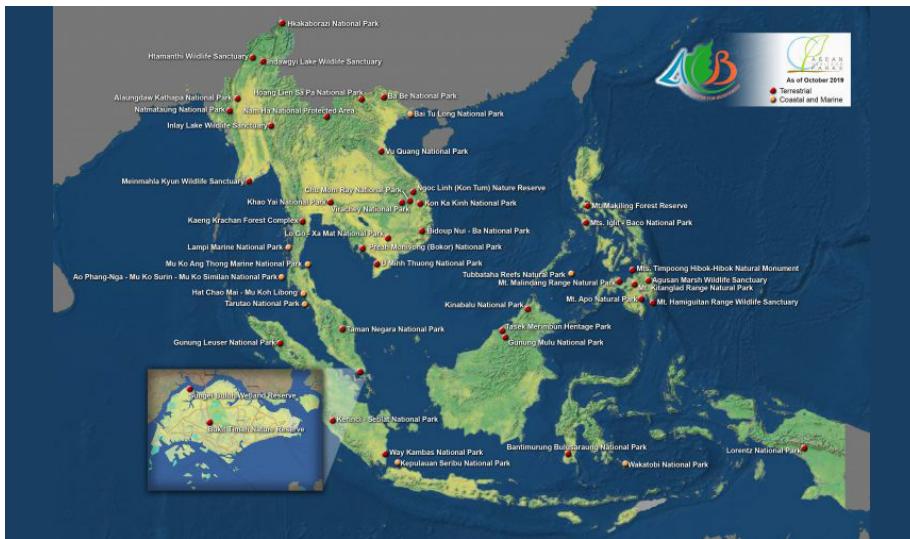


Figure 3: Map showing ASEAN Heritage Parks (source: ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity)

food we eat, the fibres of our clothes and so on. Biodiversity ethics is about the provisioning, regulating, cultural, and supporting services that contribute to the well-being of human communities.

Dr Baleva indicates how biodiversity is crucial to the attainment of UN's Sustainable Development Goals: 2 (Zero Hunger), 3 (Good Health and Well-Being), 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation), 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), 13 (Climate Action), 14 (Life Below Water), 15 (Life on Land), and 17 (Partnerships for Goals).

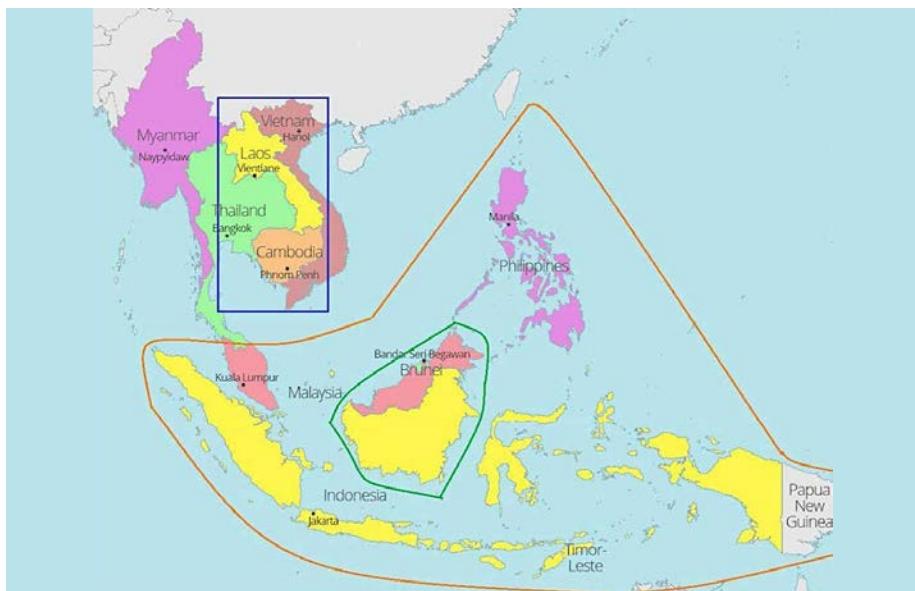
In terms of ethics, Dr Baleva describes a science-based policy using value indicators, worldviews and knowledge systems that value nature beyond quantitative measurement. Dr Baleva also points out that economists are also revaluing nature and refers us to the work of Oxford economist Sir Partha Dasgupta who has published a new economic model of natural productivity setting an economic value on what nature supplies to humanity as goods and services we all rely on.

## Ian Benedict Mia: Southeast Asia has lost 95% of its original habitat and ecosystems are in steep decline

Ian Benedict Mia, a Master's Student in Sustainability Management at Universitas Gadjah Mada, notes that 600 million people directly depend on biodiversity for food, health



Figure 4: Ian Benedict Mia,  
Master degree Student in  
Sustainability Management  
at Universitas Gadjah Mada



and livelihoods. He cites one estimate valuing biodiversity in Southeast Asia at up to \$2.19 trillion in ecosystem services. Despite the immense value that biodiversity brings to the region, biodiversity loss has unfortunately become a pressing, perennial issue within ASEAN. Benedict provides a shocking statistic estimating that Southeast Asia has lost around 95% of its original habitat, while ecosystem services required for food, water, recreation and tourism have steeply declined.

ASEAN has a number of regionally biodiverse areas. An example is the Mekong River in the Indoburma region which is preserved through connectivity partnerships. Another is called the Heart of Borneo, a transboundary cooperation of Indonesia, Malaysia and Brunei to promote research, sustainability and conservation of the island's wildlife. A third is called the Coral Triangle, an ecosystem spanning the maritime territories of Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, Indonesia, and East Timor.

These transboundary ecological regions demonstrate the regional scale of biodiversity ethics which cannot be considered the territory of any Member State alone. Three Member States are classified as "megadiverse", namely Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines because of their extraordinary biodiversity.

Although the region is set to become the fourth largest economy in the world, ASEAN risks losing 35% of its gross domestic product (GDP) by 2050 to climate change.

Figure 5: Map showing Southeast Asian biodiverse areas including the Heart of Borneo (green), Indoburma/Mekong River region (blue), and Coral Triangle (brown) (Source: Ian Mia Benedict)

Furthermore, a host of critically endangered species including the Sumatran Orangutan, the Sunda Pangolin, the Sumatran Elephant, and the Javan Rhinoceros are severely threatened by habitat loss and hunting and risk becoming only a fading cultural memory for the next generation.



Figure 6: Anjolie Razak,  
Master degree Student in  
Sustainability Management  
at Universitas Gadjah Mada

## Anjolie Razak: the ethics of biodiversity are an existential imperative

Anjolie Razak is also a student in the Sustainability Management Master programme. She underlines the emergent nature of sustainability ethics which were not issues during ASEAN's formation. Now they have become existential imperatives.

This notion of emergence means that today's ethics are constantly evolving through time and responsive to its current conditions. Our emerging regional ethics today are focused on the work that needs to be done immediately in ASEAN but also on the long-term benefits. ASEAN's region-wide ethical principles are already embedded in traditional cultures of the region. Animals and plants make up the myths, stories, songs, clothes and cuisine of Southeast Asian cultures. Indigenous cultures represent 1500 ethnic groups and tribes. They also have reverence for the region's "density of life" and practice sustainability by avoiding the overexploitation of nature. There are many examples of neglect of indigenous culture and rights in the region: deforestation by logging companies in Sarawak eroded the Penan way of life, mining operations in the Philippines ruined indigenous lands, dams in Cambodia have flooded Bunung villages and monocrop palm oil plantations in Indonesia have replaced ancient forests and peatlands. These threats to biodiversity are also threats to human rights. Yet this heritage is an "ethics of the marginalized" that are undermined by policies that give priority to economic development.

It is now obvious that more and more peoples and cities in the region are exposed to the threats of climate change and impact of biodiversity loss. This explains why government and business are adopting the ethics of biodiversity as a priority for long-term sustainability and economic development.

## Yulius Bulo: Business and Biodiversity must share an ethic of fairness

As Chief Operating Officer at the Pertamina Foundation, Yulius Bulo notes that a state-owned oil and gas company is usually under the spotlight as doing harm to the environment. Part of

his job is to ensure that Pertamina strives to be environmentally friendly, socially responsible and well-governed. Why would Pertamina adopt these ethics? Because of a State-Owned Company's mission for the nation which is driven by the "awareness to not compromise the ability of our future generations to meet their needs".

Concretely, Pertamina has committed to an authentic sustainability proposition that ensures energy access for all populations, develops renewable energy, supports the national climate transition agenda, and takes responsibility on addressing climate change issues by managing greenhouse gas emissions and practicing carbon sequestration.

According to Yulius Bulo, the ethical principle is that it is "unfair" for a State-Owned Company to exploit natural resources without being responsible for environmental protection and conservation. In relation to biodiversity, the company also has a specific biodiversity action plan to reach a net positive impact (NPI) on biodiversity. This is done, for example, by investing in land rehabilitation and ecosystem restoration upon closure of an oil or gas drilling site. This ethic of preservation and restoration drives the work of the Pertamina Foundation which has implemented more than 300 biodiversity protection programs including mangrove restoration projects, oil spill clean-ups, and wildlife conservation.

A function of ethics is to ensure that the goal is to actually make an impact rather than practice "greenwashing" to communicate a good image that is not really true. Yulius Bulo says that we must call out corporate sustainability initiatives that are "driven by ratings" and support those "driven by an authentic sustainability motive."

Ethical questions are often challenging and complicated. This is particularly so for issues of unethical "virtue signalling" such as greenwashing. Sustainability can easily be turned into marketing tools such as communicating a green label in one area to mask non-sustainable practices or unethical practices elsewhere. That is why Yulius Bulo calls on companies to embrace authentic sustainability as an ethical commitment.

## Ethical Takeaways

The tension between ASEAN's founding ethic of development and the emerging ethics of environmental conservation has become a central ethical issue.

Bianca Lisboa de Camara Brasil represents the global ethical perspective by pointing out that Southeast Asia



Figure 7: Yulius Bulo,  
Chief Operating Officer  
of Pertamina Foundation and  
Chair of the ASEAN Human  
Development Organisation  
Indonesia

occupies only 3% of the earth's surface but has 20% of plant and animal biodiversity of the planet. So, from the UN perspective, ASEAN has an ethical responsibility to the rest of the world to reverse the destructive effects of development that make the life support systems of our planet unsustainable. The United Nations Conference of the Parties (COP 15) in Montreal in December 2022 was good news for ASEAN. The ethical commitment to protect biodiversity will be recognized by concrete financial incentives and direct economic compensation for preserving its wealth of plants, animals, genetic material and ecosystems.

Dr Marie Kristerie Baleva represents the ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity whose role is to facilitate cooperation and coordination among the ten ASEAN Member States on conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity and ensure a fair and equitable sharing of its benefits. Biodiversity ethics is about the provisioning, regulating, cultural, and supporting services that contribute to the well-being of human communities. Dr Baleva describes a science-based ethics using value indicators that value nature beyond quantitative measurement but also points out that economists are also revaluing nature and setting an economic value on what nature supplies to humanity in terms of the goods and services we all rely on.

Ian Benedict Mia notes that despite the immense value that biodiversity brings to ASEAN, the region has lost around 95% of its original habitat, while ecosystem services required for food, water, recreation and tourism have steeply declined. Although the region is set to become the fourth largest economy in the world, ASEAN risks losing 35% of its gross domestic product (GDP) by 2050 to climate change. He concludes that the transboundary nature of ASEAN's ecological regions means that biodiversity ethics cannot be considered the property of any Member State alone.

Anjulie Razak makes the important point that the emerging regional ethics of biodiversity are focused on the work that needs to be done immediately but the benefits of taking action are long term. She reminds us that ASEAN's region-wide ethical principles are already embedded in traditional cultures of the region and are the natural rights of indigenous cultures. The long term benefit of taking ethical action to preserve ASEAN's treasure of biodiversity is now more obvious because populations and cities are already suffering from climate change and the impact of biodiversity loss.



Yulius Bulo represents the ethical perspective of business by noting that ASEAN's State-Owned Companies exist to preserve the nation's resources and interests. They are therefore driven by a long-term ethic not to compromise future generations. He also points out that ASEAN is in danger from the practice of "greenwashing" to communicate a positive ethical image that is not really true. He advocates for calling out greenwashing and supporting companies that are driven by an authentic sustainability ethic.

As we have seen, ASEAN has a special ethical responsibility to preserve its life systems on land and in the sea because of its extraordinary biodiversity. The tension between prioritising short-term economic gains over long-term loss of ecosystems is becoming more immediate due to the impact which is being felt not only in rural areas or by indigenous populations but by everyone today. The ethical challenges for ASEAN are to accelerate ethical action across borders and to ensure real implementation of ethics by governments, companies and individuals.

In this dialogue we can also see that ethical awareness and willingness to take action is stronger for the younger generation. ASEAN higher education will need to support this new ethic in the classroom and also accelerate the education of experts and professionals in the areas of sustainability and biodiversity.



# CHAPTER 11

## Ethics of Human Development in ASEAN

**ETHICS OF WORK AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT IN ASEAN**

**18TH JANUARY 2023, 9AM-12PM (GMT+7)**  
**FREE ONLINE WEBINAR**

<p><b>Prof. Virgel C. Binghay</b> Director of Center for Industry Productivity &amp; Competitiveness School of Labor &amp; Industrial Relations</p> <p><b>Ms. Rodora Turalde Babaran</b> Director of Human Development of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Secretariat</p>	<p><b>Prof. Vachararutai Boontinand (Jan)</b> Director of the Institute of Human Rights and Peace Studies, Mahidol University in Thailand</p> <p><b>Dr. Welyne J. Jehom</b> Department of Anthropology and Sociology in the Faculty of Arts And Social Sciences of the University of Malaya</p>	<p><b>Moderator:</b> <b>Dr. Bob Aubrey</b> Founder of ASEAN Human Development Organisation (AHDO) &amp; Chair of the Advisory Board</p>
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Link to webinar <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4lU2y1Uz02o>

The ethics of human development is critical for ASEAN during the current phase of fast economic growth and increasing mobility across borders. Human development is one of ASEAN's founding ethical aspirations and remains well accepted as a goal for all ASEAN Member States.



In this ECAAR dialogue, besides my role as moderator I gave an overview of key human development references as background to the current discussion, taken from the AHDO certification programme for human development professionals.

Human development is a broad concept with a rich philosophical history in many cultures worldwide. About forty years ago, the United Nations began a process to redefine human development beyond a purely economic meaning. In 1986 the United Nations declared that development is a human right, making it a foundational rules-based ethic.<sup>1</sup>

***The right to development is an inalienable human right by virtue of which every human person and all peoples are entitled to participate in, contribute to, and enjoy economic, social, cultural and political development, in which all human rights and fundamental freedoms can be fully realized.***

The United Nations became the reference for human development programmes and studies worldwide.

In ASEAN, this rules-based ethic of human development has become not only a right but was defined as an essential ethic of the ASEAN community in 2012 in three articles of the ASEAN Human Rights Declaration.<sup>2</sup>

## **RIGHT TO DEVELOPMENT**

***35. The right to development is an inalienable human right by virtue of which every human person and the peoples of ASEAN are entitled to participate in, contribute to, enjoy and benefit equitably and sustainably from economic, social, cultural and political development. The right to development should be fulfilled so as to meet equitably the developmental and environmental needs of present and future generations. While development facilitates and is necessary for the enjoyment of all human rights, the lack of development may not be invoked to justify the violations of internationally recognised human rights.***

***36. ASEAN Member States should adopt meaningful people-oriented and gender responsive development programmes aimed at poverty alleviation, the creation of conditions including the protection and sustainability of the environment for the peoples of ASEAN to enjoy all human rights recognised in this Declaration on an equitable basis, and the progressive narrowing of the development gap within ASEAN.***

1 United Nations Declaration on the Right to Human Development online booklet [https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Development/RTD\\_booklet\\_en.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Development/RTD_booklet_en.pdf) Retrieved 23 July 2023

2 ASEAN Human Rights Declaration <https://asean.org/asean-human-rights-declaration/> retrieved 23 July 2023

**37. ASEAN Member States recognise that the implementation of the right to development requires effective development policies at the national level as well as equitable economic relations, international cooperation and a favourable international economic environment. ASEAN Member States should mainstream the multidimensional aspects of the right to development into the relevant areas of ASEAN community building and beyond, and shall work with the international community to promote equitable and sustainable development, fair trade practices and effective international cooperation.**

The relationship between human development and work is essential since adults in today's world spend most of their waking hours working. The International Labour Organisation defined its ethics of work in 1999 under the heading "decent work" going well beyond work as paid labour.<sup>3</sup>

**Decent work sums up the aspirations of people in their working lives. It involves opportunities for work that is productive and delivers a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for all, better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom for people to express their concerns, organize and participate in the decisions that affect their lives and equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men.**

Work as human development is an ethical arena where words like freedom, personal development, social integration and fairness have concrete meaning in the moral contract between employer and employee. Work is where the rules-based ethics of human development take on a results-based framework.

For the ASEAN Human Development Organisation, development at work is defined as a deliverable for organisations, a human goal and obligation that balances the economic purpose of work as a means to profit or as production.

Development is by definition a difference assessable between the beginning and end of a work contract or job. The human development deliverable in work is measured as a "human net positive" result validated through key development indicators (KDI) that may be qualitative or quantitative.

While this concept of human development as a measurable goal and outcome is familiar in education, it is still fairly new for work. However, work as human development is becoming more accepted as a requirement in labour policy, corporate social responsibility and ethical investing through ESG (environment, social, governance) where the "S" is basically human development, human rights and social justice.

<sup>3</sup> Definition of Decent Work by the International Labour Organisation <https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/decent-work/lang--en/index.htm> retrieved 23 July 2023.

In this ECAAR dialogue we see different perspectives of human development in ASEAN with a particular focus on human development at work.

Rodora Babaran is Director of Human Development, ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Department of the ASEAN Secretariat. She is responsible for managing the Human Development Directorate with four divisions: Health; Education, Youth and Sport; Labour and Civil Service; and Poverty Eradication and Gender.

Ms Babaran explains how human development for ASEAN is part of the socio-cultural pillar and founded on the ethics of a people-centered and people-oriented community. The Directorate of Human Development is born out of the 1967 Bangkok Declaration with the goals of accelerating economic growth, social progress and cultural development. In 2021 a new vision and roadmap for the year 2025 with people at the centre, actively engaging in the community-building process and partaking in its benefits, was put forward. In other words, human development in all aspects is central to the ASEAN agenda since the beginning and this continues with the ASEAN 2025 roadmap.

What is specifically included in the ASEAN vision of human development is promoting and protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms, improving quality of life and living standards of its people, ensuring decent work for all, achieving gender equality and social inclusion, and enabling participation and meaningful engagement of its peoples.

ASEAN 2025 also considers human development challenges, including the disruptive effects of digitalisation and preparation of the people for the future of work. The digital economy is expected to add 1 trillion US dollars to the total region's GDP of member states by 2030 but a digital economy also means greater automation of work and new ways of working such as human-machine work and gig work. These changes can increase precarity of employment for today's workers and become an added factor of the already worrisome inequality in the ASEAN workplace.

Many human development inequalities were revealed during the COVID-19 pandemic. In ASEAN the pandemic resulted in the loss of more than ten million jobs and pushed ten million people into extreme poverty. Women disproportionately suffered much of the job losses and the hardship was increased by caring for children during school closures. On the other hand, Ms Babaran assesses ASEAN management of the



Figure 1: Ms Rodora Turalde Babaran, Director of Human Development of the ASEAN Secretariat

pandemic as relatively successful compared to other regions thanks to the commitment of Member States to ensure social protection and economic development during and after the crisis.

Other human development issues for ASEAN include the transition to a green economy, continuing development for an ageing workforce, and the need to increase the cross-border mobility of the ASEAN workforce.

In comparison with the European Union (EU) principle of free labour mobility as one of its “four freedoms”, Ms Babaran describes the present ASEAN situation as “aiming for free movement of skilled professionals in the region” but says that free movement of unskilled workers is “a work in progress” and “an aspiration.”

Ms Babaran points out that most academics and professionals in ASEAN prefer the term “brain circulation” rather than “brain drain” because migrants often return to contribute back to their home economies, enriched by experience and knowledge accumulated in other countries. This is especially true for students and interns who gain experience across ASEAN.

Ultimately, Ms. Ms Babaran concludes, human development in the world of work is continuously evolving and governments are aware that preparing the ASEAN workforce for the future of work is an emerging ethic in itself.

## **Dr Vachararutai Boontinand: Human Rights and Human Development go beyond the letter of the law**

Dr Vachararutai Boontinand is Director of the Institute of Human Rights and Peace Studies at Mahidol University in Thailand and a senior human rights practitioner and advocate.

She has deep experience in human trafficking, which is the forcible movement of people for the purposes of exploitation, slavery, forced labour, and bonded labour. She worked within the communities of Thai women moving abroad and Eastern European women in Thailand. For Dr Boontinand, these are human development stories of people who want to move and choose a better life but, because of their conditions of travel, become illegal or undocumented workers as soon as they enter their destination countries. This experience of dealing with human trafficking shaped Dr Boontinand’s



Figure 2: Dr Vachararutai Boontinand, Director of the Institute of Human Rights and Peace Studies at Mahidol University

interest in the right to equal opportunity and freedom of movement.

Human rights not only ensure autonomy and equity, they protect all individuals from discrimination, intentional or unintentional, based on gender, nationality, race, or beliefs. Human rights need to be exercised, and go beyond the letter of the law or a formal treaty. Dr Boontinand argues that the ASEAN labour landscape needs both laws and ethics.

In ASEAN the on-the-ground reality can greatly differ from what is spelled out in human rights standards and laws. Decisions about right or wrong actions often boil down to specific ethical guidelines. An example of this is the reality faced by the Ministry of Labour in Thailand which lacks resources to conduct checks on factories that might be using child labour or forced labour. In such a situation, a top-down approach towards human rights law enforcement cannot work without a culture of human rights enabling ordinary people to stand up for rights in the workplace. This is where human rights protection and human development go hand in hand and political democracy is reinforced by the right and willingness to speak up in the workplace.

Dr Boontinand points out that in the past companies had a legal obligation to defend policies of human rights but didn't have the obligation to report violations. Thanks to the 2011 UN Guiding Principles, human rights due diligence is mandated to both identify and act upon actual and potential human rights risks for workers a company's operations, supply chains and the services it uses.<sup>4</sup> More human development professionals are being sought out by companies to report on human rights and human development. This is crucial because discrimination and human rights violations take place in the supply chain as well as in the direct management of employees.

## **Professor Virgel Binghay: ethical frameworks are needed for changes in ASEAN's labour market**

Professor Virgel Binghay is Director of the Centre of Industry Productivity and Professor at the School of Labour and Industrial Relations at the University of Philippines. On top of his

4 UN Human Working Group on Business and Human Rights: Corporate human rights due diligence – identifying and leveraging emerging practices <https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/wg-business/corporate-human-rights-due-diligence-identifying-and-leveraging-emerging-practices> retrieved 24 July 2023.

academic career, he speaks from wide experience as a union representative, a management consultant, an educator, and finally an expert investigator for fair work in the ASEAN region.

Prof Binghay says that the need for clear ethical frameworks is ever more urgent given the scale and complexity of labour markets today. Within the region there are 70 million Micro-, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) that account for over 97% of private enterprise and manage an average of 85% of ASEAN workers.

Labour markets are also changing work. A growing source of work comes from the platform economy, the digital sector of the gig economy. For these types of organisations, frameworks are needed to better ensure the ethics of labour arrangements. The disenfranchisement of platform workers through the lack of social and labour protections is a growing ethical challenge for ASEAN.

Frameworks anchor ethics—our understanding of what is good and bad. The International Labour Organisation promotes decent work for women and men in conditions of freedom, equity, security, and human dignity. However, Prof. Binghay reminds us that decent work remains only an aspiration if not made applicable through policies and working conditions. These include fair income, employment security, safe working conditions, equal opportunities, social protections, personal development, social integration, and the freedom to organize and have a legitimate voice in expressing job-related concerns.

ASEAN governments often ensure work ethics through national labour standards. For example, the Philippines is very legalistic and has its own national labour standards and occupational health and safety standards. But there are often gaps in ensuring the compliance by the Philippine Department of Labour. Prof. Binghay agrees with Dr Boontinand that compliance is more powerful as an intrinsic than extrinsic ethic, when imbedded in a corporate culture of human rights and development and enforced as mindset of leaders.

A new paradigm for human development in companies can be found in three kinds of ethical benchmarks.

Firstly, the SA 8000 is an auditable certification developed by Social Accountability International meant to create a common standard for social welfare compliance. Criteria considered in SA 8000 include child labour, forced or compulsory labour, health and safety, freedom of association to collective bargaining, discrimination, disciplinary practices, working hours, remuneration, and management system.



Figure 3: Professor Virgil Binghay, Director of the Center of Industry Productivity and Professor at the School of Labor and Industrial Relations at the University of Philippines

Accreditation offers a way of promoting ethicality, on top of the compliance.

Secondly, there is Fairwork, an ongoing Oxford study where Prof. Binghay is a participating expert. The Fairwork framework follows five principles: fair pay, fair conditions, fair contracts, fair management, and fair representation. These principles provide a way to operationalize abstractions such as "decent work" within specific country studies with differing labour laws.

Finally, ethicality can be structured through what academics call "organisational culture embedding mechanisms." These are more internal than external ethical frameworks and according to Prof Binghay they are the most powerful of the three. They take the form of a code of conduct aligned with international rights and policies that express organisational and corporate values. Another embedding mechanism is ethical leadership, what Prof. Binghay calls a "leadership imbued with spirituality" that is guided by an aspiration towards doing good. A recent trend in organisational culture today is Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) a growing manifestation of human development ethics in companies.

Ultimately Prof. Binghay believes that ethicality is part of strategic leadership. A business that prioritizes workers is more sustainable in the long run and attracts workers that value the business and ensure its growth. Adopting ethical principles is therefore a win-win for employers, workers and society.

### **Professor Welyne Jehom: human development at work needs social science concepts and measurement**

Anthropologist Dr Welyne Jehom from Universiti of Malaya adds the holistic perspective that human development must include cultural particularities and cultural diversity. She has been actively championing human rights and human development for indigenous peoples across ASEAN. She is also responsible for developing ASEAN's first Master's degree in human development to be launched in 2024 at the Universiti of Malaya.

In her studies of rural-urban migrants and indigenous workers, Dr Jehom found that the social, cultural, and psychological dimensions of work are as important as working conditions. Yet they are often neglected. She points out that communication barriers between ethnic groups and migrants



Figure 4: Professor Welyne Jehom, Anthropologist at the Universiti of Malaya

can prevent their integration into local communities. On the other hand, citing the book, *Leading Human Development in ASEAN*, she makes the point that the diversity of values and practices in ASEAN can potentially form a regional framework for human development with specifically regional concepts like *snook* (fun) in Thai or *merdeka* (freedom) in Malay. Dr Jehom shows that these values, while belonging to very different cultures, can form a cultural framework for regional ethics.

For companies, human development as an emerging paradigm can improve management of ethics at work by including qualitative methods of law, sociology, psychology and anthropology to the almost exclusive focus on quantitative methods used by HR today. The purpose of creating an International Master in Human Development at Universiti of Malaya comes from the need to raise the level of expertise in human development and improvement of work in ASEAN.

## Ethical Takeaways

Human development is one of ASEAN's founding ethical aspirations and a broad concept with a rich philosophical history. The United Nations began a process to redefine human development beyond a purely economic meaning, elevating it to an international rules-based ethics as a human right and a results-based ethics with its sustainable development goals.

In ASEAN, this rules-based ethic of human development has become not only a right but was defined as an essential ethic of the ASEAN community in 2012.

Ms Rodora Babaran of the ASEAN Secretariat described how human development for ASEAN is a foundation of the socio-cultural pillar as a people-centered and people-oriented community. This has been expanded to include promoting and protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms, improving quality of life and living standards, ensuring decent work for all, achieving gender equality and social inclusion, and enabling participation and meaningful engagement of ASEAN peoples. She notes that human development in the world of work is continuously evolving and sees the future of work in ASEAN as an area of ethics.

Dr Vachararutai Boontinand of the Institute of Human Rights and Peace Studies at Mahidol University underlined that to be exercised, human rights need to go beyond the letter of the law and ASEAN needs ethics as well as laws. She believes a top-down approach towards human rights law enforcement cannot work without a culture of human rights that supports ordinary people to stand up for their own rights and the rights of others. She points out that in the past companies had a legal obligation to defend policies of human rights but didn't have the obligation to report violations. Today's requirements require companies to do due diligence to identify and act upon actual and potential human rights risks for workers. With this new dimension of responsibility, human development professionals are being sought out by companies to report on human rights and human development.

Professor Virgel Binghay of the School of Labour and Industrial Relations at the University of Philippines estimates that the need for clear ethical frameworks is ever more urgent given the scale and complexity of labour markets today. He describes the new frameworks that anchor ethics and reminds us that decent work remains only an

aspiration if not made applicable through policies and working conditions. However compliance is more powerful as an intrinsic than extrinsic ethic, when imbedded in a corporate culture of human rights and development and enforced as mindset of leaders.

Professor Welyne Jehom is an anthropologist at the Universiti of Malaya. Her study of rural-urban migrants and indigenous workers show that the social, cultural, and psychological dimensions of work are as important as working conditions. She has contributed to ASEAN by creating an International Master in Human Development at Universiti of Malaya to produce experts capable of using the qualitative methods of law, sociology, psychology and anthropology in human development.

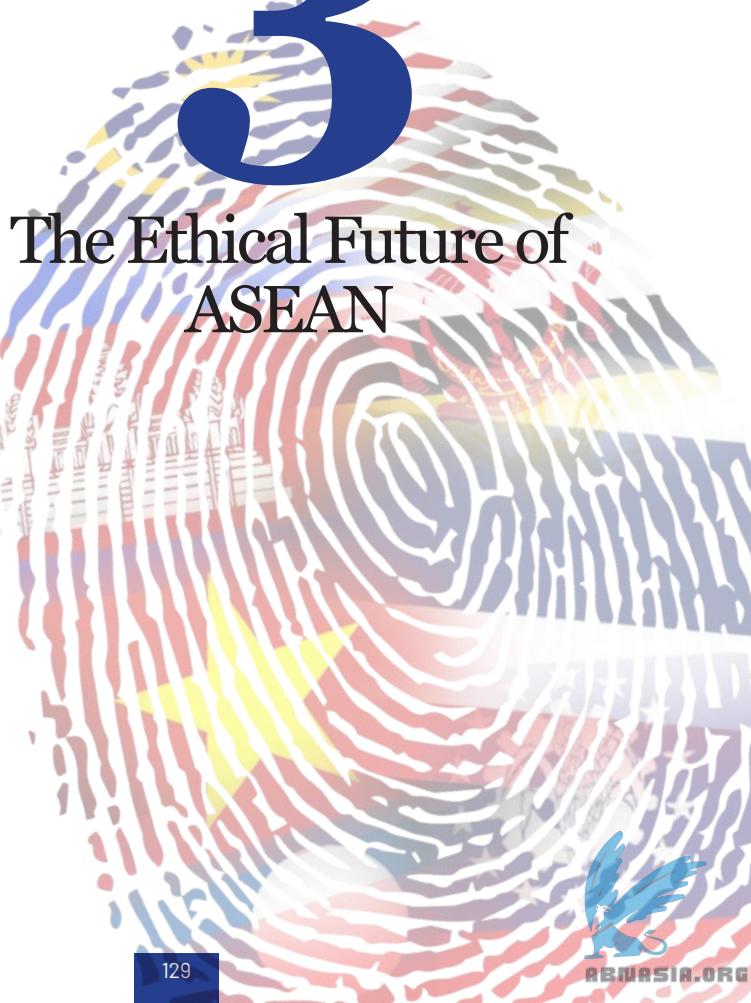
In the online discussion, the speakers unanimously agreed that human development, or human net positive, should be more than an economic indicator, and human development practitioners in the workplace need to include rights, culture, and social science measurement. Much interest from the student audience was also generated around Prof Jehom's announcement of the International Master's in Human Development at the Universiti of Malaya.

## Concluding remarks on the ECAAR Dialogues

This book is focused on the ethics of ASEAN from an inside perspective, that is, from the point of view of someone in the region and committed to the region. Part One provided the historical context and foundations of ASEAN ethics. Part Two shows how eight major contemporary issues or challenges in ethics can be discussed in a forum by ASEAN experts or representatives from different ASEAN countries. The forty-four speakers represent multiple perspectives in ethics and many have made some aspect of ASEAN ethics their life's work. Their experience and careers also give the reader an idea of the wide range of career possibilities that exist in practical ethics.

Reflecting on these eight ECAAR dialogues we can see how different types of ethics clash in disagreement and even conflict, for ethics are about what is most important. For example, those who believe that their own virtue ethics should constitute the guidelines of society will clash with those who believe that ASEAN is a diverse rules-based community. We have seen how leaders stand up for ethical principles in contrast to leaders who believe that ASEAN needs no change, or leaders who see ASEAN only according to their own benefit.

Have these eight ECAAR dialogues exhausted the ethical landscape of ASEAN? Far from it. A short list of further dialogues would include the religious tolerance, ethical education in school, slavery and human trafficking, ASEAN inequality, ASEAN freedom of mobility, ASEAN non-interference ethics, the ethics of political ideologies and emerging ethical issues such as animal rights and using artificial intelligence in war weapons.



# Part 3

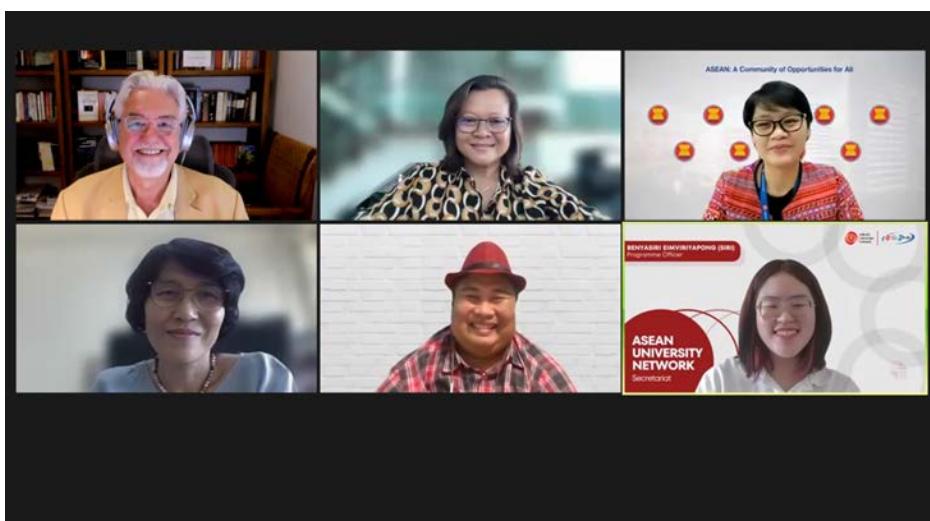
## The Ethical Future of ASEAN

**T**he development of ethics in ASEAN is not a straight arrow of time leading to a happy resolution of all ethical issues. In some areas there has been paralysis, as we have seen in the application of human rights that conflict with national policies based on virtue ethics. In others cases, the arrow of progress has gone backward as in the case of the 2021 military coup in Myanmar. New issues constantly emerge as we discussed in several ECAAR dialogues. And even when ethical policies and statements by ASEAN are agreed by all, this does not mean that they will be implemented on the ground.

In the confusing area of ethics, it can be asked whether the “arrow of progress” is an illusion, that the arrow is a weather vane that points in whatever direction the wind blows.

The ECAAR dialogues give us an idea of the evolution of ethics in ASEAN. First, because results-based ethics and emerging ethics bring into question what is important or what gives the best result. The second source of evolution is represented in the dialogues by youth who have their own ethical aspirations and want to express themselves.

In our concluding chapters, I will try to look into the future to see what ethical failure and success might look like for ASEAN in the next 50 years.



# CHAPTER 12

## How ASEAN's ethical future could fail

The project for this book began with a conversation with Marzuki Darusman in the summer of 2020 and I am writing the concluding chapters in the summer of 2023. During those three years, many ethical challenges have arisen including the Covid-19 pandemic but in general things have gone well for ASEAN.

Promising news came in the first half of 2023 with forecasts from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) that Southeast Asia is set to be the world's fastest growing region during 2023 and into 2024. A number of positive development drivers are paying off: the "demographic dividend" of ASEAN's young and increasingly educated population, ASEAN's growing role as a power in the global supply chain, embrace of the digital economy and ASEAN trade agreements with the rest of the world such as the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP).

What could possibly go wrong?

I will briefly discuss three ethics areas that are priorities for ASEAN where principles must be backed up with action and mindsets of responsibility need to be supported for all citizens. These three areas are freedom and human rights, human development and sustainability.

### Losing the ethics of freedom and human rights

Our ECAAR dialogue on freedom showed that ASEAN has considerably progressed in rules-based ethics thanks to the 2009 establishment of an ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) and the 2012 ASEAN Human Rights Declaration. Writing in the *Journal of Human Rights* in 2021, Professor Anthony Langlois called it a radical pivot.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "Human rights in Southeast Asia: ASEAN's rights regime after its first decade" by Anthony J. Langlois, *Journal of Human Rights*, Published 5 Apr 2021, retrieved 27 July 2023

**A decade ago, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) made a radical pivot on human rights: from—variously—rejection, abuse, denial, and indifference, to institutional embrace and rhetorical enthusiasm.**

However, we also saw in our dialogues of Part 2 that several speakers mentioned reversals of political freedom and human rights in ASEAN and worldwide. These reversals are built on a resurgence in virtue ethics and, in some cases, quite simply the will to preserve political power.

This constitutes a danger for ASEAN and I will illustrate what I mean with some contemporary ASEAN examples.

In Myanmar the military coup of 2021, which we mentioned several times in the dialogues, is based on the extension of systematic violations of human rights by the military over decades, culminating in the 2016 ethnic cleansing and genocide by the military.<sup>2</sup>

In the 2023 general election Thailand, a coalition of pro-democracy parties successfully challenged the military and royalist government. But the winning party was unable to take the reins of power, blocked by pro-establishment Senators chosen in 2019 by the military regime headed by coup leader General Prayut Chan-o-cha.<sup>3</sup> Thailand has experienced more military coup d'états in modern history than any other nation with a total of 22 successful or attempted coups in the past century.

In Cambodia, the 38-year strongman rule of Hun Sen was passed down to his son Hun Manet in 2023 in a vote where all opposition parties had been jailed or disqualified to run. The United Nations has long urged Cambodia to open up its civic and political space of free speech and end persecution of political opposition leaders and human rights defenders.

In the Philippines, 2021 Nobel Peace Prize laureate Maria Ressa gave an eloquent argument for freedom of the press and described how social media are used to manipulate elections with fake news and online hate speech.

In Indonesia, the new Penal Code passed by Parliament in 2022 bans all sex outside or before marriage, giving the State powers to police sexual morality and invade privacy. Human rights groups claim that the new law is a setback for personal freedom and makes especially vulnerable women and citizens identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT).<sup>4</sup>

Not everyone would agree that the countries mentioned in these examples show a definitive and long-term reversal of freedom and human rights. Nor are all ASEAN members regressing. Singapore, while still tightly controlling freedom of speech, press freedom and freedom of assembly has recently improved rights of the LGBT community

2 UN Human Rights Council " Human Rights Council opens special session on the situation of human rights of the Rohingya and other minorities in Rakhine State in Myanmar" Press Release, 5 December 2017 <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2017/12/human-rights-council-opens-special-session-situation-human-rights-rohingya?LangID=E&NewsID=22491> retrieved 26 July 2023.

3 Amnesty International, "Thailand: Election offers rare chance for candidates to commit to safeguarding human rights" 14 May, Chanatip Tatiyakaroonwong <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/4574000220> retrieved 26 July 2023

4 Human Rights Watch "Indonesia: New Criminal Code Disastrous for Rights" 8 December 2022 <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/12/08/indonesia-new-criminal-code-disastrous-rights> retrieved 27 July 2023.

as well as workers' rights. Philippines is investigating the human rights violations of Duterte's war on drugs campaign. Nearly all ASEAN countries have adopted more progressive women's rights initiatives such as protection against domestic violence and better access to education, healthcare and employment. The ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) is working with business on sharing human rights practices.

How the future of freedom and human rights will play out in ASEAN is not clear at this point but the risk of regression is real. If ASEAN should continue to regress in the major areas we have discussed here, the capacity to benefit from ASEAN's remarkable diversity would be lost.

Concerning the different types of ethics, there seems to be a disconnect between the promotion of human rights when nations meet to discuss rules-based ethics at the ASEAN level, and the active commitment to ensure freedom and rights and to implement it at the national level. Commitment to meet international standards of freedom, democratic representation and protection of human rights is an issue for other regions of what is called the "global South" and lessons can be learned about consequences of failure in the experience of African and South American regions.

A diverse ASEAN community requires freedom so that individuals and communities can express their unique identities without fear of discrimination or oppression. ASEAN's socio-cultural community would be lost without freedom and human rights because its human-centric ethics would be forced underground.

What can be done? Lessons can be learned from the EU. One of the most effective ways to anchor the ethics of freedom and human rights is to teach it in the secondary school curriculum. In 2010 the Council of Europe adopted a Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education with adoption and key development indicators measured by the European Directorate General of Democracy.<sup>5</sup> Given the differences between the EU and ASEAN, a "copy-paste" process would not work, but it is timely to educate ASEAN ethics of freedom and human rights for youth in the region's schools.

## Losing human development ethics

Human development is one of the founding aspirational values of ASEAN and by many measures the region has made it a success. For example, the United Nations Human Development Index established in the 1990s show that all ASEAN countries except Myanmar have progressed in recent years based on their three measures of longevity, years of education and GDP per capita.<sup>6</sup>

5 The Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education (EDC/HRE) programme is related to the work of the Education Department which is part of the Directorate of Democratic Participation within the Directorate General of Democracy ("DGII") of the Council of Europe. <https://www.coe.int/en/web/edc> retrieved 28 July 2023. The Council of Europe Fact Sheet showing results can be retrieved at this link <https://rm.coe.int/factsheets-learning-to-live-together-council-of-europe-report-on-the-s/1680727be3>

6 United Nations Human Development Reports compare annual scores country by country on their website <https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/country-insights/#/ranks> Retrieved 28 July 2023. Since the creation of the Index other indicators have been added: the Inequality-Adjusted Human Development Index (IHDI), the Gender Development Index (GDI), the Gender Inequality Index (GII), the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) and the Planetary pressure-adjusted Human Development Index (PHDI).

As ASEAN has evolved its human development, ethics are a central part of the Socio Cultural Community.<sup>7</sup>

**The ASEAN Socio Cultural Community is all about realizing the full potential of ASEAN citizens. The ASCC Blueprint 2025 was adopted by the ASEAN Leaders at the 27th ASEAN Summit on 22 November 2015 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.**

**ACSS is working towards:**

**A committed, participative, and socially responsible community for the benefit of ASEAN people**

**An inclusive community that promotes high quality of life, equitable access to opportunities for all, and promotes and protects human rights.**

**A sustainable community that promotes social development and environmental protection**

**A resilient community with enhanced capacity and capability to adapt and respond to social and economic vulnerabilities, disasters, climate change, and other new challenges, and**

**A dynamic and harmonious community that is aware and proud of its identity, culture and heritage.**

But there are risks for the ASEAN vision of human development despite the region's impressive economic growth. The nature of this risk is different than for freedom and human rights: in this case the risk is in losing the political will that makes human development a results-based ethics for all.

We start with human development inclusivity. A 2019 World Bank report concluded that ASEAN is not developing its human potential well:<sup>8</sup>

**The World Bank's Human Capital Index projects that upon adulthood, children born in ASEAN today will be just 59% as productive as they could have been.**

The World Bank's key development indicators are malnutrition, access to quality education and access to health.

- Despite reduction of absolute poverty in ASEAN, stunting afflicts a third of its children caused by poor nutrition for pregnant women, babies and toddlers which later makes them highly prone to lifelong cognitive and physical limitations.

<sup>7</sup> ASEAN website, about ASEAN in the Socio Cultural Community pillar <https://asean.org/our-communities/asean-socio-cultural-community/> retrieved 29 July 2023.

<sup>8</sup> World Bank Feature Story 28 September 2019 "How Countries in Southeast Asia are Working Together to Accelerate Human Capital Development" <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2019/09/28/how-countries-in-southeast-asia-are-working-together-to-accelerate-human-capital-development> retrieved 28 July 2023

- As for education, the World Bank notes that despite ASEAN's progress in increased schooling, education quality is unequal and generates large learning gaps with 21% of children leaving primary school with low reading comprehension skills.
- A third is access to health where the World Bank estimates that 15% of 15-year-olds living today will not reach the age of 60.

What other trends put ASEAN human development ethics at risk? Much of it is captured in one key indicator, rising inequality.

Inequality is not limited to ASEAN's poor Member States, it is a major challenge also for rich ASEAN countries. In a 2023 speech Singapore President Halimah Yacob stated that avoiding entrenched structural inequality is now a top government priority.<sup>9</sup>

***While meritocracy has long been the 'organising principle' of Singapore society, the Government needs to rethink its approach to education and work so that advantages and privileges do not become entrenched and persist over generations.***

ASEAN human development is at risk if wealth continues to concentrate at the top and remain in the hands of the very rich, a phenomenon in all regions except Europe.<sup>10</sup>

ASEAN institutions are fortunately more oriented to shared human development for all. For example, ASEAN institutions agree that access to high quality education should be a shared public good and should not be a driver of inequality as has been the case for American higher education.<sup>11</sup> In 2019 the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO) worked with the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) to declare higher education a human right in order to support economically and socially marginalized adults and children to lift themselves out of poverty and participate fully in their communities.<sup>12</sup>

Declaring something a right does not automatically make it a reality. Nor does access to higher education guarantee quality education. The document therefore makes concrete human development recommendations such as funding students with financial need and setting quotas for students with disabilities, ethnic minorities and immigrants.

9 Website of the President of the Republic of Singapore, Speech by President Halimah Yacob at the Institute of Policy Studies 35th Anniversary Gala Dinner <https://www.istana.gov.sg/Newsroom/Speeches/2023/06/26/Speech-by-President-Halimah-Yacob-at-the-Institute-of-Policy-Studies> retrieved 29 July 2023

10 "Why inequality is growing in the US and around the world" by Fatima Z. Sumar, Executive Director of the Center for International Development, Harvard Kennedy School, published in The Conversation 1 November 2022 <https://theconversation.com/why-inequality-is-growing-in-the-us-and-around-the-world-191642> retrieved 29 July 2023

11 "Cost of College Over Time: Rising Tuition Statistics" by Jessica Bryant 12 January 2023 on the Best Colleges Website <https://www.bestcolleges.com/research/college-costs-over-time/#:~:text=The%20total%20cost%20of%20a,2020%2C%20it%20was%20almost%20%2426%2C000.&text=Across%20all%20types%20of%20schools,times%2C%20between%201963%20and%202020.> Retrieved 30 July 2023

12 Thematic Study on Right to Education: Promoting of Access to Tertiary Education in ASEAN prepared by SEAMEO Regional Centre for Community Education Development Vientiane, August 2019 [https://aichr.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/ASEAN-Thematic-Study-Report-on-the-Right-to-Tertiary-Education\\_Final\\_020819.pdf](https://aichr.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/ASEAN-Thematic-Study-Report-on-the-Right-to-Tertiary-Education_Final_020819.pdf) retrieved 29 July 2023

The other main area where ASEAN could fail in realising human development ethics is the future of work.

First, human development at work is not the same as human resource development. As we saw in the dialogues, they are two distinct concepts that describe different aspects of societal progress and individual well-being. Yet the 2020 ASEAN Declaration on Human Resources Development for the Changing World of Work and Its Roadmap<sup>13</sup> limits human development to skills and capabilities for a digital and green economy. Social progress is defined as better employment opportunities, higher income and economic competitiveness. Inequality is not mentioned at all in the roadmap. Yet the risk of workplace inequality is a major social risk according to a 2019 Asia Development Bank Institute study.<sup>14</sup>

***Growing disparities can entail huge social costs by undermining individuals' education and occupational choices, damaging trust and eroding social cohesion, undermining the quality of governance, and increasing pressure for inefficient populist policies. This is because inequality is frequently associated with rent seeking, which has a corrosive effect on morale, societal solidarity, and fairness.***

The ethics of human development in ASEAN's future workplace needs to include the United Nations goals of enlarging people's freedoms and opportunities, improving their well-being, and enabling them to lead fulfilling lives.

How can ASEAN avoid the risk of losing its human development ethics?

First, ASEAN should embrace the ethics of the "right to develop" as stated in the 2012 ASEAN Human Rights Declaration.

Second, ASEAN should take advantage of work organisations to embed human development ethics. Organisations individualise human development at work through career mobility opportunities, continuous learning and participating in how work is organised. Organisations imbed ethics in organisational culture, codes of conduct and leadership behaviour.

Third, human development at work should be reported and measured as a human net positive result in the work experience using qualitative as well as quantitative indicators. Work is not only measured by economic performance. It is also where aspiration, freedom, fulfilment, opportunity, learning and meaningful contribution can be managed. Negative human development at work can also be measured by discrimination, exclusion, mental distress and repetitive task-based routines.

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13 ASEAN Declaration on Human Resources Development for the Changing World of Work and Its Roadmap 2020 <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/ASEAN-Declaration-on-Human-Resources-Development-for-the-Changing-World-of-Work-and-Its-Roadmap.pdf> retrieved 29 July 2023.

14 Demystifying Rising Inequality in Asia Edited by Bihong Huang, Peter J. Morgan, and Naoyuki Yoshino © 2019 Asian Development Bank Institute <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/ASEAN-Declaration-on-Human-Resources-Development-for-the-Changing-World-of-Work-and-Its-Roadmap.pdf> retrieved 29 July 2023

If human development ethics are preserved in ASEAN, the future of work will be a development experience where people pursue their aspirations and build fulfilling lives in a diverse community, as well as creating world-class economic value.

## Losing sustainability ethics

Sustainability is an emerging ethic but the concept itself is more than 50 years old. The first conference on the environment was convened by the United Nations in Stockholm in 1972 when world leaders discussed how the accelerating growth of the world economy and population was using up resources, polluting the environment and eliminating life systems to the point where they had become unsustainable. The ethical principle of meeting human needs today while maintaining sustainable resources for the human needs of future generations has been discussed and debated since that time.

As everyone knows today, we have not taken sufficient ethical responsibility. As I write this chapter in July 2023, I see on the news that it is the hottest month on the planet since records have been kept and likely the hottest for the past 120,000 years. Estimates for the next 50 years forecast that areas in Southeast Asia, South Asia, Eastern China, the Persian Gulf, the Red Sea and Brazil will become too hot for human habitation.

The reason climate change is at the top of any list of challenges facing humanity is because of global warming and also changes in biodiversity, habitat, precipitation, air quality and many other areas.

ASEAN is also one of the most biodiverse regions on the planet but ASEAN is also one of the regions with the most to lose. Its many islands make sea level change a threat and population concentrations in low-lying areas are prone to droughts, floods, typhoons, and heat waves.

ASEAN's life systems are at risk through overfishing, wildlife poaching, deforestation and loss of wilderness areas.

In our dialogue on biodiversity, Mary Kristerie Baleva of the ASEAN Biodiversity Centre in Philippines pointed out that the well-known ASEAN animals and plants at risk may disappear by our grandchildren's generation. In that same dialogue, Ian Benedict Mia underlined that the region has already lost 95% of its original habitat and ASEAN ecosystems are in steep decline.

What happens if we don't take action? Ethical dissonance allows ASEAN to embrace the need to act and continue to avoid effective action at the regional level. If this continues much of ASEAN's unique resources and economic progress will go into reverse. Moreover, ASEAN's vulnerable populations will be more strongly impacted which leads to greater inequality and potential social conflicts.

This ASEAN ethical dilemma requires a difficult shift in our sense of time for what is urgent. Prioritising the long view of sustainability over the short view of economic growth and political expediency is not psychologically how humans make decisions.

Implementation and enforcement of strong measures at the transboundary, national and local level can no longer be weakened by national indifference and corruption or gaps in investment and compliance.



Figure 1: Emblematic species of Southeast Asia's biodiversity. Source: ASEAN Biodiversity Centre.

Without a change in public awareness and engagement, sustainability initiatives may face popular resistance or support populist politics that denies the urgency to act. As with our two preceding ethical challenges, the most effective action at the ASEAN level is to ensure teaching of sustainability ethics at all levels in national education systems and to work with the private sector to embed sustainability ethics in business culture and management. Both of these institutional partners can collaborate on research and innovation to create new technologies and solutions that can contribute to the region's sustainable development.

Finally, public media can communicate on the threats and promises of sustainability across ASEAN to familiarise the public ASEAN-wide need for conservation of shared ecosystems and regional sustainability initiatives.

## The Possible Existential Loss of ASEAN Ethics

The ultimate loss of ASEAN's ethics, the existential risk, would be war or a "divide and rule" type of recolonisation by external powers.

When I began writing this book, the geopolitical tensions over ASEAN and the South China Sea made this scenario seem possible. The failure of the 2014 student protests in Hong Kong during the "Umbrella Movement" provided a stark warning of how cultural and ethical values can be reversed during a takeover. Still, a crisis scenario seemed remote. But before finishing the book, the 2023 Russian military invasion of Ukraine and the response by NATO made a crisis scenario in ASEAN seem more imaginable.

Loss of ASEAN ethics would be fatal for the ASEAN system. That ethics are something you are willing to fight for is a level of commitment that you would expect from a Nobel Peace Prize winner or a political activist, not of ordinary people who just want to live a decent ethical life.

Given the possibility of an existential loss of ASEAN's core ethics, the dividing line between standing up for ethics versus hoping that ASEAN will continue with "business as usual" is no longer so clear.

# CHAPTER 13

## How to build a positive ethical future for ASEAN

**O**ur conceptual model of five ethical types allows us to understand how different ethical perspectives can come into conflict and create knots in ethical decision-making. In the context of ASEAN, the conflicting priorities of nationalist ethics versus regional ethics have created problems in our ethics of freedom, human rights, democratic governance and a workplace free of protectionism and discrimination.

On the other hand, recognising and balancing different types of ethics has advantages for a diverse region like ASEAN. Recognising ethical types reduces bias in taking a single ethical perspective. Including multiple ethical types ensures stakeholder inputs as well as impact. Integrating different types of ethics is useful for analysing an issue and creating an inclusive and balanced framework to deal with it. Prioritising ethical types untangles conflicting ethical values and leads to robust decision-making. Including ethical types in education courses and ethical training builds critical thinking and mature ethical decision-making.

Ethical diversity and inclusion are an important part of ethical capability in ASEAN. Capability follows a logical chain of steps starting with awareness of an ethical issue, leading to taking ethical action and learning from its results. Here is a simple logical ethical model:<sup>1</sup>

1. becoming aware of ethical implications of an issue and analysing ethical types and stakeholders;
2. organising inclusive discussion of ethical issues from stakeholder perspectives and developing arguments for making an ethical judgment;

<sup>1</sup> Logical chains of ethical action going back in philosophy as far as Aristotle's practical syllogisms. This is an adaptation of the "four components model" developed by University of Minnesota psychologist James Rest. "The Four Components of Acting Morally" by Darcia Narvaez & James Rest in Moral Development: An Introduction published by Allyn & Bacon 1995 pages 385-400. Retrieved 3 August 2023 from the University of Notre Dame electronic reserves [https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Darcia-Narvaez/publication/313099978\\_The\\_four\\_components\\_of\\_acting\\_morally\\_Moral\\_behavior\\_and\\_moral\\_development\\_An\\_introduction/links/6075c2b8299bf1f56d55e854/The-four-components-of-acting-morally-Moral-behavior-and-moral-development-An-introduction.pdf](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Darcia-Narvaez/publication/313099978_The_four_components_of_acting_morally_Moral_behavior_and_moral_development_An_introduction/links/6075c2b8299bf1f56d55e854/The-four-components-of-acting-morally-Moral-behavior-and-moral-development-An-introduction.pdf)

3. agreeing to a common ethical commitment to move forward and organising an effective decision-making process;
4. taking ethical action, managing risks and assessing results for future decisions.

A major conclusion of this book based on our discussion of the evolution of ASEAN ethics and current ethical issues is that we need to accelerate ASEAN ethical capability because of the current context of geopolitical pressures and risks of ethical failure.

In the short term, I believe ASEAN's effort in building capability should be in three ethical areas: (1) capability for implementing regional rules-based and results-based ethics (2) capability for taking concerted action on emerging ethical challenges, and (3) developing ASEAN ethical leadership on the global stage.

## **Implementing regional rules-based and results-based ethics**

ASEAN rules-based institutions are sometimes criticised as being ineffectual because they lack the power to enact and enforce rules-based resolutions and laws, unlike the European Union. But the work of the ASEAN Secretariat and linked agencies shows significant progress in the first two of the four steps to ethical action, notably in raising awareness of ethical implications on issues of priority and developing agreed declarations and roadmaps for making ethical judgements.

A case in point is in the area of freedom and rights. After its inauguration in 2009, the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) proceeded rapidly to reach adoption by Member States of the ASEAN Declaration of Human Rights in 2012. Ethical capability would come from a common ethical commitment to move forward with human rights in national legislation and having mechanisms and resources for human rights enforcement. For example, ASEAN Human Rights article 25b states that "every citizen has the right to vote in periodic and genuine elections, which should be by universal and equal suffrage and by secret ballot, guaranteeing the free expression of the will of the electors, in accordance with national law." If ASEAN had the capability to ensure free and fair elections in its Member States,<sup>2</sup> a more robust rules-based ethics would have avoided issues in a number of recent elections in ASEAN.

Turning to capability in results-based ethics, ASEAN has again made progress through its regional institutions, blueprints and roadmaps. Human development ethics is a case in point. The ASEAN Directorate for Human Development has a broad scope of responsibility including education, youth, sports, health, poverty eradication, gender equality, labour practices and civil service. The Directorate is not funded to carry out activities in all these areas in a diverse region of 666 million inhabitants. Nor would a central directorate with powers to dictate policies and practices in these complex areas be a good idea. Improving

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2 A document by the Asian Network for Free Elections (ANFREL-Foundation) detailed rules-based proposals in a blueprint for the 2009 ASEAN Summit meeting in Cha-am, Thailand for free and fair elections in the ASEAN region. <https://aceproject.org/ero-en/misc/blueprint-for-asean-democracy-anfrel-2009> retrieved 3 August 2023. The 2011 ASEAN Electoral Management Bodies' Forum organised with the Asia and the Pacific International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) was held in Jakarta in 2011 but did not end with an agreement to ensure free and fair elections. <https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/speeches/ASEAN-Election-Management-Bodies-Forum-Inspiring-Credible-ASEAN-Election-Management-Bodies-PDF.pdf> retrieved 3 August 2023

human development capability comes with knowing the results of policies and practices, and this is where the Directorate plays an essential role.

Results-based ethics in human development requires evidence, of which there are different levels. The validity of evidence is generally classified in the following order, from the lowest to the highest quality, according to the methodologies used in the social sciences.<sup>3</sup>

1. the opinions of respected authorities;
2. evidence obtained by single case observations;
3. evidence obtained from historical or geographical comparisons;
4. evidence obtained from cohort studies or controlled case studies;
5. evidence obtained through randomised controlled trials (RCT).

The Covid-19 pandemic was a global experiment in using randomised controlled methods to identify how the virus was communicated, what vaccines worked best and how effective measures such as masks and social-distancing were.

However, the hierarchy of five levels of evidence listed above is not cast in stone. Randomised controlled trials are certainly not the appropriate methodology for gathering evidence on human rights abuses. Another example is genetic engineering, where the opinions of respected authorities were the right evidence for deciding not to clone humans, although for medical genetic engineering in humans randomised controlled trials (RCT) would certainly be used.

Implementing results-based ethics in ASEAN's economic community and socio-cultural community is significantly enhanced by collaboration between ASEAN directorates and research in collaboration with universities, professional groups and civil society organisations.

## Dealing effectively with emerging ethical challenges

The question here is what is effective. ASEAN has tended to be a follower in dealing with emerging ethical issues for two reasons.

First, when it comes to emerging political challenges, the preference for not taking sides and not intervening when understood as the ASEAN way of doing things slows down the process of dealing with an issue. It is like the child at school who hopes that the aggressive behaviour of the class bully will just go away. In some cases that works but in other cases it makes the issue worse. Dealing effectively would mean knowing how to develop ethical arguments on the issue that represent ASEAN's position, agreeing to a commitment and organising an effective decision-making process. It would also include the next step of taking ethical action, managing risks and learning

<sup>3</sup> "Goals of evaluation and types of evidence" by Marielle Berriet-Solliec National Institute of Agronomy, Food and Environment (Agrosup Dijon), France Pierre Labarthe French National Institute for Agricultural Research (INRA), France Catherine Laurent French National Institute for Agricultural Research (INRA), France, published in *Evaluation* 2014, Vol. 20(2) 195 -213 [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/278409063\\_Goals\\_of\\_evaluation\\_and\\_types\\_of\\_evidence](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/278409063_Goals_of_evaluation_and_types_of_evidence) retrieved 5 August 2023

from the results for making future decisions. Why this is a priority today stems from the fast-moving political and economic shifts in the world around ASEAN.

The second cause of poor effectiveness stems from ASEAN's historic position as a follower in scientific research and new technologies. ASEAN has not been a leader in physics, genetics and other scientific areas requiring heavy investment in research facilities and large numbers of top scientists. In technology, ASEAN has not been a player in computer sciences, space technologies or electric vehicles. For these reasons it has been natural to follow what the leaders are doing when it comes to issues like human cloning or data privacy.

That situation is changing rapidly as the quality of science and technology improves in ASEAN to world-class levels. In the areas of sustainability and biodiversity what ASEAN does or does not do to preserve its life systems, slow carbon emissions and curb waste and pollution has consequences for the rest of the world. Dealing with these issues is difficult enough for a national government which has its own infrastructure for policies, public debate, legislation and enforcement. For ASEAN which has to coordinate the response of ten countries, ramping up effectiveness is a challenge in itself.

In Part Two of this book, the discussion of ethical issues in technology, sustainability, business, work and human development has shown that ASEAN is doing its job to create awareness and organise ethical discussion. A renewed focus on processes to reach common ethical commitments and decision-making process and action is where the opportunity lies.

To take an example, the speed of innovation and applications in artificial intelligence throws up new ethical dilemmas almost every day including bias, automated decisions and most recently lethal autonomous weapons or "killer robots." Existing ASEAN coordinating organisations are too slow for studying these new issues, developing new ethical arguments, discussing early actions to take and enforcing policies and regulations on a regional scale. New platforms and processes are needed.

Not all emerging ethical issues develop fast. The growth of inequality in ASEAN does not require setting up a war room to track new issues day by day. Effectiveness here is not speed but setting up an ethical framework to track the growth in inequality, the effects of inequality on society in ASEAN, formulating ethical arguments for policies to counteract inequality, and getting commitment to take action across ASEAN's Member States.

## Developing the next generation of ASEAN ethical leaders

I leave for the end what is the best assurance that ASEAN ethics will continue to develop in the next generation and beyond – leadership. Capability and institutions are certainly needed. But they can all be undone if the next generation of leaders fails to take responsibility for positive ethical outcomes for ASEAN.

In Part One, we saw how in ASEAN's early leaders played an essential role in ethics. The best known still today are founders of the new nations of Southeast Asia. There are also the founders of ASEAN itself.

Other Southeast Asians have been ethical leaders on the global stage. The best known during that period is U Thant of Myanmar, the third secretary-general of the United



Nations who held office for a record two terms. In the turbulent world of the 1960s Thant facilitated negotiations to defuse the Cuban Missile Crisis, helped end the Arab-Israeli Six Day War and worked to end the Vietnam War, even publicly criticising American unethical conduct.

Ethical leadership in the early ASEAN period is not limited to politicians. It also includes cultural leaders. One of the most important is Pramoedya Ananta Toer, the Indonesian novelist who wrote his Buru Quartet while imprisoned under Suharto on the island of Buru. Thanks to the that epic novel of conscience, which was banned in Indonesia until recently, Toer remained Southeast Asia's author most often considered for the Nobel Prize in Literature until his death in 2006. Ethical leaders from that period with careers in academia, religion, business and civil society are too numerous to mention.

My point is that ASEAN's next generation of leaders are standing on the shoulders of giants, as the expression goes. These men and women went beyond the confines of their nation and profession to embrace a broader vision and scope of action. What can we say about the next generation of leaders?

With ASEAN's growing importance in the world, ethical leaders will have ASEAN as their ethical foundation on the world stage. It is no longer an aspiration although it is still a work in progress. There are three reasons to be hopeful that ASEAN will produce a truly world-class generation of ethical leaders in government, academia, religion, business and civil society. First, ASEAN has more university students today as a percentage of the ASEAN population and many of them will have studied and worked across ASEAN.<sup>4</sup> Their ethics will be better informed and more cosmopolitan. Second, as today's student leaders show, the next generation will communicate across borders on social media platforms and will be media savvy about bias and hate, falsification of facts and manipulation of social values. As we saw in Part Two youth are aware and they want to take ethical action. Remember that a third of ASEAN's population is under the age of 20! Third, as these youth enter the workforce, they will experience the rise in ethics in companies and professions that we described in the dialogues, which means that leaders in organisations will be trained and have codes of conduct in ethics.

Already today, we can see the shift towards rules-based ethics. In the ISEAS 2023 "State of Southeast Asia" survey, in answer to the question "Who do you have the most confidence in to provide leadership to maintain the rules-based order and uphold international law?" the rank of ASEAN increased from 16.8% in 2022 to 21% in 2023, in third position after the USA and Europe.

While demographics and value trends are favourable, it is impossible to be really sure of ASEAN's ethical future. Uncertainty is higher today than at any time in ASEAN's history. In 2020 the International Monetary Fund created the first "uncertainty index" and tracked uncertainty back through the previous 60 years of economic and political change by using text analysis and other methods.<sup>5</sup>

4 State of Higher Education in Southeast Asia 2023 SHARE EU Support to Higher Education in the ASEAN Region, Project Management Office Report <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/HE-in-SEA-FINAL.pdf>  
Retrieved 7 August 2023

5 60 years of Uncertainty by Hites Ahir, Nicholas Bloom and Davide Furceri, published March 2020 by the International Monetary Fund <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/fandd/issues/2020/03/imf-launches-world-uncertainty-index-wui-furceri> retrieved 8 August 2023.

Two findings are relevant to ASEAN's ethical future. First, the IMF index shows that global uncertainty, as measured in 143 countries, is the highest in 60 years. This means we are at the peak of unpredictability since the start of ASEAN.

Second, the study shows that as political systems move from autocracy, or a mix of autocracy and democracy (anocracy), towards full democracy there is a U-shaped evolution of uncertainty. In the first phase, uncertainty increases. But in the second phase as countries move from partial democracy to full democracy uncertainty decreases. The shifting politics in many ASEAN countries show how uncertainty is affecting what types of ethics predominate.

In short, ASEAN's ethical future seems to be heading in a more mature direction but there is great uncertainty within and outside ASEAN that affects the feeling that we are moving in the right direction. Given this situation, the greatest guarantee against the risks we saw in the previous chapter is the ethical quality and commitment of ASEAN's future leaders.

In this book we have seen dozens of ASEAN's contemporary and future leaders talk about the region's ethical issues. Our panellists are aware, informed, capable and engaged. The institutions and organisations they represent provide knowledge, guidance and processes for ethical capability, notably for rules-based, results-based and emerging ethics. Many of those institutions and organisations, and especially the ASEAN University Network, are hard at work developing ethical leaders who can define their own ethics while preparing for careers in which they will lead others.

The purpose of this book has been to contribute a missing element, perhaps the most important piece of the ethical puzzle of ASEAN which is an overview of ethics specific to ASEAN. My hope is that, imperfect as this book is, it will serve as a reference for today's and tomorrow's leaders, experts and students in their work on ethics. I also hope that the book will inspire writers, academics and thought leaders to do a better job in exploring ASEAN's ethics in theory and in practice.





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