



Movement for Alternatives and Solidarity in Southeast Asia

6th Southeast Asian Conference on Alternatives November 11-13, 2025 Siem Reap, Cambodia

Rationale

In recent years, Southeast Asia has experienced significant shrinking of civic space at the national and regional level. The loudest response of the national government for ensuring security of its peoples against the real experience of COVID-19 has obscured the lines of recovery with governmentality. Restrictive forms of governance had removed control from the people and fostered a mutual codependency. Meanwhile, communities have realized early on that sustainability must rise above through collective action. During the crises, communities were engaged in initiatives at the grassroots level - new forms of alternatives sought to redress roots of lack of support and communication from the national government. Eventually, these popular initiatives tested and refined were being adopted and institutionalized at the local level wherein direct forms of governance and participation are openly accessible and within reach.

The Movement for Alternatives and Solidarity in Southeast Asia grounds itself within the social fabric of grassroots organizations and peoples' association with the support of regional civil society organizations to lead a people-led regional integration. In contrast with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) which has grown into a body driven by elite consensus and monied interest rather than the needs and aspirations of the region's people, especially the marginalized. To be able to realize the vision, MASSA must develop a praxis in contrast to the limitations of the ASEAN model, wherein instead of being primarily state-led acting on behalf of corporate interest and security, an alternative regional network must be rooted in the praxis and aspirations of grassroots and marginalized communities.

The Southeast Asian Conference on Alternatives

This limitation of state-based regionalism has necessitated alternative spaces for engagement and moreso - solidarity. The Southeast Asian Conference on Alternatives is the annual regional gathering of people's organizations (POs), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), scholar-activists and grassroots organic intellectuals from various social movements in the region of Southeast Asia. The conference has taken off from the call-for-action from the ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ASEAN Peoples' Forum (ACSC/APF)¹ 2017 to adopt a new modality "for engagement by civil society with ASEAN based on greater people-to-people interactions" that will "establish a new type of regional integration" - that is grounded on the alternative practices of marginalized peoples' in the region and that is based on the principle of solidarity.

¹ The ACSC/APF is a platform for Southeast Asian civil society to engage with ASEAN and its member states in order to bring attention to the issues and concerns of the marginalized peoples of the region - in the hopes that this will result in meaningful reforms that will bring about substantial progress.



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The track record of the Alternatives Movement

From 2018 to 2023, the conference has served as an alternative platform for over 135 POs, NGOs, and grassroots activists development practitioners to share their alternative development practices, learn from exchanges among practitioners, and strengthen solidarity based on commonality of values and shared interest for social change. Through the continuous exchange and need for an organization that shall carry on the mandate of weaving a network of organizations engaged in alternatives and committed to an alternative regional integration, the Movement for Alternatives and Solidarity in Southeast Asia (MASSA) was formed by a steering committee of 17 organizations from across Southeast Asia in 2022.

By 2024, the conference from being a platform of sharing knowledge and practices was re-designed into a general assembly to collectively define the processes for the operations of a regional network; and to discuss the pressing and substantial issues in the region which the said network needs to navigate and adapt to. This conference was hosted and held in one of the communities organized by the Pasundan Peasant Union (Serikat Petani Pasundan) in West Java, Indonesia.

This year the conference is poised to take place in Siem Reap, Cambodia with one of the MASSA member organizations, Gender and Development for Cambodia, leading the organizing team. In the context of continuously growing restrictions and political repression faced by civil society across Southeast Asia, convening the conference in Cambodia - one of the countries in the region that has experienced a significant erosion of democratic space - constitutes a powerful affirmation of grassroots solidarity - to challenge dominant political and economic structures both at the national and regional levels.

Objectives

1. To ensure the active engagement of MASSA members and introduce new partners to the conference;
2. To facilitate the discussion of relevant regional issues that broadly affects the organizations membership and grassroots communities; and
3. To clarify and strengthen MASSA as a regional network through the process of organizational development (OD) which is a planned, holistic approach to improving the effectiveness and health of an organization - wherein issues are resolved, leadership and membership is clarified, processes and strategies are aligned with objectives.

Program



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The initial design for the 6th conference will build on what has already been discussed and documented from the conference held last year while aspiring towards a more proactive regional network that reify the political, social, economic, and cultural alternatives. The program presented below presents the initial design of how the conference will take shape this year.

Indicative Program for the 6th Southeast Asian Conference on Alternatives
Day 1
Grounding: Setting intentions for the conference
Review of the initial organizational assessment (OA) findings during the 5th Southeast Asian Conference on Alternatives; Continuation of the collective process of OA (wherein strengths and weaknesses of how MASSA currently functions as a regional network) and finalization of OA findings
Forming of recommendations to address urgent matters in order to improve MASSA's organizational health
Solidarity night
Day 2
Discussion on Cambodia situation (why the conference is taking place here) and relevant regional issues that broadly affects the organizations membership and grassroots communities
Planning to address urgent matters raised during the OA findings (i.e. Vision, Mission, and Goals, Organizational structure, Funding for activities, etc.)
Day 3
Updating on the planned undertakings under the regional network's major project, the MASSA Activist School