

ILO-ASEAN Trade Union Council Seminar on Regional Integration
15-17 December 2009 Bangkok, Thailand

Concept Note (draft)

ASEAN as a regional grouping of 10 countries in the East Asia region is fast developing into a strong sub regional economic and political block. In order to strengthen economic and political cooperation it has developed a number of policies including favourable schemes export-import tariffs and relaxed visa requirements for travel within the block.

It has extended its cooperation with “ASEAN plus 3” concept that include India, Japan and China as trading partners and they participate in all ASEAN meetings. ASEAN has developed cooperation with the European Union resulting in greater trading between the two blocks and also it holds annual meetings between the two groupings.

In the past 5 years there has been increased cooperation between the ILO and ASEAN resulting in a number of joint programmes and projects implemented between the ILO and the ASEAN Secretariat. Some of the major issues in this regard include promotion of good industrial relations, better cooperation on migration policies within the region, prevention and awareness campaigns on HIV and AIDS, education and awareness on Occupational Safety and Health issues.

The trade unions in the region have established a counter part organisation – ASEAN Trade Union Council (ATUC) in order to have greater engagement with and access to influence policies of ASEAN. ATUC has begun to have greater involvement in ILO ASEAN joint programmes. This has led to some degree of regional integration and this is a welcome development. However ATUC still has not achieved any formal recognition by the ASEAN whereas the employer organisation in the sub region participates as observer in discussions on business matters.

There is much progress made by many of the ASEAN member countries in terms of economic development. At the same time the abuse of trade union rights, harassment of and violation against trade unionists, abuse of migrant workers, labour laws that are not favourable to organise workers and form trade unions are some major trade union and human rights issues in the region that need attention. The establishment of ATUC and its working together with the ITUC AP has focused on addressing some of these issues. Its members look forward to assistance and guidance on the regional issues. However an effective ATUC needs a stronger administrative structure, capacity to do research and respond to policies of ASEAN and greater solidarity amongst its members.

The overall objective of the seminar is the establishment of a strengthened and effective sub regional trade union organisation. The seminar will particularly focus on:

Strengthening ATUC participation and involvement in ILO ASEAN programmes

Measures to strengthen ATUC structures for it to have an effective participation and engagement with ASEAN

Discussion with ASEAN Secretary General on ASEAN ATUC relations

Joint planning on ILO-ATUC-ITUC AP cooperation

Participation:

Two senior leaders from the 10 ASEAN member country trade unions

Observer participation by representatives of GUFs

ILO project staff