

In the midst of the proposed regional integration, ASEAN—the organisation and the region— is facing one of its greatest challenges so far. While the ASEAN governments are hoping for an integration that is merely economic in nature, the civil society is hoping for a regional solidarity that will address the current threats to democracy, citizenship, and human rights.

We feature the speech of Josefa “Gigi” Francisco, which closed the 2nd ASEAN Civil Society Conference (ACSC), in this issue’s editorial because it captures the sentiments of the civil society in the region as we continue to hope and demand for an alternative ASEAN, by and for the people.

“This gathering has not just been spectacular because the number of those who participated superseded the organiser’s own expectations but is, I believe, also momentous for several reasons.

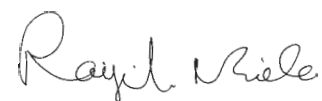
I would like to think that we helped create a political storm that forced the Philippine government to momentarily retreat from holding the ASEAN Summit. Indeed this must be seen by all as a result of our real, protracted, and even imagined political force as civil society organisations and social movements in the region that are here to balance out/resist the power of elite-led Asian states and markets.

I would also like to think that this 2nd ACSC has served as a space for several parallel as well as intersecting intra-societal, inter-movement, and inter-ideology conversations, to take place at a critical moment when ASEAN states are about to sign on to a framework for regional integration. Some of these conversations have been relatively smooth while others have been more difficult and may have sparked provocations and reactions. But for me what is important is that we talked and we are talking to each other and we successfully launched a politically colorful progressive space for CSOs, NGOs and social movements.

Finally, I would like to think that this second ACSC space has brought a lot more activist groups and women and men to realise that we are transnational actors/subjects in struggles that are lending solidarities to one another but are at the same time contesting each other from our diverse social interests, cultural locations and political perspectives. I have much hope that we will take this process forward in ways that are increasingly inclusive and democratic. While it is no less difficult, I hope that we may be able to reach more convergences and temporal unities that strengthen not just our individual organisations but also the people’s alternative agenda for ASEAN regionalism and regional projects.

Let us meet once again in the next ASEAN summit wherever and whenever it is to take place. I also want to invite all of you to the Solidarity for Asian’s People Advocacy (SAPA) General Forum in Bangkok on February 5-6, 2007.

Finally, to one and all, my warmest congratulations, my deepest respect, my genuine hopefulness and in behalf of all of the organisers—local Cebu and Philippine hosts and the regional convenors—OUR HEARTFELT THANK YOU and APPRECIATION! *Mabubay Kayo! (Long may you live!)*”



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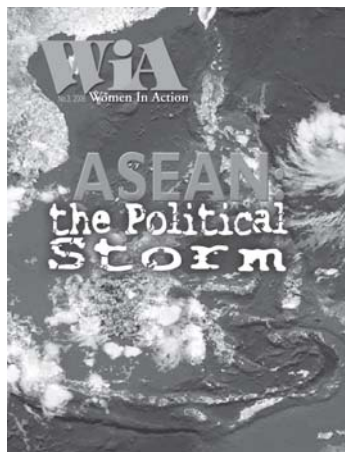
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OnTheCover

The “political storm” is how Gigi Francisco described ASEAN’s civil society as it challenges, now more than ever, the region’s governments and their notion of regionalism, democracy, and citizenship.

Cover Art: Jim Marpa