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Youths ask for Asem report card

Asian and European young people yesterday called on leaders attending October's fifth Asia-Europe Meeting (Asem) summit to set quantifiable ways of gauging their progress in pursuing sustainable development.

"We believe that it is crucial for Asem governments to develop their own quantifiable national sustainable development indicators, and make them publicly available," the youths said in a statement released at the closing ceremony of their three-day meeting in Hanoi.

Zainal A Mantaha, director of the People-to-People exchange programme of the Asia-Europe Foundation, said this was an important recommendation because governments seem to lack benchmarks to gauge their achievements on the issue.

Sixty-three young people from 23 countries gathered for the "Asem Youth Dialogue on Sustainable Development" in Hanoi to formulate recommendations for leaders of Asem.

Mantaha said these would be the only proposals submitted directly to the leaders.

The discussion touched upon a variety of topics, including poverty eradication or reduction, education, gas emission and fair trade policies.

In the six-page statement, the youths called on governments to establish national councils to streamline their efforts to achieve sustainable development, force polluters to pay, enhance the transfer of clean technology and reinforce the implementation of existing environmental laws.

Vietnam Deputy Prime Minister Vu Khoan stressed the importance of the youths' contributions to the Asem process and pledged to convey the statement to leaders during the Asem 5 Summit in Hanoi in October. Joy J Cabonegro, a Filipino youth representative, expressed hope that host Hanoi must push the youth agenda.

Rungrawee C Pinyorat

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HANOI



(c) Nation Multimedia Group
44 Moo 10 Bang Na-Trat KM 4.5, Bang Na district,
Bangkok 10260 Thailand
Tel 66-2-317-0420 and 66-2-316-5900; Fax 66-2-317-2071
Contact us: [Nation Internet](#)