



THE INFORMAL ASEM SEMINAR on Human Rights

OVERVIEW





About the Informal Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) Seminar on Human Rights

The Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM)¹ is an intergovernmental forum for dialogue and cooperation established in 1996 to deepen relations between Asia and Europe, which addresses political, economic and socio-cultural issues of common concern.

On the occasion of the 1st ASEM Foreign Ministers' Meeting (ASEM FMM1) in 1997, Sweden and France suggested that informal seminars on human rights be held within the ASEM framework. The Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs joined the Seminar series as a co-organiser in 2011; the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs in 2016 and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Democratic Republic of China in 2019.

The aim of this initiative is to promote mutual understanding and co-operation between Asia and Europe in the area of political dialogue, particularly on human rights issues.

Seminar Topics

- ▶ *Access to Justice; Regional & National Particularities in the Administration of Justice; Monitoring the Administration of Justice (December 1997, Lund, Sweden)*
- ▶ *Differences in Asian & European Values; Rights to Education; Rights of Minorities (June 1999, Beijing, China)*
- ▶ *Freedom of Expression & Right to Information; Humanitarian Intervention & the Sovereignty of States; Is there a Right to a Healthy Environment? (June 2000, Paris, France)*
- ▶ *Freedom of Conscience & Religion; Democratisation, Conflict Resolution & Human Rights; Rights & Obligations in the Promotion of Social Welfare (July 2001, Bali, Indonesia)*
- ▶ *Economic Relations; Rights of Multinational Companies & Foreign Direct Investments (May 2003, Lund, Sweden)*
- ▶ *International Migrations; Protection of Migrants, Migration Control & Management (September 2004, Suzhou, China)*
- ▶ *Human Rights & Ethnic, Linguistic & Religious Minorities (February 2006, Budapest, Hungary)*
- ▶ *Human Rights & Freedom of Expression (September 2007, Siem Reap, Cambodia)*
- ▶ *Human Rights in Criminal Justice Systems (February 2009, Strasbourg, France)*
- ▶ *Human Rights & Gender Equality (July 2010, Manila, Philippines)*
- ▶ *National & Regional Human Rights Mechanisms (November 2011, Prague, Czech Republic)*
- ▶ *Human Rights & Information & Communication Technologies (June 2012, Seoul, Korea)*
- ▶ *Human Rights & the Environment (October 2013, Copenhagen, Denmark)*
- ▶ *Human Rights & Businesses (November 2014, Hanoi, Viet Nam)*
- ▶ *Human Rights & Trafficking in Persons (November 2015, Montreux, Switzerland)*
- ▶ *Persons with Disabilities & Human Rights (November 2016, Beijing, China)*
- ▶ *Human Rights & Children (November 2017, Sofia, Bulgaria)*
- ▶ *Human Rights & Prevention of Violent Extremism (November 2018, Yogyakarta, Indonesia)*
- ▶ *Human Rights Education & Training (November 2019, Tromsø, Norway)*
- ▶ *Human Rights of Older Persons (February 2021, Online/ Seoul, Korea)*
- ▶ *Human Rights & Climate Change (March 2022, Online/ Luxembourg)*
- ▶ *Human Rights & Poverty Reduction (2023)*

1 ASEM brings together 53 Partners: Australia, Austria, Bangladesh, Belgium, Brunei Darussalam, Bulgaria, Cambodia, China, Croatia, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Kazakhstan, Korea, the Lao PDR, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Malta, Mongolia, Myanmar, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Pakistan, the Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Romania, the Russian Federation, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Thailand, the United Kingdom, and Viet Nam plus the ASEAN Secretariat and the European Union.



The following formula is employed:



The participation of civil society representatives (invited by the organisers) and official nominees from each of the ASEM countries



The participation of one representative each from the European Union and the ASEAN Secretariat



An agenda structured around the main topics related to the subject of the Seminar, with discussions held in closed-door working groups to allow free and direct exchange of views



An independent background paper prepared by the main rapporteurs and commissioned by the organisers. The background paper addresses the key questions and core issues of the Seminar topic so as to meet the information requirements for the diverse set of participants



A set of recommendations elaborated collectively to be sent to the relevant institutions in ASEM countries as informal contributions to the official Asia-Europe dialogue

The experience of the Seminars convened thus far have shown the usefulness of the chosen formula: a climate of confidence and mutual understanding, in accordance with the ASEM spirit, has grown stronger during this process since 1997; the topics selected by the Steering Committee, which focus on issues of common interest to the two regions, have made high-quality discussions possible; the high level of participation of the ASEM partners shows the strong interest of the partners for these meetings.





Organisation

The Seminar series is co-organised by the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF), the Raoul Wallenberg Institute (nominated by the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs), the French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, the Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs, the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China. ASEF has acted as the Secretariat of the Seminar since 2000.

Supervision of the Seminar is entrusted to a Steering Committee, composed of the Seminar's 6 co-organisers as well as representatives of Indonesia and of the European Union.

After each conference, the outcomes of the discussions are gathered in a publication that may be used by governments and civil society as a reference on the state of play of the debate on human rights in ASEM countries. All publications can be downloaded from www.ASEF.org.

Contact us at humanrights.seminar@asef.org