

The Extents and Limits of ASEAN's Adoption of Women, Peace and Security Agenda

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Introduction

The ten member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)¹ have pledged their commitment to advancing women's rights through several declarations. Such commitment can be found in the 1988 Declaration of the Advancement of Women in the ASEAN Region; the 2004 Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women in the ASEAN Region; the 2010 Ha Noi Declaration on the Enhancement of the Welfare and Development of ASEAN Women and Children; the 2012 ASEAN Human Rights Declaration; the 2013 Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women and Elimination of Violence Against Children; the 2015 ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on the Elimination of Violence Against Women and ASEAN Community Vision 2025, including within ASEAN Political-Security (APSC) Blueprint 2025. To act on these statements, ASEAN established the implementing bodies of the ASEAN Committee on Women in 2002 and

1 Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam.

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the ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Women and Children in 2009. The foci of ASEAN commitments are mostly on women's economic empowerment and the elimination of violence against women. Less focus is given to furthering women's involvement in the creation and maintenance of peace, even less for them to be involved in the field of security.

The lack of interest and commitment to include women in peace and security efforts and policy decision-making in ASEAN is unfortunate because sustainable peace and security can only be achieved by all stakeholders' direct efforts to improve and maintain the security of all, including women. Internationally, the concern of involving women, not only in the development agenda through economic empowerment, but also in conflict, security and peace as an empowered subject -- not only casualties, refugees and survivors -- has already been acknowledged by the 1995 Beijing Platform of Action and the 2000 UNSC Resolution No. 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. However, at the time when such international goals and resolution was offered to become a national and regional approach, ASEAN did not show its eagerness to espouse them. Admittedly, international norms need time to be processed and acknowledged, as well as the presence of active norms entrepreneurs for it to be accepted regionally and nationally.² The question arises for ASEAN, why did it take seventeen years after the adoption of UNSC Resolution 1325 for the ASEAN region to finally issued a Joint Statement on Promoting Women, Peace and Security in ASEAN in 2017, and another year to come with an ASEAN Women Peace Registry (AWPR) where women working in peacebuilding and conflict resolution can be acknowledged? Why does ASEAN need gradual convincing to see the need and value in involving women in peace and security -- not only in socio-cultural and economy? This article begins with an overview on the conception of Women, Peace and Security, followed by the progress of ASEAN's WPS agenda adoption as well as its near future trajectory. This writing analyzed the delay in WPS adoption by ASEAN and argued that it is caused by member states' diverse norms and acceptance of women empowerment, as well as the penchant for non-binding commitments. Lastly, this article concludes by providing policy suggestions on furthering WPS agenda adoption by the regional organization.

2 Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, "International Norm Dynamics and Political Change," *International Organization*, Vol. 52, No. 4, 1998, pp. 887-917.

Global Conception

Global commitments for women's human rights and recognition of their dignity and equality have been made for more than four decades. In June 1975, the First World Conference on the Status of Women in Mexico City arrived to the recognition that women should be viewed as part of the process to develop and implement policy, rather than what has been previously only positioned as recipients of assistance. The outcome of the Conference that was a global commitment for United Nations Decade for Women (1975-1985) and follow-up meetings to evaluate the progress that had been made to eliminate discrimination against women, which successfully pushed for the adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women in 1979. Yet progress remains slow and there was a need for a progressive blueprint with indicated goals, as well as a pathway for advancing women's rights. At the end of the Fourth World Conference on Women, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action³ was produced as a source of guidance to enable the realization of rights of women and girls. One of the 12 critical points of this Platform is "Women and Armed Conflict" where it discusses the violation of human rights in the situation of armed conflict and military occupation with disproportionately and differently affect women and girls, using sexual violence as a method of persecution to intimidate particular ethnic, cultural or religious minority groups. The Platform that was produced in 1995 already argued for women's increased role in conflict resolution, peacekeeping, as well as defense and foreign affairs, noting that they were still under-represented in decision-making processes.

In 2000, five years after the Beijing Platform was adopted, the UN Security Council (UNSC) adopted Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security⁴ as the first recognition by a global body that deals with security affairs of the prevalence of violence against women perpetrated by parties involved in a conflict, as well as the lack of efforts to recognize and empower women as part of conflict resolution and maintenance of peace. The UNSC Resolution 1325 has become the referred obligation of states and other state groupings, including regional and international organizations, to address women's rights to peace and security.

3 United Nations, *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action: Beijing+5 Political Declaration and Outcome*, (New York: UN Women, 2014).

4 United Nations Security Council (UNSC), "Resolution 1325", *S/Res/Res/1325*, 31 October 2000.

The Resolution is considered pioneering as it is the first to express commitment in establishing mechanisms to enable women's meaningful participation in the field of peace and security.⁵ The resolution pursues that global peace and security could be achieved with real efforts to improve and preserve women's security, as well as engagement and inclusion of women in all peace and security efforts including in conflict prevention, conflict resolution, peacekeeping, peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction.⁶ With that statement, there is a global recognition and commitment that until the women's rights to peace and security is fulfilled, there will not be inclusive and sustainable peace. The UNSC Resolution 1325 push forward the Women, Peace and Security agenda that contains four pillars of (1) prevention, (2) protection, (3) participation, as well as (4) relief and recovery. With the mandate of UNSC Resolution 1325 and other subsequent fourteen resolutions until the time this article is written,⁷ the UN Secretary General issued an annual report on the implementation of the WPS agenda, including commitment and implementation by states and regional organizations.

The mechanism of WPS reporting is supported by countries or groups of countries adopting the agenda through their National Action Plan or Regional Plan. The plans detail the considered areas of importance, a period of intervention, and – to an extend – funding commitment. Until January 2020, there are 83 countries that have adopted the National Action Plan on WPS.⁸ Meanwhile, the region that is relatively advanced in its commitment to WPS is the European Union that includes the agenda within its Strategic Approach through its Common Foreign and Security Policy with steps taken since as early as 2006. Other pan-European

5 Laura J. Shepherd, "Sex, Security and Superhero(in)es: From 1325 to 1820 and Beyond." *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 13 (4), 2011, pp. 504–521 and Sara E. Davies, Kimberly Nackers and Sarah Teitt, "Women, Peace and Security as an ASEAN priority", *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 68 (3), 2014, pp. 333–355.

6 Definition of sustainable or sustaining peace is based on the Report of the Advisory Group of Experts on the Review of the Peacebuilding Architecture, Challenge of Sustaining Peace (A/69/968 - S/2015/490) and it is "broadly understood as a goal and a process to build a common vision of a society, ensuring that the needs of all segments of the population are taken into account, which encompasses activities aimed at preventing the outbreak, escalation, continuation and recurrence of conflict, addressing root causes, assisting parties to conflict to end hostilities, ensuring national reconciliation, and moving towards recovery, reconstruction and development, and emphasizing that sustaining peace is a shared task and responsibility that needs to be fulfilled by the government and all other national stakeholders".

7 To see the list of UNSC resolution on Women, Peace and Security please visit https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/un_documents_type/security-council-resolutions/?ctype=Women%2C%20Peace%20and%20Security&cbtype=women-peace-and-security accessed 1 March 2020.

8 To see the list of countries adopted UNSC Resolution 1325 by producing National Action Plan please visit <http://www.peacewomen.org/member-states> accessed 1 March 2020.

institutions, such as North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and its partner, Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC) and Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) have similarly taken the WPS agenda on board, making the integration of women a part of security creation in the region since 2008. Other regions are also taking on the WPS agenda, the Pacific Islands Forum and Arab League have espoused the agenda since 2012, while the African Union since 2014 has appointed a special envoy on Women, Peace and Security. Criticism was directed to South Asia and Southeast Asia as the regions that lagged behind in their adoption of the WPS agenda.⁹ As this paper is concerned with the regional organization of ASEAN, it limits the scope of its study to the extents and limits of Southeast Asian countries' adoption of the WPS agenda, and to how the implementation of the agenda can be improved.

ASEAN-ization of Women, Peace and Security

ASEAN has been applauded for its success in facilitating and maintaining peace across the Southeast Asian region. Its efforts have focused on discreet diplomacy and peace-through-development. Beginning in 1967 and conducted by regional middle powers, this quiet diplomacy and development-first approach was considered relatively effective in keeping the region peaceful, although it was feeling the direct impact of Cold War conflicts through the 1960s *Konfrontasi* War between Malaysia and Indonesia to the 1950-1980s Indochina Wars.¹⁰ The ASEAN success is often attributed to its ability to sustain over five decades of regional peace, despite the ten member states still have many unresolved issues and territorial tension between themselves, as well as with other countries in the region.¹¹ This success of ASEAN in maintaining the big picture of regional peace comes with a cost of side-lining issues of contention, for example, environmental concern, such as haze; trafficking of people, including women and children; as well as keeping silent on internal conflict or domestic politics, such as the flight of Rohingya in

9 Sara E. Davies, Kimberly Nackers and Sarah Teitt, *Op. Cit.*

10 Timo Kivimäki, East Asian relative peace and the ASEAN Way, *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, Volume 11, Issue 1, January 2011, pp. 57–85, <https://doi.org/10.1093/irap/lcq016>.

11 The ASEAN member states are Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam. See, Alfred Gerstl and Maria Straskova (eds.), *Unresolved Border, Land and Maritime Disputes in Southeast Asia*, (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2016) and Associated Press, “ASEAN meeting grapples with trade war, territorial disputes”, *CNBC*, 2 November 2019.

Myanmar and unfulfilled indigenous and/or minority rights in Indonesia, Malaysia, Lao, the Philippines, Thailand and Viet Nam. The modalities of ASEAN sustaining peace and managing conflict lies in the norms of seeking agreement and harmony. Those norms include, but are not limited to, having sensitivity, politeness, non-confrontation and agreeability, as well as conducting quiet, private and elitist diplomacy rather than airing public discontent, combined with non-legalistic and non-violent approaches to conflict.¹² The formalization of these norms can be found in the four basic principles of the ASEAN Treaty of Amity and Cooperation: respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all nations; non-interference in the internal affairs of one another; settlement of disputes by peaceful means; and renunciation of the threat or use of force.

The particular norms and principles of engagement in the Southeast Asian region are commonly known as the ASEAN way. The ASEAN way, especially on non-interference, is even noted as the “ASEAN’s collective identity” and “the major factor in sustaining [regional] solidarity,” which make it as the foundation stone of the Association.¹³ The ASEAN way enables members of the organization to deal with their internal problem themselves for “face-saving” – a common gesture in the Asian culture of preserving one’s reputation or dignity,¹⁴ even if it means allowing the states neglect the rights and security of minorities in the society, including women. Such practices have resulted in a lack of joint efforts in protecting women of Southeast Asia, especially the protection of human rights of women and girls in conflict- and post-conflict-affected areas. Key issues include addressing social injustices that may lead to conflict; and other cross-cutting issues of concern for the region’s women’s rights agenda: unsafe migration, human trafficking, gender-based violence both in public and private, lack of women’s health standards, unguaranteed women’s property rights, female refugees and internally displaced persons, inadequate support for women involved in the security and peace sectors,

12 Hadi Soesastro (ed.), *ASEAN in a Changed Regional and International Political Economy*, (Jakarta: Centre for Strategic and International Studies, 1995), pp. iii-ix.

13 Jürgen Rüländ, “ASEAN and the Asian crisis: theoretical implications and practical consequences for Southeast Asian regionalism,” *The Pacific Review*, Vol. 13 No. 3, 2000, p. 439 and Herman Joseph S. Kraft, “ASEAN and intra-ASEAN relations: weathering the storm?” *The Pacific Review*, Vol. 13 No. 3, 2000, p. 462.

14 See, for example, Deepak Nair, “Saving Face in Diplomacy: A Political Sociology of Face-to-Face Interactions in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations”, *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 25, No. 3, September 2019, pp. 672–97. doi:10.1177/1354066118822117 and N. Ganesan, “Thai-Myanmar-ASEAN Relations: The Politics of Face and Grace”, *Asian Affairs: An American Review*, Vol. 33, No. 3, 2006, pp. 131-149, DOI: 10.3200/AAFS.33.3.131-149.

as well as the rise of violent extremism that involve the participation of women and girls.¹⁵ This is arguable because, in the context of ASEAN, women's issues are historically framed through an economic development approach, as if welfare becomes the panacea and all concerns regarding women's human rights will automatically be fulfilled when Southeast Asian people reach a certain level of prosperity.

Historically, ASEAN interaction was formed through elitist diplomacy, with the Association's strength as a convening power of small states grouping in the Cold War era, and this shaped its engagement on gender issues. The first ASEAN Women Leaders' Conference was convened in 1975, which compelled the creation of Sub-Committee on Women a year later to organize regional discussions on women's issues pertaining to health, training, housing and trafficking. In the next decade, the Sub-Committee transformed into the ASEAN Women's Programme that published the 1986 Thesaurus on Women in Development and assisted the 1988 Declaration of the Advancement of Women in the ASEAN Region, which promotes women as "active agents and beneficiaries" of development and suggests the need to integrate gender perspectives into the various national plans of member states. At the 1992 ASEAN Summit, women were mentioned in all functional cooperation areas except in relation to security issues, and in the 1997 release of ASEAN Vision 2020, women mentioned in the creation of caring societies and family as the basic unit of those societies.¹⁶ The non-intervention approach, however, swept under the rug the ASEAN specific women's concern on the effect of military occupation and small-medium scale of conflicts present within the region that creates insecurity. Unfortunately, women rarely become frontline fighters or politicians, and therefore their voices are often unheard in regional peace negotiations and post-conflict peacebuilding. Take, for example, the region's big peace agreements of 1991 in Cambodia and 2005 in Aceh, Indonesia. In these cases, women did not join the talks. Nevertheless, the 1998 Southeast Asian monetary crisis arguably "enhanced interaction" among ASEAN members, while non-intervention remains the norm of the region, states could voice

15 Sara E. Davies, Kimberly Nackers and Sarah Teitt, *Op. Cit.* and Sri Danti Anwar, "Women and Security: Ensure Programs Not Merely on Paper", *Jakarta Post*, 26 December 2019.

16 ASEAN, *ASEAN Vision 2020*, Kuala Lumpur, 15 December 1997, accessed https://asean.org/?static_post=asean-vision-2020, 23 March 2020.

concerns if an occurrence in one territory has a transboundary effect.¹⁷ With this approach, political and security discussion was enabled, and ASEAN Security Community was proposed in 2003 but, still, the Aceh post-tsunami discussion was still too early to point out that women were not represented in the peace talks.

It is not like women in ASEAN are not involved in peace negotiations, security talks and decision-making, Yet, their roles are often undermined, and women are very rarely able to pressure for more substantial and significant involvement. It is worth noting that the region has its fair share of prominent female leaders, including the former Indonesian President Megawati, Philippine's President Corazon Aquino and President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, Thailand's Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra, Malaysia's Deputy Prime Minister Wan Azizah binti Wan Ismail, up to the currently serving Singapore's President Halimah Jacob and Myanmar's State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi. In political decision-making, representation of women as parliamentarians in ASEAN countries was around 20% in 2018, which is still lower than the global average of 24%.¹⁸ However, it is commonly accepted that as political and diplomatic affairs in ASEAN tend to be elitists, those who rise to the leadership position mostly endorsed or related to the ones already in power. Thus more often than not, women leaders rise to power through familial kinships, such as through the influence of their father, husband, or brother.¹⁹ As family ties are perceived critical to women's political careers in Southeast Asia, although men also benefit from familial networks for their political gains, women leaders are often seen as having limited agency, unable to make an independent decision and their policies are often questioned or undermined. These situations often place ASEAN women leaders in a difficult position to pursue a policy to further women's agendas in peace and security as it can be seen essentialist and as not returning the favor of the people supporting them to reach their position in the first place. Mathew Davies (2016) raised the argument that the ASEAN member states shared similar context in framing women as subservient, especially to the masculinized assumptions on politics and security,

17 Clarita Carlos, "Towards a Regional Rapid Response Cooperation in the Asia Pacific", Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *Regional Integration in the Asia Pacific Issues and Prospects*, (Adelaide: OECD and Bob Hawke Prime Ministerial Centre in Australia, 2005), pp. 245-46.

18 The ASEAN Post Team, "Not enough women in parliament", *ASEAN Post*, 2 August 2018.

19 Nanyung Choi, "Women's Political Pathways in Southeast Asia", *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, Vol. 21, No. 2, 2019, pp. 224-248 and Huong Le Thu, "A daughter, a sister, a wife: Asia's female leaders", *The Strategist*, 8 March 2019.

in other words, women are seen as a homogenized category with issues separate from politics.²⁰ This can be seen by how the ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children (ACWC) is positioned under the socio-cultural pillar and report to the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Social Welfare and Development, while the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) positioned under the pillar of political and security community and report directly to the ASEAN Foreign Minister Meeting. It has a stronger mandate compared to the AICHR, as the ACWC is technically allowed to conduct prevention and protection of women and children, as well as review national legislation contradicting the protection of rights on women and children - whilst AICHR can only conduct promotion of human rights without protection mechanism. Nevertheless, ACWC never issued any open and formal critique against ASEAN member states for the lack of women's and children's rights protection. For example, ACWC never condemns the region's poor handling of victims of trafficking, women and children in conflict areas, including in the current Rohingya crisis, as well as migrant workers, especially domestic migrant workers that are majority female.²¹

The global WPS agenda advocated through UN Security Council resolutions rest on a wide approach of prevention, protection, participation, as well as relief and recovery with the focus on leveraging the unique experience and needs of women in conflict and post-conflict situations. After concerns over ASEAN's sluggish adoption of the WPS agenda, which many attributed to the principles of respect toward state sovereignty, non-interference, peaceful settlement of disputes, and consensus in decision-making processes,²² lately, the Southeast Asian region has experienced many breakthroughs. For the ASEAN context, the recent WPS approach includes efforts to increase women as mediators, allow women entry into security sectors and encourage female participation decision-making levels in national and regional institutions; increase campaign to end gender-based violence in conflict and post-conflict situation; issuance of Joint Declaration on WPS in 2017; formulation of ASEAN Women

20 Mathew Davies, "Women and Development, Not Gender and Politics: Explaining ASEAN's Failure to Engage with the Women, Peace and Security Agenda", *Contemporary Southeast Asia: A Journal of International and Strategic Affairs*, Vol 38, No. 1, April 2016, pp. 106-127.

21 Women account for nearly half (48.7%) of the intra-ASEAN migrant working-age population, and 90% of domestic migrant worker. UN Women, Asia and Pacific Regional Office, *Women Migrant Workers in the ASEAN Economic Community*, (Bangkok, 2017).

22 See Mathew Davies, *Op. Cit.*; Sara E. Davies, Kimberly Nackers and Sarah Teitt, *Op. Cit.*; and Hui Ying Lee, "Women, peace and security in ASEAN: Slow progress in the age of #MeToo", *The Policy Forum*, 19 July 2018.

Peace Registry in 2018; regional trainings and symposium on WPS in 2019; as well as the effort to conduct a baseline study on member states acceptance on WPS in 2020. Based on an interview with the ASEAN and UN representatives working in supporting the regional adoption and implementation on WPS agenda, it was noted that there is an increase of acceptance in joint-cooperation works on women issue beyond the traditional ASEAN pillar of socio-cultural because of heightened awareness of gender as a cross-cutting issue.²³ It was also said that as the WPS agenda will commemorate its 20 years of global endorsement by the UN and ASEAN will celebrate ACWC's first decade of work in 2020, and there is a push to work more collaboratively with other regional institutions from different pillars, such as AICHR and ASEAN Defence Minister Meeting under ASEAN Political Security Community, as well as other bodies under ASEAN Economic Community.

The progress of regional adoption of global norms, according to Finnemore and Sikkink (1998), could not take place without the active engagement of norms entrepreneurs. In the context of ASEAN WPS adoption, the key actors are the Philippines and Indonesia. These two states are the only ASEAN members that already have National Action Plans (NAPs) on WPS. The Philippines is currently implementing its second NAP (first for 2010-2016 and currently for 2017-2022), whilst Indonesia is formulating its subsequent NAP after the first one 2014-2019 was completed. The Philippines and Indonesia representatives to the ACWC are relatively unique for ASEAN as they are from academic, activist, or feminist backgrounds with an understanding that women's issues are cross-cutting. Other member states' representatives to the ACWC are often civil servants bringing a more bureaucratic approach. Therefore, the Philippines and Indonesia representatives to the ACWC, with the support of Malaysia and Cambodia, managed to include the agenda of "Gender, Peace and Security: Advancing Women's Roles in Peace Mediation in Southeast Asia" in the Commission's 2016-2020 Work Plan.²⁴ Based on the discussion with Indonesia and the Philippines representatives to the ACWC, including the agenda of security and peace in the Commission that works under the socio-cultural pillar was not

23 Interview with ASEAN Poverty Eradication and Gender Division and UN Women representative to ASEAN on Women, Peace and Security in Jakarta, 20 September 2019.

24 The ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children (ACWC) Work Plan 2016-2020, accessed <https://asean.org/storage/2019/01/37.-December-2018-The-ASEAN-Commission-on-the-Promotion-and-Protection-of-the-Rights-of-Women-and-Children-ACWC-Work-Plan-2016-2020.pdf>, 23 March 2020.

easy, especially with the presence of sub-regional tensions around the Rohingya issue, migrant workers, and trafficking in persons. There are differences in perceptions of what is considered as the scope of women's issues for ASEAN member states and sustainable discussions need to be conducted in a collegial and non-intrusive manner, by understanding the limits of what other members are agreeing to do, without giving direct critique but doing so through a diplomatic manner and private channels.²⁵ For example, several members endorsing women to enter security forces may be regarded as contradicting the norms, especially those that have male conscription in place. Therefore the term ASEAN women mediators and women working for peace are more acceptable. Another concern is that the WPS agenda can be used as an entry point for meddling in internal issues of member states, such as when a member state failed to protect the rights of internally displaced women and girls impacted by conflict.

Based on the discourse put forward by norms entrepreneurs advocating for the WPS agenda in ASEAN, the issue that became a window of opportunity for positioning women as empowered actors and part of the solution in providing and sustaining regional peace is the rise of women who engage in violent extremism. Indonesia witnessed women involved in influencing the whole family to do *hijra* or travel to Syria to join the self-declared Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in 2014-16, attempting to detonate improvised explosive device at Presidential Palace in 2017 and church bombings in Surabaya in 2018. These events raised national awareness that has subsequently been brought to the regional level. In the Philippines, women are known to support the Marawi siege by being financial operatives. In Malaysia, at least one woman was captured after planning an attack on the 2018 election day. Myanmar also fears the 2017 fall of ISIS will bring the violent extremists to spread to its shore and mobilize its people, including women. This is a fear shared by many ASEAN members that have compelled ASEAN leaders to sign the Joint Statement on WPS, which place importance on fostering women's capacity as peacebuilders, agents of peace and peace negotiators; ensure women's full participation in peace processes, and integrate gender equality in all conflict prevention initiatives. Subsequently, the ACWC worked with different parties to formulate "ASEAN Work Plan to Prevent and Counter the Rise of Radicalization and Violent Extremism, 2019-2024". While the recent ASEAN adoption of the WPS agenda can be considered progressive,

25 Discussion with ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women And Children (ACWC) representatives in Jakarta, 4-6 March 2020.

it is contradictory that the impetus for ASEAN members to adopt the WPS agenda is exactly because non-state actor ISIS sees women's agency and utility prior to the states consider the significance on women ability to contribute to peace. However, from the text of the Joint Statement on WPS, the common denominator for ASEAN member states is not *per se* empowering women to take part in the creation and maintenance of peace and security, but "recognizing that peace and security are essential to the achievement of sustainable development." It can, therefore, be said that the discourse of women's involvement in ASEAN is still based on the development perspective, or otherwise efforts made without such reference to regional joint interest would have difficulty to be accepted.

Conclusion

This article has examined the delayed WPS adoption by ASEAN that only began in 2017 through the Joint Statement. The regional norms of the ASEAN way - respecting sovereignty, the tendency of non-interference and consensus in decision-making - are often, if not always, utilized as the reason behind the Association's sluggish progress on the advancement of women in peace and security. Women's issues in ASEAN are rarely seen from a human rights perspective but are positioned as issues of economic development and welfare, while rights-based issues are considered to fall in the realm of politics and security. This is because of the long history of how ASEAN discuss women's issues more in regards to health, training, housing and trafficking, which all considered as related to welfare. More significantly, the way of issues being discussed in ASEAN are divided through the three pillars of (1) political and security, (2) economic, and (3) socio-cultural. While women issues have been long discussed through the socio-cultural and economic development pillars, ASEAN is fairly sensitive in including the new topic in the political and security pillar for fear of domestic intervention. ASEAN political and diplomatic affairs that tend to be elitists also limit women reaching leadership positions through merit but relatively providing ways for those that already connected to people in power, usually through familial networks. Although male leaders in ASEAN also benefitted from family kinship, women leaders are particularly in difficult positions if they endorse policies that are seen as essentialist siding with women and making them seen unfair. Therefore, while ASEAN has its share of women leaders, to further the

WPS agenda cannot depend solely on having them, but also through regional policy highlighting the importance of having women meaningfully contribute to peace and security.

What has been seen as effective for the ASEAN endorsement of the WPS agenda is that proactive member states have influenced the regional organization to agree and adopt a certain approach. The Philippines and Indonesia, as the two countries that have nationally adopted the WPS agenda through implementing National Action Plan, has become the norms entrepreneurs by bringing women issue in peace and security regionally through ASEAN mechanism of ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children (ACWC). However, as ACWC is a regional body that consists not only by academics and activists but also by conservatives and bureaucrats, following the ASEAN way of consensus still needs to be done. This is because it is widely accepted that the ASEAN way comprises important norms and principles that have proven successful in maintaining regional peace for over five decades. While it can be seen that the ASEAN way hampers the Association's ability in arriving into a commitment, for this specific context the absence of a Regional Plan of Action on WPS, it is suggested that ASEAN member states and citizens build on the existing mechanisms, working plans, initiatives and activities on women, as well as continue to forge cross-sectoral cooperation. Additionally, the sensitivity of reading the trend could be beneficial in encouraging ASEAN states to deepen their commitment to WPS. For example, through utilizing the current trend of women involved in violent extremism groups or the condition that women and girls are often differently impacted by conflict and disaster, that would greatly exacerbate their insecure position in the society. The region should leverage its ability in utilizing contemporary issues as a common threat to mobilize consensus. This is important for a region that opts for non-intervention and non-binding mechanism, as voluntary acts amongst states to create peace between them is a prerequisite for improving the people's condition within the country, including their human rights and women rights.