Thursday 13 October 2016

To: Foreign Ministers of the member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and the European Union

Your Excellencies,

We, the undersigned elected representatives from the European Union and member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, who share a commitment to upholding principles of human rights and democratic governance, urge you to take immediate action to secure the release of all prisoners of conscience unlawfully incarcerated in Southeast Asia.

We are alarmed by the region's shrinking space for civil society and its dramatic shift away from stated commitments to human rights, due process, and democratic principles. In the context of this shift, human rights defenders, environmental activists, journalists, politicians, and members of independent civic groups, trade unions, and religious organizations have been increasingly arrested, convicted, and imprisoned for their peaceful political activities and legitimate exercise of their rights:

- In Malaysia, former opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim remains imprisoned on politically motivated charges, targeted for peacefully exercising his right to free expression.
- In Vietnam, lawyer Nguyen Van Dai has been repeatedly imprisoned as a result of his work defending the human rights of his fellow citizens, while bloggers Nguyen Huu Vinh and Nguyen Thi Minh Thuy are serving prison sentences for publicizing online content critical of the government.
- In Cambodia, staff from the Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association (ADHOC), a prominent NGO, have been imprisoned as a consequence of their legitimate human rights work and provision of legal assistance, while female land rights activist Tep Vanny has been detained in relation to a 2013 protest calling for the release of a fellow activist.
- In Thailand, journalist and activist Somyot Prueksakasemsuk remains in prison for the publication of material deemed "offensive" by his country's government.
- In Myanmar, 15 factory workers and student union members have been detained and face charges for their peaceful protest to demand better working conditions.
- In Laos, Thongpaseuth Keuakoun and Sengaloun Phengphanh, members of the Lao Students Movement for Democracy, have been imprisoned since 1999 for planning a demonstration calling for democracy, social justice, and respect for human rights.

These are but a few cases from the long list of Southeast Asian citizens incarcerated as prisoners of conscience, whose freedom is crucial to ASEAN's future as a productive EU partner and as a regional community that respects international norms and the rule of law.

As our two regions continue to deepen political and economic ties, there exists an ever-greater imperative to ensure that human rights and a genuine commitment to social justice constitute shared priorities, which extend beyond the realm of rhetoric and make their implications felt in government policy.

The upcoming 21st ASEAN-EU Ministerial Meeting, which will take place in Bangkok, Thailand, on 14 October, represents a prime opportunity to advance this goal. It presents ASEAN leaders with a chance to demonstrate their commitment to tangibly improving the lives and freedom of their people, and their European counterparts with a venue to reaffirm their support for universal human rights in all corners of the globe.

We support the growing ties between ASEAN and the EU, and acknowledge the importance of strengthening relationships at the bilateral and inter-regional levels. But such relationships must also be based on social and political progress, including respect for human rights and democratic governance, and these issues should be addressed at the highest levels of governmental cooperation.

There is an urgent need for lofty rhetoric to be backed up by real action. ASEAN leaders have a responsibility to act on stated commitments to uphold universal human rights principles, and European leaders, as international partners committed to sustained peace and prosperity in Southeast Asia, have a responsibility to press for such action.

As elected representatives, it is our role to ensure that the voices of our peoples are heeded by the leaders of our respective nations. It is in this role that we urge you to make good on previous promises and take immediate steps to ensure the release of those imprisoned for expressing their political or religious beliefs and peacefully taking action in support of those beliefs.

The release of all prisoners of conscience would send a strong message about the joint commitment of governments in Europe and Southeast Asia to the promotion and protection of human rights and to ensuring that our cooperation achieves broad-based and sustainable benefits for our peoples.

We hope you will take appropriate action.

Sincerely,

Afzal Khan, MEP	United Kingdom
Alice Lau Kiong Yieng, MP	Malaysia
Ana Gomes, MEP	Portugal
Ariel Casilao (Congressman)	Philippines
Aye Mya Mya Myo, MP	Myanmar
Azman Ismail, MP	Malaysia
Barbara Lochbihler, MEP	Germany
Bart Staes, MEP	Belgium
Beatriz Becerra Basterrechea, MEP	Spain
Boris ZALA, MEP	Slovakia
Charles Chong, MP	Singapore
Charles Santiago, MP	Malaysia
Charles Tannock,MEP	United Kingdom
Dang Chamreun, MP	Cambodia
David Martin, MEP	United Kingdom
Demetris Papadakis, MEP	Cyprus

Dr. Laima Liucija Andrikiene, MEP	Lithuania
Elena Valenciano, MEP	Spain
Elly Schlein, MEP	Italy
Francisco Assis, MEP	Portugal
Hee Loy Sian MP	Malaysia
Heidi Hautala, MEP	Finland
Helga Trüpel, MEP	Germany
Heng Danaro MP	Cambodia
Idris Bin Jusi MP	Malaysia
Ignazio Corrao, MEP	Italy
Ioan Mirceapaşcu, MEP	Romania
Ivo Vajgl, MEP	Slovenia
Javier Nart, MEP	Spain
Jean Lambert, MEP	United Kingdom
Jeff Ooi Chuan Aun, MP	Malaysia
Josef Weidenholzer, MEP	Austria
Jude Kirton-Darling, MEP	United Kingdom
Karlos Isagani Zarate (Congressman)	Philippines
Karoline Graswander-Hainz	Austria
Kasit Piromya*	Thailand
Kasthuriraani Patto MP	Malaysia
Kati PIRI, MEP	Netherlands
Keo Phirum MP	Cambodia
Khalid Bin Samad MP	Malaysia
Khalid Samad MP	Malaysia
Khy Vandeth MP	Cambodia
Kong Saphea MP	Cambodia
Kraisak Choonhavan*	Thailand
Lath Littay MP	Cambodia
Liew Chin Tong MP	Malaysia
Lim Bunsidareth MP	Cambodia
Lim Guan Eng MP	Malaysia
Lim Kimya MP	Cambodia
Long Ry MP	Cambodia
Mahdev Mohan MP	Singapore
Manivannan Gowin MP	Malaysia
Maria Heubuch, MEP	Germany
Mark Demesmaeker, MEP	Belgium
Mark Tarabella, MEP	Belgium
Martin Häusling, MEP	Germany
Men Sothavarin MP	Cambodia
Michèle RIVASI, MEP	France
Mohd Rafizi Ramli MP	Malaysia
Mu Sochua MP	Cambodia
Ng Wei Aik MP	Malaysia
Nga Kor Ming MP	Malaysia

Ngeh Koo Ham MP	Malaysia
Nurul Izzah Anwar MP	Malaysia
Ong Kian Ming MP	Malaysia
Oscar Ling Chai Yew MP	Malaysia
Ou Chanrath MP	Cambodia
Petras Austrevicius, MEP	Lithuania
Pier Antonio Panzeri, MEP	Italy
Pot Peou MP	Cambodia
Real Kamerin MP	Cambodia
Richard HOWITT, MEP	United Kingdom
Risa Hontiveros (Senator)	Philippines
Sabine Loesing, MEP	Germany
Sim Chee Keong MP	Malaysia
Sim Tong Him MP	Malaysia
Sim Tze Tzin MP	Malaysia
Sivarasa Rasiah MP	Malaysia
Sok Umsea MP	Cambodia
Son Chhay MP	Cambodia
Su Keong Siong MP	Malaysia
Teddy Baguilat Jr. (Congressman)	Philippines
Teo Kok Seong MP	Malaysia
Tomáš Zdechovsky , MEP	Czech Republic
Tomasito Villarin (Congressman)	Philippines
Uch Serey Yuth MP	Cambodia
Vann Narith MP	Cambodia
Vincent Peillon, MEP	France
William Leong Jee Keen MP	Malaysia
Wong Chen, MP	Malaysia
Yont Tharo, MP	Cambodia
Zairil Khir Johari, MP	Malaysia
Zuraida Binti Kamaruddin, MP	Malaysia

**MPs from Thailand are formerly elected due to the suspension of democracy following the May 2014 military coup.*