

Transparency International calls on ASEAN to make anti-corruption integral part of economic community

New report says ASEAN needs a regional body that makes fighting corruption a priority

Kuala Lumpur, 24 April 2015 – Rampant corruption across Southeast Asia threatens to derail plans for greater economic integration, Transparency International warned in a new report today. ASEAN leaders must create a regional body that integrates anti-corruption principles into the framework of a proposed regional economic community or hopes for shared prosperity, upward mobility and entrepreneurship won't be fulfilled.

A regional coordinating body, or ASEAN Integrity Community as proposed by Transparency International, is needed to fast track critical anti-corruption policy measures into its existing ASEAN Economic Community framework and the ASEAN post-2020 vision. Otherwise corruption could be fuelled by increased cross-border economic activity.

“Southeast Asia is home to some of the richest, fastest-growing economies, as well as some of the planet's poorest people. Battling corruption is an integral part to reducing income inequality and sustainable growth,” said Natalia Soebagjo, Chair of TI Indonesia.

“Regional cooperation coupled with civil society and business community involvement in the development of an ASEAN Integrity Community are essential elements to ensure an economic community has a positive impact on the daily lives of Southeast Asians,” Soebagjo said.

CORRUPTION PLAGUES REGION Corruption continues to plague most ASEAN countries, as seen in the 2014 Corruption Perceptions Index, where the nine countries scored an average of 38 out of 100 (where 100 is very clean and 0 is highly corrupt). Furthermore, almost 50 per cent of people in ASEAN countries surveyed believe corruption has increased, while only a third say their government's efforts to fight corruption have been effective, according to the 2013 Global Corruption Barometer, a public opinion survey by Transparency International.

Given the grand scale of corruption in the region the proposed ASEAN Integrity Community is an absolute necessity. Through this community, ASEAN can establish effective anti-corruption policies, legislation and strategies, achieve strong and effective anti-corruption institutions, enhance mutual collaboration to fight corruption, and bring about meaningful engagement with civil society and business sector in the region.

To meet this end, the report includes a number of recommendations for ASEAN governments and calls for a mechanism for effective delivery and monitoring. This mechanism, the ASEAN Working group on Governance and Integrity, shall consist of a joint ministerial committee, and civil society and the business sector representatives.

“ASEAN governments should take the lead in declaring and defining their vision of ASEAN

Integrity Community,” said Srirak Plipat, Transparency International Regional Director for Asia Pacific. “The business community and civil society should stand ready to support them to realise the joint ASEAN Integrity Community vision.”

EARLY SUPPORTERS OF INTEGRITY COMMUNITY Malaysian and Myanmar governments’ have already shown support for the creation of ASEAN Integrity Community.

“A series of Ministerial meetings must be created to set priorities and carry out action plans, which are severely needed due to delays in the past decade. Platforms for business and civil society must be created so that they can contribute to one coherent and strategic framework of the ASEAN Integrity Community, as opposed to a random and organic approach as in the past,” Plipat said.

The recommendations in the report reiterate the commitment of all ASEAN countries who have ratified the UN Convention against Corruption. However, in many countries public institutions lack transparency and accountability, key anti-corruption laws are absent and civil society engagement is restricted. Only Indonesia and Thailand have passed a freedom of information law, while many anti-corruption authorities in the region fall short of their full potential, often suffering from a lack of operational independence and limited capacities.

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Transparency International is the global civil society organisation leading the fight against corruption.

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