

2016

# ACTIVITIES REPORT



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# ABOUT ASIA CENTRE

It provides meeting facilities and services for academic and professional development, communications and outreach, research and publications, and development and technical assistance.

Asia Centre connects peoples and regions through collaborative partnerships with educational institutions, international organizations, non-profit organizations and other institution in the private and public sector.

Asia Centre harnesses its strategic location and strong international networks to co-convene activities to address contemporary issues in the region.

With the legal, people and physical infrastructure in place, Asia Centre opened its doors for operations in January of 2016. Work began on building the Asia Centre community, developing its human rights and education programmes and establishing itself as a think tank with critical insight into issues impacting the region, through commentaries and op-ed's.

## KEY HIGHLIGHTS OF 2016



### BUILDING AN ASIA CENTRE COMMUNITY

- Asia Centre Seminars were launched to ignite interest in the Centre among Bangkok based academia, NGOs and students.
- Asia Centre Roundtables were convened to discuss hot button issues that could impact the region.
- Asia Centre Sparks Sessions were developed specifically to engage with the civil society community.



### HUMAN RIGHTS PROGRAMME

- Focuses on the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) in Southeast Asia, the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) and the role of national human rights institutions (NHRIs).
- Convened the first international conference assessing the impact of the UPR on Southeast Asia.
- Established a research caucus on the UPR in Southeast Asia.



### EDUCATION PROGRAMME

- 2 week Media & Communications Workshop on experiential learning for students from University of Liberal Arts, Bangladesh.
- Series of lectures on international relations for Stenden University Thailand.



### PUBLICATIONS

- 5 Op-ed's on human rights in the region
- Forthcoming book with regional publisher Gerakbudaya Human Rights in Southeast Asia: Civil Society Perspectives



# BUILDING AN ASIA CENTRE COMMUNITY

During the first half of the year, the Centre focused its energies on creating awareness and building ties in the community. A suite of activities were developed to achieve these goals.

The **Asia Centre Seminars** were launched to ignite interest in the Centre among Bangkok based academia, NGOs and students. The seminars provided a platform for discussion on topics affecting contemporary Southeast Asia and beyond and involved speakers from around the region

The **Asia Centre Roundtables** were convened to discuss hot button issues that could impact the region. Topics such as the Malaysian 1MDB affair, Brexit and the US election were organised to facilitate a better understanding of these events and their relevance to Asia. The roundtables gave participants the opportunity to debate and benefit from the expertise of panelists from diverse backgrounds.

The 2016 US Elections: Change At Last? for instance featured a former US ambassador, academics of various nationalities and disciplines and a journalist.



## Asia Centre Seminars

- Debating Imagined Communities: A Tribute to Benedict Anderson
- The “Kachin” Conflict in Northern Myanmar: Shifting Roots and Contexts
- A Political Utopia Called Singapore
- Cause Lawyering: In Conversation with Regional Advocates
- Entering Femininity: Reporting Rituals and Violations
- Confronting Elusiveness: Demanding Accountability in Southeast Asia
- Southeast Asia & the UPR: All Talk No Action

## Asia Centre Roundtables

- Stress-testing Single-Party Dominance in Malaysia
- Brexit & Its Implications: An Asia Centre Roundtable
- The 2016 US Elections: Change At Last?



Spark Sessions:  
An Alternative Networking Event

## Asia Centre Spark Sessions

To engage specifically with the civil society community, we launched the Asia Centre Sparks Sessions. This proved to be one of the Centre's most popular activities to date. The first event under this series entitled Spark Session: An Alternative Networking Event focused on facilitating collaboration between civil society organisations as well as linking them to potential youth volunteers and interns.

The Seminars, Roundtables and Spark Sessions were free community engagement activities that attracted a steady flow of people, ranging from 15 to 70 participants, and helped contribute towards building an Asia Centre community.

## HUMAN RIGHTS PROGRAMME

2016 saw the conceptualisation and launch of Asia Centre's human rights programme which explores how national and regional human rights mechanisms link up with international human rights mechanisms. This programme focuses on three core mechanisms: the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) in Southeast Asia, the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) and the role of national human rights institutions (NHRIs). Through the programme, the Centre undertakes evidence-based research of these mechanisms in order to gauge their effectiveness in protecting human rights in the region. The outcome of the human rights programme is geared towards strengthening the capacity of all stakeholders, especially civil society organizations, to advance the protection of human rights in Southeast Asia.

The programme fosters networking of stakeholders to exchange views over each of the mechanisms.



## The Universal Periodic Review in Southeast Asia: An Evidence-Based Regional Assessment

Asia Centre launched its human rights programme by convening an international conference on the UPR. The Universal Periodic Review in Southeast Asia: An Evidence-Based Regional Assessment was the first conference analysing the impact of the UPR on the region.

The conference helped position the Centre as a think-tank specialising in evidence-based human rights research and policy analysis. A caucus of researchers on the UPR has been established to continue engagement and monitoring of the process, with Asia Centre taking the lead. Conference proceedings will be published in an edited book that is scheduled for a launch in the first quarter of 2017.



## EDUCATION PROGRAMME

The education programme **seeks to foster teaching partnerships**, where Asia Centre acts as an **education provider to institutions of higher learning and other think tanks**. In collaboration with its teaching partners, Asia Centre offers specially designed curricula for students to take part in academic, cultural and professional development in Thailand and the region.

It includes in-class instruction, educational trips to universities as well as site visits to professional and community establishments.



INNOVATIVE EDUCATION

Specially designed curricula for students to take part in academic, cultural and professional development in Thailand and the region.

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TEACHING PARTNERSHIP

2 week Media & communications workshop with University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh (ULAB).

ASEAN & International Relations lecture series with Stenden University, Thailand.



## Media & Communications Workshop

In 2016, Asia Centre successfully launched two projects with university partners.

In September 2016, a two-week Media and Communications Workshop was convened for a contingent of students from the University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh (ULAB).

The experiential learning programme was designed to give students an introduction to the Asian media landscape, hone their practical skills and undertake a multimedia project of their own.

Asia Centre also partnered with Stenden University's branch campus in Thailand to provide a series of lectures on international relations and ASEAN. Lectures for Stenden University were held at the Asia Centre premises.

There are plans to convene similar teaching partnership activities in 2017.



## ASEAN & International Relations Lecture Series

## INTERNSHIPS

The Centre provides opportunities to interns to undertake substantive and practical work in two professional streams: a communications stream and a research stream.



Anna Jeffries



Silvia Waldbach

In 2016, Asia Centre hosted two interns on the research stream. Anna Jeffries from University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee who was referred by our partner AIP.Global was at the Centre from July through September 2016. She researched civil society and the Universal Periodic Review. Silvia Waldbach, from University of Passau, Germany was at the Asia Centre from September to December 2016. She researched on national human rights institutions in Southeast Asia.

Asia Centre internships are popular and we receive a regular flow of applicants.



## PUBLICATIONS

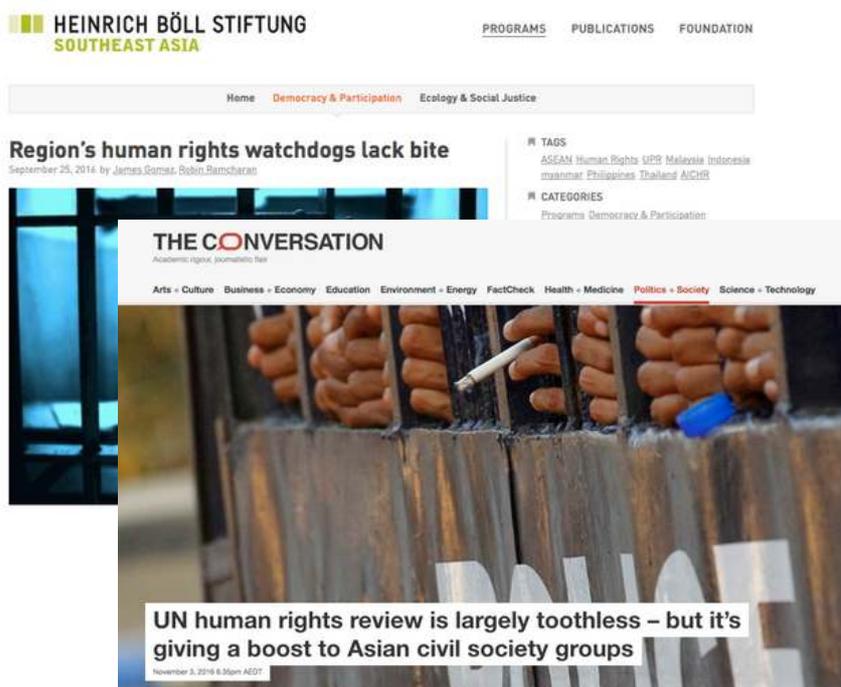
In 2016, Asia Centre, and its partner Gerakbudaya, launched jointly a regional publications series which aims to focus upon the politics, history and culture of Southeast Asian societies. This partnership established facilities to commission, publish and sell books on at Asia Centre

### Commentaries

Asia Centre regularly produces commentaries and op-ed's on critical issues impacting the region. This serves to build our profile as a think-tank and to meet our organisational goals of supporting civil society and promoting discourse through knowledge sharing.

Some of the topics covered include:

- UN human rights review is largely toothless – but it's giving a boost to Asian civil society groups
- Region's human rights watchdogs lack bite
- The ASEAN Way and Human Rights
- Democratic values and human rights in ASEAN



We have been able to successfully draw in new talent by adding to our Advisory Board and Centre Associates. Professor Jonathan Woodier a media and communications professional specializing in brand building and organizational transformation recently joined the Advisory Board. In early 2016 we welcomed two new Centre Associates; Ahmed Abid a filmmaker and adjunct faculty with the University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh, Media Studies and Journalism department and Dr. Jay Koh an artist-curator, trained in cross-disciplinary artistic research founder of iFIMA (international Forum for InterMedia Arts).

## ATTRACTING NEW PEOPLE



# EMERGING PROGRAMME AREAS

The Centre looks forward to examining some key issues in human rights that could be built up into distinct programmes moving forward. Some of these issues include:

- Terrorism and Security Laws
- Freedom of Religion and Belief



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1.7k ++ Likes



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37 Followers  
Following 200



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ASIA CENTRE



1.6k ++ on our mailing list

## ESTABLISHING AN ASIA CENTRE PRESENCE

At the end of 2016, Asia Centre was able to establish its ground presence through a year of substantive activities via the **Seminar, Roundtable** and **Spark Sessions**. Asia Centre also increased its presence online with 1700+ Facebook likes, 1,600 subscribed to our mailing lists and forging an emerging presence on Twitter, Instagram and YouTube.

Through these activities and online presence, we articulated core areas of work as a **think-tank** for evidence-based research and trainings, a **regional hub** for academia and civil society, a **project partner** for institutions with shared interests and a **meeting space** for activities and events.

In 2017, Asia Centre will continue to develop and build on these core areas of work and build community around its human rights and education programmes. It will strengthen its community engagement through publications and commentaries.