

Welcome Remarks

6th International Conference

COVID-19 IN ASIA:

Communication • Nationalism • Technology

8-10 SEPTEMBER 2021
BANGKOK, THAILAND



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Distinguished guests: Prof. Dr. Yubol Benjarongkij, Dean of the Graduate School of Communication Arts and Management Innovation, National Institute of Development Administration, Ms. Varinrumpai Puntanaree, Deputy Chief Executive Officer of the Thai Media Fund, and Frederic Spohr, Head of the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom in Thailand and special mention of our other conference partner, the Taiwan Foundation for Democracy. Warm greetings to you and our dear participants and friends - welcome to this 6th International Conference on COVID-19 in Asia: Communication, Nationalism and Technology!

Last year, at our 5th international conference, we were able to meet in a hybrid format for one day in person. This year, the conference is taking place fully online. Hopefully, next year we can all meet in person. Nevertheless, I am proud to announce that 17 partners have come together with Asia Centre, for a total of 15 panels, 52 Presentations, 22 of which are given by women.

Since the COVID-19 outbreak last year, Asia Centre has been examining a variety of impacts the pandemic has had on different societies in the region. These have covered the spike in hate speech especially towards vulnerable communities, the rise in vaccination nationalism, the increase in monitoring and surveillance, the restriction of rights to organise protests, the capacity of CSO organisations as they digitalise but still face a constraint of resources.

In analysing the pandemic's impact, we have found that one key issue is fake news or 'infodemic' and the challenges of dealing with it. Here, I draw attention to the Asia Centre's report on "COVID-19 and Infodemic in Southeast Asia", written with the support of the Thai Media Fund. There are at least four types of infodemics—conspiracy theories on the origin of the virus, unverified reports of infections and deaths due to the pandemic, false claims over health treatment or prevention, and misinformation on vaccine efficacy—that overwhelm the fact-checking initiatives in the region. To overcome this, the report recommends media literacy as the best solution to address the issue of infodemic. I hope this conference will shed new light and identify possible solutions on this and other related COVID-19 related issues.

Before we start the conference, I am also pleased and proud to announce that the Asia Centre has been granted consultative status with the UN by the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). This means we will be able to make representations on various issues to the different UN mechanisms. I would also like to announce next year's 7th International Conference, 'Freedom of Expression in Asia: Academia, Media and Internet', in Bangkok, on 24, 25 and 26 August 2022. I therefore call upon our partners and all colleagues who are interested to join us next year to get in touch. Let's continue to build networks on issues of mutual interest and concern. With continued progress on the health front, we look forward to welcoming everyone to Bangkok, next year. In the meantime, I wish you all a fruitful conference.