

Regional Conference of the Network of Social Democracy in Asia
“Effecting Real Change in Local Governance: Perspectives for Social Democratic Policies”
November 19-22, 2009,
Park Royal Hotel (tbc), Penang, Malaysia

(draft as of 16 November 2009)

Background

Social democratic parties and social democratic politics in Southeast Asia are still struggling to take root, but they are increasingly gaining ground. Political parties and pre-party formations that have sprung out of mass-based politics have been formed and have been orienting their political objectives and programs along the values of freedom, social justice, and solidarity.

Facilitated by the waves of democratic fever and institutional reforms that swept the region in recent decades, these progressive political parties gained a shot at political power, particularly at the local level. The Philippines is pioneering in this respect, having produced a reformed Leftist party, *Akbayan*, which has 20 incumbent local government officials. A similar trend is also observed in Malaysia, where opposition parties, such as the Democratic Action Party, are on the rise, capturing state governments while some independent activists have won in the recent parliamentary elections. Indonesia houses a number of progressive party-building initiatives. Despite the unsuccessful bid for registration of a peasant-based party (*Partai Perserikatan Rakyat*), it is hopeful that in the meantime, direct local elections will produce progressive politicians such as what has happened in Aceh and Bengkulu. Social democratic and progressive party building is least developed in Thailand but there are current civil society efforts to walk this path. A new party was born from the anti-Thaksin movement while other social movements have renewed their party building projects. A number of social movement activists, particularly outside Bangkok, have already crossed-over to the local government.

In May 2009, such political groups and fraternal organizations from Asia and Europe met in Manila to launch a regional network of social-democratic oriented political parties and organizations. It was agreed that such a network would work together to mutually reinforce their activities, to encourage party-building, to exchange experiences and learning, and to express common positions vis-à-vis political developments in the region. (For further information, please visit <http://www.socdem.asia/>).

It was further agreed that this network would regularly meet to discuss current topics of common concern, and in the process establish a social democratic voice and practices in the region. With the support of fraternal institutions such as the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) and the Olof Palme International Center (OPIC), the network will hold its second regional conference in November 2009 in Penang, Malaysia.

Objectives

The need for cross-country learning and shaping a social-democratic discourse on politics and governance becomes even more compelling in the light of the current global economic crisis. While the crisis has finally taken the steam out of neo-liberal ideology, it remains the task of progressives to shape alternative discourse on governance and policy reforms at the global, regional, and national level. Underpinning these reforms are new ways of thinking about the state-market-society relations. Of paramount relevance to Southeast Asian social-democratic and progressive political parties is the reshaping of these relations at the local level. Aided by democratic decentralization, the local space provides better opportunities for progressive parties (and individuals) and citizens in the region to reshape their relations and shore up social-democratic reforms. Out of principle, political analysis, and/or capacity, these progressive political parties are effectively operating in sub-national levels of government.

Therefore, the conference has three main objectives that are partly interlinked:

- 1) To present and share party-building efforts of network members, with a particular focus on the experiences of the host country, i.e. for this conference, Malaysia;
- 2) To discuss 2 examples of social-democratic local governance practices and approaches;

- 3) To initially share and discuss approaches to social policy/ social protection as social-democratic policy advocacies.

The selected issues shall be (a) public transportation and (b) water services.

- (a) Public Transportation is currently a big issue in Penang and in cities elsewhere in the region, but most Southeast Asian social-democratic and progressive parties are yet to work on this issue. In this regard, the conference aims to provide concrete plans and experiences from Malaysia and other countries to help the network members conceptualize their approaches on this issue.
- (b) Water service delivery is a concern for all, and some network members have already made substantial progress on this issue. In this regard, the conference aims to draw out lessons and insights that can be adapted and/or replicated by the network members.

Both these two issues will be discussed first on a conceptual level (What is a social-democratic approach to public transportation and water service delivery?). Secondly, network members will share how the conceptual work has influenced policy-making and implementation of these policies and programs incl. political and practical hurdles needed to be overcome.

On the issue of social protection, the conference will start a discussion process among the network members. Social policy/ social protection is, for social democrats, an essential component of public policy. After the financial and economic crisis, perspectives on social policy are slowly changing in the region, and it is now possible to bring it to the center of policy debates. Network members will have a chance to jointly formulate their arguments in favor of stronger social protection and to start a discussion – to be continued and deepened during the next network meeting - on what elements Asian social democrats find essential, urgent and feasible.

Lastly, the conference will provide space for participants to further develop the strategic direction of the network while planning specific actions that will follow this conference.

In sum, the **learning agenda** of the conference are as follows:

- To identify workable social democratic approaches in local governance (focusing on social service delivery) based on actual experiences of social democratic parties in Asia.
- To draw out lessons and strategies in introducing/implementing social-democratic local governance by parties in transition (i.e. progressive parties that have just become ruling parties).
- To begin formulating a social policy/ social protection agenda of the network.
- To map out working relations between and among party-government-social movement/ civil society in bringing about social democratic local governance.
- To identify the strategic direction and specific follow-through activities of the network.

Conference Agenda

Thursday, 19 November 2009

18.30 – 22.00

Opening: Introduction, Framework and Context Setting

Charles Santiago, MP, Steering Committee, Network of Social Democracy
Mirko Herberg, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung

Contextualizing: Political Situation Malaysia, Penang and Selangor

Moderator.: **Charles Santiago**, MP

Speakers

Liew Chin Tong, Member of Parliament, DAP

Chow Kon Yeow, MP, EXCO Local Government and Traffic Management, Penang State Government

Elisabeth Wong, EXCO for Tourism, Consumer Affairs and Environment, Selangor State Government

Friday, 20 November 2009

08.00

Departure from Hotel

08.30 – 09.30

YAB MR. LIM GUAN ENG, Chief Minister of Penang
KOMTAR, Penang, Tel. 012-2236968 (MP Liew Chin Tong)

10.00

Departure for Exposure Trip to Penang Water Supply (PBAPP, PWSA, PSDC)

10.30 – 12.00

PENANG WATER SERVICES ACADEMY (PWSA)
No. 1, Jalan Sultan Azlan Shah , Bandar Bayan Baru
11900 Bayan Lepas , Pulau

Workshop: How do parties conceptualize their agenda on the issue of water? What are the workable approaches in water-service delivery?

Input:

Mr. Jaseni Maidinsa, Chief Executive Officer, PBAPP Holdings Bhd, Malaysia
Erik Villanueva, Institute of Popular Democracy, Philippines

Moderated by **Charles Santiago**

Open Forum

12.30

Working Lunch with PBAPP Trade Unions

Return to Hotel

15.30 – 17.00

Social Democrats respond to the Crisis: Building a Social Protection Agenda

Input:

Maris Dela Cruz, Social Protection Network , Philippines

Kyou-Youb Choi, DLP, Korea

Martin Manurung, Rep-Dem, Indonesia

Moderated by: **Prof. Dr. Ramasamy a/l Palanisamy**, Deputy Chief Minister of Penang

18.00 Departure for Dinner venue at Penang Hill
David Brown's Restaurant and Tea Terraces
Strawberry Hill, Penang Hill, Tel: 04-828 8337

Context and Updates of Network Members

Moderated by Norbert von Hofmann

Saturday, 21 November 2009

09.00 – 11.30 ***“Public Transportation – The Way to Go”***

Presentation and Discussion about Public Transportation
Concept and Issues in Implementation

Presenter:

Dr. Lim Mah Hui, Member, Penang Transport Council

Open Forum moderated by **Alvin Dizon**, OPIC

12.00 Lunch and Discussion

“The Way Forward for European and German Social Democracy”

Speaker:

Olle Thorell, MP, Swedish Social Democratic Party

Wolfgang Biermann, International Department, Social Democratic Party, Germany

Moderator

Erwin Schweishelm, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung

14.00 – 17.30

World Cafe:

***Transforming politics and governance –
Expectations, Cooperation and Challenges for Social Democratic Policies***

Moderated by Mirko Herberg & Paul Pasch

Network’s Organizational Meeting: Conference Assessment and Planning

18.30 Departure to Dinner venue
The Sire Museum Restaurant
4 King Street, 10200 Penang

Sunday, 22 November 2009

AM Individual Departure

-.-.-.-