

Parliamentarians Caucus Manifesto



Putting Peoples' Participation and Welfare First: Our Commitment to Progressive Policy

Socdem Asia Parliamentarians' Caucus Jakarta Declaration Approved on December 5, 2019

Asia is in a critical moment of its history. Social forces are forging new political agendas which intend to undermine the existing liberal democratic order and to wipe out the few progressive reforms that have been won by social movements. At the same time, longstanding economic and social injustice threaten to create an even more unequal region.

Populists and authoritarians are on the rise in our region and elsewhere, on the one hand mobilizing people through fear and hatred, on the other hand promising quick fixes which are in the long run untenable and unsustainable. This follows an obvious playbook by populists and authoritarians elsewhere to reach out to the public's basest instincts to accumulate power. It is no wonder that such populists and authoritarians have utilized religious, racial and ethnic divisions to maintain its grip on power. In cases where it does not work, it has used the war against crime and drugs to justify the expansion of the coercive forces of the state.

Underneath this political current of populism and authoritarian resurgence is a backdrop of unprecedented economic growth and prosperity. Yet, such economic growth and prosperity favor only the few and not the many. Under the regime of neoliberal economics, instead of being an unintended result, inequality and injustice are structural. In a region of 4.4 billion people, economic growth and development continues to expand at an unprecedented pace, while inequalities in wealth, opportunity and access to resources are increasing also.

It is of great concern that this tremendous expansion will result in environmental degradation and climate crisis. This will affect both the current and future generations. The plunder of the environment and mass consumerism threaten the creation of a sustainable future.

However, the bleak vision of the future can be prevented. There is hope.

The surge of populism and authoritarianism can be confronted and defeated. The scourge of wealth inequality and social injustice can be contained. Shared prosperity and the improvement of the quality of people's lives can be achieved without risking the environment. This future can only be attained by greater freedom, solidarity, social justice and democracy. This is a future of social welfare for all, a kind of future that we must fight for all our societies and communities.

Beyond words, we must establish effective policies. As progressive parliamentarians in Asia, we commit toward progressive legislation in realizing the Social Democratic Pillars of Welfare in the region:

1. Greater access to affordable and quality healthcare

As our populations swell, Asia will have to rapidly improve its healthcare infrastructure to provide adequate and affordable healthcare to all. We must ensure that sound policies are in place, which will not only provide quality healthcare, but especially, protecting the vulnerable groups, and ensuring that these services are affordable for all. Healthcare costs should not become a financial burden for the poor and the marginalized.

2. Quality education

Education is a fundamental right of all people. But more importantly, it serves as a recognition that all individuals have the right to contribute to their society. In this regard, we must ensure that basic education is greatly improved, in a way that enables our children to obtain the necessary skills and knowledge in addressing the upcoming challenges. Quality education should not be only targeting children, but also reaching all citizens, regardless of their gender, race, ethnicities, and religious groups, to increase their capacities in improving their living condition. This means that we must push lifelong education, empowering people at all ages, allowing them to contribute and take part in developing the society.

3. Promotion of decent work for all

The prevailing economic system has not been beneficial to the needs and concerns of working people in the region. There is growing insecurity with the rise of automation and artificial intelligence that threatens to push some work into obsolescence. In such a scenario of precariousness, policies must be put in place to promote decent work that is able to meet the needs and aspirations of individual workers. This means a just transition towards new technologies and methods of work by ensuring the present workforce are able to retrain in new skills to fill the new jobs to be created by these technologies. Moreover, we must guarantee that workers will never be treated as disposable tools. This can be guaranteed by policies which protect and expand their rights to form unions and collective bargaining and right to just wages.

4. Creation of a progressive taxation regime

It is important that in pushing progressive policies, we are able to finance these programs with enough public financing. This can only be achieved if we change the tax regimes that currently exist towards that which promote greater responsibility of corporations and the wealthy towards society. Our region has created tremendous wealth but also created tremendous inequality. We must find ways to improve the efficiencies of our taxation, stem illicit outflow of capital and prevent a race-to-the-bottom taxation regime in Asia. We must ensure that our taxation systems are just, equitable, and proportional to the incomes of all segments of society. Taxes should work for the people by providing accessible quality public services to each and every one of the country's citizens.

5. Institutionalization of sustainable development and promotion of social cities

It is clear that the region's development has been damaging the environment. Extractive industries have polluted water systems, destroyed forests and displaced indigenous communities. We now face a frightening prospect of future generations living a much lower quality of life than those who lived before them. We have to minimize the impact of our rapid development on the environment. Many of our environmental issues cut across geographical borders and will require a strengthened regional framework for their resolution. We need to start a movement from fossil-powered energy towards carbon-neutral, safe, and clean energy resources, while ensuring that the transition remains just, equitable, and humane.



Moreover, as Asia rapidly urbanizes, it is essential that we transform our cities into liveable and people-friendly communities. We commonly experience some of these issues, such as congestion, lack of affordable housing, urban sprawls and social problems arising from rapid urbanization. We affirm our resolve to explore urban policies together and provide sustainable solutions to these emerging problems.

These policies, we believe, are the policies which serve to address the pressing concerns of our societies today. These are not quick fixes and overreaching promises but are necessary to drastically change existing systems which promote inequality and injustice. We see across the region, peoples' participation in their development and collective progress relegated to the sidelines and the margins. Policies are developed without their voice or with tokenism. Such important decisions must not be made without the contribution and participation of the public. People should come first. Our peoples' welfare and security should be the core of our policies. Our people's active participation in progress should be paramount. We therefore commit to expanding people's participation in the decision-making processes to ensure that people have a voice in the policy decisions that affect their communities.

Further, we commit to promoting a regional regime conducive to building social welfare systems through existing regional agreements and bodies if they exist, reforming them if necessary, and building new ones when needed. We understand that many of the problems we face in our countries are similar to those faced by other countries. In fact, many of these issues are interlinked. Therefore, greater cooperation and internationalism is needed; isolationism must be eschewed.

In the midst of a rising distrust over multilateralism which simplifies problems by searching for trade wars, we renew our commitment to the spirit of dialogue and create mutually beneficial cooperation for all countries. In this regard we call upon parliamentarians worldwide to strengthen our partnership. We build trust and cooperation for a more peaceful, just, and prosperous world.

We, parliamentarians from across Asia and member parties of the Network for Social Democracy in Asia (Socdem Asia), gathered this 5th of December in Jakarta, Indonesia, in the Launching of Socdem Asia Parliamentarians Caucus, affirm our commitment to the promotion of social welfare of our peoples, and in partnership with them promote inclusive policy formulation for social welfare.

This we commit to create a fairer and more equal society for the present and for the future.