



ODUMUNC 39

Human Rights Council

Promoting Women in Southeast Asia

By: Jade Young and Sean McGuffin



ODUMUNC 2016
Issue Brief for the UN Human Rights Council



Promoting Women in Southeast Asia

By: Jade Young & Sean McGuffin
Deakin University & Old Dominion University
Old Dominion University Model United Nations Society

Introduction

Women’s rights in Southeast Asia remain to be a relevant issue amongst United Nations (UN) member states, as many barriers still remain between women and real equality in the region. However, the world is starting to see a turning point in which women’s advocacy groups are speaking out about this issue, and women are finally starting to be heard. Some of the major issues that women face on a daily basis in Southeast Asia are: inequality, health care for child birth, domestic violence, sexual assaults, and exploitation. These issues have not gone unnoticed, and many social advocacy groups and UN related bodies in Southeast Asia promote women’s and provide a platform for advocacy. Some of the better known NGOs (nongovernmental organizations) operating in the region are Oxfam International, ActionAid, Amnesty

International, and Human Rights Watch.

Background

Southeast Asia consists of eleven countries with an approximate total population of 620 million people. These countries are Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Timor-Leste, and Viet Nam. While these states are relatively close to one another, they vary widely from state to state on economic, cultural, and political bases. Some states like Singapore and Brunei are very wealthy, and have some of the highest GDP per capita in the world; while others like Cambodia and Timor-Leste are on the opposite side of the spectrum. They are also differ religiously; Indonesia has the world’s largest Muslim population, and countries like Thailand have are comprised of over 90% Buddhists. Still further their forms of government vary from an





ODUMUNC 2016
Issue Brief for the UN Human Rights Council



Promoting Women in Southeast Asia

By: Jade Young & Sean McGuffin
Deakin University & Old Dominion University
Old Dominion University Model United Nations Society

absolute monarch in Burundi, a single party state Singapore, and a functioning democracy in the Philippines. Any resolution on the region would need to be a workable solution for every state, and working with instead of against their many differences.



Human Trafficking

The trafficking of women and children is a serious public health and human rights concern within the region, with an estimated 200,000 to 250,000 women and children trafficked each year in Southeast Asia (Amador, 2013). The UN Office on Drugs and Crime defines human trafficking as the recruitment or transportation of peoples by means of threat, force, abduction, or coercion of any kind to possibly achieve the consent of a person having control over another for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation can be in the form of, but not limited to, sexual exploitation, forced labour, and organ removal. This should not be confused with migrant smuggling, in which the profit of the illegal venture is in the transportation of persons, and not the exploitation there of, and whose peoples are normally let free

once at their destination. Human trafficking can often lure people in by promising them passage into another country, but then force them to work for low wages to pay for their transportation. The UNODC lists that sexual exploitation constitutes 79% of all human trafficking, followed by forced labour at 18%, but the analysis does admit that this could be due to statistical bias, because sexual exploitation is often more reported than domestic servitude, forced marriage, bonded labour, and other forms of exploitation (UNODC, 2015).

Many women who are victims of human trafficking are lured in by the promise of jobs or education in more developed countries, trying to leave either poverty, conflict, or some other form of distress. Once taken their documentation and passports are confiscated, and they are removed from their place of origin. Despite a common misconception, two out of three persons trafficked either stay in their country, or cross borders within the same region. East Asia has the highest percentage of intra-regional trafficking, with a full third going to the Middle East and a quarter going to the Americas. Many of these international trafficking rings are highly organized; moving individuals across borders, and arranging means of exploitation over a long period of time. One additionally worrying trend is the doubling in the amount of children being trafficked from 2004. Within the Southeast Asian and Pacific regions 64% are involved in forced labour, while 26% are



ODUMUNC 2016
Issue Brief for the UN Human Rights Council



Promoting Women in Southeast Asia

By: Jade Young & Sean McGuffin
Deakin University & Old Dominion University
Old Dominion University Model United Nations Society

involved in sexual exploitation. Within that same region 77% of those persons trafficked are women.

Thailand is often proclaimed the trafficking hub for the region and worldwide. The NGO Children's Organization of Southeast Asia [COSA] (2015) have stated that because Thailand borders four countries Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia and Southern China, it has become a major crossroads for the majority of the trafficking within the region. It has been suggested that approximately 99 percent of those trafficked into and out of Thailand are natives of Southeast Asia, with a fourth of those being trafficked for labour. In a report written by the Australian Institute of Criminology (2010), Thailand reportedly is currently housing approximately three million undocumented migrants, the report suggests that the reasoning behind Thailand being a hotspot for human trafficking is due to its lack of border control, which is true for much of Southeast Asia. The UN Development Program (UNDP) states that human trafficking has been created out of economic problems, but also has created a multitude of problems on its own. The major issues that surround human trafficking and the then created development issues are: severe health issues especially with the spread of the HIV virus, gender related problems as unequal power relations reinforce women's secondary status in society, and lastly it creates a major legal issue as

human trafficking strips all those involved of their basic human dignity.

Women in Contemporary Southeast Asia

Gender in Southeast Asia is often the deciding factor concerning one's independence, the ability to work, and even health (Tobin, 2014). It has been stated in an article written by CARE (n.d.) that in 2012 Myanmar appointed their first women to office, however, only 4.6 percent of seats are held by women.

There is also a noticeable correlation between many of the female heads of state in this region and already established political families. In each case where a women rose to the highest political position of that country their father has been a very important political Presidents/Prime Ministers. This is not to say they were not capable of these feats, but that the system around them was bias against women, and their aristocratic connections was a driving factor in their appointment just as it would have been had they been male. In Cambodia women make up half of the formal labor force, but earn 33% less than their male counterparts in the same industries. Cemented gender roles and biases in some Southeast Asian cultures are so dramatic that 81% of women in Laos believe that men are justified in committing acts of domestic violence towards their significant other in certain circumstances (CARE, n.d.). Even in the new millennium, women in South



ODUMUNC 2016
Issue Brief for the UN Human Rights Council



Promoting Women in Southeast Asia

By: Jade Young & Sean McGuffin
Deakin University & Old Dominion University
Old Dominion University Model United Nations Society

Asia are deprived of their socio-economic and legal rights. The system in which Southeast Asian women live in where religious injunctions, tribal codes, feudal traditions, and discriminatory laws are prevalent. They are plagued by a system that, while it has been improving as of late, has a legacy of social discrimination which still permeates through the laws of many countries. In some urban centers of Southeast Asian countries women's social roles have improved to some extent. They have now comparatively more opportunities for education, employment, and enjoyment of civil rights within society. However, Southeast Asian society is still a distance away from seeing gender equality and fairness at its highest form (Niaz & Hassan 2006, p. 120).

Every county in Southeast Asia has signed the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). This is one of the UN's core treaties on international human rights, and is often called the Women's Bill of Rights. The CEDAW has three major components: substantive equality, state obligation, and non-discrimination aimed at creating equality among the sexes. However, a lack of clarity among the countries hinders any implementation, and there are often conflicting laws and regulations. Indirect discrimination through the form of gender neutral laws is common. This is where the law itself is neutral to both men and women, but because of other regulation or customs creates disadvantage towards women. This

can be seen in inheritance laws where sons are often preferred over daughters or in hiring practices where women are often seen as too fragile to handle certain responsibilities.

Education of Women and Girls

Education within Southeast Asia is taken very seriously. Each individual government understands that having a knowledge-based population is the key in developing one's state. However, with that being said gender inequality is still very prominent within the education sector. According to The Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization [SEAMO] (2004) "The rate of female enrolment in secondary education schools is much lower than that of male enrolment, while the most disadvantaged in upper secondary education is ethnic minority school girls". According to a report written by the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund [UNICEF] (2009) "Southeast Asia remains the most gender unequal and insensitive region in the world, cultural and social beliefs and practices interface with each other to form multi and overlapping disparities that excludes girls from their right to education". UNICEF believes that if education was made more readily available to girls/females it could solve some of the more pressing human rights issues that women face on a daily basis. However, as was mentioned, the region is especially diverse. In some countries like Brunei, Malaysia, Thailand, and the Philippines



ODUMUNC 2016 Issue Brief for the UN Human Rights Council



Promoting Women in Southeast Asia

By: Jade Young & Sean McGuffin
Deakin University & Old Dominion University
Old Dominion University Model United Nations Society

literacy rates is higher among women. An example that UNICEF uses is the ever growing population tradition of underage marriage. According to UNICEF Southeast Asia leads the global statistics chart of underage marriage with a full 58% of girls in Southeast Asia getting married before the age of eighteen. Being married this early in life hurts endangers a woman's opportunity to receive a real education. Once they are married women are often expected to tend to the needs of the home and children, thus hindering their prospects for education.

Domestic Violence Epidemic



United Nations Women on their website states "In East and Southeast Asia, the widespread prevalence of violence against women is a serious issue, particularly with regard to domestic violence and marital rape, child marriages, and trafficking in women and girls. Despite considerable progress in establishing policies and programs, implementation has been far slower. This gap is largely the result of deeply entrenched cultural values, attitude and

practices that are rooted in gender stereotype and ultimately justify exploitative behavior and violence against women" (UN Women, 2015). UN Women maintains that statistics of the region paints a horrific picture of the life of Southeast Asian women. Domestic violence is the major cause of death and/or disability amongst women between the ages of 15 to 44, and a full 70% of women are victims of some form of physical or sexual violence, usually from an intimate partner. UN Women have implemented "Partnering with the National Human Rights Commission in Thailand to establish gender-sensitive measures in criminal courts across the country, ensuring effective implementation of Thailand's domestic violence legislation" (2009).

Conclusion

The UN's partnerships with NGO's have shown tremendous strength when giving guidance to individual governments on the topics mentioned above. Hopefully, the UN, its humanitarian partners, and its Southeast Asian member states will find themselves capable to address these issues of gender equality and exploitation. The major questions around the role of women in Southeast Asia is not on what issues it is they face, but how to tackle said issues. Is the response an increase in border security to end human trafficking, is it a bottom up approach to better the lives of women and help them gain necessary funds or loans to attend college, or is it to further enable



ODUMUNC 2016
Issue Brief for the UN Human Rights Council



Promoting Women in Southeast Asia

By: Jade Young & Sean McGuffin
Deakin University & Old Dominion University
Old Dominion University Model United Nations Society

individual member states to act on these
issues by providing guidelines for action?
All of these questions will hopefully be

discussed, and researched further for, in
committee.



ODUMUNC 2016
Issue Brief for the UN Human Rights Council



Promoting Women in Southeast Asia

By: Jade Young & Sean McGuffin
Deakin University & Old Dominion University
Old Dominion University Model United Nations Society

Bibliography

Amador, Julio 2013, 'Confronting Traditions and Contextualizing Modernity: The Challenges of Protecting Women's Human Rights in Southeast Asia', *Rethinking International Relations Global Ethics Network*, retrieved 20 June 2015, <http://www.globalethicsnetwork.org/profiles/blogs/confronting-traditions-and-contextualizing-modernity-the>

Asian Society 2015, Women in Southeast Asia, retrieved 20 September 2015, <http://asiasociety.org/women-southeast-asia>

Australian Government Australian Institute of Criminology 2010, Migration and people trafficking in Southeast Asia, *Trends & Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice*, no. 401, Canberra.

Children's Organization of Southeast Asia 2015, *Prevent Trafficking, Empower Communities, Change Lives*, COSA, Chiang Mai

Greenwood, T n.d. 'Marginalized Urban Women in Southeast Asia', *CARE*, retrieved 21 September 2015, < <https://www.care.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/MUW-in-SE-Asia-Report.pdf>>

Niaz, U & Hassan, S 2006, 'Culture and Mental Health of Women in Southeast Asia', *Word Psychiatry*, vol 2, pp 118 – 120, retrieved 20 September 2015, <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1525125/>

Tobin, B 2014, Gender Discrimination in Southeast Asia, *Borgen Magazine World News*, retrieved 20 September 2015, <http://www.borgenmagazine.com/gender-discrimination-southeast-asia/>

The Southeast Asian Ministries of Education Organization 2004, *Challenges of Education in Southeast Asia*, SEAMO, retrieved 26 September 2015, <http://www.seameo.org/v1/library/dlwelcome/publications/paper/india04.htm>

The United Nations Development Programme 2009, *Trafficking in Persons and Human Development: Towards a More Integrated Policy Response*, retrieved 7 October 2015, http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/hdrp_2009_51.pdf

United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund [UNICEF] 2009, "Overcoming Barriers to Girls Education in Southeast Asia", retrieved 29 September 2015, < http://www.unicef.org/rosa/whole_book_b.pdf>



ODUMUNC 2016
Issue Brief for the UN Human Rights Council
Promoting Women in Southeast Asia



By: Jade Young & Sean McGuffin
Deakin University & Old Dominion University
Old Dominion University Model United Nations Society

United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime 2012, *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons*, UNODC, New York

UNDOC, *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons*, retrieved 21 November 2015, http://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/glotip/GLOTIP_2014_full_report.pdf

UNDOC, *Human trafficking what is it*, retrieved 21 November 2015 <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/human-trafficking/what-is-human-trafficking.html>

UN Women: Asia Pacific, *CEDAW & Women's Human Rights*, retrieved 21 November 2015 <http://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/focus-areas/cedaw-human-rights>

UN Women, *CEDAW Southeast Asia Programme (CEDAW SEAP)*, retrieved 21 November 2015, <http://www.unwomen-eseasia.org/projects/Cedaw/cedawseap.html>

UNWomen 2015, 'End Violence against Women', retrieved 29 September 2015, < <http://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/focus-areas/end-violence-against-women>>

Picture References

Introduction Picture, *Gender Equality Stats don't tell the full story*, <http://www.dw.com/en/gender-equality-stats-dont-tell-the-full-story/a-17082195>

Background Picture, *The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)*, <http://www.arfmar.info/english/dmgk/>

Education of Women and Girls Picture, *Southeast Asian Resource Action Centre*, < <http://www.searac.org/new/all-students-count-act-calls-education-data-catch>>

Domestic Violence Picture, *Voice of America*, <http://www.voanews.com/content/un-says-epidemic-of-violence-against-women-is-global/1685918.html>

<http://www.asean.org/communities/asean-socio-cultural-community/category/acwc>

<http://www.madre.org/>



ODUMUNC 2016
Issue Brief for the UN Human Rights Council



Promoting Women in Southeast Asia

By: Jade Young & Sean McGuffin
Deakin University & Old Dominion University
Old Dominion University Model United Nations Society

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Convention_on_the_Elimination_of_All_Forms_of_Discrimination_Against_Women

http://www.unodc.org/documents/Global_Report_on_TIP.pdf

http://www.unodc.org/documents/human-trafficking/Executive_summary_english.pdf

<http://www.unwomen.org/en>