



# 2020 Activity Report



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Tech Performance

# About



Asia Centre is a not-for-profit organisation that seeks to create social impact in the region. It serves as a think-tank, meeting convener, project partner and social enterprise. Asia Centre was first established in 2015 in Bangkok, Thailand and in 2018, a second branch was registered in Johor Bahru, Malaysia.



## THINK-TANK

Asia Centre undertakes independent, evidence-based participatory research on significant issues affecting the region. The Centre convenes conferences, roundtables and seminars to discuss these issues and communicates policy advice through publications and workshops.



## MEETING CONVENER

Asia Centre convenes academics, civic society activists (CSOs), donors, government officials, journalists, INGO professionals and others for conferences, meetings, roundtables seminars and workshops to meet, discuss and collaborate to address issues impacting the region.



## PROJECT PARTNER

Asia Centre works with partners to develop programs, implement projects, and convene activities that serve to, inter alia, extend the partner's reach across the region.



## SOCIAL ENTERPRISE

In order to implement projects and activities, Asia Centre needs resources to cover its overhead and operational costs. Hence, part of the income is generated via the rental of its meeting space together with event management, catering and administrative support. The Centre also undertakes commission research and implements activities for partners. It also applies for project grants by responding to application calls.



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# Asia Centre Strengthens Online Capabilities

In 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Asia Centre took steps to strengthen its online capabilities. It invested in video-conferencing equipments, established an in-house studio, signed up for relevant digital services, improved its presence on social media platforms and undertook digital training of staffs. This allowed Asia Centre to strategically shift and increase its operations and activities online.

## RESPONDING TO COVID-19

### Work From Home

During the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic in mid March 2020, Asia Centre initiated working from home to continue its operations and make preparations to postpone activities. Asia Centre Staffs and interns held daily video meetings via Zoom, communicated via WhatsApp and used Google Suite to continue work on projects.

### Postpone Activities

Following consultation with partners, in-person activities were postponed. These included the Melbourne Outreach (23-27 March), half-day seminars at Chiang Mai University (29 April) & Songkla University (22 May) and the Journalism for An Equitable Asia Award Ceremony and Workshop with Oxfam in Asia in Bangkok (2-3 April). The annual international conference, Hate Speech in Asia: Challenges and Solutions was also moved from 8-10 July to 7-9 October 2020.

### Infrastructure Response



Increasing Social Media Footprint



Video-Conferencing Equipment



Software Licences  
(Microsoft, Google Suite, Zoom, Survey Monkey, Canva)



Digital Skills Training



Video Programming



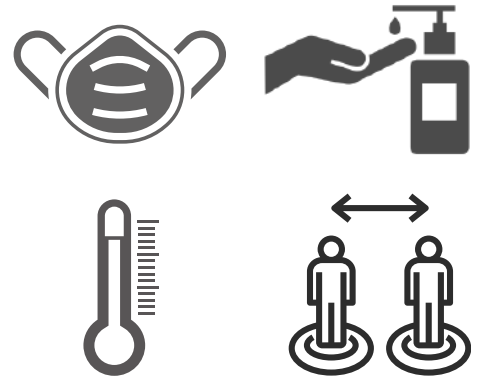
Establish in-House Studio



## Asia Centre Strengthens Online Presence

### Resume Operations (Health Protocols)

When the Thai government announced the opening phase of the economy on 3 May 2020, Asia Centre began opening up preparation and resumed operations with plans and health protocols to ensure the safety of all working in the office. Visitors had to wear masks, check their temperature, regularly wash their hands and observe social distancing.



### Resume Activities

With the Covid-19 pandemic expected to continue into 2021, Asia Centre converted the postponed in-person activities to online events. Asia Centre leveraged its strengthened social media presence to communicate with audiences globally. Activities were recorded, edited and posted on Youtube. Online posts were published daily on Facebook, IG, Twitter, and LinkedIn. Meetings via Zoom became a norm for team discussions and communications with all project partners. The Centre also undertook more evidence-based research and began working on three reports.



In 2020, Asia Centre's project focused on hate speech which escalated during the COVID-19 pandemic. Under its Hate Speech Project, in 2020, Asia Centre organised two webinars, published one report, organised one report launch that was featured in three media outlets, convened one international conference, wrote five media commentaries and spoke at five external events.

### Hate Speech Webinars

On 27 May 2020, the Centre organised the first of its two media literacy webinars, "COVID-19 and Hate Speech in Asia" and, on 24 June 2020, a second webinar, "COVID-19 and Vulnerable Communities". During each event speakers from academia and CSOs spoke whilst over 100 online participants attended each event. The two webinars acted as previews to Asia Centre's 5th international conference on "Hate Speech in Asia: Challenges and Solutions" from 7-5 October 2020.



### Hate Speech Report Launch

On 22 July 2020, the Centre published its first baseline study, Hate Speech in Southeast Asia: New Forms, Old Rules. On the same day, about 200 registrants attended the report launch through Zoom and Facebook live-stream. Three panelists discussed Asia Centre's report during the launch.

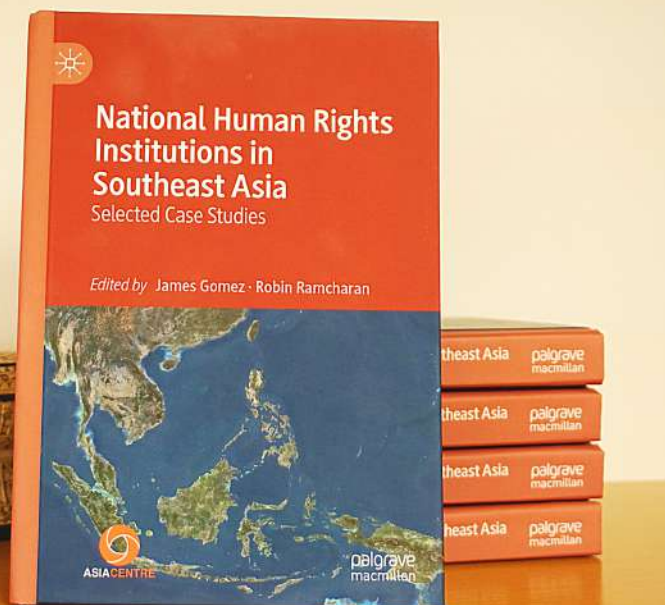
### Hate Speech in Asia Conference

From 7 to 9 October 2020, Asia Centre held its 5th international conference, "Hate Speech in Asia: Challenges and Solutions" as a hybrid conference due to COVID-19 travel advisories. The conference was held at the Law Faculty, Thammasat University on the first day for in-person sessions and at Asia Centre where the online sessions were coordinated for another two and half days. The conference convened along with 18 partners with 13 panels and 47 speakers and had 340 people ranging from INGOs, CSOs, academia, government officials, and private companies attend the panels.



In 2020, Asia Centre's book on human rights institutions arising from its 2nd International Conference was published. The Centre also published, with different partners each, three reports assessing the impact on human rights brought on by COVID-19, disinformation and hate speech in the region.

## BOOK



### *National Human Rights Institutions in Southeast Asia Selected Case Studies*

*National Human Rights Institutions in Southeast Asia: Selected Case Studies* is part of an emerging assessment of a nascent regional human rights architecture that is facing significant challenges in protecting human rights. As part of this architecture, the book asks can NHRIs overcome its weakness and provide protection, including remedies to victims of human rights abuses. This is Asia Centre's second book with international publisher, Palgrave Macmillan.

## REPORTS



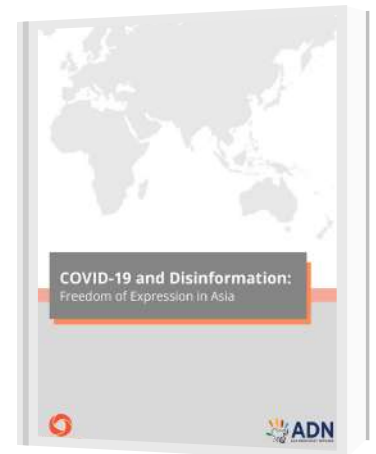
### *Hate Speech in Southeast Asia*

On 22 July 2020, Asia Centre, in partnership with Thai Media Fund, published its first report, "*Hate Speech in Southeast Asia; New Forms, Old Rules*". This report examines the rise of the hate speech phenomenon in Southeast Asia and identifies four forms of hate speech; (I) ethnic and religious groups, (II) foreign nationals, migrant workers and refugees; (III) political values and ideology; (IV) gender and sexual minority.



### *COVID-19 and Democracy in Southeast Asia: Building Resilience, Fighting Authoritarianism*

On 9 December 2020, Asia Centre in partnership with Empowering Fundamental Freedom Defenders in Southeast Asia (EAFDD) launched the Centre's second report, "*COVID-19 and Democracy in Southeast Asia: Building Resilience, Fighting Authoritarianism*". The report evaluates the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on democracy and human rights in Southeast Asia. The findings show that the pandemic has accelerated the regression of democracy in the region and that it requires civil society to take the lead in mounting a pushback against rising authoritarianism.



### *COVID-19 and Disinformation: Freedom of Expression in Asia*

On 6 November, in partnership with the Asian Democracy Network (ADN), Asia Centre compiled a report titled "*COVID-19 and Disinformation: Freedom of Expression in Asia*". The report demonstrates how the governments of 14 Asian Countries use the COVID-19 pandemic as an opportunity to censor political criticism. The report further uncovers how governments in the region are able to expand their control into digital media spaces through 'fake news' legislations.

# COVID-19 Impacts in Asia

In 2020, given the COVID-19 pandemic, Asia Centre responded to its consequences and impact by organising three webinars, one report, four commentaries, and four interviews. These activities helped frame and inform the Centre's programme of activities for 2021.



## Countering the Coronavirus-related Infodemic: sharing Best Practices

On 9 November 2020, Asia Centre and Taipei Economic and Cultural office in Thailand convened the webinar, "Countering the Coronavirus-Related "infodemic": Sharing Best Practices" with 6 speakers discussing solutions to COVID-19 infodemic with the collaboration of public and civil society. The total number of registrants were 146 and attendees were 37.

## Japan - ASEAN Relation: The impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic

On 18 November 2020, Asia Centre held the 3rd ASEAN-Japan Roundtable which explored the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the relation between ASEAN countries and Japan. This event had five speakers along with 159 participants from 492 registrants.

## Report Launch - COVID-19 and Democracy in Southeast Asia: Building Resilience, Fighting Authoritarianism

On 9th December 2020, The baseline study, COVID-19 and Democracy in Southeast which discussed the highlight of the report including threats of democracy from the COVID-19 crisis and its regulations. Asia was launched along with 5 speakers and 83 attendees from 247 registrants attending via Zoom webinar.

# Equitable Asia Award Ceremony



In 2020, Asia Centre convened the 2020 Journalism for an Equitable Asia Award Ceremony. This was held online on 2 December after postponing the initial face-to-face event in April due to COVID-19 travel advisories. the event had 44 attendees from 72 registrants

Going into its second year, Asia Centre, once again in partnership with Oxfam in Asia, announced the nominations for the 2021 Journalism for an Equitable Asia Award Ceremony in 2021.



In 2020, Asia Centre representatives was invited to five webinars hosted by Oxford Poverty & Human Development Initiative (OPHI), Online Hate Prevention Institution (OHPI), IEEE computer Society, United Nation Human Rights Office of The High Commissioner, Freedom of Religion or Belief in Southeast Asia (SEAFoRB) to centre around topic of hate speech. They also were invited to another five online discussion on the topic of COVID-19 by Deakin University, Council of Asian Liberals and Democrats Empowering Fundamental Freedom Defenders in Southeast Asia (EADEA), Seoul National University Asia Centre & Kyushu University and HIVOS .



Online Racism in the Coronavirus Crisis



#HumanRightsTalk; Countering Hate Speech



Combatting Fake News During COVID-19



The 2020 US Presidential Election: Will It Matter For Democracy and Human Rights in Asia



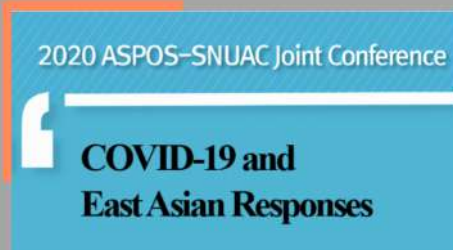
Webinar: The Corona Crisis and Its Impact on Human Rights and FoRB In Southeast Asia



Asia-Pacific Regional Forum on Hate Speech, Social Media and Minorities



Nurturing Human Rights in East and South East Asia Conference



COVID-19 and East Asian Responses

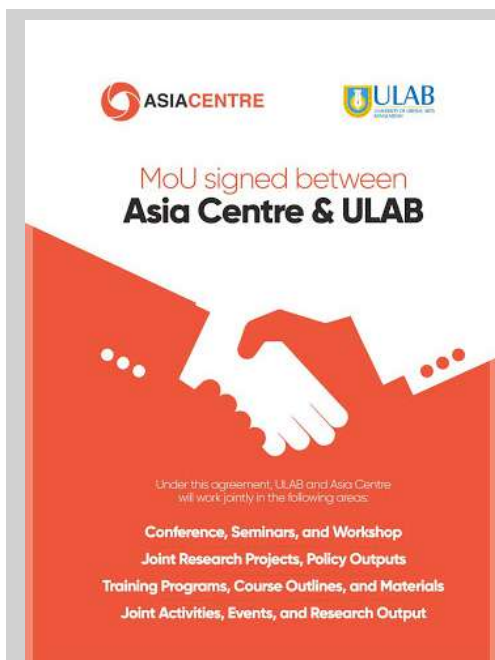


Focus Group Discussion Shrinking Civic Space in Southeast Asia



## MoU with NIDA

On 21 July 2020, Asia Centre signed an MoU with the National Institution of Development Administration's (NIDA) Graduate School of Communication Arts and Management Innovation. This MoU has built on as the recognition of an existing work relation and partnership to co-conveners of Asia Centre's 6th international conference 2021, COVID-19 in Asia; Communication, Nationalism, Technology, scheduled on 6-8 October 2021.



## MoU with ULAB

On 25 September 2020, Asia Centre signed an MoU with the University of Liberal Art Bangladesh (ULAB) as an official mark of work relation since 2016, one media and communication workshop, and, contribution to the 4th International Conference's panel, Fake News and Election in Asia, in 2019. This MoU will lead to future collaborations and projects.



## MoC TECO

On 21 September 2020, Asia Centre signed a MoC with the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office in Thailand (TECO). This MoC paved the way for a Project Partner to webinar, "Countering the Coronavirus-related Infodemic: Sharing Best Practices" organised on 9 November 2020.

## EMBASSY VISITS



### Embassy of Switzerland Bangkok

On 16 June 2020, Asia Centre team visited the Swiss Embassy and met Pierre Hagmann, Deputy Head of Mission. This meeting paved the way for collaboration on hate speech projects and conference.



### Taipei Economic and Cultural Office

On 13 August 2020, Dr. Robin Ramcharan, Executive Director of Asia Centre, had an opportunity to visit the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office in Thailand and sign the condolence book for the late former president, Lee Teng-hui, Taiwan democracy icon.



### Netherlands Embassy Bangkok

On 29 September 2020, Asia Centre's Team visited the Netherlands Embassy Bangkok and had a chance to discuss with Ambassador Kees Rade for future collaboration.



## Interviews

In 2020, Asia Centre representatives had 4 interviews with VOA, Green Left, Al Jazeera News, Asia Society Australia on the topic of COVID-19 and another 7 interviews with Nikkei Asia, CGTN, BFM, VOA and Al Jazeera News regarding political development

13 April: **ASEAN +3 Summit**

### COVID-19

17 April: **VOA**, Asian Media Battles Officials to Report Coronavirus

6 May: **Green Left**, Migrant Workers Bear Brunt of Singapore's COVID-19 'Second Wave'

11 May: **Al Jazeera News** on Rights of Malaysia's Undocumented Workers

12 Oct: **Asia Society Australia**, The Pandemic and Civil Society- Southeast Asia and COVID-19

### Political Developments

28 July: **Nikkei Asia**, Thai Youth Protests Draw Moral Support from Hong Kong Activists

5 Aug. **CGTH**, Whether Singaporean Want Opposition Elected Worth Watching

10 Aug: **BFM**, Thai Call for Reform after Activists' Arrest

28 Aug, **VOA**: Taiwan Accredits Surge of Foreign Reporters, some Fleeing China

7 Sep: **Al Jazeera News**, the Rohingya Refugees' Arrival in Aceh, Indonesia

9 Sep: **ABC TV Australia's** Beverly O'Connor, Rohingya Massacre Video Confession and Elections in Myanmar

19 Oct: **BFM**: Theatre of Indirect Communication

28 Oct: **VOA**: For Filipino Journalists, Local politics Can Be a Dangerous Beat



## Op-eds

Regarding Op-Eds, Asia Centre published 3 pieces about Journalism/media with Bangkok post, Nikkie and VOA News, 4 pieces about COVID-19 with Asia Global Online, Bangkok post, Jakarta Post, and 5 pieces of Hate Speech with Bangkok Post, Irrawaddy, The Jakarta Post, and The Vibes.

### Journalism/Media

12 Feb: **Bangkok Post**, Journalism Suffers Existential Crisis

2 March: **Nikkei**, China Expelled WEJ Journalists Because It Cannot Bear Criticism

28 Sep: **VOA News**, Why Facebook Suddenly Closed 155 Accounts Targeting the Philippines

### COVID-19

12 March: **Asia Global Online**, Democracy in Southeast Asia: Elite is An Obstacle

1 April: **Bangkok Post**, Coronavirus and Democracy in Southeast Asia

25 April: **Jakarta Post**, COVID-19 Shrinks Civic Space in Southeast Asia

27 May: **Bangkok Post**, COVID Crisis Stifles Political Criticism in Southeast Asia

### Hate Speech

18 Jul: **The Irrawaddy**, Hate Speech Threats Proliferate in Myanmar, Southeast Asia

26 Aug: **The Jakarta Post**, Inaction Risks Hate Speech Normalization in Japan

30 Sep: **The Vibes**, Solution to Hate Speech Needs Holistic Approach

16 Oct: **Bangkok Post**, Govt Hate Speech Spikes in SE Asia.

### Democracy in SEA

09 Dec: **International Affairs**, COVID-19 Accelerates Democratic Regression in Southeast Asia

10 Dec: **The Jakarta Post**, Women and Youth Targets of COVID-19 Authoritarianism in SE Asia

10 Dec: **The Bangkok Post**, COVID-19 Sidelines Human Rights

15 Dec: **Rappler**, Surveillance to Deepen in Southeast Asia Post COVID-19

# MALAYSIAN PARTNERS



## MARI: Hate Speech Panel & Malaysia Oped

In 2020, Asia Centre has postponed the opening of Asia Centre 2nd branch in Malaysia dealing with COVID-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, Asia Centre has continued its relationship with Malaysia partners and activities to establish the strong foundation of its 2nd branch. Asia Centre has MARI contributed to one of the panels in 5th international conference, Hate Speech in Asia: Solutions and Challenges, published 1 Oped, 'Solutions to Hate Speech Needs Holistic Approach' with The Vibes.

## Asia Centre Malaysia Branch

In the meantime, the Asia Centre Malaysia branch is continually renovating. One of the floor is planed to an in-house studio which will facilitate for future digital production and projects.



# Interns

# Volunteer



Asia Centre welcomed eight interns from Germany, Indonesia, South Africa, Thailand and Taiwan.

We had one volunteer from the Netherlands, Belen Bode.

## SOCIAL MEDIA

In 2020, one of the major Asia Centre missions is to strengthen the online presence on online platforms. The online posts and contents have been strategized to actively post every day with an advance plan on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn whilst every Asia Centre events and activities were recorded and edited to post via Youtube. Asia Centre published over 58 videos on its youtube accounts. In total, Asia Centre has more than 10501 Facebook followers, 656 LinkedIn followers and 557 Twitter followers.



10,501 followers



656 Followers



557 Followers



Conference



Webinars



Knowledge video



Interview

## Publications



3 baseline studies



1 book



## Partners

- 5 MOUs
- 3 Embassy Visits



## People

- 8 interns
- 1 volunteer

## Activities



1 International Conference



3 Webinars



1 Roundtable



2 Report Launches

## Advocacy:

### Media Engagements



14 Interviews



16 Op-eds



6 News reports

### Social Media Engagement



follower



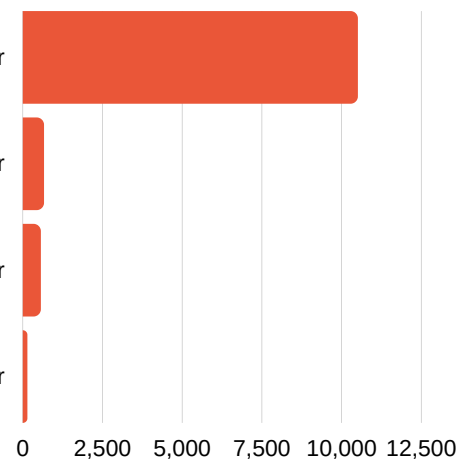
follower



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11 Speaking Engagements



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