

Dear Colleagues,

We write to share news of the release of our current Special Issue of *The Journal of Human Rights* (JHR 20.2), focusing on Human Rights Governance in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations – ASEAN. The issue is guest edited by Anthony J. Langlois (Flinders University, Australia) and Mathew Davies (Australian National University).

As the issue goes live online, the ASEAN Intergovernmental Human Rights Commission (AICHR) is conducting its annual meeting, which this year is hosted by Brunei-Darussalam. With the world watching a deteriorating situation in Myanmar, where a bloody military coup has undermined a period of limited democratic advance, ASEAN's capacity to make a collective response which prioritizes the rights and wellbeing of the people of Myanmar is critical. But is the region's human rights regime up to the task?

This question is considered directly across a number of the articles in the special issue. The regime itself, as Co-editor Anthony J. Langlois details, has now existed for a decade, but is widely considered to lack the authority, autonomy and capacity to address critical human rights issues. An inside look at these challenges, and the longer history of the regime, is provided by Her Excellency Yuyun Wahyuningrum, Commissioner for Indonesia at ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR).

The question of how to make rights work as an institutional framework for cooperation is also taken up by Catherine Michelle Renshaw, and Co-editor Mathew Davies. Renshaw looks at Myanmar and Brunei specifically, and Davies situates his proposals in a comparative context, contrasting ASEAN's rights regime with the Inter-American system.

A different way into the question of rights governance is to consider how it links with other institutional mechanisms, and this is the approach taken by Robin Ramcharan, who considers the role of the Sustainable Development Goals, and in particular SDG 16, as a complementary protection process to ASEAN's rights regime.

The special issue contains two articles which consider the question of human rights protection on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity expression (SOGIE). Meredith L. Weiss looks at the ways in which SOGIE rights advocates have responded to and utilized the advent of a regional rights regime for community building and advocacy, while George Baylon Radics discusses the ongoing legacy of British colonial-era anti-sodomy laws in Singapore, Malaysia, Brunei and Myanmar.

The intent behind this special issue was to mark the first decade of ASEAN's institutionalisation of human rights, and to use the anniversary as an opportunity for reflection on what has been achieved, as well as a provocation for what needs to be done. From the profound trauma being experienced in Myanmar today, through to the day-to-day experiences of SOGIE discrimination and violence, there are great challenges for the realisation of rights in the region. But as the work of Wahyuningrum and her colleagues, and countless rights advocates across the region makes clear, there is a great appetite to make rights matter.

In signing off, we remind you of the Journal of Human Rights' longstanding engagement with human rights in ASEAN, beginning with [The Formation of the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights: A Protracted Journey](#), Volume 10, Issue 3 (2011) and [States of Compliance?: Global Human Rights Treaties and ASEAN Member States](#), Volume 13, Issue 4 (2014). In thinking about the ongoing situation in Myanmar, we also direct you to [Recovering from Statelessness: Resettled Bhutanese-Nepali and Karen Refugees Reflect on the Lack of Legal Nationality](#), Volume 16, Issue 4 (2016) and [Security Sector Reform in Transitions from Military Rule: Legacies of Authoritarianism in Brazil](#), Volume 18, Issue 2 (2019).

We hope that you enjoy the Special Issue.

Best wishes,

Rachel Chambers (Social Media Co-Editor)