2018 Asia-Pacific Partnership Meeting
Of Child Rights Coalitions and Networks

Manila, Philippines | 19-22 June 2018
Child rights advocates and organizations from different parts of Asia and the Pacific gathered in Manila, Philippines to participate in Child Rights Coalition Asia’s (CRC Asia) four-day Asia-Pacific Partnership Meeting of Child Rights Coalitions and Networks 2018 (APPM 2018) from June 19 to 22, 2018.

The four-day meeting consisted of fruitful and thought-provoking discussions on rising child rights issues. APPM 2018 had eight sessions which covered; children’s rights in international migration, children as human rights defenders, surrogacy, child marriage, violence against children, online child protection, children’s rights in urban settings, and the 30th anniversary of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN CRC).

The Welcoming of Participants

Amihan Abueva, Executive Director of CRC Asia, opened the meeting by sharing the meeting objectives, which include strengthening advocacy capacity by building knowledge on emerging child rights issues and situations; engaging with sectoral groups and fellow child rights advocates; and developing possible plans for the celebration of the 30th anniversary of the UN CRC and the high-level political forum related to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Meanwhile, Hope Tura, Child Rights Governance Manager of Save the Children Philippines, welcomed the participants to the meeting, which has been conducted annually by CRC Asia for four years with the support of Save the Children.

Tura shared some details from Save the Children’s End of Childhood Report 2018: The Many Faces of Exclusion. The report looked at the indicators that steal childhood from around the world. These indicators, referred to as “childhood enders,” include poor health, malnutrition, exclusion from education, child labor, child marriage, early pregnancy, and extreme violence. Tura also underscored that this meeting could facilitate the sharing of expertise and experience to produce concrete achievable plans and sustainable actions to improve the well-being of children.

Session 1: Children’s Rights in International Migration

The first session of APPM 2018 focused on the joint general comment regarding the human rights of children in the context of international migration. The discussion was led by Atty. Mikiko Otani, member of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child.

Atty. Otani presented the highlights of the two newest General Comments of the Committee that was jointly produced with the Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families. She highlighted that these two general comments on the rights of children in international migration should be read together, as the first one talks about the general principles and the second one discusses the State obligations.

The UN CRC General Comments Nos. 22 and 23 cover all children in international migration, including children who are migrant themselves, children born to migrant parent, and children whose parents migrated to another country. These General Comments also extend to countries of origin, transit, destination, and return.

Session 2: DGD Hub: Children as Human Rights Defenders
CRC Asia’s Advocacy and Communications Coordinator, Hazel Bitaña joined Atty. Otani to discuss "Children as Human Rights Defenders," which was the theme of the 2018 Day of General Discussion (DGD) of the Committee on the Rights of the Child. Emma Grindulis from Child Rights Connect joined via Skype to provide updates on the preparations to the DGD.

Bitaña kicked off the discussion by presenting background information about the DGD. Meanwhile, Atty. Otani provided the rationale of the selected theme and Grindulis shared the completed actions so far, such as the creation of a Child Advisory Group, and to provide additional information on how civil society organizations could contribute to the DGD.

To contribute to this discussion, CRC Asia conducted a DGD Hub to gather inputs and recommendations from civil society organizations in Asia and the Pacific regarding the theme. The APPM participants were grouped according to sub-regions (East Asia, South Asia, and Southeast Asia) as part of the workshop to gather their views and experiences on the theme “children as human rights defenders." These inputs were collected and summarized for submission to the Committee.

**Session 3: Surrogacy**

Vice-Chair and Thailand's Representative on Children's Rights to the ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children (ACWC) Atty. Wanchai Roujanavong discussed the implications of surrogacy on the rights of the child. He shared Thailand’s new law on surrogacy.

Atty. Roujanavong shared the experience of Thailand in creating the first and only law on surrogacy in Southeast Asia. He stated that Thailand’s law is not perfect at the moment, but the country is in the process of improving it and in sharing the lessons learned to other ASEAN countries that are in the midst of adopting their own surrogacy laws.

He also presented the issues of surrogacy in relation to the rights of the child, which touched on the concepts of commercial surrogacy, prohibition of exploitation of children born from surrogacy, best interests of the child, rights of children born from illegal surrogacy, right to nationality, and children’s right to know of their origin at a proper time, among others.

**Session 4: Child Marriage**

Dr. Rinchen Chopel, Director General of the South Asia Initiative to End Violence Against Children Secretariat provided updates on the efforts in South Asia to address child marriage. He shared that member states in the sub-region have decided to expand the scope of its Regional Action Plan to End Child Marriage in South Asia until 2023. SAIEVAC is planning to convene in August 2018 to discuss efforts on using laws to promote accountability in ending child marriage.

Other on-going efforts to end child marriage include partnering with key agencies, establishing commitments through declarations and calls for action, mainstreaming of the advocacy at the national level, conducting legal reviews and policy harmonization efforts, and working with the national human rights institutions to drive the regional and national agenda to end child marriage.
**Session 5: Violence Against Children**

Jonathon Passmore the Technical Lead for Violence and Injury Prevention of the World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Office for the Western Pacific presented WHO’s seven evidence-based strategies to end violence against children: INSPIRE.

Meanwhile, Dr. Bernadette J. Madrid the Executive Director of the Child Protection Unit Network shared the experience of the Philippines in using INSPIRE in making the Philippine Plan of Action to End Violence against Children (PPA EVAC).

She presented the PPA EVAC’s six key result areas and the corresponding action points that are in line with INSPIRE to address the demand side, supply side, and enabling environment. She also highlighted the importance of strengthening the social service workforce to achieve a collective impact. As part of the learning visit, Dr. Madrid also presented background information on the Child Protection Unit Network’s history, team, services, and mandates, among others.

Rupar Mya, Myanmar’s Representative on Children’s Rights to the ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children (ACWC), affirmed the commitment of ACWC in addressing violence against children, as reflected in the ACWC Work Plan and in the ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on the Elimination of Violence against Children (RPA EVAC).

Mya shared that in her country, the RPA EVAC has been translated into the national language and the government is now in the process of developing its child protection policy and national plan of action on ending violence against children.

She also stressed the importance of reaching out widely to those at the grassroots level in order to fully understanding what is happening on the ground. Mya mentioned that capacity building, coordination, and cooperation pose challenges in addressing violence against children, but these must be done in order to protect our children. There should also be exchange of information and expertise among different countries in order to learn good practices and evidence-based strategies.

**Session 6: Online Child Protection**


Lemineaur shared one of the objectives of the research is to develop a descriptive profile of unidentified children depicted in child sexual abuse and exploitation materials in the International Child Sexual Exploitation (ICSE) database. She ended her presentation by sharing the recommendations: we need to have good research practice, be up to date with latest trends, and influence policy and decision-makers.

Bitaña joined Lemineaur and shared the recommendations of children during the ASEAN Regional Children’s Consultation on Online Child Protection last February 2018 in Jakarta, Indonesia.
Dr. Junaidi Rahman, Brunei Darussalam’s Representative on Children’s Rights to the ACWC, welcomed the recommendations from the children and also responded by sharing the ongoing initiatives of the Ministry of Education in his country on online child protection, which include public awareness raising targeted to parents and teachers.

He also reacted positively to the children’s recommendations on providing budget for online child protection by saying that the funds should be coming from the government for sustainability. As such, the ACWC will be doing exploratory work on public budgeting for children’s rights. Furthermore, Dr. Rahman expressed the need to encourage other countries to be part of the ICSE database to strengthen investigations and enforcement against online child sexual exploitation and abuse. He reiterated the importance of cooperation among agencies, stakeholders, and countries to advance online child protection.

Session 7: Children’s Rights in Urban Settings

UNICEF Philippines Country Director Lotta Sylwander provided an overview of children in urban settings in Asia. Sylwander said that children “growing up urban” experience challenges in terms of infrastructure, basic services, violence and hazards, and participation. She added that UNICEF’s priorities in urban programming are focused on reducing equity gaps in cities; promoting a safe and sustainable urban environment; adapting urban planning and budgeting for children; enhancing the voice and participation of children living in poverty; and strengthening the evidence base on children.

Meanwhile, Atty. Yasmeen Muhammad Shariff, a former member of the Committee on the Rights of the Child presented the salient features of the UN CRC General Comment No. 21 (GC 21) on children in street situations. She explained that, according to GC 21, children in street situations are those who depend on the streets to live and/or work, whether alone, with peers or with family; and those who have formed strong connections with public spaces and for whom the street plays a vital role in their everyday lives and identities.

APPM 2018 invited a child speaker from Bahay Tuluyan, Donita Ruiz who discussed issues of children in street situations, as well as their recommendations on efforts for children in street-connected situations. Ruiz shared the 4 Steps to Equality: commit to equality, protect every child, provide access to services, and create new solutions. During the open forum, Ruiz said that, for her, she has no trouble with being called as a “street child,” but for some of her friends, the term “street children” has a stigma so they would rather be called “children in street situations” or “children in street-connected situations.”

Indonesia’s ACWC Representative on Children's Rights Yuyum Fhahni Paryani also delivered her inputs and reactions to the sharing of the first three speakers, highlighting the need to link what is happening in reality and what is written in documents. She mentioned in order to do this the government must have the political will and commitment.

Paryani reiterated her point by sharing the experience of Surabaya, Indonesia in addressing prostitution in the city. With the commitment of the mayor, Surabaya was able to close down its red-light district, the biggest in Southeast Asia, and is now in the process of developing the area.

She pointed out that the issue of cheap labor and “online sex” affect children in urban settings. The decentralization of governance also has an impact on urban and rural settings. Adding that
one way to address the problems in urban settings, as done by the government of Indonesia, is to implement preventive measures that will encourage people to stay in their provinces instead of going to the cities. This could be done by strengthening the capacities of rural areas, building its infrastructure, and providing alternatives.

**Session 8: 30th Anniversary of the UN CRC**

Bitaña kicked off the discussion by presenting some of the existing plans from different organizations and agencies in the world related to the celebration of the 30th anniversary of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 2019. It was followed by a workshop to brainstorm the possible coordinated efforts and activities in Asia for this momentous occasion.

Christopher Peñales, Chapter Program Manager of the Family Planning Organization of the Philippines SOCSARGEN and Focal Point for CRC Asia of the Mindanao Action Group for Children’s Right to Protection (MAGCRP), closed the session by thanking everyone for being part of the meeting.

As one of the founding members of CRC Asia, MAGCRP is happy to be part of a regional body that brings together people who are experts in their own fields. Using the “is the glass half-empty or half-full” metaphor, Peñales said that some attendees of this meeting might feel like their glasses are half-full now because they have been filled with so much information and knowledge, but there may be others who might feel like the meeting made them view the glass as “half-empty” with so many things to do when they go back to their respective countries. In any case, he believes that the meeting not only brought out new ideas, but also inspired people to do more for the best interest of the child.

He ended his speech by highlighting that, even after thirty years, there are still challenges in implementing the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. However, children cannot wait and everyone must reflect why child rights issues still exist today.

In between the sessions, the participants also had the opportunity to introduce their organization and present the organization’s achievements. APPM is a continuing effort of CRC Asia to facilitate a venue for collaboration and cooperation for national coalitions and networks for the realization of the rights of the child.