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LSE Southeast Asia Forum

Friday 13th May 2016
The Lincoln Centre, London, WC2A 3ED

Panel IV: Inclusion and Exclusion in Southeast Asia

Chair

Bussawaran (Puk) Teerawichitchainan (SMU)

Speakers

Catherine Allerton (LSE SEAC)

Augusto Gatmaytan (Ateneo de Davao University)

Alice Nah (University of York)

Giulio Ongaro (LSE)

This panel focused on exploring the issues of inclusion and exclusion in present-day Southeast Asia countries, particularly in Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Laos. Inequality has been the subject of discussion around the world, including Southeast Asia. This panel addressed the issue of inequality within a country by highlighting the struggles of marginalised groups such as minorities, indigenous people and children of migrant workers. Their voiceless existence was often overlooked in national development projects and thus allowed injustice to persist. The panel also looked into the case of Indonesia where human rights defenders were often left unprotected, thus having their own security put at risk and how civil society responded to it.

Catherine Allerton presented issues surrounding children of migrants in Sabah based on her ethnographic fieldwork in Malaysia. The economic contribution of foreign workers play an important role in Sabah State of Malaysia yet, for various political reasons, the state is leaning more towards anti-migration. Migrant workers' children, whose parents or grandparents are often from Indonesia or the Philippines, are both excluded and included in the local Sabah society. Despite being born in Sabah, these children are seen as "illegal" for not having proper documentation. They have limited, if any, access to social benefits thus they are often excluded from state facilities such as health and education facilities. However, they are in a way included in the community through their shared language, their jobs, and their shared cultural events. To these children, being undocumented has no moral aspects, it is more a matter of practicality; either you are lucky enough to have legal identification or not. Since lack of an 'effective nationality' is a commonality among many of these children, Allerton argues that what dominates these children's lives is their perpetual 'foreignness' rather than statelessness or illegality per se. The continuous narrative handed down in families that it is still better to live in Malaysia compared to the place from which their family originates is what allows their marginalisation.

Augusto Gatmaytan touched on the issues of indigenous rights in Mindanao, the Philippines. Many of the current issues of indigenous groups' marginalisation in the Philippines are rooted to the question



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of land. Indigenous groups frequently continue to be denied control over natural resources on their land. Spatial marginalisation such as missing road links can lead to economic exclusion. In addition, it is estimated that 9 out of 10 of indigenous children lack access to general education, leading to further economic exclusion. In Mindanao, conflict in perceptions of land or property rights has resulted in the usurpation of traditional lands through an alliance between the state, the military, and big business. Three quarters of the insurgents in Mindanao are indigenous people illustrating how poverty can push people to extremism. Gatmaytan called for problematising government's development programme which is sometimes entangled with centralisation agendas.

Alice Nah did a research on the security and protection of human rights defenders in various countries, including Indonesia. Human Rights Defenders can be anyone who advocates, promotes or protects human rights. The use of the term "Human Rights Defenders" can inadvertently raise the level of risk that defenders face. In her presentation, she assessed the extent to which civil society in Indonesia has responded to the emergence of this protection regime and examines the ways in which they respond to the human security paradigm. One of the cases in Indonesia that highlights the work of human rights defenders was the public caning practice in Aceh province for those found in close proximity with a member of the opposite sex when unmarried. Nah highlighted how social networks play a fundamental role in the protection of Human Rights Defenders. The proliferation of new technologies has enabled human rights defenders to exercise their freedom of expression and allowed them to overcome restrictions on their mobility. Nah found that there has been increasing attention by states and civil society on the importance of protecting human rights defenders at risk since the UN General Assembly's adoption of the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders in 1998.

Giulio Ongaro is currently doing a research on the complex medical system and shamanic tradition in the Akha community in Laos for his PhD studies at the LSE. During his presentation he spoke on the Akha identity based on his two year experience living in an Akha community in highland northern Laos. Through national centralisation identity projects, indigenous groups are being challenged by the government to maintain their very own identity. In the case of Laos, this includes the identity of the Akha community. Though there is resistance to Laos' government centralisation efforts, there has also been acceptance for the efforts, particularly when the policies benefit the Akha. The Akhas see themselves as not tied into any particular geographic location. Their identity derives from traditions and rituals inherited from their ancestors, thus they are defined by what they do, not where they lived. In his research, Ongaro also compared the implications of minority policies towards the Akhas in different countries such as in China, Myanmar, Thailand & Laos.

Written by Rapporteur
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