

SOCIAL INCLUSION IN GOVERNANCE AND PEACE-BUILDING IN ASIA

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Abstract

The first apostolic exhortation of Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, is of timely relevance to the crises in governance and the threat of armed conflict in the world at large. The papal document relates these problems to the social exclusion of the poor and the vulnerable, which, he thinks, should be a primary concern of Christian witnessing.

Pope Francis delivers his powerful message in simple, clear and straightforward language. He offers Christ's legacy to humanity – the civilization of love – as an alternative to a global order based on greed and selfishness.

My paper examines the implications of his teachings to Asia, particularly the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) of which I am most familiar. Finally, the paper refers to the position of His Holiness on human trafficking as a glaring result of poverty and social exclusion across national borders, and reports on actions that have been taken by ASEAN to address this issue.

The Pontiff's Approach to Governance: Inclusion of the Poor in Society

Evangelii Gaudium highlights two issues which he considers as “fundamental at this time in history” and which he believes “will shape the future of humanity”: the inclusion of the poor in society, and peace and social dialogue.¹

His thoughts on governance are embodied in Chapter Four, Section II, “The Inclusion of the Poor in Society” and Section IV, “Social Dialogue as a Contribution to Peace”.² The following are excerpts from *Evangelii Gaudium*:

Welfare projects, which meet certain urgent needs, should be considered merely temporary responses. *As long as the problems of the poor*

¹ Pope Francis. *Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium of the Holy Father*. “Inclusion of the Poor in Society”, Section II, Chapter Two, The Social Dimension of Evangelization. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2013. Available online: http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/francesco/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium_en.html

² “The Economy and the Distribution of Income” in Section II: The Inclusion of the Poor in Society, Chapter Four, The Social Dimension of Evangelization, Paras 202–206.

are not radically resolved by rejecting the absolute autonomy of markets and financial speculation and by attacking the structural causes of inequality, no solution will be found for the world's problems or, for that matter, to any problems. Inequality is the root of social ills (Para. 202).

The dignity of each human person and the pursuit of the common good are concerns which ought to shape all economic policies. At times, however, they seem to be a mere addendum imported from without in order to fill out a political discourse lacking in perspectives or plans for true and integral development. How many words prove irksome to this system! It is irksome when the question of ethics is raised, when global solidarity is invoked, when the distribution of goods is mentioned, when reference is made to protecting labour and defending the dignity of the powerless, when allusion is made to a God who demands a commitment to justice. At other times these issues are exploited by a rhetoric which cheapens them. Casual indifference in the face of such questions empties our lives and our words of all meaning (Para. 203). We can no longer trust in the unseen forces and the invisible hand of the market. Growth in justice requires more than economic growth, while presupposing such growth: it requires decisions, programmes, mechanisms and processes specifically geared to a better distribution of income, the creation of sources of employment and an integral promotion of the poor which goes beyond a simple welfare mentality. I am far from proposing an irresponsible populism, but the economy can no longer turn to remedies that are a new poison, such as attempting to increase profits by reducing the work force and thereby adding to the ranks of the excluded (Para. 204).

Politics, though often denigrated, remains a lofty vocation and one of the highest forms of charity, inasmuch as it seeks the common good. We need to be convinced that charity 'is the principle not only of micro-relationships (with friends, with family members or within small groups) but also of macro-relationships (social, economic and political ones)'. I beg the Lord to grant us more politicians who are genuinely disturbed by the state of society, the people, the lives of the poor! It is vital that government leaders and financial leaders take heed and broaden their horizons, working to ensure that all citizens have dignified work, education and healthcare. Why not turn to God and ask him to inspire their plans? (Para. 205).

The Holy Father reminds every State that it is its responsibility to safeguard and promote the common good of society:

Based on the principles of subsidiarity and solidarity and fully committed to political dialogue and consensus building, it plays a fundamental role, one which cannot be delegated, in working for the

integral development of all. This role, at present, calls for profound social humility (Para. 240).

Pope Francis attributes much of current social relations to the economy of exclusion:

Today everything comes under the laws of competition and the survival of the fittest, where the powerful feed upon the powerless. As a consequence, masses of people find themselves excluded and marginalized: without work, without possibilities, without any means of escape. Human beings are themselves considered consumer goods to be used and then discarded. We have created a ‘throw away’ culture which is now spreading. It is no longer simply about exploitation and oppression, but something new. Exclusion ultimately has to do with what it means to be a part of the society in which we live; those excluded are no longer society’s underside or its fringes or its disenfranchised – they are no longer even a part of it. The excluded are not the “exploited” but the outcast, the “leftovers”.³

His Holiness criticized the trickle-down theories

which assume that economic growth, encouraged by a free market, will inevitably succeed in bringing about greater justice and inclusiveness in the world. This opinion, which has never been confirmed by the facts, expresses a crude and naïve trust in the goodness of those wielding economic power and in the sacralized workings of the prevailing economic system. Meanwhile, the excluded are still waiting. To sustain a lifestyle which excludes others, or to sustain enthusiasm for that selfish ideal, a globalization of indifference has developed. Almost without being aware of it, we end up being incapable of feeling compassion at the outcry of the poor, weeping for other people’s pain, and feeling a need to help them, as though all this were someone else’s responsibility and not our own.⁴

He regrets that we have come to accept dominion of money over ourselves and our societies:

The current financial crisis can make us overlook the fact that it originated in a profound human crisis: the denial of the primacy of the human person! We have created new idols. The worship of the ancient golden calf (cf. *Ex* 32:1-35) has returned in a new and ruthless guise in the idolatry of money and the dictatorship of an impersonal econ-

³ Para. 53, Chapter Two, “Amid the Crisis of Communal Commitment”.

⁴ Para. 54.

omy lacking a truly human purpose. ... man is reduced to one of his needs alone: consumption.⁵

“Money must serve, not rule!” is his admonition. His Holiness was unsparing in condemning institutions and attitudes that perpetuate social inclusion and inequality.

While the earnings of a minority are growing exponentially, so too is the gap separating the majority from the prosperity enjoyed by those happy few. This imbalance is the result of ideologies which defend the absolute autonomy of the marketplace and financial speculation. Consequently, they reject the right of states, charged with vigilance for the common good, to exercise any form of control. A new tyranny is thus born, invisible and often virtual, which unilaterally and relentlessly imposes its own laws and rules. Debt and the accumulation of interest also make it difficult for countries to realize the potential of their own economies and keep citizens from enjoying their real purchasing power. To all this, we can add widespread corruption and self-serving tax evasion, which have taken on worldwide dimensions. The thirst for power and possessions knows no limits. In this system, which tends to devour everything which stands in the way of increased profits, whatever is fragile, like the environment, is defenceless before the interests of a deified market, which become the only rule.⁶

The Pope exhorts the people to practice generous solidarity and to return “economics and finance to an ethical approach which favours human beings”.⁷ He says that this entails

working to eliminate the structural causes of poverty and to promote the integral development of the poor, as well as small daily acts of solidarity in meeting the real needs which we encounter.

He reminds us that although the word “solidarity” is

a little worn and at times poorly understood ... it refers to something more than a few sporadic acts of generosity. It presumes the creation of a new mindset which thinks in terms of community and the priority of the life of all over the appropriation of goods by a few.⁸

The viewpoint of His Holiness with respect to inequality as the root of social ills is corroborated by the Executive Secretary of the UN Economic

⁵ Para. 55.

⁶ Para. 56.

⁷ Para. 58.

⁸ Para. 188.

and Social Council for Asia and The Pacific (ESCAP), Ms. Noeleen Heyzer. She said that

inequality not only threatens social cohesion, but is also a challenge to sustaining the region's economic dynamism. ESCAP findings show that higher income inequality adversely affects domestic demand and contributes to balance-of-payments deficits as well as higher household debts.⁹

The Pontiff's Perspective on Peace and Social Dialogue

The events at the start of this year have further shaken the world and have had an impact on the Church: the worsening crises in Syria, Ukraine, Venezuela and Egypt, ensuing challenges to peace and security in the Asia-Pacific region brought about by conflicting territorial claims in Northeast and Southeast Asia, the danger of renewed conflict in the Korean peninsula, and the continuing difficulties faced by the economies of Europe, the United States and Japan.

Our part of the world – Southeast Asia – is on the brink of war. This is the result of the increasingly aggressive behaviour of China, whose objective is to corner the resources and strategic supply lanes of the South China Sea and its surrounding waters. Its actions are also motivated by its desire to compensate for the century of humiliation and exploitation at the hands of West and Japan. Because it is not yet capable to take on these big powers, its easy targets are its small neighbours, which do not have the strength and wherewithal to effectively defend their maritime territory and exclusive economic zone. In this day and age, the international jungle is still governed not by the rule of law but by the principle of “might is right”. Imperial ambitions and forcible annexation of territories of small countries still hold sway.

In the face of these distressing conditions, the Church has an essential responsibility in helping restore trust, ethics and justice in international relations. In *Evangelii Gaudium*, His Holiness observes that

our world is being torn apart by wars and violence, and wounded by a widespread individualism which divides human beings, setting them against one another as they pursue their own well-being. In various countries, conflicts and old divisions from the past are re-emerging. I especially ask Christians in communities throughout the world to offer a radiant and attractive witness of fraternal communion. Let

⁹ UN News Centre, 19 December 2013. <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=46785&Cr=escap&Cr1=#.U6guKahCU7A>

everyone admire how you care for one another, and how you encourage and accompany one another.¹⁰

Pope Francis warns of inequality among nations that marginalizes the peripheral economies and exacerbates poverty at the local level:

If we really want to achieve a healthy world economy, what is needed at this juncture of history is a more efficient way of interacting which, with due regard for the sovereignty of each nation, ensures the economic well-being of all countries, not just of a few.¹¹

Indeed, our Church under the Pontificate of Pope Francis has the indisputable moral ascendancy to exhort its members to set the example for building a better world. True to his humble character, he explains that

this Exhortation is not a social document, and for reflection on those different themes we have a most suitable tool in the *Compendium of the Doctrine of the Church*,¹² whose use and study I heartily recommend.¹³

Enhancing Social Inclusion in Asia

The Holy Father stresses that “conceptual tools exist to heighten contact with the realities they seek to explain, not to distance us from them”.¹⁴ At this juncture, we should examine the relevance of *Evangelii Gaudium* to the plight of peoples in Asia and the Pacific.

Despite the fact that it is the fastest growing economic region in the world, Asia and the Pacific is still home to about two-thirds of the world’s poor. Approximately 700 million live on less than US\$1 a day, 400 million of them in urban areas.¹⁵ There are about 1.7 billion who are living on less than \$2 a day.¹⁶

About half of the region’s poor live in rural areas. They include the poorest of the poor, often indigenous people or vulnerable groups with little economic opportunities. The Asian Development Bank reports that the majority of rural poor live in marginal dryland and wetland areas and their numbers are likely to increase with global warming.¹⁷

¹⁰ Para. 99.

¹¹ Para. 206.

¹² Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. 2004. *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana.

¹³ *Evangelii Gaudium*, Para. 184.

¹⁴ Para. 194.

¹⁵ Asian Development Bank. 2013. *Overview – Poverty reduction: Promoting inclusive pro-poor growth*. <http://www.adb.org/themes/poverty/overview>

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

In response to this predicament, many countries in Asia have adopted inclusive growth as a priority in development policy. Alan Winters of the Asian Development Bank Institute uses the following definition of inclusive growth in the *Asian Development Outlook 2012*: “growth coupled with equality of opportunity”. It is accompanied by three policy pillars:

sustained growth to create productive jobs for a wide section of the population; social inclusion to equalize access to opportunity; and social safety nets to mitigate vulnerability and risks and prevent extreme poverty.¹⁸

The ASEAN Contribution

The next task of this paper is to review the efforts of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in promoting social inclusion. I was affiliated with ASEAN for a total of five years, first as Deputy Secretary-General of the organization and more recently, as Philippine Ambassador and Permanent Representative to ASEAN.

Founded in 1967, it is composed of ten member-countries: Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Viet Nam. It is economically diverse: the richest are Brunei and Singapore, the middle income are Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines and Thailand (the founding countries, along with Singapore), and the ones who joined in the nineties are Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Viet Nam (or referred to as “CLMV”). Cambodia was a socialist country. Laos and Viet Nam are still socialist. Myanmar used to be ruled by a military junta. Among the CLMV countries, it is Viet Nam that is the best performing in terms of economic growth and liberalization.

In pursuing its goal of building an ASEAN Community by 2015, the organization is committed to developing itself into a more people-centric organization. The envisaged regional community has three pillars: ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC), ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), and ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC).

Each pillar has adopted a blueprint, which is a framework for action structured into strategic-level development and cooperation outcomes and

¹⁸ L. Alan Winters, *Globalization, Infrastructure, and Inclusive Growth*. ADBI Working Paper Series, No. 464. Tokyo: ADB Institute, 2014.

<http://www.adbi.org/files/2014.02.24.wp464.globalization.infrastructure.inclusive.growth.pdf>

impacts toward regional community-building. The inclusion of an ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community, which was championed by the Philippines, reinforces the organization's mission of addressing the needs not only of our member-governments but also those of civil society.

Recently, the ASEAN Secretariat, in cooperation with the member-states, has completed the Midterm Review of the ASCC Blueprint implementation.¹⁹ The findings, which were generally positive, are summarized as follows:

- 90% of all the action lines have been addressed through the conduct of various activities by ASCC sectoral bodies. There have been many challenges in the course of implementing the Blueprint at the national and regional levels. But there are continuing efforts to improve and fast track meeting the 2015 targets and prepare for post-2015 challenges.
- The implementation of the Human Development component is positively progressing towards realizing its goal to enhance the well-being and livelihood of the peoples of ASEAN by providing them with equitable access to human development opportunities. This is confirmed by statistics showing the average number of school years completed by the adult population increased from 7.5 years for ASEAN-6 and 4.6 years for CLMV in 2005 to eight years and five years respectively in 2010. The literacy rate of the youth population across ASEAN-6 countries inched closer to 100 per cent while the CLMV (Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Viet Nam) countries have significantly improved their literacy rate from around 81 per cent in 2009 to 92 per cent in 2010.
- As a result of strong economic growth, the extent of absolute poverty (proportion of population living on less than \$1.25 a day in purchasing power parity terms) in ASEAN declined significantly between 2000 and 2010, from around 45 to 16 per cent in CLMV countries and from around 29 to 15 per cent in ASEAN-6.
- In the social justice and rights component, overall implementation is steady with 21 out of 28 actions (~79%) having been addressed. This characteristic focuses on rights for the vulnerable and marginalized in

¹⁹ Mid-Term Review of the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Blueprint (2009-2015): Regional Assessment. Adopted by the ASEAN Leaders at the 23rd ASEAN Summit. 2013. Jakarta: ASEAN Secretariat, 2014. This author is grateful to Deputy Secretary-General for ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Alicia Bala for her kind assistance in sharing a copy of the MTR Report and for her permission to cite its highlights.

ASEAN – particularly women, children, persons with disabilities, older people and migrant workers. Institutional mechanisms to facilitate co-operation to promote social justice and rights of vulnerable groups have been strengthened with the establishment of the ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children (ACWC), and the ongoing development of an ASEAN instrument for the protection and promotion of the rights of migrant workers.

ASEAN is striving to meet the expectations of the ASCC Blueprint by 2015, particularly in improving the quality of life of its people. Given the diversity of ideologies, religions, cultures, and political and economic systems of ten member-countries, achieving this ideal is not an easy task. However, reforms and joint efforts have gained momentum. A major incentive for success is the common desire of member-countries to enhance their collective voice in the international arena.

Human Trafficking: Product of Poverty

The Holy Father states that there are new forms of poverty and vulnerability ... the homeless, the addicted, refugees, indigenous peoples, the elderly who are increasingly isolated and abandoned, and many others. Migrants present a particular challenge for me, since I am the pastor of a Church without frontiers, a Church which considers herself mother to all.²⁰

He laments that

I have always been distressed at the lot of those who are victims of various kinds of human trafficking. How I wish that all of us would hear God's cry: "Where is your brother?" (*Gen 4:9*). Where is your brother or sister who is enslaved? Where is the brother and sister whom you are killing each day in clandestine warehouses, in rings of prostitution, in children used for begging, in exploiting undocumented labour? Let us not look the other way. There is greater complicity than we think. The issue involves everyone! This infamous network of crime is now well established in our cities, and many people have blood on their hands as a result of their comfortable and silent complicity.²¹

²⁰ Para. 210.

²¹ Para. 211.

ASEAN Responses to Human Trafficking and Rights of Migrant Workers

The ASEAN has adopted three declarations that protect women, victims of human trafficking, and migrant workers: the *ASEAN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women in the ASEAN Region (2004)*, the *ASEAN Declaration Against Trafficking in Persons Particularly Women and Children (2004)*, and the *ASEAN Declaration on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers (2007)*.

The mandate of the *ASEAN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women in the ASEAN Region*²² is “to promote an integrated and holistic approach to eliminate violence against women by formulating mechanisms focusing on the four areas of concerns of violence against women, namely, providing services to fulfil the needs of survivors, formulating and taking appropriate responses to offenders and perpetrators, understanding the nature and causes of violence against women and changing societal attitudes and behaviour”. ASEAN member-states have enacted domestic legislation to prevent violence against women and re-victimization of women and girls subjected to any form of violence, whether in the home, the workplace, the community or society or in custody.

Among the measures taken under the *Declaration Against Trafficking in Persons Particularly Women and Children*²³ are

to identify the countries of origin and nationalities of such victims and thereafter ensure that such victims are treated humanely and provided with such essential medical and other forms of assistance deemed appropriate by the respective receiving/recipient country, including prompt repatriation to their respective countries of origin; and to strengthen regional and international cooperation to prevent and combat trafficking in persons.

The *ASEAN Declaration on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers*²⁴ provides that

the receiving states and the sending states shall take into account the fundamental rights and dignity of migrant workers and family mem-

²² *ASEAN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women in the ASEAN Region*, 2004. <http://www.asean.org/communities/asean-political-security-community/item/declaration-on-the-elimination-of-violence-against-women-in-the-asean-region-4>

²³ *ASEAN Declaration Against Trafficking in Persons Particularly Women and Children*, 2004 <http://www.asean.org/news/item/asean-declaration-against-trafficking-in-persons-particularly-women-and-children-3>

²⁴ *ASEAN Declaration on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers*, 2007. <http://www.asean.org/communities/asean-political-security-community/item/asean-declaration-on-the-protection-and-promotion-of-the-rights-of-migrant-workers-3>

bers already residing with them without undermining the application by the receiving states of their laws, regulations and policies, as well as

intensify efforts to protect the fundamental human rights of migrant workers, facilitate access to justice and social welfare services as appropriate, promote fair and appropriate employment protection, payment of wages, and adequate access to decent working and living conditions for migrant workers, and facilitate the exercise of consular functions to consular or diplomatic authorities of states of origin when a migrant worker is arrested or committed to prison or custody or detained in any other manner, under the laws and regulations of the receiving state and in accordance with the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations”.

...and let the skies rain down righteousness (Isaiah 45:8)

The experience of ASEAN bears out the analyses and conclusions of Pope Francis. In his Apostolic Exhortation, he stressed the necessity of translating advocacies into actual practice, as

ideas disconnected from realities give rise to ineffectual forms of idealism and nominalism, capable at most of classifying and defining, but certainly not calling to action. ... Not to put the word into practice, not to make it reality, is to build on sand, to remain in the realm of pure ideas and to end up in a lifeless and unfruitful self-centredness and gnosticism.²⁵

The Church has an essential and urgent role to play in restoring trust, ethics, justice and peace in contemporary relations among peoples and nations. It has the ascendancy to set the example for building bridges and a new world order.

After only one year of his Papacy, Pope Francis’ personal example and his genuine concern for the poor and the excluded have already resonated with peoples of different faiths and cultures.

We rest our hope in the moral and spiritual leadership of His Holiness in spreading Christ’s legacy to humanity – the civilization of love. It is the alternative to a global order based on alienation, greed and selfishness. In the 21st Century, we still witness the vicious rivalry among hegemonic powers whose realpolitik concept of peace is confined to the balance of terror.

²⁵ Para. 233.

Pope Francis exemplifies the primacy of Love that is enshrined in our Christian faith. The social doctrine of the Church states that

“love must thus enliven every sector of human life and extend to the international order. Only a humanity in which there reigns the ‘civilization of love’ will be able to enjoy authentic and lasting peace.”²⁶

Like Saint John XXIII, who prevented a nuclear war during the Cuban missile crisis, and like Saint John Paul II, who was instrumental in ending totalitarian rule in Eastern Europe, Pope Francis can lead us towards to this new world order based on justice and love for humanity.

²⁶ *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, op. cit.*, Para. 582.