

CALD Statement No. 1 S. 2013

CALD Statement on Challenges to Fundamental Freedoms

We, the representatives of member parties, partners, and friends of the Council of Asian Liberals and Democrats (CALD), on the occasion of the *Conference on Challenges to Fundamental Freedoms*:

Recognizing that all human beings possess fundamental freedoms and rights by virtue of their humanity, and not on the basis of their citizenship, race, nationality, language, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, social class, or any other status:

Acknowledging that in many countries, notwithstanding democratic development in recent years, fundamental freedoms and rights are still under threat – and this alarming state of affairs exists in democratic and non-democratic states alike;

Noting that challenges to fundamental freedoms and rights in democratic countries emphasize the need for continuous democratic development, and for enduring vigilance to preserve democratic gains;

Emphasizing that threats to fundamental freedoms and rights are more severe in countries living under a despotic government, or those experiencing a crisis or war;

Highlighting the need to strengthen recognition and implementation of political rights, economic freedom, civil liberties by enshrining them in the country's constitution;

Noting that political rights, economic freedom and civil liberties should be interrelated, interdependent and indivisible - the realization of one right or freedom facilitates advancement of the others. Alternatively, the deprivation of one adversely affects the others;

Underlining that international solidarity and cooperation is essential in helping overcome challenges to fundamental freedoms and human rights in Asia and beyond;

Do hereby:

On Political Rights

Recognize that all people possess the right to participate, directly or indirectly, in the formation and operation of government at various levels, and in particular in local government responsive to people's needs;

Stress the importance of effective systems of consultation and accountability that enhance governmental responsibility to the citizenry;

Ensure fuller participation of hitherto disempowered groups, in particular women and the youth, in the political and decision making process;

Note that in democratic and non-democratic countries alike, populist promises without responsible planning can adversely affect the impact of the franchise;

Acknowledge that in some countries governments, which should be the protector of fundamental freedoms and rights, could be their primary violators, eg by manipulation and politicization of the judiciary and law enforcement agencies;

Affirm the importance of an independent and sensitive judiciary in enforcing basic rights and the rule of law;

Emphasize the need for mechanisms that command confidence, to provide swift and effective remedies for citizens' grievances;

Note the importance of promoting independence and a culture of responsibility amongst professionals exercising public influence;

Highlight the critical role played by civil society in monitoring government actions and in preventing its abuse of power, as well as of government institutions that check on both public and private corruption;

Affirm the importance of an independent and responsible media that is transparent about its structure, ownership and focus;

Recognize that social stability emanates from full respect of political rights, not from the later's restriction;

On Civil Liberties

Reiterate its commitment fundamental civil liberties namely right to own property; freedom of speech, of espression and of the press; freedom of information; freedom to organize and assembly; religious freedom, among others;

Argue that these rights and liberties are essential in the achievement of societal stability and progress, and can only be realized under true democracy;

Emphasize the value of social media in the exercise of freedom of expression and of information, particularly in countries which have a restricted political environment;

Commend the move of some Asian countries to repeal the repressive Internal Security Act (ISA), and encourage other countries which still practice the draconian act to follow suit;

Recognize that freedom of information and freedom of expression are necessary to encourage governmental transparency and accountability;

Ensure the full recognition and application of women's rights and gender equality;

Emphasize the need to protect and promote the rights of national, ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities by observing tolerance and pluralism, and to protect the right to territory and domicile, and the right to seek redress for discrimination and prejudice;

Ensure equal rights and non-discrimination of individuals regardless of gender identity and sexual orientation;

Defend and support activists who have risked their lives and personal freedom, to fight for human rights and civil liberties;

Ensure that these rights are in full accord with the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the exercise of the institutions of the judicary/courts, police, military and all other instruments of the state are not used to limit due process and exercise of these fundamental rights and civil liberties;

Underline that respect for fundamental freedoms are essential in creating a society within which individuals can flourish, develop, and pursue what is best for themselves and for others:

Uphold that respect and observance of fundamental freedoms is needed in order to institute positive changes in society, anchored in the rule of law especially an independent judiciary and an independent legal profession;

On Economic Freedom

Highlight the need for full implementation of laws and regulations relating to economic freedom;

Recognize that economic freedom, while a loaded concept, should be characterized by inclusivity, independence from government, and autonomy in the organization of trade unions;

Debunk the argument that economic development through free trade can only be fully realized in an environment which curtails fundamental freedoms and rights;

Underline that the practice of fundamental economic freedoms is necessary for the achievement of the benefits of free trade;

Ensure that access to resources, capital and opportunity is available not only to big corporations but also to small and medium size businesses;

Maintain that with the observance of fundamental freedoms and rights, citizens can hold the government accountable for its economic policies and prevent or lessen corruption; and

Emphasize that observance of the rule of law is critical in creating an environment conducive to the exercise of economic freedom.

Adopted on 2 March 2013.

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