

# Enduring Legacy, Evolving Odyssey

THE PEARL ANNIVERSARY (1993-2023) COMMEMORATIVE BOOK  
OF THE COUNCIL OF ASIAN LIBERALS & DEMOCRATS



BY JOHN JOSEPH S. CORONEL





# Enduring Legacy, Evolving Odyssey

THE PEARL ANNIVERSARY (1993-2023) COMMEMORATIVE BOOK  
OF THE COUNCIL OF ASIAN LIBERALS & DEMOCRATS



BY JOHN JOSEPH S. CORONEL

Copyright © 2023  
Council of Asian Liberals & Democrats (CALD)  
All rights reserved.  
**ISBN:**



The book, *Enduring Legacy, Evolving Odyssey*, commemorates the milestone of the Council of Asian Liberals & Democrats (CALD) as it enters its fourth decade. But more than just a celebration, this book is a call for deeper self-reflection for CALD members, its stakeholders, and its partners, as we chart together a roadmap for the future.

First of all, I would like to thank the 15 resource persons for their invaluable and enlightening inputs that were the bases of this publication, and formed the bulk of its content. They are former Secretary Florencio “Butch” Abad, Ms. Jayanthi Balaguru, Mr. Moritz Kleine-Brockhoff, Dr. Chee Soon Juan, Mr. Siegfried Herzog, Ms. Siripa Intavichain, Mr. Jules Maaten, former Minister Mu Sochua, former Senator Francis “Kiko” Pangilinan, Dr. Wolfgang Sachsenröder, former Minister Sam Rainsy, former Senator Mardi Seng, former Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva, Sir Graham Watson, and Ms. Maysing Yang.

To the CALD Chair and Secretary General, Mr. Pangilinan, and former Representative Francis “Blue” Abaya, and the other member of the Executive Committee; and to Mr. Kleine-Brockhoff and the staff of the Friedrich Naumann Foundation (FNF)-Southeast and East Asia, my sincere gratitude for your unwavering support.

To my colleagues at the CALD Secretariat, Mr. Paolo Zamora, Ms. Jaja Janolo, and Ms. Chelse Caballero, we have always worked together as an effective and efficient team, and this book project is no exception.

And finally, I would like to acknowledge the book’s creative and production team. My predecessor as Executive Director, Mr. John Coronel, conducted the interviews, and later wove together the narratives and thoughts of the resource persons into one comprehensive and cohesive whole. Ms. Cecile Balgos served as the book’s editor whose scrutiny and insights, and whose dynamic collaboration with the author considerably enhanced the quality of the book’s content. Mr. Mike Gadi who has done the design of so many other CALD publications, is the book’s art editor, and once again, he has made this book visually appealing and engaging. Our hardworking student intern, Ms. Fatima Galang, served as project assistant. Among other endeavors, she did the laborious task of transcribing the interviews.

This book is a welcome addition to the rich collection of CALD publications, which have provided helpful and important references for CALD and a wider public readership.

**CELITO F. ARLEGUE**

Executive Director

Council of Asian Liberals & Democrats

In human life, the 30<sup>th</sup> year of existence signifies physical and mental maturity, and consequently, readiness to make important decisions.

The same can be said of organizations. Thirty years means that the organization must already be established enough to embark on new endeavors or to chart new horizons.

I see the Council of Asian Liberals and Democrats (CALD), which is celebrating its 30th founding anniversary this year, in that way. This is the right time for the organization to explore new paths and to enter uncharted territories in its quest for a more democratic, developed and equitable Asian region.

Before it can do this, however, it needs a thorough assessment of what it was able to accomplish (or failed to accomplish) in the past, the reasons behind these, and how these should be taken into account in determining its future direction.

It is in this light that this book proves significant. By looking at the history, evolution and performance of CALD from the perspective of key leaders and partners, this book provides a useful starting point in the process of critical self-reflection. The book rightly acknowledges the legacy of CALD as foremost political party network in the Asian region while also raising the difficult questions that CALD has to address as it enters its fourth decade. Some of these questions include:

- Does an ideological political party network like CALD still have value in a world that is manifestly post-ideological and even, some would argue, post-political?
- How does CALD look at its performance as a network promoting liberal and democratic principles and practices considering the current state of liberal democracy and social market economy in the Asian region?
- How does CALD perform in terms of navigating the balance between speaking out against undemocratic political maneuvers, human rights abuses, and violations of the rule of law, and shielding its member-parties which may be partly or wholly responsible for such actions (as losing face is considered 'un-Asian')?

- Is CALD adopting well to global and regional developments which impinge on its work as a network of political parties? Is it just going through the motions even if the circumstances already push it to “break the wheel” to make substantive impact?

This book may not be able to provide answers to all these questions, but the intersecting (sometimes contradicting) views of the resource persons interviewed, without doubt, are great starting points for reflection and discussion.

In human life, 30 years old is a major turning point. As CALD marks its 30<sup>th</sup> founding anniversary, it is, in a way, also in a threshold of its existence. Backed by an enduring legacy, I am confident that CALD will make the right choices to define its evolving odyssey as the Asian region’s most successful political party network.

**FRANCIS “KIKO” PANGILINAN**



On behalf of the Friedrich Naumann Foundation (FNF) South East and East Asia Office, I would like to congratulate all the member parties, the executive committee, the past leadership, and the secretariat of the Council of Asian Liberals & Democrats (CALD) on the occasion of its 30<sup>th</sup> foundation anniversary.

Despite challenges faced by the organization as a whole and the individual parties and their leaders and members through the past three decades, CALD has not only survived, but it has thrived. CALD and the political parties that are part of this alliance, whether while in power or in opposition, have been significant and positive forces that helped shape the political landscape of the region. Their advocacies and actions have led to the promotion of freedom, democracy, human rights, the rule of law, good governance, and inclusive development in several countries in Asia.

CALD was founded during the wave of democratic resurgence and restoration sweeping not only Asia but many parts of the globe as well. Dictatorships fell in the Philippines, South Korea, Indonesia, and Taiwan. In Thailand, civilian rule was restored after a period of political upheaval and military intervention. In my native country, the Fall of the Berlin Wall not only led to the unification of Germany, but also ended communism in Eastern Europe.

In the past decade or so, military coups, the imprisonment or forced exile of democrats, the rise of elected populist leaders, the struggle of several liberal parties to attract voters, and disinformation especially in social media have caused a worrisome decline and stagnation of democracy worldwide. That's why CALD is even more important now than it was before.

FNF has been a partner of CALD not only since day one, but even before its formal establishment. Our decades-long partnership remains strong to this day. I am confident that the partnership will continue. Existing avenues for cooperation and collaboration will widen further. The FNF-CALD partnership can withstand the challenges of our times, because it is based on shared ideals, common aspirations, strong professional and personal relationships, equity, reciprocity and mutual respect.

I would like to acknowledge the work of my predecessors : Wolfgang Sachsenröder, Uwe Johannsen, Hubertus von Welk, Rainer Adam, and Siegfried Herzog. To them, we owe the foundation's presence and stature in the region.

Congratulations to CALD on the occasion of its pearl anniversary!

**MORITZ KLEINE-BROCKHOFF**

# Enduring Legacy, Evolving Odyssey

THE PEARL ANNIVERSARY (1993-2023) COMMEMORATIVE BOOK  
OF THE COUNCIL OF ASIAN LIBERALS & DEMOCRATS

## Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	
<b>Of Anchors and Oars</b>	<b>10</b>
CHAPTER ONE	
<b>Surfing on the High Tide of Democracy</b>	<b>15</b>
<i>Sidebar 1: To Fight the Beatable “Unbeatable” Foe</i>	<i>33</i>
CHAPTER TWO	
<b>The Populism of the Present, the Phantom of the Past</b>	<b>37</b>
<i>Sidebar 2: Cambodia’s Latest Sham Elections</i>	<i>57</i>
CHAPTER THREE	
<b>Synergy in Diversity</b>	<b>61</b>
<i>Sidebar 3: Restricted Area: No Liberals Allowed</i>	<i>84</i>
CHAPTER FOUR	
<b>Marching Forth Toward the Fourth Decade</b>	<b>87</b>
EPILOGUE	
<b>Let Freedom be the Axle of Our Wheel</b>	<b>110</b>
BIBLIOGRAPHY	112
PROFILES OF RESOURCE PERSONS	113
ABOUT THE AUTHOR	122
ABOUT CALD	123

## *Of Anchors and Oars*

On 10 December 2023, the Council of Asian Liberals and Democrats (CALD) celebrates its 30<sup>th</sup> foundation anniversary. *Enduring Legacy, Evolving Odyssey* serves as the organization's commemorative publication for this auspicious occasion.

The book richly describes the heritage built over the past three decades based on the narration and views of the resource persons from CALD member parties and its partners.

Fifteen resource persons were carefully and strategically selected. All played crucial roles in the formation and/or further growth and development of CALD. Their moral fortitude, intellectual adeptness, political maturity and sophistication, and ideological grounding were evident in the course of our conversations.

This book is partly a collection of many stories. It is a collection of individual narratives woven together to form the big picture—the CALD landscape, if you will. Many stories are unique, many more are common and overlapping, and some may be contradicting others.

But what the resource persons provided was more than just a recollection of past events. They shared keen analyses of the dynamics that shaped CALD's nature, functioning, directions, and public image within the bigger and complex political, economic, and socio-cultural milieu inhabited by CALD and its members, a habitat where Asian liberals and democrats either thrive or suffer.

Three of the interviewees were important actors in laying down the groundwork for the establishment of this Asian political network. They are two of the founders—former secretary Florencio 'Butch' Abad of the Liberal Party(LP) of the Philippines, and Ms. Maysing Yang of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) of Taiwan—while Dr. Wolfgang Sachsenröder was the then head of the Asia office of the Friedrich Naumann Foundation (FNF).

Four were former Chairs of CALD— Abad, former minister Sam Rainsy of the Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP), Dr. Chee Soon Juan of the Singapore Democratic Party (SDP), and former Thai prime minister Abhisit Vejjajiva of the Democrat Party (DP)— while former senators Francis 'Kiko'



Pangilinan of LP and Mardi Seng of the Candle Light Party (CLP) of Cambodia are the outgoing and incoming Chairs of CALD, respectively.

Also interviewed were the current and former Chairs of the CALD Women's Caucus, Ms. Jayanthi Balaguru of the Malaysian People's Movement Party (PGRM) and former minister Mu Sochua of CNRP, and the incumbent Chair of CALD Youth, Ms. Siripa Intavichein of DP.

Being the principal partner of CALD, FNF was represented by the incumbent and former FNF Regional Directors for Southeast & East Asia, Mr. Moritz Kleine—Brockhoff and Mr. Siegfried Herzog, the latter being the German liberal foundation's current regional head for Latin America.

The resource persons included as well Mr. Jules Maaten, the FNF Regional Director of the European Dialogue Programme and who once served as FNF Regional Director for Sub Sahara Africa and Country Director of FNF Manila succeeding Herzog. Maaten was also a Member of the European Parliament (MEP) from 1999 to 2009 representing the Netherlands, and a former Secretary General of Liberal International (LI). Sir Graham Watson, an MEP for two decades (1994 to 2014) representing the United Kingdom, was the leader of Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe Group (ALDE) from 2004 to 2009, and its predecessor, the European Liberal Democrat and Reform Party Group (ELDR).

ALDE remains as an important partner of CALD. It has hosted conferences and Asian interns at the European Parliament in Brussels. Reciprocally, ALDE regularly sends a delegation to important CALD events in Asia.

The aforementioned Europeans from FNF and ALDE have actively participated and spoken in several CALD events. They have offered a valuable non-Asian perspective in discussing the various topics and issues covered by the book.

On several occasions, Mr. Celito F. Arlegue, CALD Executive Director, was consulted for purposes of additional information or clarification.

The book is divided into four chapters.

Chapter One is about the genesis of the organization, which was born during the surge of a democratic wave in Asia and many other parts of the globe.

Chapter Two is about the resurgence of autocracy, and the rise in disinformation, which has been identified as a major threat to democracy.

Chapter Three is about strengths and weakness of CALD as an alliance of diverse organizations and as a partner of leading liberal movements in the world, particularly those based in Europe.

The fourth and last chapter is about how and where to move forward in the next decade based on the experiences and lessons learned over the last 30 years.

But the above is a rather simplistic categorization. Chapters One, Two, and Four may have been chronologically arranged though there is no clear or precise delineation per section as the journey is actively evolving; it is a continuing process, and in many cases, a sustained and vigilant struggle. Throughout the four chapters, the history, ideology, vision and mission, traditions, and track record of CALD were examined and various aspects of the roadmap for the immediate future were touched upon.

This year, 2023, marks the pearl foundation anniversary of an organization that was formed like the pearl. It is a precious gem, but its luster is a result of irritants. Aside from the pearl, I would like to use more marine motifs.

Legacy and odyssey are symbolized by the anchor and oars, respectively. Mardi Seng mentioned the strong anchors of ideology and values that keep CALD afloat despite the intensity of political storms.

Oars, however, represent CALD's odyssey. And the journey of CALD—its purposeful interventions that succeeded and even those that proved insufficient, its frustrations and inadvertent triumphs, the relentless machinations of detractors, and the strengthening bonds of friendship and camaraderie—all these and many more are worth telling and recording for posterity.

The anchor and the oars could very well be CALD's *taijitu*. In ancient Chinese philosophy, the *taijitu* is the circular symbol of the *yin* and *yang* dualism, the complementary forces in harmony, constantly interacting to create balance and to effect change.

I initially hesitated to use the anchor as a symbol of ideological steadfastness given the negative connotations and usage of the word. In technology, the term “boat anchor of legacy” refers to outdated and obsolete systems that result to inefficiency and stifle innovation.

Inadvertently, the anchor may hint at, at least, two undesirable idiomatic expressions: an excess baggage or even an albatross around the neck. But the values that we espouse—freedom, democracy, human rights, inclusive

development, social justice, the rule of law, and good governance—are not only universal. They also cannot possibly be obsolete. Although, as the experiences of our friends from Cambodia, Myanmar, Hong Kong, and Singapore would show, defending democracy can be such a heavy burden to carry, and those courageously fighting for it face the risk of having not just an albatross, but also a noose, around their necks.

Khun Abhisit used another idiom that alluded to the sea: “the high tide of democracy,” to which I proposed, as the reverse side of this coin, the phrase “the undertow of autocracy” to refer to the tyrannical forces that violently pull down anyone, anything, or any idea getting in the way of absolute and perpetual power.

The high tide of democracy and the undertow of autocracy, the ups and downs, the opportunities and the challenges, the best of times and the worst of times, on the surface where the sun shines and underneath it, the abyss of total darkness, oblivion, and even death. This is why the odyssey of CALD has to evolve, as it has to navigate, with diligence and intelligence, the waters of these omnipresent, powerful, and clashing currents.





CHAPTER ONE

# Surfing on the High Tide of Democracy





Born on Human Rights Day. The CALD Inaugural Conference at the Queen Sirikit Center in Bangkok, 10 December 1993.



*The past is a foreign country;  
they do things differently there.*

**L.P. HARTLEY (1895-1972)**

**W**HEN the Council of Asian Liberals and Democrats had its inaugural conference three decades ago in Bangkok, the founders, proponents, and supporters of this umbrella organization of liberal, democratic, reformist, and progressive political parties in Asia had one thing foremost in their minds: the future.

And back then, in consideration of how the long, difficult, and often tragic past had been, the future was bright and sunny.

For centuries, most of Asia were colonies of Europe, the United States, and Japan. From mere territories of imperial powers, sovereign countries were born after the Second World War. Independence was the result of long, arduous, and costly struggles.

General Aung San (1915 to 1947) of Burma summed up the sentiments of the revolutionaries of the region who struggled for independence, some of whom, like the father of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, became the founding fathers of newly formed nations: “(We) made our choice in the conviction that the danger of standing up for basic human rights in a repressive society was preferable to the safety of a quiescent life in servitude.” These were life-changing choices that altered the course of national histories; for many, choices paid with their very lives.

Yet in Asia, as it was in Africa and South America, the peoples of newly independent nations that endured centuries of oppression and subjugation

by foreign masters ended up having to contend with similar or even greater degrees of abuse and maltreatment. This time, however, it would be in the hands of home-grown dictators, many of whom enjoyed the support of the United States as well as European powers like the United Kingdom and France.

As veteran journalist and political commentator Amulya Ganguli (2011) remarked candidly, “Throughout the Cold War, (the United States) propped up totalitarian regimes wherever it could on the plea of countering Soviet communism. Although the U.S. was aware that these dictatorships were the obverse side of the oppressive Communist regimes it was supposed to be fighting, American presidents... justified them by the celebrated explanation in favor of an American stooge: he may be an S.O.B. (abbreviation by author), but he’s our S.O.B. (abbreviation by author).”

The willingness of Western powers to condone the tyranny, political repression, and unabated corruption of their allies led to widescale human-rights violations, poverty and underdevelopment, crony capitalism, and the further weakening of vital government and democratic institutions. All these resulted to widescale public discontent within developing countries in the South (Asia, Latin America, and Africa).

A tyrant is a tyrant whether he be a foreign invader or a compatriot. With the birth pains of a newly independent nation, it was no longer a fight between the colonizer and the colonized, but between democracy and despotism.

Ironically, the spirit that became the impetus for the dismantling of the dictatorships that Western powers were coddling to curb the growth of communism contributed to the eventual collapse of the Soviet Empire given the series of interrelated and interconnected events.

...

### **CALD’S TIME HAD COME**

The 1986 People Power Revolution in the Philippines toppled the Marcos Dictatorship. Like dominoes, Asian autocrats fell one after the other, among them Soeharto of Indonesia.

The idea of a formal organization amongst liberal, reformist, progressive, and democratic politicians in Asia fermented within their ranks and

allies outside the region, mostly in Europe. The prospects were exciting; the conducive environment for such an alliance was enticing. In other words, CALD's time had come.

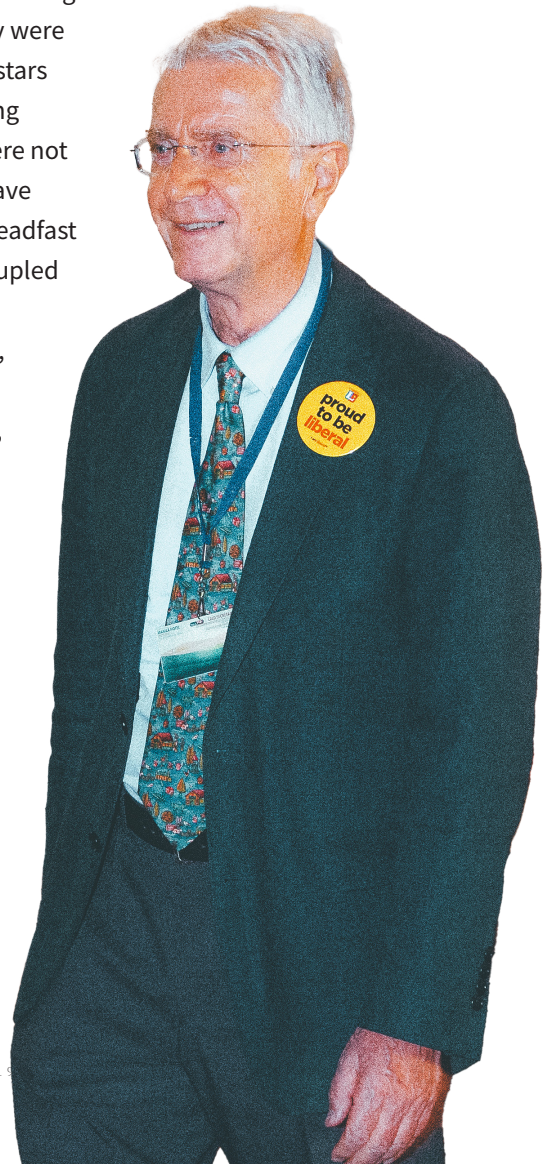
But the gestation period lasted for about six years, according to Dr. Wolfgang Sachsenröder who headed the Asia office of the Friedrich Naumann Foundation based then in Singapore (from 1986 to 1997). Dr. Sachsenröder was not only an eyewitness; he played crucial roles as well from the gestation period to CALD's birth and formative years.

Germany's liberal Friedrich Naumann Foundation—and particularly Dr. Sachsenröder—prepared the groundwork for CALD. Of utmost importance was identifying the right people to be part of the alliance. Many were obvious choices; the shining political stars were much visible during those exciting times. But prominence and stature were not enough criteria. The alliance had to have people of proven integrity and with steadfast commitment to democratic ideals, coupled with vision and intellect.

Sachsenröder traveled the region, meeting not only the celebrated political leaders of different countries, but also those who showed potential and promise—most of whom would form the core leadership of CALD during the critical formative years.

He first met then Thai Foreign Minister Surin Pitsuwan, and then Deputy Speaker Raul Daza and then Secretary Florencio 'Butch' Abad of the Philippines. "The Democrat Party (DP) in Thailand and the

Dr. Wolfgang Sachsenröder who headed the Friedrich Naumann Foundation in Asia when CALD was still in the planning stages recently said during the online interview with the author, "I'm really very pleased to see that CALD is still around and thirty years is really something. I was only fifty at that time, going to be eighty this month. It's part of my life."



Liberal Party (LP) in the Philippines were the starting points, so to speak,” Dr. Sachsenröder said, and more work remained. He visited other countries in East and Southeast Asia, reaching out to, among others, Dr. Kim Dae Jung of the Democratic Party of South Korea; Son Sann, a prime minister in the late 1960s, and his son Son Soubert, of the Buddhist Liberal Democratic Party of Cambodia; and Ms. Maysing Yang of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) of Taiwan.

Minister Surin would become the Founding Chair of CALD while Deputy Speaker Daza and Secretary Abad alternately served as CALD Chairs during the first tenure of LP as CALD chair party from 1997 to 1999.

FNF had been CALD’s principal partner from the very start. But the dialogue and individual partnership between FNF and the founding member parties of CALD—Thailand’s Democrat Party, the Democratic Progressive Party of Taiwan, the Liberal Party of the Philippines, the Buddhist Liberal Democratic Party of Cambodia and the Democratic Party of South Korea—had existed much earlier.



CALD Cofounder, Ms. Maysing Yang of the Democratic Progressive Party of Taiwan (center), is flanked by Dr. Surin Pitsuwan, Thai Foreign Minister and the founding CALD Chair, and Dr. Wolfgang Sachsenröder.





The founders of CALD during the inaugural conference, including the Hon. Chuan Leekpai, Thai Prime Minister (3rd from the right) and Dr. Kim Dae Jung (2nd from the right) who would become the President of South Korea in four years' time.

“Born in Bangkok, but conceived in Portugal.” This was an oft repeated phrase when describing the origins of CALD. Together with fellow parliamentarian, Mr. Alongkorn Ponlaboot of DP, Abad felt a certain degree of alienation during a conference of global liberals in Sintra, Portugal, which was sponsored by FNF. Abad lamented the absence of an Asian agenda. He reckoned that most Asian countries was relating more to the West, particularly to their former colonial masters politically, economically and socially than to their neighbors.

Over bottles of beer, the Asian delegates brainstormed on the possibility of creating an Asian counterpart or component of similar multinational groupings like Liberal International (LI) and the European Liberal Democratic and Reform Group (ELDR), which had been founded much earlier in 1947 and 1976, respectively. Not only was there the need for such cooperation, collaboration, and consolidation, the global and regional environments were conducive for such.

Sintra was the cathartic turning point. After a preparatory meeting in Taipei, the Caucus of Asian Liberals and Liberals held its inaugural conference at the Thai capital on 10 December 1993.

In its formative stage, CALD had little in terms of track record and plenty when it came to obstacles. Despite the difficult and more than the usual birth pains—for one, the formation of an alliance of political parties



based on ideology had not been attempted or at least, took off, in the region—the founders and those who subsequently joined the organization were both optimistic and aspirational; and more importantly, they were inspired and determined.

“Caucus” was eventually dropped in favor of “council.” It was more than a matter of semantics. The latter term was more expansive and inclusive; furthermore, it was free from the connotation of being temporary, of being established for merely a short term or to undertake specific tasks.

The inaugural conference (December 1993|Bangkok) was graced with the presence of then Thai Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai who was on his first term of office (September 1993 to July 1995) and then South Korean opposition leader Dr. Kim Dae Jung, who would become his country’s Eighth President, holding office from 1998 to 2003.

Prime Minister Chuan’s first term started shortly after Thailand’s 1992 Pro-Democracy Uprising that led to the ousting of the military junta and initiation of political, economic, and social reforms. Mr. Chuan is considered as Thailand’s first prime minister to come to power without either aristocratic or military backing (Britannica, n.d.).

As for President Kim, Sachsenröder had this to say: “Kim Dae Jung was one of the politicians standing up against Lee Kuan Yew (and the other proponents of Asian values) to say ‘It’s all nonsense, we are as predisposed to democracy and liberal values as anybody else in the world’”

The universality of human rights and democracy, which CALD founders and subsequent leaders adhered to, ran counter to the Asian values<sup>1</sup> discourse that justified authoritarianism for the sake of economic growth.

In 2000, history was made in Taiwan when DPP ended the Kuomintang’s (KMT) one-party rule that had lasted for more than half

---

<sup>1</sup> **Asian values** refer to a set of values promoted since the late 20th century by some Asian political leaders and intellectuals as a conscious alternative to Western political values such as human rights, democracy, and capitalism. Advocates of Asian values typically claimed that the rapid development of many East Asian economies in the post-World War II period was due to the shared culture of their societies, especially those of Confucian heritage. They also asserted that Western political values were unsuited to East Asia because they fostered excessive individualism and legalism, which threatened to undermine the social order and destroy economic dynamism. Among Asian values that were frequently cited were discipline, hard work, frugality, educational achievement, balancing individual and societal needs, and deference to authority. (<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Asian-values>)



Prior to Taiwan's national elections in March 2000, Liberal International held its first Executive Committee meeting in Asia. The LI, CALD, FNF and ELDR delegates witnessed first hand the successful campaign of DPP.

a century<sup>2</sup> and included the world's longest Martial Law (1949 to 1987). With the new millennium came the election of Mr. Chen Shui-bian and Ms. Annette Liu as President and Vice President of Taiwan, respectively. The two shared a lot in common: both lawyers, they were leading human-rights defenders and democracy activists who became prisoners of conscience.

It was shortly before the historic 2000 elections that Liberal International held its first executive committee meeting in Asia. DPP hosted the event in Taipei, with its national candidates addressing the assembly. LI delegates observed the rallies of DPP. More importantly, they visited the DPP headquarters, where they were briefed on campaign strategies that, given the results of the elections campaigns, proved highly successful.

The author was one with the observation of the international delegates: aside from living up to its name as being both progressive and democratic, DPP was effectively organized, with its staff being both well-trained and highly motivated; thus, Taiwan would be in good hands if the party stalwarts would govern Taiwan as well as they managed the party. One DPP figure stood out because of her commanding presence and eloquence:

<sup>2</sup> KMT ruled mainland China from 1927 to 1949 prior to its relocation to Taiwan as a result of the Chinese Civil War. It ruled Taiwan without interruption from 1949 until its defeat in the 2000 elections.

Ms. Bi-Khim Hsiao, the youthful Director for International Affairs who was coordinating the visit. Hsiao would later rise not only in the party, but also in both the legislative and executive branches of the government as, among others, a member of parliament and the current Taiwanese Representative to Washington DC. She also served the international liberal community as a former LI Vice President, and CALD Chair (2018-2020) and Secretary General (2004-2005).

President Chen and Vice President Liu were reelected in 2004 with the international liberal family including LI and CALD observing the elections in Kaohsiung.

Another East Asian country experienced an end to a decades-long one-party rule with the victory of the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) in the 2009 elections. The ascent of DPJ leader, Mr. Naoto Kan, as Japanese prime minister ended the 54-year monopoly of power of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). The now defunct DPJ was a CALD observer member party.<sup>3</sup>

But some of the most sweeping and impactful changes were in Europe. *Solidarnosc*<sup>4</sup> in Poland; and *glasnost* and *perestroika*<sup>5</sup> in the USSR hastened the Fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. The sea change resulting from democratic revolutions was global in scope. This was followed by similar movements outside Asia and Europe including the Middle East.

---

<sup>3</sup> The CALD Charter (Article IV, Section 2) says, “A political party or organization that is in sympathy with the principles of liberal democracy as described in this Charter may be granted observer-member status for a period of three years. Before the end of the three-year period, the observer-member should have applied for full membership. If this does not happen, the affiliation of the political party or organization ceases immediately.”

<sup>4</sup> *Solidarnosc*, the Polish term for solidarity, refers to the Solidarity movement in Poland, which was a significant social and political movement that emerged in the 1980s. It played a pivotal role in the eventual collapse of communism in Poland and had a profound impact on the political landscape of Eastern Europe. (<https://www.britannica.com/event/Solidarity-Polish-trade-union>)

<sup>5</sup> *Glasnost* and *perestroika* were the twin pillars of Soviet reform introduced by President Mikhail Gorbachev. *Glasnost*, which means ‘openness’ in Russian, referred to the greater freedom of expression and openness in Soviet society. It aimed to reduce censorship, increase transparency, and allow public discussion and criticism of the government. *Perestroika*, meaning ‘restructuring,’ aimed to reform and restructure the Soviet economic and political system. It involved moving toward a more market-oriented economy, allowing limited private enterprise, and reducing the central planning and control of the state. (<https://www.history.com/topics/russia/glasnost-and-perestroika>)

## THE UNDERTOW OF AUTOCRACY

Most CALD member parties enjoyed the blessings of the renewed democratic vigor in the region during the so-called high tide of democracy in the late 1980s and through the 1990s. Yet that was also the time when CALD members in three countries—Myanmar (Burma), Cambodia, and Singapore—were being forcibly drowned, paradoxically, by the turbulent undertow of autocracy.

Even then, Hun Sen's Cambodia was already being described by Mr. Sam Rainsy, the exiled leader of the opposition, as "a mere façade of democracy." Yet, the country still had democratic spaces where the opposition could operate, albeit with the threat of political repression like arbitrary arrest and imprisonment hanging like the sword of Damocles over their heads.

During the 2003 European Liberal Democratic and Reform Party (ELDR)-CALD Mission that visited several towns and villages in the Cambodian countryside, the author reckoned that given Cambodia's underdevelopment and the widescale poverty among its masses, there could be



The ELDR-CALD Mission to Cambodia with, third from the left, Saumura Tioulong, MP, from the Sam Rainsy Party of Cambodia; Dr. Ronald Meinardus, FNF-Manila head; Graham Watson, MEP, ELDR Leader; Dr. Neric Acosta, MP, of the Liberal Party (Philippines); and Dr. Rajiva Wijesinha, President of the Liberal Party of Sri Lanka. On stage was Sam Rainsy, MP.

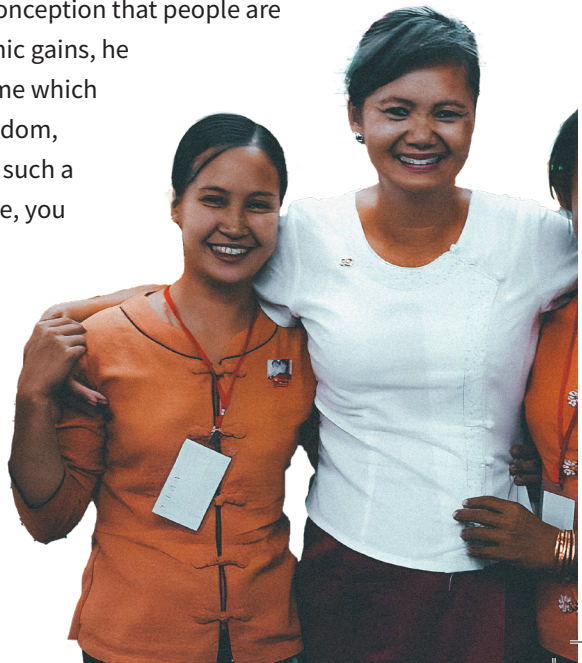
the presumption that basic needs such as food would be first on any Cambodian's wish list. But he was amazed that whenever he asked ordinary Cambodians what they wanted, they would quickly reply, "Democracy and freedom." In an interview much later with Ms. Mu Sochua of the National Cambodian Rescue Party (NCRP), the author asked, "Do you think that was true then? Is it still the case—that people are still yearning for democracy despite the primary concern, the basic needs that remain lacking, and, thus, may make democracy not that important, perception-wise?"

Mu Sochua's reply: "Definitely! I think right after the war, people were saying 'We are hungry for food.' But with the concepts of human rights and democracy introduced and explained by the opposition in so many years, we play a very big role in it. So does civil society."

She also acknowledged the support of international democratic institutions like FNF and the National Democratic Institute (NDI). But she noted that with the Cambodians having experienced oppression firsthand, "people feel more hungry for freedom. And you can go out to the countryside and people will mention the (vernacular terms) for democracy and freedom as part of their regular vocabulary; these are no longer just the terminology of NGOs and opposition parties."

"Hun Sen and Hun Sen's party had been in power for decades and the regime is getting more and more authoritarian, more and more corrupt, there are more and more social injustices," Sam Rainsy explained in a later interview. "So there is understandably a desire for change." Debunking the Asian values argument, and the misconception that people are willing to sacrifice democracy for economic gains, he pointed out: "When you are facing a regime which asks you to choose between rice and freedom, when you are confronted in the face with such a choice on the path of an autocratic regime, you should not answer because you should make it clear that we want both: rice and freedom at the same time. A regime that asks us to choose between rice and freedom would end up depriving us of both."

A global icon of democracy and women empowerment,  
Madam Mu Sochua of Cambodia (in white).





In prosperous Singapore, Dr. Chee Soon Juan of the Singapore Democratic Party (SDP) was having similar musings as Sam Rainsy. And for speaking his thoughts out loud, Dr. Chee would land in jail several times.

The first time he found himself behind bars was in 1999. “I remember the date and the year (of the first time I was imprisoned), because it was then my daughter was born,” he said. “It was a particularly difficult time. When you think back, we weren’t able to communicate like this, right? No Zoom, no Instagram, no Tik Tok, no Facebook.”

“I remember (thinking) something had to be done,” Chee said. “The question was, how do we go about doing it? For me, what I did was a very simple act of—you know, you wouldn’t even bat an eye in the Philippines or in the other more democratic countries—where I took one speaker with me and clipped the mic onto my collar and went to the downtown district and practically just gave a speech. That was like the crime of the century in Singapore.”

Chee publicly asked why Singapore couldn’t really afford a free-speech venue. He recalled, “It was the late William Safire, that *New York Times* columnist, who actually asked Lee Kuan Yew in an interview—if I’m not mistaken it was in Davos, Switzerland during the World Economic Forum—‘Why is the government so insecure and not allow the Singaporeans to speak?’ After all we’d developed into a stage (where) people would automatically assume that you get more freedom. Surprisingly, Lee Kuan Yew responded, ‘Why not?’”

“And then that was the birth of a little place in a corner in Singapore called Speakers’ Corner, which was modeled after the one in Hyde Park,” said Chee. “We joked around and said it wasn’t so much the ‘Speakers’ Corner’ but ‘Speakers Cornered.’”

The quip proved apt; Singapore’s token of free speech was restrictive. Demanding for the abolition of the Internal Security Act by gestures and shouting slogans, which was what we did, was not allowed, Chee said. And so despite the Speakers’ Corner, Chee was imprisoned, prevented from traveling, and made bankrupt for speaking his mind.

Lawsuits were filed against Chee by three incumbent or former prime ministers: Lee Kuan Yew, Goh Chok Tong, and Lee Kuan Yew’s son, Lee Hsien Loong—the triumvirate once



described by a prominent CALD stalwart as “The Father, the Son and the Holy Goh.”



Dr. Chee Soon Juan, Secretary General of the Singapore Democratic Party during the 2001 CALD Conference in Manila

Chee said that he has lost track of how many times he has been incarcerated. But he thinks “it was probably more than a dozen,” which cumulatively lasted for about six months.

Democracy advocates in Myanmar would have it worse. People Power was not always peaceful or successful, and the citizens’ failed uprising against Myanmar’s military rulers in 1988 would prove to be among the most heartbreaking.

From its inception, CALD had been campaigning for the restoration of freedom in Myanmar and the release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi from house arrest. Despite the victory of the National League for Democracy (NLD) in 2015, the Tatmadaw (Myanmar’s military) refused to be under

civilian control, even appointing its own commander-in-chief. Daw Suu Kyi was able to become her country’s de facto leader for a short time, however.

During the 2020 elections, NLD once again won by a landslide. Refusing to recognize the results of the elections, the Tatmadaw launched a coup and seized power. Old habits do die hard.

In 2021, CALD expressed its deep concern “that these recent developments put Myanmar into another political stalemate—preventing economic progress, democratic reforms, ethnic conflict resolution, and effective response to the COVID-19 pandemic that continues to ravage the country.”



Today Myanmar's pro-democracy activists are once again waging a revolutionary war against the junta.

Perhaps the most glaring example of autocrats not only ignoring the cries of the people but cracking down viciously on them, however, would be the Tiananmen Square protests and subsequent massacre in the Chinese capital in 1989. Beijing's violent reply to the protests occurred mere months before the Fall of the Iron Curtain. Aside from causing tragic casualties, it led to the state employing more repressive measures to counteract dissent. The tragedy, however, served as a grave warning to the rest of the world about China's capacity and willingness to repress its own people.

In Taiwan, the ruling KMT's vision of unification with China was thus met with disillusion and suspicion, and fueled further support for the then opposition DPP. But the massacre of mostly university students at Beijing during the latter part of the last millennium was only the beginning.

DPP's Maysing Yang asserted that recent developments have caused further distrust to China and wariness about its autocratic propensities. She cited Beijing's crackdown of democratic dissent in Hong Kong, particularly from 2019 to 2020, despite China's earlier commitment for the Special Administrative Region to maintain its autonomy and civil liberties under the 'one country, two systems' principle promised during the handover. Even international press organizations have left Hong Kong, Yang said, observing that "many foreign journalists are now in Taipei. And the same is true for global civil society organizations."



CALD Chair, Bi-Khim Hsiao, MP, and Ms. Maysing Yang (right) of the Democratic Progressive Party in Taipei (2018).

The International Republican Institute (IRI), for example, has its regional hub in Taipei. And this is symbolic as well. IRI noted on its website, “With its vibrant democracy and civil society, Taiwan is a world leader in innovating to create positive social change and foster citizen-centered good governance. IRI programs support those innovators and connect Taiwan’s expertise to changemakers in the region and around the world.”

.....

### BORN ON HUMAN RIGHTS DAY

The birth of CALD was an auspicious event given the circumstances. It was not a mere coincidence that it was founded on Human Rights Day. More than being symbolic, it underlined the unequivocal commitment of the organization’s founders to freedom, democracy, and justice.

There was the late Nobel Laureate Kim Dae Jung, who before becoming President of South Korea had spent most of his political life as an oppositionist and prisoner of conscience. Dr. Kim was the embodiment of those times of dissent and disquiet that preceded the establishment or restoration of democratic rule.



Dr. Kim Dae Jung (center) flanked by Mr. Jules Maaten, Secretary General of Liberal International (right), and FNF's Dr. Wolfgang Sachsenröder (left) during CALD's inaugural conference in 1993.

“It is safe to say that CALD was born during the high tide of democracy,” the Hon. Abhisit Vejjajiva declared during an interview with the author. Mr. Abhisit, Prime Minister of Thailand from 2008 to 2011, was CALD Chair from 2016 to 2018.

“Before I became Chair,” he recounted, “I had always been familiar with CALD from the beginning because the Democrat Party was very instrumental in the setting up of CALD.” In 1991, the then 27-year-old was already a member of parliament representing Bangkok. “We know that it was important for liberal democratic parties in the region to show solidarity and always exchange ideas with each other,” he said. “I think the end of the Cold War and globalization very much dominated the trends in most countries. And I think pretty much many people thought that this was the only route that most countries would take toward prosperity and toward better quality of life and participation for the people.”

To tackle the then still ongoing historic shifts from dictatorship to democracy, CALD held the “Democratic Transitions in Asia” conference deliberately in Jakarta as Indonesia had just ended the 32-year military dictatorship of Soeharto. The proceedings of the conference held in early 2001 were documented in a publication of the same title.

At the conference, then CALD Chair Sam Rainsy declared, “Cries for freedom and reform reverberate in all corners of the continent. In *Demokrasi, Reformasi, Doi Moi*, People Power, or by any other name, we witness the resurgence of democracy in the region.”

In the same conference, Dr. Martin Lee, Founding Chairman of the Democratic Party of Hong Kong, said, “Some Asian leaders

Thai Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva delivering his keynote address during the CALD Workshop on Building a Strategic Campaign Plan held in Bangkok from 11 to 15 March 2011.



equate the rule of law with the rule by law... (which is to) treat the legal system as an instrument of suppression... We cannot just trust a benign dictator—or can we trust (even) a democratically elected leader?”



Dr. Martin Lee, the Founding Chair of the Democratic Party of Hong Kong, speaking during the 2001 CALD Conference in Jakarta.

Lee’s warning is worth keeping in mind. The fall of authoritarian leaders did bring about democratic rule and the rise of reformist leaders. But democratically elected right-wing populists with the similar despotic tendencies of dictators past eventually emerged. In fact, the words uttered by Dr. Lee years ago proved prescient, underscoring the dangers of charismatic yet autocratic leaders like Rodrigo Duterte of the Philippines and Narendra Modi of India who are capable of winning elections.

“The years of the gestation and the foundational first years of CALD was the peak of the Third Wave,<sup>6</sup>” said Dr. Sachsenröder. “There was a lot of money, all sorts of organizations, the Americans, the Swedes, the Dutch, and the German foundations, of course, were working for liberal democracy, which was spreading to many countries in the world, especially after the authoritarian era in Asia.”

“It was interesting for many,” he said. “But (now) the Third Wave is over and sometimes I start to have some doubts about the applicability of some liberal recipes to every country in the world.”

<sup>6</sup> This concept was coined by political scientists Samuel P. Huntington and Larry Diamond. The Wave started in the 1970s and continued to the early 21<sup>st</sup> century with democratic governments gaining power in Asia, Latin America, and Eastern Europe.



## ***To Fight the Beatable “Unbeatable” Foe***

*During the interview with former senator Francis “Kiko” Pangilinan, the author mentioned that he was in a unique position since he was a youth leader in the 1980’s who fought against Martial Law and the Marcos Dictatorship, and almost four decades later, he was a vice presidential candidate of the opposition having to contend with the well-oiled machinery of fake news and black propaganda that were exponentially magnified through social media. During the CALD Iloilo conference last November, the focus was on disinformation and democratic decline. He then asked the good senator, “Which is the more formidable foe, dictatorship or disinformation?” Below is his response by narrating his experiences.*

\*\*\*

That’s an interesting question. I think it should not be an either or setup and choice. Of course, we must go to each jurisdiction and apply different approaches depending on the situation. Perhaps in some areas like the Philippines, there is relatively more space to fight disinformation even if it is very challenging. Perhaps in Cambodia or Myanmar, the situation is very different and therefore approaches have to be adjusted accordingly. But for us to learn, for us to know the future or where we are to head in the future, we have to go back to the past.

I was actually a victim of disinformation in my youth during the martial law years. When martial law was declared in the Philippines, the dictatorship closed down free press, arrested journalists and opposition leaders, jailed them all, and controlled mass media. Of course, it was not social media then but mass media—radio, television, and newspapers were all controlled. Censorship was the name of the game, therefore, propaganda was massive.

I was only in Grade Two when martial law was declared so we were called martial law babies and then eventually we were called

Ninoy Aquino babies because in 1983, eleven years after the dictatorship was established, Ninoy was shot dead in broad daylight.

When I was a freshman at the University of the Philippines-Diliman, I looked at all these activists as strange individuals who were out of touch because of the propaganda that I was exposed to daily. I looked at them and said, “What’s wrong with these guys? Why are they marching in the streets? What are they protesting? Martial law, we benefited from it.” In fact, in 1981, Marcos Sr. had a state visit in the US, and he was side by side with Ronald Reagan so in my view, the propaganda was telling me everything was great. Until Ninoy was shot. In other words, I was a victim of disinformation because I believed that Marcos was good for the country. I believed that he was one of the best presidents, that martial law actually ended a threat of communist insurgency. That was what I carried for eight years, that he was a war hero.

When Ninoy was shot, somehow, it’s hard to propagandize what happened there and pretty much slowly, that was the turning point for me. My politicization started when I asked, “How could an opposition leader, in broad daylight, be shot dead when there were three thousand soldiers supposedly guarding him?” The government’s version of the story was really strange.

We were being fed with all kinds of garbage. That’s why I started to question, and that’s when my desire for the truth began. Who killed Ninoy? Why was he killed?—eventually, the outpouring of sympathy (exacerbated) by the craziness by which he



Francis "Kiko" Pangilinan, CALD Chairperson

was assassinated. Then I started to attend discussion groups, I started to attend symposia and rallies. That's when I realized, nope, the country is in a rut, it is a corrupt state. That's when certain facts began to unravel like ill-gotten wealth. The dam burst; they could no longer stop the flow of the truth and information and the facts.

So fast forward to today, many of those who have been subjected to the disinformation look at me as a rabble-rouser, a troublemaker. I realize, oh my gosh, what I was thinking of thirty plus years ago, in terms of those speaking up, that's what they're now saying about me. *Bakit hindi ka na lang tumulong? Nanggugulo ka. Diba?* (Why don't you just help the government instead of being a troublemaker?) When you look at social media threads that's the standard line we are subjected to when we speak up. Why? Because they don't want us to speak up.

We are trolled, we're bashed, we are accused of being destabilizers, we're accused of being in cahoots with the Reds. That's why I know many out there will sooner or later see that there is something wrong with disinformation. But we have to be ready and continue to provide the vehicles and platforms where we are able to discuss the truth, the facts. I am certain.

I remember Mon Jimenez<sup>7</sup> when he was still alive, he said in laboratory experiments time and time again, the mouse is eventually able to navigate around the maze. It learns. In the same way, disinformation is like that maze and eventually, we would be able to learn to navigate disinformation that we are being subjected to. But that requires organization, that requires leadership, that requires continued interventions—action steps in terms of speaking up, in terms of platforms for vetting, where half-truths and lies are exposed, and facts and accurate information are provided.

---

<sup>7</sup> Ramon "Mon" Jimenez was a leading communications expert and top advertising executive who was appointed as Secretary of Tourism by President Aquino, III.





CHAPTER TWO

# **The Populism of the Present, the Phantom of the Past**



## 2023 ACTIVITIES

- CALD Regional Conference for Sustainable Urban  
Mobility and 4th CALD Executive Committee Meeting  
24-25 March 2023 / Bangkok, Thailand
- CALD 50th Anniversary Conference and 4th CALD  
Executive Meeting  
24-25 November 2023 / Taipei, Taiwan
- CALD 2023 Executive Meeting  
24-25 May 2023  
Thailand's 1st National Conference - 24-25 May 2023  
Thailand's 2nd National Conference - 24-25 May 2023  
Thailand's 3rd National Conference - 24-25 May 2023
- CALD 2023 Executive Meeting  
24-25 May 2023  
Thailand's 1st National Conference - 24-25 May 2023  
Thailand's 2nd National Conference - 24-25 May 2023  
Thailand's 3rd National Conference - 24-25 May 2023

## CALD PUBLICATION

- The Great Asian Pushback: Interviews with Changemakers
- CALD Smart Mobility Baseline Study

*...As he discovered in the course of his uncountable years that a lie is more comfortable than doubt, more useful than love, more lasting than truth.*

**GABRIEL GARCÍA MÁRQUEZ (1927-2014)**  
**FROM AUTUMN OF THE PATRIARCH**

**D**ESPITE the significant changes in Asia's political landscape in the late 1980s and the 1990s, only one member of the Council of Asian Liberals and Democrats was a ruling party when the organization was founded in 1993: the Democrat Party (DP) of Thailand. Others like the Liberal Party (LP) of the Philippines and the Malaysian People's Movement Party (PGRM) were with ruling coalitions, while the rest were in the opposition.

Still, none of the other founding member parties was in exile and none of their leaders was in prison—although many of them were former prisoners of conscience, including CALD founders South Korea's Kim Dae Jung and LP Philippines' Florencio Abad, as well as the first Taiwanese president and vice president from the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). As the years and decades passed, leading CALD political figures from Myanmar, Cambodia, Singapore, Thailand, and the Philippines would be at the receiving end of a plethora of repressive state machinations. Forced exile, incarceration, house arrest, trumped up legal charges, assassination attempts, unceremonious stripping of parliamentary immunity, and even the forced termination of elected positions were only some of the experiences they would go through.

In 2008, Mr. Abhisit Vejjajiva became the 27<sup>th</sup> Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Thailand, the youngest in 60 years. A couple of years later in the Philippines, then Senator Benigno Simeon 'Noy' Aquino III, CALD



Secretary General in 1999, was swept into power in what could only be described as a spontaneous and inspired people's campaign. The second Aquino presidency (2010-2016) succeeded the regimes of Presidents Joseph Estrada and Gloria Arroyo, both of which were mired in corruption scandals, and in the case of Arroyo, electoral fraud as well.

Mr. Aquino's promise to leave the country better than it was before was one of the guideposts of his presidency. And this promise was fulfilled. Dr. Raul Fabella of the University of the Philippines-School of Economics and the Asian Institute of Management noted that the average rate of growth of the Philippine GDP during Aquino's tenure from 2010 to 2016 was 6.2 percent, higher than the average during the watch of any president in history; foreign investment of just over US\$1 billion in 2010 grew to US\$8 billion by 2016; and poverty incidence declined from 26.3 percent to 21.6 percent. Aquino's finance secretary, Mr. Cesar Purisima, put it succinctly: "Good governance delivers great economics."

Yet despite the outstanding economic performance of the fourth Liberal president in the Philippines, LP's standard bearer in the 2016 national elections, former Senator and Interior Secretary Mar Roxas—whom President Aquino vigorously campaigned for—lost.

When this was pointed out to Abhisit, he remarked, "Well, I could pronounce the same argument for my own government in Thailand. But you could analyze the numbers, you could do whatever. But as we say as liberal democrats, in a democracy, it's the people who give the verdict. Much as we think we've done the right thing, we did what's best, and we may have achieved whatever and, of course, for us here in Thailand and also for President Aquino, we had very difficult circumstances to deal with."

Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva of the Kingdom of Thailand



The author then asked the former Thai prime minister, “So it’s the failure in communication, exacerbated by disinformation? Would you say that was the case?”

“Yes, things have become worse obviously,” he said. “Because I think whether it’s authoritarians, dictators, populist-elected governments, extremists-elected governments, (they) are obviously much more effective in getting their somewhat simpler message across.

“We liberal democrats have always struggled with simple messages because we tend to feel that we should not oversimplify things,” he added. “Whether it’s we failed to deliver or even if we thought we delivered, we also failed to convince people we delivered—which is what mattered.”

Politics is perception.

.....

## A REVERSAL OF FORTUNE

Abhisit explained the new challenges to democracy, in general, and liberal democracy, in particular, which emerged during the decade or two that followed CALD’s founding.

“As I said, by the time I became chair, things have evolved,” he said. “Frankly, things have taken a turn for the worse. Because not long after CALD was set up, we have to admit that many of the aspirations and hopes and expectations that we had from both globalization and the end of Cold War didn’t quite materialize the way we thought it would. So, from a situation where everybody was seeing an advance of liberal democracy in the region, even attempts to bring along Myanmar at that time, which was obviously struggling with the roadmap to democracy, many thought that this was an irreversible trend.”

“In Thailand,” he continued, “obviously we were probably one of the first to face a populist elected authoritarian government. And it became more and more difficult to make sure that the liberal part of liberal democracy was integral to the system. But for us liberal democrats, we don’t think that’s really the way democracy should go. But the problem is, this recession has become a global phenomenon. So, it’s not just countries in this region, especially ones that emerged from the economic recession at the turn of the century and looked like it was becoming more and more democratic or began to

experience recession in some form or another. For Thailand, we've since had two coups d'état while less and less democratic constitutions were being put in place. And so, from a situation where members of CALD, which had at one point thought that we would become major individual forces in our own countries and also the government, more and more we find less and less of our members in government."

Abhisit also mentioned the "considerable recession and regression as far as the fortune of democracy itself and the members of CALD are concerned," citing Thailand and the Philippines.



During CALD's Silver Anniversary Celebrations in Bangkok hosted by the Democrat Party of Thailand, then CALD Chair Abhisit Vejjajiva welcomes Philippine Vice President Leni Robredo, Chair of the Liberal Party.

When CALD observed its silver jubilee in 2018, the year-long celebrations focused on the theme "Reclaiming Democracy, Rebuilding Society." As CALD Executive Director Celito Arlegue explained, this was "in recognition of the realities that we are confronting today, that democracy has been somehow exploited by the populists claiming to be more democratic than the liberals. They claim that they're closer to the people. So we take that it's necessary for liberals and democrats to reclaim democracy before we can rebuild society... there's a recognition that institutions are not yet established. For this reason, populists and strongmen can easily do away with them, and in the process, threaten the entire democratic project." (CALD, 2018)

"We realized that when liberals are in power, the tendency is to look at long-term solutions to issues," Mr. Arlegue said. "This translates to a perception that we're not concerned about the immediate bread-and-butter issues that our people wanted to see addressed. People are easily impressed when

they see an action man who can immediately deliver results. Liberals, on the other hand, have to go through processes. When there's a process, checks and balances are stronger, and there's less possibility for abuse and mistakes. We have to recognize, however, that people want immediate results." (CALD, 2018)

"I think you have to first look at the most powerful countries in the world and what is happening there," said Sir Graham Watson, Member of the European Parliament (MEP) from 1994-2014, and leader of the Alliance for Liberals & Democrats for Europe (ALDE) from 2004 to 2009. "There is no doubt that in the United States of America, democracy is much less healthy than it was. You have a very deeply divided society, a very vociferous politics with some people not committed to the democratic standards and to the inclusive society that we want to see."

"If you look at the People's Republic of China," he added, "we have seen in the last 10 years a terrible slide back toward a tighter autocracy, toward less political freedom. There might be more economic freedom, although even that is in doubt. But there's certainly less political freedom. And if you look at Russia, you can see a country which has turned inward ... quite terribly in recent years. And if you add some of the other big powerful countries like India or South Africa, again you see democracy less healthy than it was 10 or 15 years ago."



ELDR's Sir Graham Watson with then CALD Chair M.R. Sukhumbhand Paribatra, MP, during the first ever joint meeting between Asian and European liberal parliamentarians and political party leaders in Seoul, Korea in 2001.

“So,” said Mr. Watson, “I’m not surprised if the trend in those countries contributes to a more general trend worldwide. And even if you look at Europe, I have to be honest and say that democracy in some of the major European countries—the United Kingdom, Italy, Sweden—is not clearly in a very healthy state. Although at the European level, it is still quite strong. There are big questions connected to the rise of populism and the exploitation of populism through social media. CALD did a great conference not so many months ago on this very topic.”

“You know, democracy faces a number of dangers,” he said. “I am not sure that my children will grow up and live in a free society as I have had the pleasure of living in during their lifetimes.”

To Friedrich Naumann Foundation Regional Director for Latin America Siegfried Herzog, the developments in Asia and Eastern Europe since the Philippine People Power Revolution of 1986, and the collapse of socialist dictatorships gave the illusion that “liberal democracy had vanquished its enemies and there was no plausible alternative... And that was, of course, a bit premature and optimistic.”

“I’ve learned from Douglass North, the Father of Neo-institutional Economics, that authoritarian systems or systems built on personal loyalties, clientelist systems, have been (around)... for literally millennia,” said Herzog, who has also served as FNF Regional Director for Southeast and East Asia. “To think that this would now just vanish in a pop of smoke was probably a bit



Mr. Siegfried Herzog during his tenure as FNF-Manila Resident Representative from 2006 to 2010.

ahistorical. Because if you look at it in that way, a lot of countries that on the face of it are supposed to be democracies, in reality were much more along clientelistic lines, and where a lot of voters are sort of hiding into clientelistic networks. And, you could make a case for that in India and the Philippines.”

“So,” he said, “the model of liberal democracies where the parties compete on the basis of ideas has always been and continues to be a minority proposition. And the second thing is that we’ve seen a backlash against democracy in many parts of the world because authoritarians learned to adapt to the market economy—at least to some extent in order to compete economically and to show people progress when they realized the socialist model has failed economically: the model of China and Vietnam.”

Herzog added, “I would say, these are the long lines—that what is happening is you have a backlash from authoritarian systems that don’t want to give up power and that still have enough levers and are willing to use brutal repression, as they have learned...that brutal repression works. If you have a current revolution at your hands, as long as your security services remain loyal, you can just shoot people and eventually, they’ll give up. We’ve seen that.”

“Of course, throughout these decades in the background, we begin to see China’s rise,” Abhisit said. “And clearly China does not fit into any kind of standard definition of liberal democracy, but it’s succeeding. So, at my time, I think I saw my mission as us trying to put our heads together and try to see how to stop this tide of populism, nationalism, extremism, fundamentalism, or whatever that were—an obstacle to democracy. But truth be told, I don’t think we’ve succeeded. And we’re still stuck in this situation where there is a lot of regression... in democratic values in the region and the fortunes of most of our members have.”

For Abad, who had headed various departments for different Philippine administrations, “reforms would not last if dependent on leadership alone. PNoy (President Aquino III) actually refused to communicate, not failed to communicate.” Abad, President Aquino III’s budget and management secretary, maintained that an activist mindset is needed to have a better appreciation of the country’s problem and if long-term institutional reforms are to be achieved.





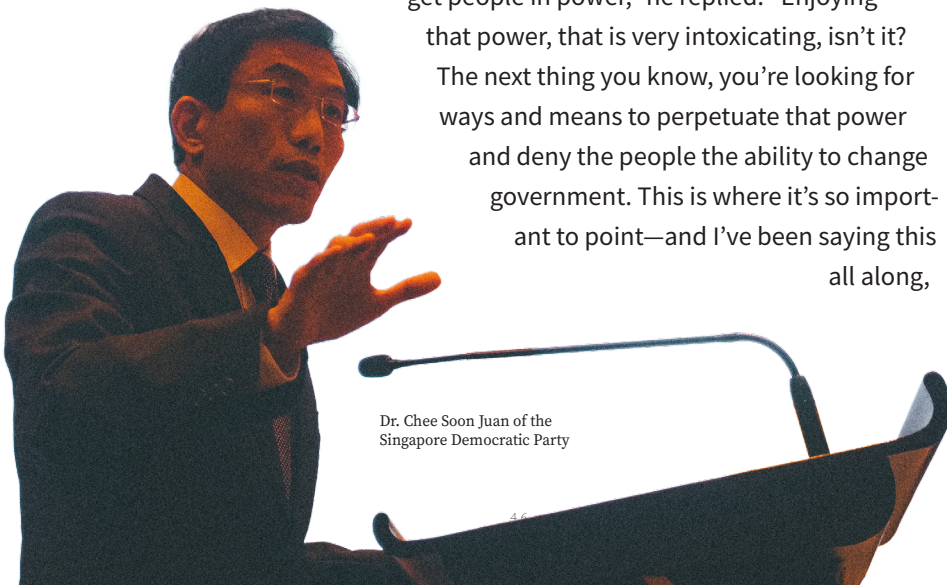
## THE UNGRANTED CONSTITUTIONALLY GUARANTEED FREEDOMS

“I pointed out that the Singapore Constitution still provided for the right of freedom to speech as well as assembly,” Dr. Chee Soon Juan of the Singapore Democratic Party said as he narrated his own difficult odyssey as a dissident and prisoner of conscience when he was persecuted for exercising those freedoms. “That was taken away from me and I did want to make it a point, to say that we really needed to move ahead and advance as a nation, as a society if we are going to have the people play a more meaningful role. So, I decided that it was important that I pushed the envelope, if you will, and to make sure that conversation started amongst the people.”

“Of course, I had lots of detractors as well,” he said. “But you know, the supporters asked the question, ‘Why is it that we can’t enjoy some of the freedoms that many people are enjoying across the world?’ So, I found myself wanting to establish that and the best way to do that was not to cooperate. Okay, I’ll have to pay the penalty, I’ll go to prison, which is not exactly a fun place to be in. But in so doing, we’ll be able to further that whole dialogue and conversation about human rights, and free speech and assembly in Singapore.”

The author then asked Chee, “Would you care to answer that question? Why is it that Singapore cannot enjoy the freedoms that the other countries are enjoying?”

“Therein lies the question about when you get people in power,” he replied. “Enjoying that power, that is very intoxicating, isn’t it? The next thing you know, you’re looking for ways and means to perpetuate that power and deny the people the ability to change government. This is where it’s so important to point—and I’ve been saying this all along,



Dr. Chee Soon Juan of the  
Singapore Democratic Party

together with Martin Lee—that when you look at Singapore, there’s much that other more autocratic regimes are studying and looking at.”

Chee said that some 10 or 15 years ago, he had written a paper warning people to pay attention to Russia.

“Everybody was just—I’m talking about the whole world, the West and everything—basically just interested in trade to the point that human rights, political freedoms, get subjugated all in the name of trade,” he said. “When you look at what’s happening right now, this is exactly what I thought and we’re paying this huge price because everybody just wanted to trade even when Putin was in the process of incarcerating his opponents.”

“The same thing is still happening until things started to take a turn for the worse, and then we find ourselves scrambling to see what’s going to happen,” said Chee, who is a psychologist by training. “It has had huge repercussions across the world.”

In reference to Putin’s war against Ukraine and democracy, Chee said, “This is where I’m saying that when we don’t get our priorities right, you’re going to face consequences sooner or later. By priorities, I mean not just investing in businesses and putting human values second, but putting people first, right? Rather than—I know it’s cliché saying profit before people, but it is something that’s very true when people are just interested in going out and making that almighty dollar. We cannot, as I said, subjugate political freedom, democracy, and people power. We’ll end up in very bad circumstances, very bad places when things start to go wrong, and there are no checks and balances, and autocrats come into power and start making very huge miscalculations.”

.....

## EMILY IN HONG KONG

In the first chapter of this book, CALD members from three countries—Myanmar (Burma), Cambodia, and Singapore—were described as being pulled down by the undertow of autocracy while the rest of the CALD parties were surfing on the hightide of democracy. The CALD individual members from Hong Kong<sup>8</sup> were not included since during the early years of CALD,

---

<sup>8</sup> Because political parties in Hong Kong are not allowed to join international organizations, the

Hong Kong was still a British colony and its people still enjoyed their freedoms and civil liberties.

Since its 1997 handover to China, Hong Kong has been subjected to undemocratic policies despite the ‘one country, two systems’ principle. The erosion of democratic freedoms and the increasing influence of Beijing in what used to be a bustling, cosmopolitan city resulted to massive protests, especially in 2014 during the Umbrella Movement, and in 2019 to 2020. Expectedly, Beijing responded with an iron fist.

In the CALD book, *The Great Asian Pushback: Interviews with Change Makers* (Manila, 2022), among the advocates and innovators Ms. Marites Vitug talked to was Ms. Emily Lau, a CALD individual member from the Democratic Party of Hong Kong (DPHK). Lau, who chaired DPHK from 2012 to 2016, summarized the situation in Hong Kong:

*I look out the window now, it's raining. It's very cloudy. The mood is like the weather, very dark. Many people are very, very tense and worried, and some may be packing their bags, and getting ready to get out. Others may be too frightened to speak. It's very sad. Hong Kong used to be a very free, very safe, and very vibrant city. That's why so many people all over the world love Hong Kong. They've come to work here, live here, study here. We have friends all over the world, including in the Philippines and other places. But now, some people would say the city has changed beyond recognition.*

*I am still one of those who would talk to foreigners. I would say the game is not over. And Hong Kong people will still continue with the struggle for freedom, for human rights, for a high degree of autonomy, which was promised in the 1984 Sino-British Joint Declaration and the Basic Law, whereby the*

---

Democratic Party of Hong Kong (DPHK) became part of CALD through the individual membership of its leaders, including Dr. Martin Lee, its founding chair, and Ms. Emily Lau, its former chair.



*Chinese government said, after the handover to China in 1997 by Britain, the Hong Kong people will continue to enjoy their free lifestyle for 50 years until 2047. Now we're not even halfway there.*

*I refuse to accept that we will no longer have a high degree of autonomy, no longer be free and safe. We will continue to do our work to safeguard our free lifestyle, but in a peaceful and nonviolent way. We will not break the law, as a law professor at the Hong Kong University reminded us. They say that if you don't like the law, you can criticize it. But you shouldn't break the law. And I have no intention of breaking the law. But even then, if they still come and arrest me and others, of course, there's not very much we can do.*

• • • • •

## CHINESE HEGEMONY

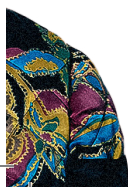
Mr. Sam Rainsy meanwhile sees the threat of Chinese hegemony not only regionally but globally as well, culling from the Cambodian experience. "I think that China is an issue that liberal democratic countries, parties, and organizations have to address," he said, "because China wants to impose their model of government, and also their model of society, to the rest of the world."

"But the Chinese model is against our values," said the Cambodian opposition leader. "So the big battle is to defend our values, which are threatened by China's expansionism, not only militarily or politically, or trying to increase her swarm of influence, strengthening herself on land and on the sea. China is also being aggressive on the economic front."

"In wanting to impose her model of government and society, the Chinese government is using more and more sophisticated means of control, of surveillance on the population," he pointed out. "There are dictators who are tempted to adapt those models proposed by China. So, China has allies and potential allies with a number of autocrats and autocratic regimes. I can speak for sure about Cambodia but I think there are other examples throughout the world."

Said Sam Rainsy: "Hun Sen and his regime allowed Cambodia to be this military outpost of China, to violate human rights, to be involved in land

Ms. Emily Lau, CALD individual member  
from the Democratic Party of Hong Kong





Sam Rainsy (C) with Juergen Wickert of FNF (R) as CALD Executive Director, John Coronel, looks on.

grabbing, et cetera. Cambodia is the paradise for money laundering thanks to the ill-gotten legitimacy of the Hun Sen regime. Cambodia is controlled by a mafia state where the Chinese mafia has deeply penetrated.”

“This is a big challenge,” he said. “That is why it is important for democratic countries and democratic forces all over the world to show solidarity when one country like Cambodia is threatened by the negative influence of China by means of support, including financial, to an autocratic regime like that of Hun Sen’s, and to resist Chinese expansionism. It affects not only the Cambodian people, but all global citizens who want to live in a democracy.”

“So, when we talk about democracy in Cambodia, the issue is not only democracy in Cambodia,” said Sam Rainsy. “The issue is how could we, together, defend our values, and nobody should neglect any country, even a small nation like Cambodia, whose people are resisting the influence of China and the danger of being under an undemocratic system. The battle for democracy is worldwide. So, I think the lesson to learn in this changing world order is the role of China which is more assertive and aggressive than ever.”

In his book *The China Fantasy: How Our Leaders Explain Away Chinese Repression* (2006), Washington-based journalist and China expert James Mann questioned the U.S. policy of overlooking China’s abuses for the sake of business opportunities. Wrote Mann: “From Clinton to Bush to Obama, the



prevailing belief was engagement with China would make China more like the West. Instead, China has gone in the opposite direction.”

Ms. Maysing Yang, a CALD cofounder from DPP-Taiwan, agreed with that assertion. “As long as China remains an authoritarian country, other authoritarian regimes will resist the pressure to change,” she said. CALD, as a democratic alliance, must assist and support its members—whether as individuals or as a party—that face the threat of China’s aggressions and intrusions, she added.



Yang mentioned Hong Kong’s Dr. Martin Lee, Mr. Sin Chungkai, and Lau of the Democratic Party, all of whom used to be CALD individual members. She noted as well that activists who are under attack include the Tibetan exiles and dissidents within China. “We don’t have to be afraid of autocrats,” she emphasized, pointing to the urgent need to give support—financial, moral, etc.—to those struggling for liberty and self-determination, something Yang said she had experienced herself.



“Well,” said Philippine Senator Francis Pangilinan, “it will take a lot of diplomacy and negotiations and skills (in dealing with the issue). We don’t want a fight or confrontation with China. We want to have a rapprochement,<sup>9</sup> if we can call it that. How do we engage effectively and that we are able to keep in step with our core principles of CALD, but at the same time are able to call out what we feel to be precisely a concern about undermining democracy and undermining liberalism in the region?

“I don’t see China as an enemy in that regard,” he said. “They are a reality that we have to deal with, and we have to engage with. We hope that now, and in the future, we will be able to engage with China in a better set of conditions and move away from this current impasse and confrontation. We don’t want that confrontation with China. We’d like to have a healthy, constructive engagement with them and with other countries in the region.”

---

<sup>9</sup> the establishment or resumption of harmonious relations

## THE DICTATORSHIP OF THE DISINFORMED

During the 14th CALD General Assembly (November 2022, Iloilo City, Philippines), delegates signed a declaration to take appropriate action to re-claim lost or damaged democratic spaces, adopt truth-telling and protection as an advocacy, and combat disinformation concerns in digital infrastructure, education, culture and arts, and democratic institutions and processes. They also vowed to reconvene to report on concrete progress in the effort.



The 14th CALD General Assembly on "Building a Democratic Coalition against Disinformation" in Iloilo City, Philippines last November 2022.

"From what I've heard from the participants, it was helpful," reported Mr. Moritz Kleine-Brockhoff, FNF Regional Director for East and Southeast Asia. "I think they learned a lot from Taiwan how to counter disinformation from mainland China and that's how it should be, sharing experience and learning from each other."

"We have to recognize that disinformation has existed as long as human society has existed," Sir Graham Watson commented. "But, of course, with the development of electronic communication, the tools through which disinformation has spread have enabled a much faster spread and therefore is doing a much greater damage. And perhaps we are failing in our role as protective democrats to combat that by using the same information tools to spread the message of democracy and freedom."

Mr. Moritz Kleine-Brockhoff, FNF Regional Director for South East and East Asia



He added, “Remember what they say in America, that the criminal is halfway across the world before the policeman has got his boots on. I think the devil is halfway across the world before the democrats get their boots on. It is partly our failure to proselytize, if you go back to the old days of democracy, if you go back to history—and I’m talking about the recent years, not ancient Greece. But if you look at the roots of democracy in the 18th-century Enlightenment, the people who were in favor of democracy, they were proselytizers, they were people who went out to preach it. I think we have grown up in many countries that have democracy, we have grown up to take it as a given. And we are not doing quite so much as we should be doing to draw people’s attention to the dangers to democracy, and to try to anchor it more firmly in our societies.”

FNF Regional Director of the European Dialogue Jules Maaten likewise lamented that liberal and democratic parties worldwide have been slow to respond to these challenges, citing the disinformation campaigns in the Philippines, Mexico, the United States, and the United Kingdom, among others and external influences of China and Russia.

“We’ve been slow to wake up to these,” said Mr. Maaten, a former MEP (1999 to 2009), and LI Secretary General (1992-1999). “We are still in this idea that ‘oh everything is going so well and we may have a little blip on this game,’ and we’re thinking that ‘oh yeah, we are right. We have good arguments on our side and it will all be fine.’ And now we’re discovering that it’s not going to be fine if you don’t try to be as clever as your enemies.”

Mr. Jules Maaten of FNF who once served as a Member of the European Parliament and Liberal International Secretary General.





“You put out propaganda and people take it as true,” Herzog said. “So that’s nothing new but one could argue that digitalization, social media, the greater connectivity, has amplified those effects.

Herzog also discussed the double-edged sword of the Internet, saying, “Greater connectivity has amplified wealth, closer economic integration, globalization, and anyone who can read the data set can see how that has massively increased global wellbeing and wealth. But increased connectivity also has its downsides: fake news spreads faster, contagion spreads faster, risks accumulated through stupidity and greed in one part, let’s say in Wall Street, when that explodes, it doesn’t just come to America, it comes to the rest of the world, you have a global financial crisis. Those effects have probably become more drastic.”

“Change has become faster and become more encompassing,” he said. “The things that I would see globally, why we now have a crisis of liberal democracy, is because our governments are not acting fast enough, they’re not protecting us from all these changes, they’re not solving the problems that pop up because democracy is not fast. It’s a process of negotiation, of accepting that differences of interests, not just differences of opinions, but sometimes really conflicting interests, and there’s no perfect solution. You have to negotiate it out, sometimes compensate, people have to give up something and that takes time. That’s something that people find too complex, too confusing, too boring.”

“This,” said Herzog, “is where populists come in and where people look for the fake comfort of authoritarianism that projects an image of strength and capability.”

.....

## THE SILVER LINING

Taking a very pessimist view, it would seem that this is a vicious cycle of tyrants of one form or the other, from a dictator to a popularly elected authoritarian populist. The true democrat coming to power would be the exception rather than the rule, or at best a temporary respite.



But then CALD is about hope. More than that, it is about remaining steadfast to its principles. Furthermore, there are silver linings. For one, the impetus for cooperation becomes stronger during the direst situations and in the face of challenges.

As Maaten put it, “It is not just governmental cooperation that you need because that tends to be too stale, too formalistic to formulaic... but you need other types of political cooperation. Governmental cooperation isn’t political cooperation anyway (with the former having) all sorts of other interests involved, which you wouldn’t have in CALD, for example. So especially at this time of really great crisis, I believe there is a reason for optimism. From the point of view of liberal democracy, this cooperation is really necessary. And CALD is there, so it’s a good thing.”



Herzog meantime argued that authoritarian models are not sustainable. He said, “We see right now with what is happening in Russia, that exactly that model can lead to disaster. One of the poster boys of the new right and the left, Putin and Putin’s Russia, is now basically collapsing. That authoritarian system—especially if it’s economically unsophisticated like Russia is—it tends to be aggressive internally and externally. The external aggression, of course, comes out of Russian imperial history. Putin wants to preserve the empire and has started a war that he is losing.”

“Right now,” Herzog said, “we see the collapse of this authoritarian model in Russia and once this system collapses, we will have repercussions around the world again. Probably in 10 years, we’ll have again a new dynamic. So we shouldn’t be fixated just on the problems of today, but we should also see some of the drivers that make life for authoritarians more difficult.”



Abhisit shared an encounter he had about a year ago with a graduate student. He said that the student, who was doing his thesis, had come to interview him. “(He) asked a question, ‘Who will win? Democracy or authoritarians?’” recounted Abhisit.

“And of course, he was obviously focusing on Thailand in particular. I said, ‘Look, at times we took for granted that democracy is here to stay and then we mess it up.’ So it’s important to recognize that democracy can become chaotic and deteriorate; it can be lost! But while that’s the case, I also don’t see authoritarians can last forever. It’s important for us not to lose hope and to find ways to regain the ground that we’ve lost.”



“We live now in much more difficult times,” observed Watson. “We live in a world dominated by populism, by a return to autocracy in many countries, by backsliding democracy. It’s very much more difficult for liberals to operate and to operate freely. But in a sense, the CALD network is even more important these days when democracy is backsliding than it was last century when it was a more open global environment.”

Maaten offered this view: “I think that the founding of CALD is already visionary in its time, it’s a time of optimism for liberals. And at the moment, it may be less the case in so many aspects. I think the necessity of CALD is even greater now than it was then. It’s nice to be cheerful when it’s sunny, but when it’s rainy, it’s more difficult. So CALD is more necessary now than it was then.”

\* \* \*

## ***Cambodia's Latest Sham Elections***

Most undemocratic regimes around the world have elections with different and opposing parties and candidates contesting. To remain in power, the disenfranchisement of political rivals is done through electoral fraud and disinformation, among others. But Hun Sen and the Cambodian People's Party (CPP) had dropped even the pretense of democratic exercises when the subservient supreme court dissolved the main opposition party in 2017.



“Democracy was brought to trial and it lost,” was how Ms. Mu Sochua described the decision, it was not only the Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP) that ceased from existence, but so did democracy, or perhaps more accurately, its last remnants.

In 2017, Reuters reported that “Rights groups condemned the decision by the court, which is headed by a judge who is a member of the ruling party’s permanent committee. They said it left Cambodia as a de facto one-party state and rendered next year’s election meaningless.”

In a sense, the Cambodian opposition was made a victim of its own success. Because Sam Rainsy Party and the Cambodia National Rescue Party have been increasing its seats in parliament after every national elections, the inevitability of the opposition party getting into power became the impetus for Hun Sen to take more drastic measures.

Mr. Sam Rainsy had long described his beloved country as a façade of democracy, since 2017 even that façade was demolished exposing nothing more than collapsed and crumbled democratic institutions.

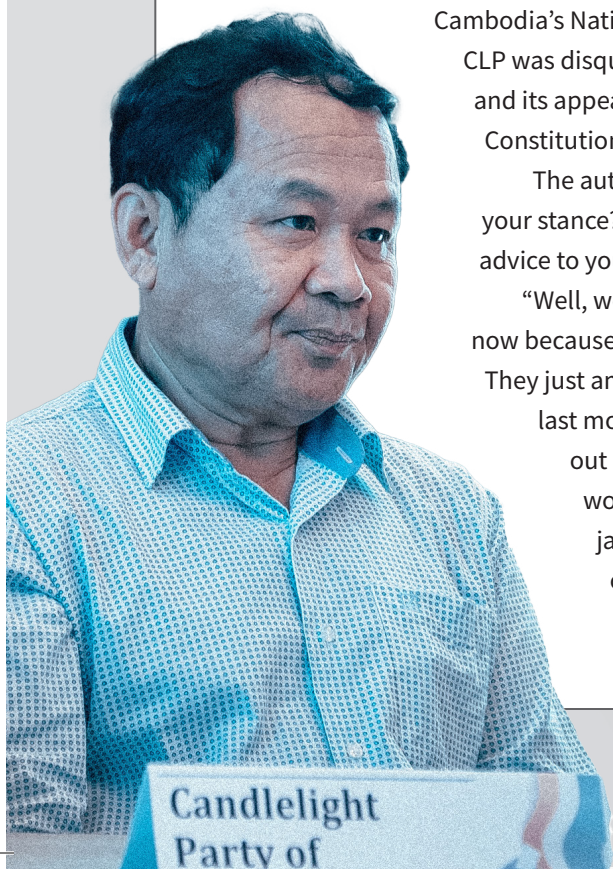
“CALD and other friendly parties and organizations must denounce this sham election, a fake election, a misleading election,” Sam Rainsy said in a recent online interview with the author. “By denouncing such a sham election, you will deprive the Hun Sen regime of any legitimacy. The same legitimacy to borrow money and because of corruption, a good percentage of aid and loans goes to the pocket of Hun Sen and worse, these resources are used to repress democracy; the same legitimacy to represent Cambodia as a whole.”

“When the government dissolved CNRP in 2017, we kept the Candle Light Party (CLP) dormant because we did not want to participate in an election that just completely dissolved our sister party,” stated Mr. Mardi Seng. “So, we took a stand but after four years, we realized that because we are democratic party and we support democracy, we have to participate in the election.” But because of a decision by Cambodia’s National Election Commission, CLP was disqualified from contesting, and its appeal was dismissed by the Constitutional Council.

The author then asked, “So what is your stance? A boycott? What will be your advice to your followers? Not to vote?”

“Well, we can’t even do that right now because we would end up in jail.

They just amended the election law as of last month that anyone who speaks out against the election process would be charged and put in jail,” Seng responded during our July 14 online dialogue.





“Yesterday two of our leaders have been charged with that, without evidence. The previously, we had two others and as of last night, we had about ten other people trying to escape to Thailand.”

This is seventh quinquennial elections in Cambodia since elections were restored in 1993 and the second since the dissolution of CNRP. In the 2018 elections, the unopposed CPP expectedly won all 125 seats. Provisional results indicated a landslide victory for the CPP, winning 120 of the 125 seats with the royalist FUNCINPEC having the remaining five seats.

“FUNCINPEC gave up their ideals (a long time ago), it became completely corrupt. Prince Ranariddh betrayed his followers and supporters,” Sam Rainsy narrated. “Then, the FUNCINPEC base turned to my party and I think the base of support I got from the people was from FUNCINPEC first. Then, FUNCINPEC continued to go down the drain.”

Like Angkor Wat that was overrun by the wild tropical jungle, the ruins of Cambodia’s democracy can be restored. Like the magnificent temples that are considered some of humanity’s greatest treasures, democracy is a heritage that the Cambodian people rightfully deserve and own.





CHAPTER THREE

# Synergy in Diversity



2004 ALDE-CALD Meeting in Brussels, Belgium



*Coming together is a beginning; keeping together  
is progress; working together is success.*

EDWARD EVERETT HALE (1822-1909)

**M**ESSIEURS Abhisit Vejjajiva, Mardi Seng, Graham Watson, Jules Maaten, and Siegfried Herzog, among other interviewees, were one in saying that the Council of Asian Liberals and Democrats was founded under more auspicious times, and through the decades, democracy has been in a decline. This is a topic thoroughly discussed in the previous sections.

It is important to take into consideration the diversity of CALD member parties and the countries where these political parties gestate and operate, and how, through the years, each member party has affected— and was affected by—CALD.

.....

#### THE POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

In a luncheon interview with the author, former Secretary Florencio Abad (who, like former Prime Minister Abhisit, former Minister Sam Rainsy, former Senator Francis Pangilinan, and Dr. Chee Soon Juan, has served both as CALD Chair and president/leader of his political party) gave a bird's eye view of CALD member parties at the present.

Mr. Abad noted that Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan have remained democratic, politically stable, and economically developed. He cited the



East Asian experience and attributed a significant part of their success to the institutionalization of agrarian reform, and the establishment of a manufacturing base. This led to the creation of a wider middle class.

South Korea and Taiwan have both experienced repressive authoritarian regimes. As mentioned earlier, Taiwan experienced the world's longest Martial Law. South Korea had a series of military dictatorships since the end of the Korean War in 1953, the most notorious dictator being General Park Chung-hee who seized power in a military coup in 1961 and ruled until his assassination in 1979.

Abad's assertion about the three East Asian nations cannot be said of countries belonging to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), where most CALD members come from.

Abad suggested that it may be instructive to categorize countries in the region based on their level of democratization (or the lack of it). He then went on to describe Taiwan as a liberal democracy; Malaysia and Thailand as comeback democracies; Indonesia and the Philippines as democracies with illiberal characteristics; Singapore a mixed regime; and Cambodia and Myanmar exclusionary authoritarian regimes.

"The changes that are happening in Thailand and Malaysia are noteworthy. But unfortunately, the key players there are not with CALD," Abad lamented, referring to the current Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim and the ruling People's Justice Party (PKR) or more popularly known as Keadilan; and the Move Forward Party, led by Mr. Pita Limjaroenrat, which won the most number of seats during Thailand's May 2023 national elections, although not enough to form a government on its own.

Secretary of the Philippine Department of  
Budget and Management, Florencio Abad



This led the author to think of the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P), the current ruling party in Indonesia. Interviewing Watson, the author asked, “As the PDI-P, the party in power in Indonesia, is a member of CALD, do you think that the democratic gains of Indonesia are deep enough or significant enough?” Watson’s reply: “No, I think Indonesia has a long way to go before it becomes a modern democracy. And not all of the signs are hopeful. I think there are pressures within the country that are going to be difficult to resolve and change. But you know, that’s partly the work of a network of liberals.”



Elsewhere in ASEAN, liberal and democrats have had a hard going. The National League for Democracy (NLD) of Myanmar and the Cambodian National Rescue Party of Cambodia, despite massive popular support for the democratic opposition not only from the grassroots but also from the global civil society, have been disenfranchised electorally because of a military coup and a judicial decision, respectively. In the Philippines, as in Thailand, undemocratic populists immediately succeeded the governments once led by liberals and democrats.

The Philippines has had three populists presidents emerge since the People Power administration of Corazon ‘Cory’ Aquino: Joseph Estrada, Rodrigo Duterte, and Ferdinand Marcos Jr., all of whom won in landslide victories. Because of weak institutions, it became possible for Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, who immediately preceded Benigno ‘Noynoy’ Aquino III, to manipulate institutions, including the elections commissions, the church, mass media, and even political parties (it is widely believed that the internal split of the Liberal Party was at her instigation) for the sake of her political survival.

Observed Ms. Jayanthi Balaguru of the Malaysian People’s Movement Party (PGRM): “In Malaysia, we are not as troubled in the political environment like Cambodia or Thailand, for the matter. What I can say is that it’s safe to go out. It’s safe to say whatever you want to say, but of course, in a limited position. The opposition is allowed to (run), vote, and things like

that. But Cambodia, this is the second time around that opposition is being suppressed again. Where are we moving forward? In a recent trip to Cambodia we actually talked to the women groups and told them, ‘No, don’t give up hope.’”

Balaguru is also the Chair of the CALD Women’s Caucus and the first Asian president of the International Network of Liberal Women (INLW). These groups have been vocal against the repression and imprisonment of women activists, foremost of whom is former Philippine senator Leila de Lima.

“Maysing Yang, Emily Lau, and I came to the Philippines shortly after she was arrested and went to visit her in prison,” recounted Balaguru. “We were actually threatened by messages when I was at the airport, waiting for my plane to leave for Malaysia. There were people who already hacked into my hand phone and were leaving messages such as ‘Who are you?... Barking dog.... Get out of my country.’ Those kinds of horrible things. And I remember I was with our late human rights champion, Chito (Gascon). He was also flying to Malaysia for some conference so we both were in the lounge together. So, when he talked to me, he said, ‘Be careful, shut down your messenger for a while so you can board the plane in peace and not be worried about that.’”

“But again,” Balaguru continued, “one year passed, two years passed, three years passed. I think five years now, John? And she’s still there. She was acquitted in some charges but she’s still there. So how long more? But it’s the iconic people like her who show us that it is an ongoing struggle that we still really have to go on.”

“We are all shouting out loud but it is moving very slowly,” said Balaguru. “Maybe in 10 years’ time if I’m not around anymore, John, and if you’re interviewing the next person, you may still get the same answer. We are still moving but at a snail’s pace. But maybe, like you say, at least there’s a pace, slowly but surely, like the tortoise that won the race at the end.”

Ms. Jayanthi Balaguru, Chair of the CALD Women’s Caucus, and President of the International Network of Liberal Women.





Outside the detention facility of Philippine Senator Leila de Lima with Ms. Balaguru, Hong Kong Legislator Emily Lau, and Ms. Maysing Yang of DPP-Taiwan.

### MARCHING TOGETHER, WALKING THE TALK

The author discussed with the interviewees how CALD in general and CALD member parties in particular were able to respond to the complex political, economic and socio-cultural in specific countries and the region as a whole; how they adapted to pertinent developments; of the extent of remaining steadfast to cherished ideals and values; and the strengths and deficits of CALD's collaborative efforts.



“CALD is a very wide and very varied body,” Watson said. “Some of its members are very strong, very established parties like the DPP in Taiwan. Some of its members—I think of our friends in Singapore for example or others—are in a very different place in their political situation and country. So, I think it’s hard in general to judge. But what I would say is this: I

think all of the CALD member parties have kept the flame of liberalism burning during all of the years in which CALD has been going and have used each other as a kind of mutual support network in doing that. And I think that a mutual support network has been more important to the weaker parties or the parties operating in more difficult conditions.”



“But nonetheless,” he said, “it has been a support value to every single member of CALD. Moreover, I would say that during the years—let us go from approximately 1999 to 2009, during the years when the outlook for global cooperation was rather better than it is today—many of those CALD member parties had real impact on the political life of their countries.”



Maaten meantime said, “The strength of CALD is its international dimension so that people in other countries know that they are not alone and that is hard to do. Even most national politicians think that they have to solve the situation within the confines of their national identity. COVID is a prime example of that. I’m not sure how it went in Asia, but I think it’s quite similar to the European reaction, which was to immediately close the borders of different countries.”

“And then it took half a year to discover that maybe that’s not a great idea, that you had to tackle the problem together,” he said. “But we lost half a year at the beginning with everybody thinking that they could do better than anybody else. So that’s a major key action that you see. The more international components become important and especially amongst the liberals, the centrists, the democrats, you need to attack these problems together because they go beyond which you can cover on a national level.”

“I think that’s one of the great successes of CALD,” Maaten asserted when asked about the ideological commitment of CALD and its members. “That they have been able to do that. It would never ever have happened without CALD.”

“Let’s be honest,” he said. “The oldest parties in CALD are not historically, traditionally liberal parties. They are close enough with the Liberal Party of the Philippines, it’s here. But it becomes more difficult if you talk about other parties if they purely come from an ideological point of view. So, it’s such a huge success to have this liberal family in Asia, especially Southeast Asia. I don’t know if all these parties at home would describe themselves as liberal. Probably not. And that’s also so important. But they are happy to be part of that international family. That is huge as a success.”



“Can one go even further?” mused Maaten. “Probably, but that is so hard. How do you turn the certain parties which have been there from the very start? And how do you really turn them into a fully-fledged, proper liberal party? I don’t know. I don’t think you can ever do that. They are what they are. And that’s good enough, that’s liberal enough. So, we would probably have to be happy with that. I think that is one of the greatest successes of CALD. Could it go further? Absolutely, it can go further but I don’t know if one can manage that, and that is not because of CALD or something like that. That is simply because it is very difficult to change a party from the outside. But you can do it if a party is becoming completely anti-liberal and that sometimes happens as well. But if that happens, you can put pressure on a party. We can figure it out, that is a threat that can always work because they have an autonomous way of working.”

CALD cofounder Ms. Maysing Yang of the DPP declared, “I am proud of CALD for two things: First, CALD member parties have shown independence as political parties. The government isn’t the boss. Secondly, from the very beginning, CALD members have been aware of and motivated by the core value of liberalism and democracy.”



“I think CALD definitely has a mission, definitely has a purpose, definitely has people and parties that adhere to liberal democratic values, for sure,” remarked Ms. Mu Sochua. “And it is unique in that sense because, how many liberal parties are there in Asia especially when compared to Europe? Not that many, right? I think the liberal parties that are members of CALD are Taiwan and then the Philippines. The rest are very democratic, but are they truly liberals? I don’t think so. It’s a hybrid. “

“Nevertheless,” said the Cambodian opposition figure, “I think we speak the same language of democracy, we have the same values, the same ideals. We in Cambodia, we would promote democracy, we would not promote liberal views. Why? Because people are more familiar with democracy and democratic principles and values. But we have not really promoted that word

‘liberal’ because people don’t think of it as something positive. Although we think liberal, we practice liberal values.”

“It’s good to have a strong anchor in any storm,” said Mardi Seng, a former senator from the Candle Light Party (CLP) of Cambodia and incoming CALD Chair. “It’s very good that we have a strong anchor and we do have a strong anchor in principles of liberalism and democracy. But at the same time once the storm has passed, we need to move on. Now we are facing different sets of challenges, different sets of storms, and personally I think we need to be a little more pragmatic, a little more flexible, and we need to come together again openly and discuss about the directions, about how—at this point, especially in Cambodia, we are not thinking about winning, we are thinking about surviving.”



“Once the storm has passed, we need to rebuild and face new challenges and win elections,” he said. “I mean, the purpose of our political party is to serve the people’s needs. If we are so disconnected from people that we want to serve, if we are sitting on our moral high horses and not getting anywhere, people won’t support us. We need to translate our principles so that the people would understand. So, I think connecting with people is very important.”

“Populists are very good at taking advantage of people’s fear, of people’s daily concern, and they are connected to them,” Mardi Seng also pointed out. “They take advantage of that. I think we should have a better narrative from liberalism points of view, we need to have a better narrative to explain to people and so that people can be connected to us, connected to our principles, connected to the way we do things.”



How to connect with the people has also been top of mind for Abhisit. “I think it’s important that we recognize that we were not seen as effective as we had hoped to be or as we should have been in sustaining whatever achievements we thought we had made,” he said. “Economically, I think the populist and now more recently, the more left-leaning

solutions, have much more appeal to people who feel that they now live in a very unequal society.”

“That’s one thing,” said the Thai veteran politician. “And the second thing is, take the case of the USA where the clear setback of the liberal democracy was in Trump years. The comparison would be that America has survived it so far because I think some of their institutions show greater resilience and maturity. And again, ultimately, the voters opted for very—I would call it stable, others would call it uninspiring—leadership of Joe Biden. But that’s not the case with many countries around the world and also, of course, in this region where people still opted for colorful, big-talking leaders.”

“So again, because during the times of these non-liberal democratic regimes, our institutions are not as strong and resilient in resisting some of the things that were done and upholding some key principles,” he said. “We—I think many of the parties in CALD—have had to make so many compromises in terms of principles. We have been caught doing things that we say shouldn’t be done. I think that also had an effect on the level of confidence, the level of faith that people can have in parties that claim to uphold liberal democracy.”

“I don’t want you to think that I am pessimistic about the prospects of liberal democracy,” said the former Thai premier. “I am not. There’s also a new generation in the region looking to craft a new vision for politics which they may not count as liberal democracy and such. But I look at many of their agenda, it’s certainly very familiar to us. Although they may approach it or they might implement it or they might try to sell it in a different way.”



Watson meanwhile argued, “I think that it is hugely important, but I think we have to recognize that you don’t campaign on the grounds of ideology. You campaign on the things that matter to people. If I give you an example, liberals here in Brussels where I am sitting today, are not campaigning for the rights of individuals. Well they are, but are not campaigning

with a great ideological manifesto. They’re campaigning for things like making sure the streets are clean, making sure that the buses run on time, all of the things which matter to people in their daily lives. What is important though is that you do this in the context of your ideologies so that when you’re talking to people saying ‘We will make sure you have a better

bus service,’ you are also explaining to them why you think it’s important that they have a better bus service, how this fits in with your general approach to politics and governance. People understand that you are good people, that you are worried about their welfare, and you’re not only worried about a society where you get power, money, and wealth.”

“I think this trend toward more active solidarity, this trend will be confirmed,” said Sam Rainsy. “It is a general trend in CALD, but we see countries like Indonesia taking a more active part in trying to promote democracy, to defend the people in our region of serious human rights abuse. So, it’s very encouraging and I hope that the new democratic forces that just emerged, like in Thailand, will be a part of this trend toward a more active solidarity among democrats.”



Senate President Franklin Drilon (2-L), Senators TG Guingona (L), Kiko Pangilinan (R) and Loren Legarda (2-R) with Cambodian opposition legislators, Mr. Sam Rainsy and Ms. Saumura Tioulong.

Having been exiled so many times in his political career, Sam Rainsy and his colleagues would fly to Manila to meet. The first time was in 2004; even long before it became the ruling party in 2010, LP had assured the Cambodian oppositionists that it could provide a safe haven for them. In 2012, when Sam Rainsy Party and the Human Rights Party merged to form the Cambodia National Rescue Party, the historical meeting was held at the CALD office in Manila. After Duterte became president in 2016, such a gathering could no longer be possible especially given Duterte’s political alliance and supposedly close personal friendship with China’s Xi Jinping and Cambodia’s Hun Sen.

The author asked Mr. Pangilinan, being both Chair of CALD and the Philippine Liberal Party, regarding the extent by which CALD contributed to LP's growth in terms of ideological coherence, and being more advocacy and platform-oriented.



“Oh, significant, very significant contributions,” he responded. “The exchange of experiences and ideas of liberal parties and member parties of CALD in the last two years have helped us craft our own action steps in upholding and defending democracy and liberalism within the country. I would cite, for example, the zoom webinar on disinformation.

One of our guests was the Minister of Digital Affairs of Taiwan (Audrey Tang). She shared her experiences with us regarding how Taiwan combatted disinformation.

Prior to COVID, research institutions pointed out that the Taiwanese elections of 2019 was heavily trolled, disinformation was massive, and yet they shared with us how they were able to overcome, and how they were able to generate a strong pushback against disinformation. That really helped us in our efforts here locally.”

“It’s very important to have these exchanges, these discussions, and these engagements with other political parties in the region,” Pangilinan said. “For example, the difficulties faced by Hong Kong: we have been able in the past to articulate their concerns in the international arena. The same with Cambodia. So, this solidarity with political parties and organizations in the region must continue and be further strengthened.”

He also underscored that CALD has access to the international community where, together, the problems of member parties that are subjected to severe constraints and acts of repression because of the machinations of autocratic and anti-democratic states can be addressed.

In the issue of combating disinformation and in trying to resuscitate democracy, the author asked the senator about that space, that niche that remains despite the current democratic recession. What would be CALD’s niche and how can that democratic space be protected and, more importantly, further expanded?

“We need to come together with other like-minded individuals, organizations—not just political parties but also civil society (and others) all the



more now,” Pangilinan said. “The lesson in the Philippines in the last elections is that the people are actually capable of mobilizing, of volunteering. The massive outpouring of support in the grassroots, the massive campaign rallies that we experienced resulted from a hunger for the truth and hunger for good governance. So, there is that starting point, at least for the Philippines and we must pursue that. It must be a public-private, NGO-stakeholders mobilization approach. We can’t do it alone, political parties won’t be able to do it alone. We must come together and continue to unite behind the respect of human rights, defending the truth, upholding justice, and the pushback against disinformation.”

Asked about CALD’s impact of CALD on the region, and its member parties on the political evolution of countries, SDP’s Chee said that the “whole picture is rather spotty.”

“And by that,” he elaborated, “I mean, of course in certain countries you do get a lot more progress and I’m thinking about, say, in Indonesia, in Taiwan, the Philippines, and in a very perverse sense, Cambodia as well. You see, some of these autocrats, especially as I said in Cambodia, are really reacting to some of the work that Sam Rainsy and his party are doing and that has made their rule there more iron-fisted than it really has to be. As I said, perhaps in a perverse way, CALD has made that impact, otherwise the ruling regime would not have reacted the way they did.”



“Then you have in other countries where progress has been a lot more limited,” Chee said. “I take into consideration my own country here where because of very sophisticated laws put in place, the progress of democracy is a lot more muted, a lot more limited. But still, I think overall in that sense, CALD has had its impact throughout the region and I think it’s important that we continue to find where those niches are so we can begin to educate the public in terms of what CALD is doing, what its values are—and you’re talking about basically universal values of human rights, freedom of speech and association, and assembly. So, I think all these things are important and that CALD continues to pursue these issues and again, be there when the situation arises that we can begin to empower citizens across its region.”

## FROM THE FREE TO THE SOCIAL MARKET ECONOMY

Ever since CALD's founding, Abad had pointed out the problems of the free-market economy in the context of the Philippines and most nations in Southeast Asia. He underscored the importance of government regulation and social safety nets if growth is to be equitable and economic development, inclusive.

"I was chair at a time where I thought, you know, we really thought we had to think hard about this," Abhisit recalled. "I floated some ideas, especially when we became more active in Liberal International, where we tried also to get our Western colleagues to see a wider perspective of the kind of challenges that democracy faced. And in particular, we were very much saying that in countries in this region, when you allow liberalism to be equated with the free market and it resulted in greater inequality or volatility, democracy earns a bad name."



In the interview with Mr. Moritz Kleine-Brockhoff, FNF Regional Director for Southeast and East Asia, the author mentioned that "much as the leaders of CALD do not believe in the Asian Values Debate, that you can sacrifice democracy for the benefit of the economy, Butch Abad considered the inapplicability of Western liberal economic standards and the free market economy."



To this, Kleine-Brockhoff replied, "I would disagree, respectfully. We are not promoting a free market economy, and we're not suggesting that safety nets are not needed anymore. We just believe that the degree of economic freedom must be as high as possible, the role of the state must be rather small in order to generate enough wealth, in order to generate enough tax income, to be able to finance the social safety nets which every country needs and deserves. We do not promote free economies; the term we use at the FDP and the Foundation is social-market economy. But the social democrats would stress the social in social-market economy and we would

stress the market to make the social possible. That's the difference. A lot of parties in Asia are social-democratic when it comes to their economic policies. We're not but that doesn't mean we're free-market libertarians. Far from it."

A section in the FNF website<sup>10</sup> states, "Germany's swift economic recovery... was based on implementing an economic order that allowed entrepreneurs, innovators, and workers the freedom to achieve unprecedented results. It guaranteed the rule of law and a high degree of predictability and stability. This economic order, the Social Market Economy, was based on the ordoliberal idea that governments and markets both have essential roles to play in a modern, open society. The state acts as a referee, observing the game and enforcing its rules, while abstaining from participating in the gameplay itself."

.....

### REACHING OUT BEYOND ASIA

Liberals are globalists. Internationalism is in the liberal DNA. Liberals believe that the core values of freedom and democracy are universal. Thus, this multiparty regional alliance with a multinational membership maintains partnerships beyond Asia.



The London-based **Liberal International (LI)** is the world federation of liberal political parties and allied organizations. It says on its website,<sup>11</sup> "While the essence of democracy cannot yet be said to be the norm across Asia right now, Liberal International has a proud tradition of supporting Liberal Democratic parties and persons in their fight to win greater freedoms. We do this

<sup>10</sup> <https://shop.freiheit.org/#!/Publikation/1062>

<sup>11</sup> <https://liberal-international.org/our-members/regions/asia/>

alongside our dynamic regional organisation, the Council of Asian Liberals and Democrats (CALD).”

The Democratic Progressive Party of Taiwan, Democrat Party of Thailand, Liberal Party of the Philippines, Cambodia National Rescue Party, and Civic Will-Green Party of Mongolia are full member parties of LI, while the Malaysian People’s Movement Party and the Singapore Democratic Party are observer members. CALD is a member of LI as a cooperating organization.

South-South relations are done by CALD in cooperation with the

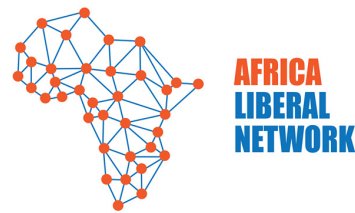
**Red Liberal de America Latina (RELIAL)** and the **African Liberal Network (ALN)**.<sup>12</sup> Founded in 2003,

RELIAL is a network of 39 liberal institutions from 18 Latin American countries. ALN is an organization

composed of 44 political parties from 30 countries in Africa. The network developed from what was originally the Organisation of African Liberal Parties and was established during an initial meeting of parties in Mombasa, Kenya in July 2001.

“CALD, in the spirit of South-South Cooperation, recognizes the comparable political, economic and social issues and problems that the three continents confront—from the role of money in politics, expansion of executive power to economic and social exclusion,” said CALD Executive Director Celito Arlegue. “For this reason, CALD has

maintained strong relations with its counterparts in Latin America (RELIAL) and Africa (ALN) through executive missions, regional network meetings on the sidelines of Liberal International events, and participation in each other’s general assemblies and major conferences. Through these, it is hoped that



<sup>12</sup> <https://liberal-international.org/our-members/cooperating-organisations/>

there will be greater understanding and appreciation of common regional issues and concerns, and ultimately, to possibilities for cooperation and joint action.”

FNF Regional Director for Latin America Siegfried Herzog admitted, “I think the big impact work that CALD has been doing is capacity-building for political parties at different levels. Parties have become more open in talking amongst themselves behind closed doors about the internal problems and also challenging each other. This is what we’ve copied in Latin America from CALD or rather what I have taken to Latin America to use in RELIAL.”



The Rome-based **Alliance of Democrats**, which operated from 2005 to 2012, was a coalition of center-left, centrist and center-right political

parties and groupings, among them the U.S. Democratic Party, the European Democratic Party (EDP), and CALD.

Two of the Asian delegates who attended the many events in the Italian capital were then opposition parliamentarians, Mr. Naoto Kan of the Democratic Party of Japan, and Abhisit, both of whom soon became the prime ministers of their countries.



The Washington-DC based **National Democratic Institute (NDI)**<sup>13</sup> is a non-profit, non-partisan, non-governmental organization that works in partnership around the world to strengthen and safeguard democratic institutions, processes, norms, and

values to secure a better quality of life for all. NDI envisions a world where democracy and freedom prevail, with dignity for all.

The first CALD-NDI joint venture was a regional workshop on how political parties can combat corruption. This was in 2002 and was followed by another workshop on a related topic, electoral observation missions in several Asian capitals, and publications.

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.ndi.org/who-we-are>





TAIWAN FOUNDATION  
for DEMOCRACY

財法 臺灣民主基金會  
團人

The **Taiwan Foundation for Democracy (TFD)**<sup>14</sup> was established in 2003 with the full support of the country's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and all its major political parties. TFD was founded to consolidate Taiwan's progress in democracy and human rights, as well as to give back to the international community for all the assistance Taiwan had received on its path toward democracy. As the first national democracy assistance foundation in Asia, TFD has flourished alongside the deepening of democracy in Taiwan. By organizing many democracy-related events and international seminars, TFD not only connects Taiwan with the world's democratic camp, but also strives as far as possible to promote the country's proudest democratic accomplishments and human rights practices to every corner of the planet.

TFD has supported CALD programs and operations since 2004. Arlegue explained that TFD has been an ardent supporter of CALD directly and through the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). Through the years, the Foundation has been providing small grants to CALD to support its activities, particularly those that deal with women and youth. TFD, through the DPP, has also been supporting a staff in the CALD Secretariat for almost two decades. In addition, the DPP uses funds from TFD whenever it hosts CALD events in Taiwan—major conferences, election missions, and specialized workshops.

Two of the book's resource persons discussed two of CALD's most important partners.

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.tfd.org.tw/en/about/director>

## Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom



**FRIEDRICH NAUMANN  
STIFTUNG** Für die Freiheit.

The Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom (FNF)<sup>15</sup> is a German political foundation. In Germany and in 60 countries around the world, FNF and its partners promote freedom, liberalism, democracy, human rights, pluralism, tolerance, curbing climate change, an open and digital society, social market economy, and the rule of law. It is a non-profit organization that focuses on civic education.

FNF has close ties to Germany's Free Democratic Party (FDP). Abroad, it works with government institutions, NGOs, academia, political parties, researchers, students, journalists, activists, start-ups, and artists who share its values and want to join it in promoting freedom. It works collaboratively and seeks long-term partnerships, highlighting the importance of individual freedom and strong democratic institutions. FNF promotes economic freedom and free trade, and wants businesses to respect human rights. FNF has worked in Southeast Asia since 1969 with offices in Bangkok, Hanoi, Jakarta, Manila, Seoul, Taipei, and Yangon. It also works in Malaysia.



"The overarching 'L' word—everything associated with liberalism ties CALD and FNF together," said Kleine-Brockhoff. "It's one long-standing partnership, trust, and common values."

The author then asked, "Would you say that it's a partnership characterized by equity, reciprocity, and mutual respect?"

"I think there's a lot of respect," said Kleine-Brockhoff. "I mean, I'm just an administrator and these guys are politicians, I have great respect for them."

Culling from his experience as CALD's first executive director and recalling the many conversations he had with the organization's principals, the author responded, "I think there's appreciation that the programs and activities of CALD are not funder-driven, which is a danger for other NGOs. It is a partnership guided by visions, based on an equal footing. I think it's good for both organizations."

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.freiheit.org/philippines/focus/about-us>



Asian and European liberal and democratic parliamentarians gather outside the Korean parliament in Seoul in 2002.

### Alliance for Liberals and Democrats for Europe

CALD also maintains a strategic and synergistic partnership with ALDE that has resulted to, among others, a regular biennial joint meeting and conference held alternatively in Brussels and various Asian cities, depending on the host party, and an internship program for young Asian liberals at the European parliament.

“Liberals and Democrats across Europe created their family in 1976, and in 1993 established even further to form a true European political party, fighting every day for your rights and freedoms,” ALDE said on its website. “Every year our family gets bigger and stronger. Now consisting of 70 member parties and more than a thousand individual members across the EU, we put people at the center of our party and this allows us to grow together.”

In an interview with Sir Graham Watson who was ALDE leader from 2002 to 2009, the author reminisced, “I remember, Graham, when we met in Bangkok to plan the first ever dialogue between Asian and European liberal parliamentarians. That was more than 20 years ago. ALDE was not in existence



then, it was the ELDR group in the European Parliament. Can you comment generally about the CALD-ALDE partnership and its benefits and impact?

“I remember, John, I remember very well our first meeting and our subsequent meetings,” Watson said. “I remember them with great pleasure, I really do. When I became the leader of the ELDR group in 2002, it struck me that although we are doing good work at European level and although we were talking a lot about how to build the European Union, to bring in new countries and so on, which we have succeeded as we were very effective pro-Europeans, we were not doing enough to look at elsewhere in the world.”

“When I made the group much bigger in 2004 at the 2004 Parliamentary Elections,” he recounted, “I did a deal with Romano Prodi in Italy and Francis Bayrou in France to bring their forces into the liberal family. And we renamed it ALDE rather than ELDR. I worked very hard to establish greater structural links between ALDE and CALD, between ALDE and the African Liberal Network, between ALDE and the RELIAL. If I look back, I’m actually very proud of having done those things.”

“The one that has worked best has been the ALDE-CALD relationship,” said Watson. “Partly because we benefited from having the Friedrich Naumann Foundation very heavily involved in promoting the network. We had some great people. I remember some of the FNF people who were working with us at that time. It was a great opportunity and there has not been enough concentration on the links between Europe and Asia because of reasons like colonial history. Europe looked more toward Africa and Latin America than it did toward Asia.”

“I wanted to change this focus so I invested quite a lot of time and effort and resources in trying to develop this structured cooperation between ALDE and CALD,” he said. “I’m delighted to see that it is still ongoing.”

.....

### THE LEGACY OF SOCRATES

When asked if he had a few more thoughts at the end of a very fruitful and enlightening interview, Watson said, “What I would say, John, is, first of all, thanks to you guys in the Philippines because you have been, in many ways, at the center of all of this and at the center of development. And I can think back to a number of wonderful meetings that I’ve been to in the

Philippines with you guys. I think back to one in Cebu many years ago, and one in Tagaytay, and the work that you and your colleagues have done in holding this together and in building it up.

“I think you guys can take a moment of reflection and self-congratulation in what you’ve achieved,” he said. “I also think that the friendships and the links that you have created will have a far greater impact over time than we are able to perceive at the moment.”



The top brass of ALDE, CALD and FNF with former President Corazon Aquino in 2006 in Manila.

“You know,” Watson said, “one of the characteristics of dictatorship, of autocracies, is that they are very closed societies. They don’t talk to each other. One of the characteristics of liberals is we’re the ones who carry on where Mr. Socrates left off. We are working internationally, across borders, spreading ideas, bringing people together. And that’s a tremendous strength for the future.”

★ ★ ★



## ***Restricted Area: No Liberals Allowed***

A statement by the CALD Chair dated 11 April 2023 reported that, “Today, we learned that China, as announced by the Taiwan Affairs Office, has imposed sanctions on the Council of Asian Liberals and Democrats (CALD) and its officials for violating the ‘One China’ principle, advocating for Taiwan’s independence, and expanding Taiwan’s international space.

While we consider the sanctions as unfortunate, the Council stands by its programs and activities that aim to advance democracy, human rights and the rule of law for all people of Asia. We remain committed to promote the basic values of liberal democracy as stated in our Charter, and to not cower in the face of authoritarianism or from those who threaten our freedoms.”



“CALD is a threat to China. That’s one of the measures of its success,” Sir Graham Watson asserted. “That mighty empire feels threatened by a small band of loosely grouped liberals doing what we should be doing. I think it is a feather in CALD’s cap.”

This sentiment is echoed by Mr. Jules Maaten: “Well, that is a huge compliment to CALD. You know that China takes CALD so seriously that it sees CALD as a danger to its stability. Fantastic. It’s not very practical of course but it’s a huge compliment.”





Mr. Wolfgang Sachsenröder was reminded when the Chinese government ordered the closure of the FNF-Beijing Office as a result of the Dalai Lama's presence in a 1996 conference in Germany which was hosted by the foundation. "I

don't know whether he (former senator Pangilinan) has relations with the Chinese Embassy there to clarify a bit what they are doing," Sachsenröder said, citing certain advantages of cooperating with foreign embassies, and the usefulness of targeted information.

In his letter to CALD, Taiwanese Vice President and Chairperson of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), William Tai, expressed his grave concern over the gratuitous sanctions imposed to CALD by China's Taiwan Affairs Office, and thanked CALD for its unwavering commitment to promote basic liberal values, and expressed solidarity to protect the shared principles of CALD and DPP, both of which are committed to resist autocratic aggression.

### CHAPTER THREE

MARCHING FORTH TOWARD THE FOURTH DECADE

CHAPTER FOUR

# Marching Forth Toward the Fourth Decade







*We travel together, passengers on a little spaceship, dependent on its vulnerable reserves of air and soil, all committed, for our safety, to its security and peace. Preserved from annihilation only by the care, the work, and the love we give our fragile craft.*

**ADLAI STEVENSON II (1900-1965)**

*It's not hard to make decisions when you know what your values are.*

**ROY DISNEY (1930-2009)**

**A**FTER a thorough discussion covering the history of CALD, the bigger political, economic, and socio-cultural environment, the organization's track record, and the like, this chapter is intended to tackle where forth CALD, its member parties, and concerned individuals, go from here—at least in the foreseeable future, or about a decade hence.

.....

## **DIALOGUE AND FREEDOM**

Quoting once again the U.S. politician and diplomat Adlai Stevenson II, “The first principle of a free society is an untrammelled flow of words in an open forum.”

Although it has many other programs like training workshops, electoral and solidarity missions, publications, and internships, among others, CALD has made an impressive mark with its conference and high-level meetings. The themes of these conferences reflect the most pressing issues and concerns affecting Asia.

While she was still the CALD Secretary General, Ms. Bi-Khim Hsiao said, “Over the years, members of CALD have developed a wide variety of common vision through close exchanges, workshops and conferences. The issues raised and shared by our members have been timely and visionary.”

These notable gatherings have been attended by prominent movers and shakers from the world of politics, government, civil society, business, media, and academia—including heads of states and governments as well as Nobel laureates—from all corners of the world. But more than the stature of participants, what makes these events remarkable is the high quality of the discussions, from the speeches and presentations to the dynamic dialogues that follow within and outside the formal program.

Indeed, CALD has somehow ensured the active and unhampered exchange of views and ideas, the healthy sharing of best practices, and the formation and bolstering of professional and personal networks. Considering that many in CALD and its allies are legislators and public officials from the executive branch of government, these discussions and connections have contributed to the shaping of public policy in different countries, whether in legislation or in national or local governments' development plans, as well as in party platforms of CALD members.



“One should never ever underestimate the value of talking,” said Sir Graham Watson. “In many ways, the most important thing we can do are exactly the things that CALD is doing, which is to bring people together regularly, to involve people into thinking together regarding the challenges we face in conferences. One of the great things about the development of communications technol-

ogy is Zoom. The fact that we are having this conversation today, across many thousands of miles of cyberspace. The opportunity to bring people together more regularly for working together, it's good.”

“I take it back to the days before the Internet where communication was a lot more restricted, more limited,” said Dr. Chee Soon Juan. “It is being able to go to some of these conferences and see what other people are talking and thinking.”



“I look forward to the high-level engagements,” admitted incumbent CALD Chair and former senator Francis ‘Kiko’ Pangilinan. “When I was able to sit down on several occasions with former Prime Minister Abhisit, for example, and now we are trying to pursue this meeting with Anwar, and I believe we’re making arrangements to meet with the top-level leaders in East Timor. So yes, these are important engagements that will strengthen liberal democracy,

especially in the region. Yes indeed, these high-level exchanges must continue to be a major, focal, regular action point, regular part of our programs in CALD.”



Mr. Pangilinan said that these interchanges have had a lot of impact on him as a legislator and party official. “I still speak about our private meeting with the digital minister of Taiwan after that forum (when) she shared even more experience about battling disinformation, which we actually applied,” he said. “For example, the ‘three Fs’ principle of battling disinformation: fast, fair, and fun.<sup>16</sup> So, we used that. In my case, my social-media

subscribers increased seven to tenfold when we started becoming more colorful and using more light materials while still consistent with our advocacies, security in my case. That was very valuable for me and I look forward to even more interactions at that level.”

Ms. Mu Sochua meanwhile believes that it is not the quantity of conferences and meetings that matter but quality, as less number of events will generate more impact given the high level of discussion and coverage. Much as she said that she appreciated CALD resolutions and statements, the Cambodian oppositionist said that these are not as effective as, for example, a press conference with national, regional, and global media in attendance. She recommended the continuation and increasing the high-level meetings and missions to Brussels, and to consider visiting the United States in the future.



<sup>16</sup> According to Mr. Pangilinan the principle of the three F’s that they adopted from Taiwan are “(1) FAST: Within two hours from monitoring a disinformation campaign on social media, you have to respond. It has to be (2) FAIR, you don’t resort to disinformation to counter disinformation so that’s the second. THIRD, fun. Instead of being a grim and determined rebuttal of the disinformation you are being subjected to, there must be humor. Humor lowers the defenses of your audience because they start to laugh about it. It’s more effective in terms of connecting rather than digging in and your primary arguments are facts and data, which is important, but it may not necessarily be as effective as humor.”

There may be the risk that CALD Conferences are becoming echo chambers, with the same people interacting amongst themselves and speakers preaching to the church choir, so to speak. Then again, echoes can break glass ceilings.

There was a consensus about the relevance of CALD conferences and that they should remain as a core program of CALD. But there were several interviewees who expressed the need to reach out to other players, other sectors—to go beyond the usual faces.

• • • • •

### **A PLANT THAT GROWS**

Dr. Jose Rizal (1861-1896), the Philippines' foremost national hero, once declared that "Liberalism is a plant that grows."

In this section, reaching out and expansion are discussed to refer to both participants in CALD events, and engagements with other partners regardless of time frame; i.e., it can be merely on an ad hoc basis, or a long-term partner like ALDE with recurring co-ventures.

It must be noted that in CALD conferences and other events that are open to a wider public, other sectors like business and industry, media, academia, civil society and the like, and even opposing political parties, have been invited, and their participation has been invaluable.

Though coalition building has been identified as a positive thing, it was also pointed out that preserving the nature of the core membership, the parameters of which had been set by the organization's very name—an alliance of liberal and democratic political parties in Asia—is essential.

"This is always a challenge for such an organization, not just for CALD but others like the Alliance for Liberals & Democrats for Europe (ALDE)," Mr. Jules Maaten said, referring to the difficulties of generating greater interest and participation in events. "The question and subsequent challenges. First the question is, is it necessary to go beyond the people who participate in the events? And if you ask that question, then you easily sound too negative, as if (we've been) dealing with people who aren't good enough. I think it is already very good that we have these meetings of politicians and networking opportunities of



what is by now a huge group of people who have been involved in CALD in one way or another. Especially if you include CALD Youth and so on. So that, in itself, is extremely valuable.”

“Maybe the type of challenge we have is certainly something that I see in my colleagues in ALDE are trying to grapple with,” he added. “What I’m thinking about is, how do you go beyond that level? How do you involve, or at least excite, other people in our member parties? I wouldn’t necessarily say the greater public because that is even difficult to do as an international NGO. But certainly, more people than those who are actively involved. Although what is happening is already very good. And it is not so easy to do because what interests those people, how deep will you go?”

Thinking aloud, Maaten said, “You’ll send them a 50-page survey or research document—maybe not. But then you do something that is quite thin and it’s just a campaign with stickers and baseball hats, but that is not enough either. We can always produce videos to convey or build a base. I don’t know how far, how big the reach we’ll get with those things.”

“So when you think about it, how do we do it?” he asked. “But we haven’t found out yet. That might be a challenge, I wouldn’t be overambitious with all the members in our parties...because I think that would be overreaching.... Maybe instead of two or three persons in member parties, we manage to get through a few dozen people in our member parties, that would already be very significant. But how do we do that? That’s the question. We need to go a little bit further because the challenge is so great. So, without saying that it is not good what we are doing at the moment, the challenge is to see if we can somehow get beyond that. But that is more easily said than done.”

“We have to understand the constraints and the fact that we are limited in the number of our friends and how and why we should be more active in broadening our family,” Mr. Sam Rainsy clarified. “We all know that CALD is helped by FNF and FNF is linked to the FDP (the Liberals) in Germany. German foundations have to take into account the political landscape in Germany, and these parties compete locally and nationally in Germany and their foundations have to follow the line of the different parties. So, you cannot ask CALD to reach out directly to parties from socialist groups who are being in touch with SPD. So, this is an existing constraint.”







Ms. Jayanthi Balaguru pointed out, “I think we should reflect on the ways to go beyond the dividing lines because the core values, human rights and democracy and good governance, are all the same. We all share the same core values so we need to work and to reflect, use our imagination, our creativity to find out the right formulas to work together with many other parties who have the same core values as ours, who presently belong to different groupings.”

“With the moving times and with CALD,” she said, “I think one of the key things that we believe in is inclusiveness all the time. And I feel that that is the way you leave behind a trail, leave behind things for other people to come and take over because you are not there forever. The chair is not yours forever; somebody else would take over that position.”

Mr. Siegfried Herzog noted that CALD has already mobilized the two constituencies that are most important to CALD and liberal parties in general: women and youth. “Of course, they’re not homogeneous,” Herzog said, “so within that subset the younger women are especially important because they came to be a neglected sector. And of course...another one is the informal sector entrepreneurs. The food vendors, the taxi drivers, the tricycle drivers, those whoever make small business or in the *tiangges* in the Philippines, the mom and pop shops.”



Related to this, Dr. Wolfgang Sachsenröder suggested that some CALD activities can integrate educational trips to the countryside to see firsthand the conditions there. “I told my foundation several times, ‘My tragedy is mostly (I’m) stuck in the capitals,’” he said. “But in those years, we were relatively free and I’m glad I took the time to look into other parts of the countries we were in at that time. I think it’s important and informative.”



Former Thai Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai (2-R) is greeted by Philippine Senate President Franklin Drilon (2-L) as CALD Chair, M.R. Sukhumbhand Paribatra (R) and former CALD Chair, Secretary Butch Abad (L) look on. This was during the CALD 10th Anniversary celebrations in Bangkok.

## PASSING ON THE TORCH

As early as December 2003, during the 10<sup>th</sup> foundation anniversary of CALD, Nobel Laureate and South Korean President Kim Dae Jung heralded that “CALD has become an epicenter of democracy in Asia.” The following two decades were marked by the further growth and development of the organization.

CALD is where it is now because of visionary and influential personalities who have taken the cudgels of leadership through the past three decades. Many of them served as CALD chairs including Foreign Minister Surin Pitsuwan, M.R. Sukhumbhand Paribatra, and Mr. Abhisit Vejjajiva of Thailand; President Chen Shui-bien and Ms. Hsiao of Taiwan; Mr. Florencio ‘Butch’ Abad, Deputy Speaker Raul Daza, Senate President Franklin Drilon, and Senator Pangilinan of the Philippines; Dr. Rajiva Wijensiha of the Liberal Party of Sri Lanka; Mr. Sam Rainsy of Cambodia; and, Dr. Chee of Singapore.

Some were here from the very beginning and more joined as the journey continued. It was they who served as the moral and cerebral compass that guided CALD’s evolving odyssey.

The presence and even persistence of the leaders, trendsetters, and keepers of the liberal flame are important for the organization to remain

relevant and dynamic. Hence, a vacuum of leadership must be prevented through proactive measures.



“Just a month ago, as chairman of CALD, I hosted the delegation of CALD Youth in the farm,” Pangilinan narrated. “I told them precisely that they are the future of liberalism and democracy in the region and in the world. Our role as the elders is to just keep that flame burning. We cannot allow that flame to be snuffed out, to be extinguished, and we will pass on the torch of democracy, of human rights, of liberalism, to the next generation.”

He also said, “I’m optimistic given how people have been—especially in the Philippines in the last campaign—how they have come out in vast numbers, the outpouring of creativity, of sympathy, of support, particularly from the youth sector. It gives us hope that this flame will eventually engulf the entire country and of course the region, in due time.”

“The leadership training of the youth, communication workshops, I think those are hugely important because what CALD is basically doing is investing in the future,” Chee emphasized. “I think our world will only begin to reveal the results... sometimes it takes years and decades for things like that to manifest itself and bear fruit. So, I think on that score, we shouldn’t be wringing our hands too much and saying ‘Hey, where is all this going? Is it useful?’, and so on.”



“You have the other issues sometimes,” he said, “when we talk about wanting to make immediate progress and see what happens when dictators come down hard on members and what do we do now. That, of course, is a little trickier and how that really begins to translate into action where we can push back. Of course, CALD being the way that it is, possesses very little political influence, political power across this region here vis-à-vis some of these governments where all the resources are at their disposal to crack down and crush their opponents.”

“CALD is going in the right direction when we’re talking about investing in the youth programs and education and training,” said Chee. “But at the same time, we’re not moving as quickly with the results. Justifiably, it’s because, as I said, resources are limited, very limited. Hence, you get this very sketchy kind of picture.”

“One of the things that CALD still does well,” said Sir Graham Watson, “is (bringing) together young people from different parties. Because the friendships and the contacts you forge when you are in your twenties and thirties are friendships and contacts that endure for life. It’s much easier to make friends, to be open to new ideas, to have new ways of looking at things for younger people. We need to be constantly reinvesting in the people who will succeed. There’s no cynicism that often comes with age. I do think that concentrating on bringing younger people together is a job for liberals everywhere. Asia is no exception.”



Mr. Moritz Kleine-Brockhoff also observed, “We can’t overestimate CALD’s influence on political parties and their decision-making. All we can do is build structures like the CALD Youth, give platforms to young people, and the rest is up to parties. It’s up to parties to what kind of people they send to CALD events, not only the CALD Youth but the regular CALD events, and to what extent they want to give opportunities to younger politicians as well. I think you have to accommodate both. The old guards, as you would call them I guess, and the younger people.”

.....

## WOMEN AND YOUTH

The old guards and the new breed, like the yin and yang, are complementary forces needed for CALD to be a complete organizational being.

Mu Sochua, however, stressed, “First of all, the training of youth must stay. The training of women must stay.”



So far, the CALD Women's Caucus and the CALD Youth are the only two subgroupings in the organization.



Herzog cited DPP as a model when it came to women and youth empowerment. "The DPP in Taiwan, from the beginning, has been the voice of young women and especially young people in Taiwan and we've not absorbed enough lessons from that, I think," he said.

"Partly because there's not many in the DPP who have explained that. I remember, I learned it actually not from

the DPP but from Graham Watson when we were in Taiwan, and he talked about the secret source (of strength) in the DPP. So, to this day, the DPP has been tapping into those."

"It's no accident that the DPP has had the first female president," Herzog said. "In other democracies, it's often been a conservative party who had the first women leaders.<sup>17</sup> The DPP has really from the beginning cared about the women's role. I think in South Korea, the various incarnations of liberal democratic parties usually also have had the best success there."

CALD Youth's membership is from the youth departments of all CALD member parties. Since its formation in 2010, CALD Youth has held international workshops and trainings on strategic planning, leadership, political communications, and climate change. In December 2012, CALD Youth became a regional member organization of the International Federation of Liberal Youth (IFLRY). CALD and IFLRY first collaborated with each other for a discussion on the role of youth in promoting nonviolent political change.



Founded in 2005, the CALD Women's Caucus provides the platform and opportunity for women leaders to discuss women's roles and involvement in the advancement of parties. The training sessions are designed for women planning to run for political office, and are aimed to develop women's campaign skills to provide them with the understanding and confidence to run for

<sup>17</sup> In Europe, the late British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and former German Chancellor Angela Merkel come to the author's mind.





CALD's 2005 General Assembly in Taipei focused on Women in Politics with Taiwanese Vice President Annette Lu giving the keynote speech.

political positions. The workshops also concentrate on how to overcome the challenges and constraints women face given complex political environments and how to find and sustain support within their political parties.

The author interviewed the incumbent heads of the CALD Women's Caucus and CALD Youth, Balaguru and Ms. Siripa Intavichein, respectively.

In the previous chapters, Balaguru already discussed the campaigns of the CALD Women's Caucus, especially when advocating against the repression of women leaders like Leila de Lima.

As for the CALD Youth, Siripa reported, "We tried to broaden our youth network, not just in Asia but also to Europe and across the world. We also joined IFLRY. What we do is we try to broaden our network across countries and across the world, to see how we can share our experiences to the youth members in each country."

"Within CALD, there are many active youth that are living in exile," she said. "As many of them ended up living in exile so we are sort of being the net for that, helping them, also being the support they need while living in exile." The exiles she mentioned used to be residents of Hong



Ms. Siripa Intavichein of the Democrat Party of Thailand is the current Chair of CALD Youth.

Kong, Cambodia, and Myanmar. Siripa lamented that many of these political asylum seekers already had arrest warrants, and that her group had lost contact with some of them.

As for CALD Youth's agenda, Siripa said, "We want to broaden our network and be the sort of support (network) and in terms of exchanging knowledge." She also said that the environment is a leading issue for them, as well as the democratic deficits, considering the struggles of their many members, and the scourge of disinformation.

.....

### THE LONGEVITY OF PYRAMIDS

For almost 4,000 years, the pyramids of Egypt were the tallest manmade structures on earth. Their summits remained intact; they did not topple because of their firm and wide bases.

This is the reason why CALD has invested not only on high-level conferences and meetings, but also on the training of staff of political parties and the staff of politicians and officials from these parties. Whenever the topic was to their interest, the principals themselves would sometimes show up and listen in.

So far, CALD has had targeted workshops on youth, women, communication, climate change, smart cities and political management. Kleine-Brockhoff noticed, however, that the political management workshop had not been done for quite some time.

Balaguru's point about the need to disseminate the learnings by participants to their respective parties must be taken into consideration with regard to training programs. In terms of expanding CALD's reach as discussed in the earlier section, Balaguru observed that most CALD member parties have failed to further and deeply reach within their own organizations. The backyard is the first place for expansion as far as CALD member parties are concerned. Balaguru cited the need for CALD member parties to multiply the recipients of the lessons learned from CALD workshops by disseminating these further down to the membership. Reports by participants to workshops, echo seminars, and such —these are some tasks that, sadly, parties fail to accomplish.



“How does the party gain from being a member of CALD?” asked Balaguru. “What CALD is trying to do is to empower party members, give them lessons for them to take back home so they can then share it with the other members of the party.”

She admitted that her own party has done little or no follow-up. “Once you disembark from your plane, you reach your house, you don’t even take it to the party level,” she added.

She said that even if a report is filed by a participant, that same evaluation paper is given to the party, which files it. “That’s it. That stops at the filing level,” Balaguru said. “What I should do is go back to my division, tell them I just attended this workshop and it’s really good techniques, we should actually learn this, and then maybe 10 people who attended will go to their own communities and repeat it. This is what I feel like we should do.”

.....

## ONLINE EVENTS AND DIGITAL CAMPAIGNING

Asked how his tenure as CALD Chair was, Chee responded, “I’m not sure if I’m the right person to talk about this because if you remember my tenure as Chair in CALD, I was banned from traveling for most of that period. It was difficult for me to be able to really play a very active role in terms of the agenda and talk about some of the pressing issues that CALD has faced.”



“Nevertheless,” he said, “I thought at that time, it was instructive because I began to realize the importance that the Chair plays in terms of wanting CALD to take direction. So going forward, I can only say that it’s hugely important that we continue to give the Chair all the support that he or she needs in order to do an effective job and press on with CALD’s program.”

Pangilinan was also unable to travel much as CALD Chair; a huge segment of the Liberal Party's tenure as CALD chair party was during the global lockdown.



"COVID really disrupted everything," said Pangilinan. "Of course, front and center was COVID. It was no joke yet we were able to intervene, we were able to act despite the difficulties, despite challenges and how disruptive everything was."

These days, he said, "we're looking forward that as things normalize, we would be able to help further strengthen CALD and build on what we have worked on and initiated.

I wish we could have done more, but really, it was a challenge to overcome. COVID really got us all derailed in our plans. We had a lot of plans for CALD in terms of membership recruitment....All told, how I wish I had become chairman not at the time of COVID, but that's that. We did as best we could given the constraints."

Despite the havoc it wrought, the worldwide pandemic also created new avenues for dialogue. For an organization like CALD, Zoom and similar digital platforms that became ubiquitous during the lockdowns proved to be cost-efficient, convenient, and easy to set up while having a global reach.

Nothing, however, can replace in-person attendance to CALD events where a good part of the discussions—in fact, even the more important and interesting ones—are outside the formal structure of the program. Furthermore, the nonverbal context and environment as well as the nonverbal component of language are important in dialogue, especially among Asians.

There is, of course, the more difficult aspect of digital communication, which has been discussed in the previous chapters. There is no denying the role of social media, when used in a perverted way, in disinformation, which in turn leads to democratic decline. But much as liberals eschew the widescale lies and half-truths propagated by the other camp through digital platforms, the technology and all effective but morally acceptable tactics are there for the taking.

In Cambodia, with Sam Rainsy and the leaders are in exile and Hun Sen controlling the media, digital communication is used more. Said Mu Sochua: “So you look at even our youth when they go online, they go live. They get three, four, five thousand people watching them. And viewers sometimes can go up to a million on Facebook. This is particularly important to counter the lies propagated by state-controlled media and paid trolls.”



In the past, the Cambodian opposition had been most successful in terms of grassroots organization such that every election, there was a noticeable increase in the number of parliamentary seats. This was accomplished way back when Sam Rainsy and the opposition leaders would immerse themselves in rural communities. In other words, face-to-face communication.

In a sense, the Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP) became a victim of its own success. When the inevitability of being the next party in power became clear, Hun Sen weaponized the judiciary and had the party dissolved.

Yet whether campaigning in person as they did in the past or in digital platforms, Mu Sochua underscored one reason why they were effective, a reason that not only was in line with their principles, but also worked: “We spoke the truth!”

Sachsenröder meanwhile recalled an instance when not having the speaker physically present in the same room made little difference. He said, “I attended an online conference with Abhisit and even my wife was rather impressed by how he manages to bring across his message. It was really well done. At the moment, all my German politicians are far from that. I’m very unhappy with my government in Germany at the moment.”

Whether online or face-to-face communication, Sachsenröder emphasized the importance of public speaking, even suggesting undergoing some courses on it for some CALD members. He also said that “communication and the right language” that will convince “the audience with the correct formulation about liberalism” is crucial to get the right messages across.



“I think CALD can always be relevant when the right person is speaking up at the right moment with the right media,” he said. “I think it’s detrimental if CALD is being perceived as having the wrong speakers at the wrong time. Abhisit is one of the very convincing people.”





Dr. Surin Pitsuwan

The author pointed out that aside from the former Thai prime minister, the late Foreign Minister Surin Pitsuwan was also an excellent speaker who wowed the crowd in many a CALD event. Sachsenröder heartily agreed, saying, “I’m very sad that he died so early. He was a good friend from the beginning.”

### THEME BUILDING

Themes of CALD conferences are determined by the Executive Committee, with the aid of the Secretariat, and have to be in tune with pertinent developments in the region. Nevertheless, the author asked the resources persons what topics they would like to suggest, or at least, be interested in.



“I’m interested to know the story of how this new party in Thailand (Move Forward Party), emerging from nowhere, suddenly became this dominant,” Pangilinan said. “We could pick up a few things or a few lessons from them. I had wanted to do a dialogue, for example, with the Milk Tea Movement leaders. How did they come together in Thailand, for example; also, the Umbrella Movement (in Hong Kong). These are valuable lessons in mobilization and in dealing with challenges of different countries that should be shared and where insights are drawn.”

Ms. Maysing Yang believed that it may be worth for CALD to look into the issue of artificial intelligence (AI) as this would have serious ramifications not only in the economy but to democracy as well.



“I honestly think that AI is going to become more of an issue, and I do agree that somehow we got to try to anticipate what’s going on,” Chee reckoned. “But that’s a very technical aspect of it and I’d like to say that there are experts around whom we can consult. But frankly speaking,

experts are just as winded, as flummoxed as everybody else in terms of how we're going to deal with this. I'm not sure there's a lot that we can do other than say, look and we should be on our guard, just to make sure that as we go forward, we are very attuned to developments and be able to contribute our own voice in terms of how that is going to equip some of these autocrats in furthering their own causes, own aspirations. But as I said, we got to stay ahead of the learning curve."

"Environmental issues are not at the forefront of the policy in political parties in Asia," Kleine-Brockhoff said, "which strikes me a bit strange because if you ask voters or citizens what they care about, the environment and climate change are up there, particularly in cities that are polluted...I keep telling my friends in the parties, do something about it and if you don't, the Green Party will come around and steal 10 percent of the vote. So, there's more awareness but it hasn't translated in climate change being prominent in the agenda of political parties yet."



"In every election, there seems to be a large number of first-time voters and if you look at their priorities, a lot of them really care about climate change and the environment," he continued. "A, it's an important topic; B, it resonates with young voters. So, I think it's important for several reasons for political parties to focus on climate change and I hope we contribute a little bit with our climate change work."

Mr. Celito Arlegue, CALD Executive Director, noted that "CALD commenced its Climate Change Programme in 2011 with the goal of assisting in the formulation and propagation of a liberal climate change agenda that is suited to the Asian region."

"To this end, CALD adopted a Climate Change Statement in 2012 that highlighted, among others, the necessity of adapting to climate change impacts and building climate resilient communities," Arlegue explained. "The Climate Change Statement has contributed to the shaping and re-shaping of the policies of Asian political parties and governments with regard to climate change in order to realize a resilient and sustainable Asian region. This contribution is most evident in the environmental party agenda and governance platforms of the Democratic Progressive Party of Taiwan, the Liberal Party of the Philippines and the Civil Will Green Party of Mongolia."

“The environmental initiatives of these parties were captured in the 2014 CALD book, *VULNER-ABLE: From Risk to Resiliency*, which documented the accomplishments and best practices of the Climate Change Programme,” Arlegue stated.

“In recent years, the Programme has evolved to have a more specialized focus—Smart City and Smart Mobility,” Arlegue continued. “This is in recognition of the key role played by local governments in creating safe, healthy and sustainable communities conducive to the realization of human potential. “

“Gender issues, youth, it’s still a message that is a winning and accepted in all our respective countries,” said Abhisit. “I think they have worked because they continue to be winning issues for liberal democrats. And so, that’s why we succeed with that. We’re not so successful when we talk about the general issue of rights, political rights. We’re certainly not successful now about issues on how we handle the media, especially the new media. We seem to have a lot now of activities focusing on the issue of disinformation. But mainly, it looks to me as a forum for shared grievances rather than the ability to craft a vision that can drag all of us out of this trap. There are also other issues that can be winning issues like climate change and so on and maybe when we look further.”

.....

### KNOW THYSELF



During the author’s interview with former CALD Chair Abad, the latter raised three important questions: (1) Has CALD outlived its usefulness?; (2) Who will continue taking up the cudgels for CALD?; and, (3) How will it regain relevance and play important roles in the strengthening or restoration of democracy in the Asian region?

Abad warned that, “We cannot be business as usual, otherwise, we will lose our relevance.”

The first and last questions necessarily assume that CALD was relevant and quite useful once, but that it has lost, to a certain extent, its significance, which is precisely why it has to be regained or why there is the possibility that CALD has outlived its usefulness. Abad was the first resource person the

author interviewed; judging from the content of the first two chapters of the book, most of the interviewees have answered this question in good part, or at least took this issue head on.

There appears to be an agreement at least that CALD was a key player during the high tide of democracy. But did its reverse side, the resurgent undertow of autocracy, make CALD lose its relevance? The reply: Quite the contrary. As argued by many of the resource people, CALD is needed more in times of crisis, and the reign of tyrants and undemocratic populists is not permanent—as can also be said of liberal and democratic governments in a world of changing political fortunes.

But the questions Abad raised presuppose the need for an honest and critical assessment of the organization as a whole, and in terms of its parts (members and sectoral wings), and partners.

“I just think that it is time for CALD to undergo a re-examination,”



Chee said. “I think in terms of where, who we are, I think that’s pretty well laid out. But in terms of strategy, how we go forward, I think that’s something that we need to talk about. I think we’ve come a long way, but we need to be mindful of the fact that we need to constantly have this

self-examination. I think if we don’t do that...there’s a danger that we would slide into oblivion, and I really don’t want to see CALD going that way. I guess maybe the time has come for us to just sit down and have an honest discussion about where we’re going to be taking this organization to in years to come. “

“I think the problem has been is that we’ve evolved into a kind of family of parties and I think we still have that reluctance to engage in the kind of exchange and frank discussions that might offend our friends and members of the family,” offered Abhisit. “So we might touch on it, we might sort of mention it.”



“I remember we had issues with Malaysian friends, our Indonesian friends,” he said. “I’m sure many people had issues with the Democrat Party of Thailand. But the problem, I think that there is a fear, given that there is already a weakness of all of us as individual parties and the weakness of this coalition as a whole that splitting it further might not have the desired effect. Entering its fourth decade, if we now want to take this to the next level, well,

we may have to change some of our ways. But we need to build this culture where we would be more accepting of criticisms from members of the family, from our friends.”

The author then said to the former CALD Chair from DP-Thailand, “As the first executive director of CALD, I have observed a certain degree of maturity, a certain degree of interpersonal relationships that I would be in the opinion that people in CALD, given their principles, are in a position that can withstand being criticized. Can we have more room for frank discussions?”

“I think our principles are clear,” Abhisit responded. “I mean, what is liberalism if it cannot tolerate different views? But I think that’s partly the problem. We’re also working against a more natural Asian culture where we have more reluctance to have the kinds of discussions that could lead to a loss of face, bad feelings among those considered as friends and colleagues. And I can understand that...in the U.S., they’re very good at offending friends, probably more than offending enemies. And while many of the Western allies tolerate that, I can see how that also generated a backlash against the U.S. here in the Asian region. So there is something, I think in the Asian culture, that sometimes means we have to seek alternative ways of doing things and maybe it cannot be as effective as we would like it to be. In all fairness, you mentioned that you thought we had the principles and the strength to do this. I should say that when things are going well, it’s always easy.”

Abad suggested an honest, high-level facilitated workshop to know where CALD and its members and allies are right now and chart the roadmap of the future. He also suggested having a discussion paper to start of the conversation amongst CALD’s key personalities.

In the author’s humble opinion, this book can serve as a reference for such a paper and forum.



“I think we’re making progress in some of the countries,” Chee said. “But to be able to make sure we cement our place in terms of the champion of human rights values, political freedoms, basic common decency and how we treat our fellow human beings, I just think we should be able to take that to a higher level.”

“It’s difficult for me to be sitting here in a Zoom meeting right now that we have to be able to grapple with some of these very complex issues,” he said. “But I think at some point, we should sit together and really



have a heart-to-heart discussion and examine where we've come from and how to make the greatest impact going forward but that takes a bigger forum, if you will, than what we have right now. Just be able to sit down and have a good meeting of minds and if you will, redefine—well, sharpen the focus of CALD and where we want it to go. That, I think, is important as well and as I've said, it will take a lot more time and space for us to be able to come to that conclusion and see where we want to head toward.”

## ***Let Freedom be the Axle to Our Wheel***

To a certain extent, this book is a travelogue. It is about the journey of CALD that has lasted for about three and a half decades, starting from the gestation period, which was about six years prior to its formal foundation 30 years ago.

It has become a journey for me as well. And what a privilege and honor it has been that I was able to share the journey that is this book with the 15 resource people whom I interviewed in the past months or so; or more accurately 16 to include Lito, my successor as CALD Executive Director, who I repeatedly consulted.

Most of these 16 people, I have known for more than two decades now. Many I consider as close friends. But all of them, without exception, are the people who I greatly admire and respect.

Doing the interviews and writing this book were a catharsis for me. It brought back so many memories of cherished moments, and gave me a better appreciation of the difficulties and hard work that came with the job of running the Secretariat for a diverse, dynamic, and demanding group of Liberals and Democrats, which I did on a full time basis from January 1999 until the latter part of 2007.

In the book introduction, I used several metaphors with marine motifs to illustrate the thoughts I wanted to convey to the readers: the pearl, the high tide, and the undertow. And of course, the anchor and oar, which I described as the *taijitu* of CALD, the yin and yang inside a circle.

In this epilogue, I would like to use another round-shaped symbol: the wheel with the axle in the center.

Given the plethora of massive challenges enumerated and described thoroughly in the book, the need for a deeper assessment and focused discussions for a more accurate roadmap, and the collective nature of CALD's decision making process, the answers to the question where to go from here, with the accompanying why's and how's, require further reflections and deliberations.

CALD's valuable and most enduring partner, Germany's Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom, hit the nail on the head when its Philippine office made this their campaign slogan: "It's all about freedom!"

We may have no definitive answer to determine where the CALD wheel would venture during its fourth decade, where it would exactly take us. But if the axle of that wheel is freedom, then the chances of CALD going in the right direction becomes greater.

And the axle has to be at the very center of that wheel as freedom has to be, intrinsically, in the core of our being. Slightly off centered, and we lose our balance.

So here is my personal take on freedom, a topic I pondered on for more than half my life, way before I became part of CALD; a topic I became more engrossed in when I joined the Liberal Party's then youth wing way back in the late 1980s; a topic that has become more endearing and significant in my role as CALD's first executive director, and since 2018, as the founding president of the Center for Liberalism and Democracy, LP's think tank, and editor of *Plaza Miranda*, CLD's policy and opinion online quarterly magazine.

Freedom and choices are interrelated and closely correlated concepts. The absence of options is seen as making one unfree. Thus, the availability of choices is considered as a key ingredient of freedom.

But here lies the paradox. When stripped to its barest essence, freedom leaves us with only one option, which for all intents and purposes, is not to have any choice at all.

And here is what has become a key guide post on how I should live my life, especially when faced with a difficult decision that I have to make: In its quintessence, freedom leaves me no choice. No choice but to do the right thing.

And with that settled and out of the way, the only inner demon that I have to contend with is the devil in the details.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Britannica, n.d. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Chuan-Leekpai>

A. Ganguli (2011): “He may be a son of a bitch, but he’s our son of a bitch”  
published by the Asian Post, February 2.

Reuters (2017) “Cambodia’s main opposition party dissolved by Supreme  
Court” [https://www.reuters.com/article/us-cambodia-politics-  
idUSKBN1DG1BO](https://www.reuters.com/article/us-cambodia-politics-idUSKBN1DG1BO)

**Florencio “Butch” Abad**

Former Philippine Secretary (Minister) of Budget and Management

Former Chairperson, Council of Asian Liberals and Democrats



Florencio “Butch” Abad previously served as the Secretary (Minister) of the Department of Budget and Management of the Republic of the Philippines (2010-2016). He also served as the National Campaign Manager and worked in the transition team of then President-elect Noynoy Aquino in 2010. He was a member of the House of Representatives elected in 1987 to represent the Lone District of Batanes. He was re-elected in 1995, 1998 and 2001. He became president of the Liberal Party of the Philippines from 1999 to 2004 and chairperson of the Council of Asian Liberals and Democrats in 1999. He served as Secretary (Minister) of Agrarian Reform during the first Aquino administration and served as Secretary of Education under the Arroyo administration. Abad resigned from this post due to the electoral fraud controversy charged against then President Arroyo. Abad finished his Bachelor of Science in Business Management, and Bachelor of Laws at the Ateneo de Manila University and passed the Bar Examination in 1985. A fellow of the Edward Mason Program in Public Policy and Management at the Kennedy School of Government in Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts, Abad also holds a Masters in Public Administration degree.

.....

**Jayanthi Devi Balaguru**

Chairperson, CALD Women’s Caucus



Jayanthi Devi Balaguru is currently the Chairperson of the CALD Women’s Caucus and the President of the International Network of Liberal Women (INLW). In July 2019, she was also elected as a member of the Liberal International Human Rights Bureau. She is a lawyer and held many prominent positions in the Parti Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia (PGRM). Among her posts were Central Committee Member, Secretary General of the Women’s Wing, Vice Chair of the Central Law and Human Rights Bureau, Chair of the Environment and Quality of Life Bureau and Chairperson of the Federal



Territories Women's Wing. She is an advocate for a fair and just society who believes that each voice needs to be heard and rights should be respected. Balaguru regularly conducts programs on women empowerment. She obtained her Bachelor of Laws from Staffordshire, England and later received her Master's of Law from the University of Malaya.

.....

### **Chee Soon Juan**

Secretary General, Singapore Democratic Party  
Former Chair, Council of Asian Liberals & Democrats



Dr. Chee Soon Juan is the Secretary General of the Singapore Democratic Party and Chair of CALD from 2008 to 2010. A vocal opponent of the ruling People's Action Party (PAP) of Singapore—which has held power since 1959—he has been jailed, sued and bankrupted by Singaporean prime ministers, past and present. He is a recipient of Defender of Democracy by Parliamentarians for Global Action (2003) and Prize for Freedom by Liberal International (2011). In 1992, the National University of Singapore sacked him as a lecturer when he joined the SDP and took part in an election. Dr. Chee was a Research Associate at the Monash Asia Institute (1997); a Human Rights Fellow at the University of Chicago (2001); a Reagan-Fascell Fellow at the National Endowment for Democracy (2004); and a visiting fellow of the Sydney Democracy Network (2014).

.....

### **Siegfried Herzog**

Regional Director for Latin America, Friedrich Naumann Foundation



Prior to his current post as FNF Regional Director for Latin America, he has held several positions in FNF as Regional Director for Southeast and East Asia (2014-2018), Regional Director for South Asia (2010-2014), Manila Resident Representative (2006-2010), and Head of the Asia Department (2003-2006). Herzog graduated with a Masters in Economics from Eberhard-Karls University Tuebingen, Germany. He started his tertiary studies

researching on framework conditions for industrial investment in Bangladesh. He also became an exchange student at Georgetown University, Washington D.C., USA.

.....

### **Siripa Nan Intavichain**

Chairperson, CALD Youth  
Democrat Party, Thailand



Siripa Intavichain currently serves as Assistant to former Thai Prime Minister and Democrat Party Leader, Chuan Leekpai. She is also the Business Development Director for Sirinakorn Co., in Thailand. She was also elected as a global shaper at the Bangkok Hub of the Global Shapers Community. Siripa received her Bachelor's degree from the Mahidol University with concentration in Entertainment Media and holds a Master's degree in Global Management of Finance and Politics from the Regent's University in United Kingdom and Governance from Chulalongkorn University in Thailand, respectively.

.....

### **Moritz Kleine-Brockhoff**

Head, Friedrich Naumann Foundation For Freedom Southeast and East Asia



Moritz Kleine-Brockhoff joined the Foundation in 2009 as Project Director of Myanmar, Malaysia and Cambodia. From 2012 to 2013, Kleine-Brockhoff was Head of the Asia Department and the Human Rights Department at the FNF Head Office in Potsdam. He later became Project Director of FNF Indonesia and Malaysia in 2013, before taking up the position of Head of Regional Office in Bangkok in December 2018. He began his career as a journalist at Deutsche Welle (DW) in 1998. In 2000, Moritz moved to Indonesia to be the Southeast Asia Correspondent for German Newspapers Frankfurter Rundschau, Tagesspiegel and Stuttgarter Zeitung.

### **Jules Maaten**

Regional Director, Friedrich Naumann Foundation European Dialogue  
Former Member of the European Parliament



Jules Maaten is the Regional Director of the European Dialogue programme of the Friedrich Naumann Foundation (FNF), managing the Brussels, Madrid and Prague offices, including projects in the UK, France, Italy and Hungary. He was previously Head of International Regions and Deputy Head of the International Department at FNF Headquarters in Potsdam. Prior to that, Maaten was Regional Head of the Subsahara Africa Region of FNF in Johannesburg, and Country Director of FNF Philippines in Manila. From 1999 to 2009, he was a Member of the European Parliament, and from 1992-1999 Secretary General of the Liberal International in London.

.....

### **Mu Sochua**

Vice President, Cambodia National Rescue Party  
Former Minister of Women and Veterans Affairs



Mu Sochua is the Vice President of the Cambodia National Rescue Party. She is also a former Chairperson of the CALD Women's Caucus and a former Member of Parliament in Cambodia. After 18 years in exile, she returned to Cambodia in 1989. In 1998, she was elected to the Cambodian National Assembly. She ran for a parliamentary seat in the North West of Cambodia (the most devastated region after the war), and won. In that same year, she became Minister of Women and Veterans' affairs, as one of only two women to join the cabinet. During her six years as Minister of Women's Affairs, Sochua campaigned widely for gender justice throughout Cambodia's remote villages to end violence against women and halt the exploitation of female workers. To achieve these goals, she helped to draft the country's law against domestic violence, negotiated an international agreement with Thailand to curtail human trafficking in Southeast Asia, and launched a campaign to engage NGOs, law enforcement officials, and rural women in a national dialogue. She declined a ministerial post in the new government of 2004, joining the opposition party

instead, to fight corruption and government oppression against democracy and human rights. She became an MP for the party as well as a Member of its Steering Committee. Additionally, elected in 2009 as the Sam Rainsy Party's official Women's Wing leader, she has continued the battle, furthering the party's core "bottom-up" approach.

• • • • •

### **Francis 'Kiko' Pangilinan**

Chairperson, Council of Asian Liberals and Democrats

Chairperson, Liberal Party of the Philippines

Former Philippine Senator



Francis 'Kiko' Pangilinan was first elected to the Philippine Senate in 2001 and was re-elected for a second term in 2007. He was elected as Senate Majority Leader in 2004 and held the position until 2008. He graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in English and a Bachelor of Laws from University of the Philippines (UP). He earned a Master's Degree in Public Administration as an Edward S. Mason Fellow at the Harvard University John F. Kennedy School of Government in 1998. He started his political career in the UP student government before he ventured into local politics in 1988, when he was elected youngest councilor in the biggest city in the capital, Quezon City. In 2001, he won as senator in his first foray on the national political stage. He immediately made his mark as a lawmaker, pushing pioneering laws like the Juvenile Justice and Welfare Act. When his second term ended in 2013, he pursued his passion of farming and has since become a farmer. In 2014, he was appointed Presidential Assistant for Food Security and Agricultural Modernization, overseeing the country's rice and coconut industries and the government's irrigation infrastructure system. In May 2016, he won a fresh six-year Senate term. In October 2021, Pangilinan accepted Vice President Leni Robredo's offer to be her running-mate in the 2022 national elections, foregoing his own safer, shoo-in run for re-election in the Senate. His campaign battle cry was "Hello Pagkain, Goodbye Gutom (Hello Food, Goodbye Hunger), bringing to fore food security for the Filipinos as a vital issue in the May elections.

### **Sam Rainsy**

President, Cambodia National Rescue Party

Former Minister of Finance

Former Chair of the Council of Asian Liberals & Democrats



Sam Rainsy is the Acting President of the Cambodia National Rescue Party. His political career began with Prince Ranariddh's Funcinpec Party, becoming the Prince's European representative in 1989. He had previously served as Minister of Finance in a coalition government that emerged in Cambodia after the UN-supervision elections in 1993, and was a Member of the Supreme National Council of Cambodia from 1992 to 1993. In 1995 he formed the Khmer Nation Party, which became the Sam Rainsy Party (SRP) when it was forced to change its name in order to contest the 1998 elections, where he was re-elected to the parliament. In 2006, Liberal International awarded him with the Prize for Freedom honoring his dedication to championing human rights, democracy, and the rule of law. Prior to his entry to politics, he was a financial analyst and investment manager with various banks and financial institutions, positions which included chairman and chief executive officer of DR Gestion, a Paris-based investment company and Bank Director at Paluel-Marmont. Sam received his MBA from INSEAD Paris. He served as CALD Chair from 2000-2002 and once again from 2012-2014.

.....

### **Wolfgang Sachsenröder**

Political Party Forum Southeast Asia, Germany



Dr. Wolfgang Sachsenröder moved from student politics to local politics with Germany's Free Democratic Party, and, after more than ten years in academic exchange, to the Friedrich Naumann Foundation. From 1986 to 1997 he was the first regional director for East and Southeast Asia, witnessing major political developments, including the formation of the CALD. In the following postings, he covered the Middle East and Maghreb and later the Southern Balkans. Retired in Germany, he came back to Singapore in 2009, joined the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies and continues to do research on



political parties in the region. His latest publication, *Power Broking in the Shade*, July 2018, is the first comparative study on party finances and money politics covering all ASEAN countries except Brunei.

.....

### **Mardi Seng**

Treasurer, Candlelight Party, Cambodia  
Former Senator, Kingdom of Cambodia



Mardi Seng is a former senator of Cambodia and served as secretary of the Anti-Corruption Commission at the Senate. He previously served as treasurer of the Sam Rainsy Party and has managed four electoral campaigns and elections in different provinces. He worked in US banks focusing on Compliance, Audit and Risk Management for 15 years. He finished Economics from Calvin College and Finance from Northeastern University in Boston. He is now the Treasurer of the Candlelight Party.

.....

### **Sir Graham Watson**

Former President, Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe Party (ALDE)  
Former Member of the European Parliament



Sir Graham Watson is a former leader of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) Party and secretary general of the International Federation of the Liberal Youth (IFLRY). He was elected a Liberal Democrat (UK) Member of the European Parliament five times. He was awarded the medal of liberalism in Bulgaria, in the presence of delegates to the ALDE party council meeting. Sir Graham has, since 1979, worked to advance liberal values in his home country, across Europe and around the world.

## Abhisit Vejjajiva

Former Prime Minister, Thailand

Former Chairperson, Council of Asian Liberals and Democrats



Abhisit Vejjajiva served as Thailand's 27th Prime Minister, holding the post from December 2008 to August 2011. Even before that, he already had a storied political career. In 1992, Khun Abhisit won a seat in Bangkok for the Democrat Party. After the Democrat Party won the subsequent general elections, he was appointed Government Spokesperson (1992-1994). In 1997, when the Democrat Party formed the ruling government after the abrupt resignation of the then premier, Khun Abhisit was appointed a Minister Attached to the Prime Minister's Office under the government of Khun Chuan Leekpai. From 1992 when he won his first election, Khun Abhisit has emerged a Member of Parliament in each and every election he has contested. In a political career that has spanned two decades, he has assumed many responsibilities: Deputy Secretary General to the Prime Minister for Political Affairs (under then Deputy Prime Minister Supachai Panichpakdi); Chairman of the House Committee for Education; and as Leader of the Opposition in the House of Representatives for three terms. Within the Democrat Party, he has also assumed many positions: Party Spokesman, Deputy Party Leader; and from 2005 to 2019, Party Leader. Khun Abhisit was born in Newcastle upon Tyne in the United Kingdom in 1964. After completing his primary education in Thailand, he returned to the United Kingdom to study at Eton College. He later graduated with a Bachelor's Degree in Philosophy, Politics, and Economics (PPE) with 1st class Honours from Oxford University, where he also earned a Master's Degree in Economics. He served as CALD Chairperson from 2016 to 2018.

## Maysing Yang

Founding Member, Council of Asian Liberals and Democrats  
Ambassador-at-large for Democracy and Human Rights, Taiwan



Ms. Maysing Yang is Ambassador-at-large for Democracy and Human Rights of Taiwan. She served as Vice President of the International Network of Liberal Women (INLW) and Taiwan Foundation for Democracy (TFD). As a member of the Democratic Progressive Party of Taiwan (DPP), she is among the founding members of CALD. She is also a board member of various organizations such as the Unrepresented Nations and People Organization (UNPO), Peng Min-ming Foundation, and the Dr. Chen Wen-cheng Foundation. She served as vice chair in Research and Planning Board of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), and worked closely with the Vice Minister, Michael Kau, to establish Taiwan Foundation for Democracy (TFD) in 2003 after the model of the National Endowment for Democracy, USA. Ms. Yang studied Sociology in Tunghai University in Taiwan, and later received her Master's Degree in Sociology in Fordham University in New York, USA.



# Enduring Legacy, Evolving Odyssey

THE PEARL ANNIVERSARY (1993-2023) COMMEMORATIVE BOOK  
OF THE COUNCIL OF ASIAN LIBERALS & DEMOCRATS

Book Project Coordinator

**Celito F. Arlegue**

Editor

**C. C. A. Balgos**

Cover, Graphics & Layout

**Michael Gadi**

Project Assistant

**Fatima Galang**

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**John Joseph S. Coronel** was appointed as the first Executive Director of the Permanent Secretariat of the Council of Asian Liberals and Democrats in 1999. After resigning in 2007, he has remained as consultant and editor/writer of CALD. He is the author of *Compelled by Duty, Conscripted by Destiny: Portraits of 16 Asian Women in the Frontline of Democratic Struggle* (2018), which served as the silver anniversary commemorative publication of CALD. He edited two CALD books, namely, *Vulner-Able: From Risk to Resiliency* (2013) and *Freedom to Organize* (2014), the organization's handbook of political party management. He was also the scriptwriter for several CALD audio-visual productions.

He is the Co-founder and President (since 2018) of the Center for Liberalism and Democracy (CLD), the think tank of the Liberal Party (LP), and Founding Editor of its quarterly online policy and opinion magazine, *Plaza Miranda*. He has done consultancy and/or writing work for various liberal organizations including LP and its then think tank, the National Institute for Policy Studies (NIPS), CALD, and Friedrich Naumann Foundation (FNF); as well as liberal leaders, then Senator Francis Pangilinan, then Cambodian Member of Parliament Sam Rainsy, and then Secretary Neric Acosta.

He served as consultant, and writer/editor of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Laguna Lake Development Authority (LLDA), Philippine Commission on Human Rights, Amnesty International, and *Blueprint Magazine*, among others. He is the author of *Tradition & Innovation: People, Places and Practices of Bamboo Music in the Philippines* (2022), published by the University of the Philippines-Center for Ethnomusicology.



## ABOUT CALD

The Council for Asian Liberals and Democrats (CALD) was inaugurated in Bangkok in 1993, with the support of then Thai Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai and South Korea's Kim Dae-Jung. CALD, which offers a unique platform for dialogue and cooperation, is the only regional alliance of liberal and democratic political parties in Asia.

CALD was formed out of the recognition of leaders of like-minded political parties in Asia of the need for a dynamic forum promoting discussion and exchange of ideas regarding trends and challenges affecting democracy, human rights, and the rule of law in the region. The chair parties of CALD since its inception to the present have been the Democrat Party of Thailand or DP (1993–1995, 2002–2004, 2016–2018), the Democratic Progressive Party of Taiwan or DPP (1995–1997, 2004–2005, 2018–2020), the Liberal Party of the Philippines or LP (1997–1999, 2005–2007, 2020 to present), the Singapore Democratic Party or SDP (2007–2010), the Liberal Party of Sri Lanka or LPSL (1999–2000, 2010–2012), the Sam Rainsy Party/Cambodia National Rescue Party (2000–2002, 2012–2014), and the Civil Green Party of Mongolia (2014–2016).

The other members of CALD are the Parti Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia (PGRM), the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P), the Candle Light Party (CLP), and the Nation Awakening Party (PKB) of Indonesia. In 2010, CALD bestowed honorary individual membership to Daw Aung San Suu Kyi of Myanmar. The Constitutional Democratic Party (CDP) of Japan is an observer party.

Through CALD, political parties, groups, and individuals have a continuing discussion on the developments occurring in the various countries of the region. The aim is to assess the possibilities for liberal solutions to problems facing Asian democracies.

Accordingly, CALD organizes network meetings including those with its partners (Friedrich Naumann Foundation, Liberal International, Alliance for Liberals and Democrats for Europe, Renew Europe, Taiwan Foundation for Democracy, and the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs), international conferences on vital issues affecting the region, and regular workshops on communication, political management, and women in politics. It also sends missions for various advocacies, sponsors internship programs in its secretariat, as well as maintains a website, a social-network group account, and a weekly electronic newsletter.









CALD.ORG