

Opening Message at the ASEAN Session on "Civil Society Organization (CSO) and the Agriculture and Forestry Sector in the ASEAN Region

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ASEAN Headquarters, Jakarta, Indonesia

By Mohamad Nurrudin, Secretary General, API

Good morning everyone.!

I thank the ASEAN leaders, senior staff and development partners for investing time to know more about us from Civil Society Organizations. I hope it leads to better understanding and cooperation in building a caring and sharing ASEAN community. As a farmer leader, I believe that this interaction and dialogue will help us live the vision of a people-centered ASEAN.

I remember the first time I set foot in the ASEAN headquarters in 2007. I was with other farmer leaders from the Asian Farmers' Association for Sustainable Rural Development or AFA, a regional federation of small-scale farmers organizations with 10 million members from 8 countries in Asia. We had a dialogue with then ASEAN Secretary General Ong Keng Yong, who said that it was perhaps the first time for ASEAN to receive such a big delegation of farmers in the ASEAN hall. Secretary Ong keng yong reminded us that the logo of ASEAN symbolizes rice stalks. It is recognition that small-scale farmers play a very important role in ASEAN. From that first dialogue, I was inspired to continue our critical yet constructive engagement with ASEAN through our collective efforts in AFA. We produce issue papers like these where we discuss in simple language the issues and concerns being addressed by ASEAN leaders, which have great impact in our lives, such as regional trade agreements, food security and climate change. Through these issue papers, we are able to make our fellow farmers aware of the impact of the policies being made at ASEAN. We are then able to analyze the issues and formulate concrete proposals that will be more responsive to our situation. We are also able to develop policy proposals which we put forward in every occasion where we are given the chance to present our views, like the first ever private sector dialogue with AMAF leaders last October 2011.

I hope that through this CSO 101 session, the small spaces for participation at the member state level and at the ASEAN level can be widened to hear more loudly the grassroots voices of small-scale women and men farmers, fishers, indigenous peoples and other marginalized sectors. We hope that through this "getting- to-know you" session, we can find more allies and friends from the ASEAN member state representatives and staff who will recognize and appreciate our role in building a more food secure, healthy, happy and caring ASEAN community .

Thank you and Hidup Petani, or long live the farmers, in ASEAN!