



THE ROLE OF ASEAN SUMMIT: AGAINST CYBER CHILD-PORN EXPLOITATION IN SOUTH EAST ASIA

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Abstract - The rise of internet use as an impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has brought along a considerable risk of children being sexually abused within cyberspaces. This action refers to Cyber Child-porn Exploitation. Southeast Asia shall act fast as a significant targeted region to combat this specific crime and protect its minor citizens. Studies show that anti-children porn exploitation laws in ASEAN are primarily domestically rooted, representing the principles of state sovereignty under Article 2 para 2 ASEAN Charter. However, the cross-border nature of cybercrime also adhered well to this specific crime. Therefore, it requires one unified understanding among ASEAN member states to comply with Article 5 ASEAN Charter, which prevents each state from irresponsibly ruling the anti-children porn exploitation. This fact potentially grows into a conflict between member states, which can hinder the objectives of the cooperative, as stated in Article 1 of the ASEAN Charter. Thus, ASEAN must prevent chaos while designing a regulation model to unify the understanding. This research applies normative legal investigation, primarily relying on statutory definition, literature review, and secondary data analysis. As a decision-making body of ASEAN, ASEAN Summit is expected to promote the unification understanding of anti-children porn exploitation laws.

Keywords: ASEAN, child porn, exploitation

INTRODUCTION

The role and impact of the internet world on children's lives have changed in unforeseeable ways thirty years after the Convention on the Rights of the Child was adopted in 1989. Children now have access to beneficial opportunities thanks to the internet. However, children are also at risk of violence, abuse, and exploitation on the internet, and this risk is only getting worse as internet usage among children develops dramatically. Due to easy access to the internet and the decreased cost of creating and disseminating pornographic images, particularly across national borders, the development and expansion of the internet, as well as the use of home computer technology, have significantly changed how pornographic images are distributed. The creation of these photographs has evolved into a sophisticated worldwide cottage business thanks to computer technology. Computer technology is presently used by those who commit crimes involving child pornography (molesters) to organise and gather these illicit photos.

Children are more in danger not only from criminals in their neighbourhoods but also from criminals throughout the world due to the widespread availability of affordable, accessible technology and the ever-declining cost of internet connectivity in recent years. Technology has made it easier for child sex offenders to interact with youngsters, groom them, and have sex with them without ever leaving their homes. High-quality cameras and webcams are frequently included with digital devices, giving anyone the ability to create child sexual abuse materials and also child porn exploitation. Additionally, ever-evolving technology enables the distribution or sale of child sexual abuse materials, such as child porn exploitation through completely untraceable "dark web" networks and forums. Pornographic content that shows minors or people who appear to be minors engaging in sexually explicit behaviour or realistic depictions of such conduct is referred to as child pornography (Deanna, 2017). Since then, law enforcement, hotlines, and civil society organisations



trying to address the issue have reported major cases of online child exploitation and abuse, including sexual exploitation and abuse (J. Tan et al., 2021; James Tan et al., 2021).

Child pornography is defined by Article 2(c) of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution, and Child Pornography (OPSC) as "any representation, by whatever means, of a child engaged in actual or simulated explicit sexual activities or any indication of the sexual parts of a child for primarily sexual purposes (Todres et al., 2009). According to Article 3(1)(c) of the OPSC, "each State Party shall ensure that, as a minimum, the following acts and activities are fully covered under its criminal or penal law ... producing, distributing, disseminating, importing, exporting, offering, selling or possessing for the [purpose of sexual exploitation no the child pornography. Every human being younger than eighteen, unless the majority is reached earlier under the law that applies to children, is considered a child, according to Article 1 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989).

Southeast Asia has stunning natural scenery, a wide range of historically significant sites, and a diverse population. The area, known as the tourism sub-region with the fastest growth rate in the world, welcomed 104 million foreign visitors in 2015. Even though there is still poverty in some of the region's countries, there has been significant progress in many places thanks to the rise in regional tourism and the availability and use of communications and Internet technology. The sexual exploitation of children, particularly the sexual exploitation of children in travel and tourism and online child porn exploitation, is a regrettable side effect of increased tourism in the area and increased Internet and communications technology usage. Despite decades of worldwide attempts to fight it, the horrible crime of child porn exploitation persists in Southeast Asia. Despite concerted international efforts to stop it, this crime against children continues 25 years after the UN General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and 20 years after the First World Congress against the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children. Even though there have been many victories in the fight against child porn exploitation, including the passing of anti-porn exploitation child legislation, enhanced child protection systems, and greater prosecutions of child sex offenders, the issue persists unabated mainly.

Research suggests that particular groups of children are at heightened risk of child porn exploitation are:

- a. Poor children, children who are working, children who are out of school, homeless and street-based children
- b. Children in conflict zones, migrating children, refugee children, stateless children, minorities, indigenous children, children with disabilities
- c. LGBTQIA children and children forced into early marriage.

Children in Southeast Asia are susceptible to porn exploitation due to several intricate and frequently connected variables. These elements frequently have roots in the political and socioeconomic environments of Southeast Asian nations. The elements affect and shape the child's development and determine whether the child is at risk from hazards like child porn exploitation. The existence of child protection systems further determines the degree to which children are susceptible to porn exploitation. Although child protection systems are developing in the majority of Southeast Asian countries, they are still insufficient to safeguard children who have already been abused and to stop future exploitation of children.

A network of sexual exploitation gangs and child sex traffickers targets Southeast Asia (Firdaus, 2022; J. Tan et al., 2021). The international sex market has a huge demand for sex, primarily from adult men seeking sexual fulfilment with children. The crime syndicate tries to supply this demand. Children are the victims of commercial sexual crimes such as child prostitution, child pornography, child sex tourism, and child trafficking. The criminals and crime networks operate not just in one nation but also in other Southeast Asian nations. In other words, both child sex crime syndicates and offenders acting as labourers, tourists, or other professional groups have found that the Southeast Asian region has become an easy market. The laws in this



field are not yet favourable to the victim, and victims of child sexual exploitation frequently lose their human rights. Victims of child sexual crimes do not obtain enough legal protection.

The sexual exploitation of children, particularly in travel and tourism, online child porn exploitation, child trafficking for sexual gratification, and child marriage are all examples of child sexual exploitation in Southeast Asia. These issues frequently overlap. Although child sexual exploitation is unquestionably not a new phenomenon in Southeast Asia, the social and economic elements that render youngsters susceptible to it seem to be changing, and new advancements in travel, the internet, and communications technology are further compounding the issue. The rising risk factors for child porn exploitation are highlighted in this portion of the regional overview, which also provides brief reviews of some of the major factors affecting children in Southeast Asia.

The age restriction and the child's level of comprehension are also important considerations when discussing a child's criminal accountability (criminal liability / *toerekeningvatsbaarheid*). The criminal law of Indonesia, specifically the Criminal Code, which was replaced by Law Number 3 of 1997 concerning Juvenile Court (Juvenile Court Law), and ultimately replaced by Law Number 11 of 2012 concerning the Criminal Justice System for Children (Law of CJSC), regulates the age at which a child becomes criminally responsible. According to the conceptual definition, criminal culpability refers to the transmission of an objective condemnation of a criminal act based on the terms of the relevant law. Subjectively, the maker who complies with the (criminal) law's requirements may face punishment for his deeds. Meanwhile, there must be an element of guilt, such as purposeful action or negligence, to establish criminal liability or impose a crime (Puspitosari, 2020).

A child refers to a person who is under the age of 18 in this context. A youngster considered to be delinquent is 14 (fourteen) years old or younger but has not yet become 18 (eighteen) years old and is believed to have committed a crime. The criminal law seeks to establish what behaviours or individuals are punishable (including the minimum age of criminal responsibility) and the applicable punishments. The majority of child porn exploitation incidents take place in underdeveloped nations with lax laws and kid protection procedures. Children who live in poverty are more open to being used in numerous ways and are a major source of SEC recruits. Children's opportunities and freedom are greatly limited by poverty. Children are frequently driven by their circumstances to make terrible decisions, such as entering the commercial sex industry to support the survival of the family, which leaves them in financial desperation.

It is prohibited to create, possess, or disseminate visual materials that depict minors under the age of 18 engaging in sexual activity. Visual representations (pictures or films) that depict such sexual behaviour are illegal under law, even though several states in the United States and many other nations permit adult-child sexual activity and marriage—federal law in the United States. In the same vein, while it is acceptable for children to engage in sexual activity with other children or with themselves, it is not good to show such activity visually (in pictures or movies).

Significant economic inequality is present throughout Southeast Asia. Singapore, a developed country with a robust economy, is at one end of the economic spectrum, while Cambodia, a nation that has suffered from war, destruction, and subsequent economic stagnation for years, is at the other end of the spectrum and has only recently begun to experience robust economic growth. Stateless, minority, migrant, and rural people all around the region are economically worse off than other groups. Research reports have emphasised the effects of poverty on children. More than 30 million children lack access to basic health care, clean water to drink, proper nutrition, and sanitation, according to a United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) study on multidimensional child poverty in six ASEAN nations. According to the study, certain groups such as those who live in rural areas, members of specific ethnic minorities, such as the Kinh/Chines in Vietnam, and households with low levels of education experience deprivation to a greater extent (Minujin, 2021).

In Southeast Asia, poverty is frequently typified by a lack of income, which affects one's ability to obtain food, shelter, transportation, medical care, education, vocational training, and employment. The most important feature of poverty that increases vulnerability to child porn exploitation is homelessness. As a result of the absence of proper adult supervision and assistance,



children who live on the streets frequently have to engage in any employment or activity to survive. Certain types of juvenile sex offenders profit from this weakness by luring kids with the promise of quick money. Children may be required to generate income for the family in households under severe financial strain. In Southeast Asia, there are few chances for kids to get money and those that do tend to be on the periphery of society like begging, selling food or other minor products, working as labourers, or offering sexual services. Although there are currently no accurate estimates of child labour in the area, some estimations of its prevalence, including its worst forms, have been made.

Based on the structure of the ASEAN Declaration from Manila on December 20, 1997, which outlines the various forms of cybercrime, including:

- a) Cyberterrorism (National Police Agency of Japan (NP A)) is an electronic attack using a computer network on very important infrastructure that could hurt a country's social and economic activities;
- b) Cyber Pornography, the deployment of pornographic, indecent, and child pornographic materials; and Cybercrime
- c) Cyber Stalking, the crime of stalking through the use of computers and the internet;
- d) Cyber Harassment, sexual harassment via email, website, or chat program using programming skills to commit crimes; hacking; using programming skills for illegal purposes;
- e) Carding (credit card fraud), Carding occurs when people who do not have credit cards use them to commit a crime (Hius et al., 2014).

Those are the typical crimes conducted within cyberspaces (Atem, 2016). Child pornography within cyberspaces is also considered a crime. The traditional definition of child pornography has been expanded to the cyber world as part of cyberporn. Children's exploitation of porn online has become a global issue as no states are accessible in this case, not even developed countries (Imperato, 2020). For example, the case of children's exploitation of online porn occurred in Singapore, one of ASEAN's well-developed nations (Devaraj, 2023). Following the transnational nature of cybercrime, the crimes of child exploitation to online porn rises the complexity to deal with. It requires collaboration between states to fight against this crime, which is possibly done by establishing regional mutual understanding among ASEAN member states.

The 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child and its 2000 Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution, and Child Pornography are both treaties to which all ASEAN nations, except Singapore, are party. The Convention against Cybercrime 2001 only has the Philippines as a member state. Finally, the 2015 ASEAN Convention Against Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children has been ratified by all ASEAN nations. Since 2015, ASEAN states have taken a leading role in passing new or revised anti-child pornography laws, allegedly with the encouragement and cooperation of international organisations. During that time, six members passed laws, with Myanmar and Singapore passing laws in 2019.

It has been observed that different ASEAN members do not take a uniform stance on laws governing child pornography as each member state could enact its preferred law regarding child pornography (Jayakumar, 2019; R. Smith, 2023). Laws can vary greatly in length or length, depending on the situation. Access to more than one statute may be necessary when more than one statute is needed. The law may have been standalone in some cases, or it may have been included in the Criminal Code. For example, Indonesia welcomed this specific ruling in more *general* ways. Due to the inclusion of child pornography in a general anti-pornography statute in Indonesia, the situation is made even more complicated. Child pornography is defined in detail in certain statutes while being only briefly mentioned in others. When discussing ways to access child pornography, computer systems are occasionally included, while other times they are not. ASEAN has used various legal tools to harmonise laws among its member states (R. Smith, 2023). A Directive would seem unnecessary given that the recommendations from this assessment are more aspirational and intended to enhance cooperation than to alter the member states' core legal frameworks. On the other hand, a Declaration would seem to be a useless strategy. Consequently, a treaty is still a possibility.



It would seem that the ASEAN Convention Against Trafficking of Persons, Particularly Women, and Children, would be a good example. The benefit of following this Convention as a guide is that the majority of the more divisive issues have already been settled. Articles regarding jurisdiction and extradition are needed; the Convention on Cybercrime's Article 10 is particularly pertinent. An example of such a convention might be:

- a. A thorough explanation of what constitutes child pornography based on a review of the terminology in the member nations' current laws;
- b. A thorough list of child pornography offences, including cybercrimes;
- c. Footnotes or "illustrations" that specify which activities, as employed in Malaysian and Singaporean law, constitute offences and which ones do not;
- d. An article requiring the parties to establish or update their laws on child porn so that their definition of child pornography is consistent with those created in a) above and so that they contain all of the offences created for b) above;
- e. Articles regarding collaboration on a global scale and between nations are also included.

Last but not least, the convention should allow the parties to express reservations regarding their agreement to the Convention's articles (R. B. Smith, 2020). The discussion raises questions as to whether ASEAN could unify the concept of child porn and its derivative actions including porn industries. The ASEAN summit could facilitate and promote a unified understanding of the national action plan against these specific economic crimes. This article discusses the role of the ASEAN summit in dealing with the law harmonisation regarding anti-children pornography exploitation.

The ASEAN Charter principles supporting the Anti-children exploitation Law Making within ASEAN members

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is a regional organisation established upon mutual understanding of ten Southeast Asian nations. ASEAN members are Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam. This cooperative was initiated in 1967 to accelerate the region's economic growth and social and cultural progress. To further support the main aim of this cooperation, equality, and partnership is applied to strengthen the foundation. After several decades, the members realised the urge to have a unified basic understanding beyond the signed Declaration. Therefore 2005, the eleventh ASEAN Summit issued the Declaration to establish the ASEAN Charter. Three years later, in 2008, the ASEAN Charter entered into force on 15 December 2008, along with several community councils. The ASEAN Charter has become the fundamental understanding applicable to its member states.

The purposes as mentioned earlier are ruled under Article 1 ASEAN Charter and derived into fifteen specified purposes. Article 2 para 2 of the ASEAN Charter rules that in pursuit of Article 1, ASEAN and its members shall adhere to fundamental principles as follows:

- a. Respect for the independence, sovereignty, equality, territorial integrity, and national identity of all ASEAN member states;
- b. Shared commitment and collective responsibility in enhancing regional peace, security, and prosperity;
- c. Renunciation of aggression and the threat or use of force or other actions in any manner inconsistent with international law;
- d. Reliance on peaceful settlement of disputes;
- e. Non-interference in the internal affairs of ASEAN Member States;
- f. Respect for the right of every Member State to lead its national existence free from external interference, subversion, and coercion;
- g. Enhanced consultations on matters seriously affecting the common interest of ASEAN;
- h. Adherence to the rule of law, good governance, the principle of democracy and constitutional government;
- i. Respect for fundamental freedoms, the promotion and protection of human rights, and the promotion of social justice;



- j. Upholding the UN Charter and international law, including international humanitarian law, subscribed to by ASEAN Member States;
- k. Abstention from participation in any policy or activity, including the use of its territory, pursued by any ASEAN Member States or non-ASEAN State or any non-State actor, which threatens the sovereignty, territorial integrity, or political and economic stability of ASEAN Member States;
- l. Respecting cultural, language, and religious diversity while upbringing the expected values in the principle of unity in diversity;
- m. The centrality of ASEAN in external political, economic, social, and cultural relations while remaining actively engaged, outward-looking, inclusive, and non-discriminatory, and;
- n. Adhering to MTR (multilateral trade rules) and ASEAN's rules-based regimes for effective implementation of economic commitments and progressive reduction or barrier to regional economic integration in a market-driven economy Daniel Chua & Eddie Lim, *The Asian Charter* (2017).

All member states, including ASEAN as an organisation itself, shall comply with the principles while designing strategies to accelerate purposes obtaining. Not limited to the principles, every member state of ASEAN is obliged not to violate Article 5 of the ASEAN Charter. Article 5 rules the Rights and Obligations of Member States that cover: 1. Promote equality in terms of rights and obligations, 2. Member States shall adhere to its domestic legislation under the provisions within this Charter and take all necessary measures, and 3. Any serious breach of the Charter shall be reckoned to Article 20 of the ASEAN Charter (Chua & Lim, 2017). Therefore, the member state of ASEAN is encouraged to comply with both principles and their rights and obligations ruled in Article 2 para 2 and Article 5 of the ASEAN Charter.

First, the principle of "Respect for the independence, sovereignty, equality, territorial integrity, and national identity of all ASEAN member states" requires the state members to not interfere with each state's interest and independence. Failure to comply with this principle can cause one state to lose its independence which threatens the principle of "Shared commitment and collective responsibility in enhancing regional peace, security, and prosperity". To uphold regional security and respect the sovereignty of each member, the principle of "Reliance on peaceful settlement of disputes" shall be the first discourse in solving problems among ASEAN member states. For example, ASEAN has set some rules and promoted "ASEAN ways" in dispute settlement mechanisms regionally through AFTA DSM. However, this recourse remains unused. Regardless, ASEAN still strongly promotes this principle as seen in its Investment Framework. This is because ASEAN's designed dispute settlement mechanism is considered more relevant to the culture and regional situation.

Not only concerning the member states peace, but ASEAN also promotes global stability by enhancing the principle of "Adherence to the rule of law, good governance, the principle of democracy and constitutional government", "Respect for fundamental freedoms, the promotion and protection of human rights, and the promotion of social justice", and "Upholding the UN Charter and international law, including international humanitarian law, subscribed to by ASEAN Member States". Those principles obliged the member states to respect fundamental values and norms that are globally recognised.

However, factually speaking, some member states interpret the principles differently which causes ASEAN to fail to comply and overcome issues between members (Suprpto et al., 2023). For example, in trade cases, Indonesia-Thailand took WTO DSM instead of AFTA DSM to solve the problem. The consideration of both members was the absence of precedent cases. Furthermore, in the territorial dispute case of Sipadan-Ligitan, Indonesia-Malaysia took recourse before the International Court of Justice instead of having the ASEAN High Court as its first recourse. By interpreting the principle of non-intervention as an action not to interfere with one state's sovereignty and independence, as a fundamental principle in ASEAN law-making, it failed to counter human rights issues within this regional territory by remaining silent and not taking serious action. This fact contradicts the willingness of ASEAN to accommodate human rights protection.



This fact of multifaceted interpretation's drawbacks could harm and deposition ASEAN's existence. In the context of cybercrime and its derived action, cross-border and human rights violation nature requires cooperation in preventing and overcoming the issues. Factually speaking, the interpretation and legal consequences of this conduct are varied among ASEAN Member States. Therefore, ASEAN shall become the first place to accommodate the unification interpretation principles. It prevents disputed understanding, which usually becomes the ground of bigger disputes in precedent cases (Limsiritong, 2016; Soeparna, 2021; Udomjitpittaya & Fitriana, 2019).

The Role of the ASEAN Summit in unifying the perception of children's exploitation of cyber-porn

ASEAN Summit is the supreme policy-making and decision-making body of ASEAN, comprised of the Heads of State or the Government of the Member States under Article 7 of the ASEAN Charter (Chua & Lim, 2017). Regularly, this body shall hold twice-annually meetings while also permitted to hold ad hoc meetings where specific pivotal issues arise. This body has several functions to ensure that the Member States will comply with all the protocols, mutual understandings and any legal consensus made by the organisation. Under Article 7 para 2 of the ASEAN Charter, this body could deliberate, provide policy guidance and make decisions on vital issues relevant to the organisation's objectives. Moreover, this body is also authorised to instruct the relevant ministers to establish ad hoc inter-ministerial meetings where important agendas must be made. The basic principle for the ASEAN Summit to make a decision, under Article 20 of the ASEAN Charter, is "consultation and consensus". When this principle is inapplicable or does not reach the consensus required, the ASEAN Summit shall have the recourse to apply other approaches (Soeparna, 2021). The intervention of the ASEAN Summit may erode the ASEAN's capacity by, at some points, extending the legal power by enforcing any recommendations. At this point, it is noteworthy to define the ASEAN Summit as a political body; therefore, to support its functions, it can utilise the political solution.

The ASEAN Summit could seek a political solution under these two situations: 1. Member States disregard the Panel and Appellate Body's decision, and 2 when the State (who is injured) refuses to accept the violating members' modified legislation. In this case, the ASEAN Summit could politically lead to the unification of Member States' understanding of children's exploitation of cyber-porn. This could prevent the conduct since the beginning, as there has not been a consistent understanding among ASEAN Member States against child pornography. Some domestic legislations extensively rule, while others regulate it very short (R. B. Smith, 2020). Not only could it lead to a unified understanding, but the Summit also could ensure that the Member States enforce the rule against this conduct. Formerly, in the case of human rights violation conduct, ASEAN rules the ASEAN Convention against Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children 2016. In the Convention, a transnational approach within ASEAN has been enacted. However, the State Parties must adopt laws and measures to establish criminal offences under Article 5 para (2) to utilise this approach further. Adopting the transnational practice in the Convention, the ASEAN Summit could promote this in future legislation on cyber-porn exploitation of children.

In the case of transnational conducts, the ASEAN Summit could also promote political involvement for violating States to enact the proposed clauses by the Summit, such as region-wide policy on child protection from cyber-porn exploitation. However, this notion is hindered by the fact that the ASEAN Member States have some complex issues in formulating and implementing standardised laws region-wide. The first issue is that Members' economic capacities vary - poor and rich countries. The second issue is that members' religious values and backgrounds are also varied. In this sense, it can cause difficult discussions among Member States.

CONCLUSION

The need for harmonisation of cyber porn regulations where children are victims of irresponsible criminals who exploit children. Harmonisation of these regulations can be carried out between countries in ASEAN, considering these crimes cross national borders using technology and impact moral degradation.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors thank Universitas Pembangunan Nasional “Veteran” Jawa Timur and the Research and Community Service Institution for supporting this publication.

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