



Sailing for democracy, human rights,  
peace and justice

## A learning workshop on Civil Society & Advocacy

04-06 December 2025, Bangkok, Thailand

In a world where vested interests often overshadow basic human rights, who speaks for the voiceless? We believe that civil society organizations (CSOs), the agents of social change, tirelessly fight for democracy, human rights, and justice for all. It is this conviction that sparked our recent learning workshop, a gathering designed not just to discuss, but to unite, inspire, and empower the CSOs for a positive change.



After nearly  
25 years  
in the civil

society movement, this course helped me rediscover the true role of civil society as a powerful driver of social change. It clearly demonstrated how connecting theory with practice can lead to more impactful and effective advocacy."

— Selvakumar Sivanathan, New Zealand–Sri Lanka Forced Migrant Support Group, New Zealand

### Lightening the way

Everyone has a purpose in life, yet many are held back by limited opportunities and weak connectivity. Too often, systemic barriers prevent individuals from realizing their true potential. As Civil Society Advocates, we have a responsibility to hold systems and governments accountable for ensuring democracy and human rights. However, geopolitical and vested interests frequently cause suffering and deny people their basic rights. In this struggle, civil society remains a vital agent of social change, consistently championing democracy and human rights for everyone.

The COAST Foundation team brings over four decades of advocacy experience, spanning local to global platforms. This includes engagement with UN agencies, participation in the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS), and contributions to the Grand Bargain (GB) agreement for promoting aid localization. It has established





*Understanding the history of democracy and human rights, and linking the past with present realities, is essential for moving forward. As a student of political science, this course refreshed my understanding of the evolution of these concepts and reaffirmed them as a clear pathway for civil society organizations. This course should be replicated across our countries."*

— Md. Abu Nayeem, Cordaid, Bangladesh

national and Global South alliances to advance equal participation, strengthen democracy, uphold human rights, and promote accountability and transparency across all sectors of society.

This journey has offered valuable lessons on the challenges and rewards of driving social change. We felt a strong responsibility to share this knowledge and, equally important, to learn from fellow advocates working on the front lines every day. We envisioned a space where passionate individuals could come together to sharpen their skills, exchange experiences, and amplify their collective voice for democracy and human rights.

### A vision materialized

To bring this vision to life, we partnered with the Sustainable Development Foundation in Thailand. Together, we organized an immersive three-day learning workshop titled "Civil Society and Advocacy: Theory, Tools, and Impact." Our goal was simple: to create a non-profit, high-impact event for advocates across the Asia-Pacific region.

The response was overwhelming. We welcomed 14 committed participants from seven countries--Bangladesh, Kyrgyz Republic, Indonesia, Switzerland, Myanmar, New Zealand, and Thailand. Each participant arrived in Bangkok with unique experiences but shared a strong commitment to building a better world.





I have participated in many

workshops and trainings, but this course was truly unique. It strengthened my understanding of the foundations of democracy and human rights and effectively linked theory with practical tools. The session on video-making and crafting advocacy messages for social media was particularly valuable for shaping public opinion and influencing government action."

— Aye Aye Myo, ND-Burma, Myanmar



## A journey of discovery

Our three days together offered an in-depth exploration of advocacy. We examined the foundations of our work—from the evolution of civil society to democracy and human rights. This was far from a traditional lecture series; each session was dynamic and interactive, with equal time devoted to presentations, lively Q&A, and hands-on group collaboration.

The room came alive as participants shared compelling stories about the state of democracy and human rights in their home countries. We moved from theory to practice, using a 13-criteria tool developed by Harvard University to identify pressing advocacy issues within their communities. Together, we mapped key stakeholders and developed actionable, one-year advocacy plans ready for implementation back home.

## What did we discuss?

The learning workshop was designed to build a strong foundation in civil society and advocacy, with a focus on practical knowledge and effective strategies. It covered the definition and evolution of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), the concept of democracy and its historical development, and the role of CSOs in modern democratic systems. The sessions also explored human rights principles and their historical emergence, including the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948.

Participants explored the critical role of civil society in eradicating all forms of slavery and torture and in advancing individual freedoms alongside civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights.

## Engaging media for advocacy

In addition to traditional exercises, participants received practical guidance and engaged in hands-on activities to produce short advocacy videos for social media. They successfully created and presented these videos during the workshop. Participants also learned techniques for crafting impactful social media messages and writing press releases to secure media coverage—skills they applied effectively. Today,



Working with civil society groups across Myanmar and the Asia-Pacific, I found

the scientific approach to issue identification and stakeholder mapping especially valuable. These tools are essential for effective advocacy planning. I plan to roll out this course within my networks to strengthen our collective advocacy efforts."

— Ye Htwe, Community Development Association, Myanmar





*In Indonesia, we continue to face multiple human rights challenges alongside recurring disasters. While my background is in disaster management, this course highlighted the critical role of civil society advocacy. Its balanced approach to theory and practice, especially the development of an advocacy plan, was a key takeaway for me."*

— Jessica Novia, YAKKUM Emergency Unit, Indonesia

media and social platforms have become powerful tools for shaping public opinion and pressuring governments to uphold the rule of law, restore justice, and protect human rights.

### Live interactive session by CSO champions

Participants engaged in interactive sessions with Ms. Debbie Stothard, a renowned Malaysian human rights leader and founder of ALTSEAN-Burma (1996), based in Bangkok; Dr. Kritsada Boonchai, a researcher at Chulalongkorn University and a leading civil society advocate in environmental protection, natural resource management, and sustainable development; and M. Rezaul Karim Chowdhury, Executive Director of COAST Foundation in Bangladesh, a human rights activist with over 40 years of global experience.

As champions of civil society, the speakers shared their experiences from the Asia-Pacific movement, highlighting their active roles in promoting and restoring human rights and democracy. They also addressed key challenges faced by civil society actors and inspired participants by reaffirming the critical role of CSOs in building just, inclusive, and democratic societies.

### Our key takeaways

As the workshop concluded, the transformation was evident. Participants left not only with certificates but with a renewed sense of purpose for CSOs and a practical toolkit for driving change.

#### We departed with-

1. A deeper, renewed understanding of our shared history in advancing democracy and human rights.
2. A structured framework for identifying advocacy priorities and designing high-impact campaigns.
3. Practical expertise in crafting persuasive messages for social media (Facebook, X, LinkedIn, etc.).
4. Hands-on ability to create compelling advocacy videos that amplify key messages and drive social change.
5. Knowledge and techniques for writing effective press releases that attract media attention and secure publication.

Our journey concluded with an inspiring river cruise in Bangkok—a perfect setting to reflect, recharge, and strengthen connections. The final evaluation was unanimous: participants emphasized that the world needs more of these convenings. They said: "Let's bring this energy to the country level to empower even more CSOs to play a meaningful role in restoring democracy and human rights."



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