

Title: The Recognition of Religion and Religious Law in ASEAN States: Risks, Opportunities and Challenges for Human Rights and Peace in the Region

Convenor: Professor Helen Quane

The proposed panel will present findings from an inter-disciplinary research project investigating the impact of State recognition of religion and religious law on human rights and peace within the ASEAN States. Focusing on the region's principal religions (Islam, Buddhism and Christianity) and their respective laws (Sharia law, Buddhist law and Canon law), the research provides insights into the status of religion and religious law across all the ASEAN States and the impact of this status at a national level in several thematic areas including communal relations, the politicisation of religions and sexualities. By exploring State recognition of religious law, in addition to recognition of religion, the research addresses an underexplored issue in the region that can have significant implications for human rights and peace. A further distinctive feature of the research is its emphasis on religious-based discrimination rather than simply religious freedom, thereby facilitating a more holistic assessment of the State's engagement with religious communities in the region. Recognising how religion is deeply embedded within the societal fabric of the region as well as local political dynamics, the research identifies several challenges, risks and opportunities associated with State recognition of religion and religious law within ASEAN.

The panel will enable the research team to share its findings from the research conducted between 2019-early 2020 and obtain feedback from the conference participants prior to undertaking research entailing a more in-depth field study. The significance and timeliness of the research is evident from trends within the region, not least the rise of identity politics, 'piety trumping' religious conservatism, increased intolerance of minorities (religious, sexual, ethnic) and the potential for communal conflict to spill over into neighbouring States.

The panel will comprise presentations from several members of the research team, including:

Prof. Dr. Helen Quane (Swansea University, United Kingdom) will provide an overview of the research project and the principal themes that emerge from the documentary review;

Dr. Sriprapha Petcharameesree (Institute of Human Rights and Peace Studies, Mahidol University, Thailand) will address the impact of State recognition on communal relations in her paper and how recognition or the privileging of certain religions can generate discrimination, exclusion, human rights violations, and inter-communal tensions;

Dr. Mark Capaldi (Institute of Human Rights and Peace Studies, Mahidol University, Thailand) will explore constructions of sexuality in the region, how an anti-sexuality discourse can be embedded in certain religions, and the impact of State recognition of religion and religious law on members of the LGBTQ community;

Dr. Dian Shah (National University of Singapore) will analyse how the politics of religion manifests itself in, or shapes, the regulation of religion within the region.

The panel presentations will conclude with a brief overview by the convenor of the next steps in the project. It is proposed to allocate 60 minutes for the panel presentations to be followed by 30 minutes for questions and discussion.