



9th March 2006

7th Informal ASEM Seminar on Minority Rights in Budapest, February 2006

Dear Participants,

ASEM member states should pay more attention to the importance of the “rights of minorities”. This was one of the outcomes of a two-day, intensive seminar on **“Human Rights and Ethnic, Linguistic and Religious Minorities”**. **The 7th Informal ASEM Seminar on Human Rights took place in Budapest on 23-24 February** at the premises of the Central European University and brought together delegations of 35 out of the 38 ASEM Member States and the European Commission with representatives from the governments and various sectors of civil society. The seminar resulted in intensive discussions of high quality on many aspects of this important topic **including four main recommendations to ASEM and its member states:**

1. Member states should make more use of ASEM to discuss this sensitive issue of minority rights more intensively, as its informal character allows for more open and intensive debates.
2. Although the discussion was not conclusive, many participants recommended that the Asian ASEM members could consider the drafting and adoption of some kind of regional instrument (political declaration or charter) relating to the protection of human rights, in general, and minority rights, in particular.
3. A more intensive use of the ASEM framework could be utilised for consultations about minority rights issues, for instance intergovernmental consultations prior to, or at the sidelines of, specialised meetings of the United Nations Organisation and relevant ASEM ministerial meetings about such issues.
4. ASEM is encouraged to consider becoming more active in the area of training and awareness-raising on minority rights issues such as establishing a specialized database on good practices relating to minority rights protection.

This seminar is the latest in a series initiated on the occasion of the first meeting of ASEM Foreign Ministers in Singapore in February 1997. It was decided that informal seminars on human rights be held within the ASEM framework. The aim of this initiative

was to promote better mutual understanding and co-operation in the area of political dialogue, particularly on human rights issues, as well as to build a bridge between representatives of civil society organisations and officials from ASEM Governments.

The multidisciplinary spirit and the variety of backgrounds of participants are among the most important aspects of this series. For the past seven seminars an academic, an NGO activist or trade unionist and an official from the relevant ministries of each ASEM country participated to the meetings.

The Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) holds the secretariat of the series, co-organised with the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Swedish Raoul Wallenberg Institute (RWI). Supervision of the seminar is entrusted to a Steering Committee, which consists of the following members: France, Sweden (through the RWI), China, Indonesia, the European Commission and ASEF.

Enclosed is a brief 2-page memorandum of the conclusions of the Seminar as a prelude to a more comprehensive report to be circulated by the end of April or early May 2006.

Yours sincerely,



Frédéric Tiberghien
Conseiller d'Etat
Representative of the French
Ministry of Foreign Affairs



Gudmundur Alfredsson
Director
Raoul Wallenberg Institute



Bertrand Fort
Deputy Executive Director
Asia-Europe Foundation