The United Nations' Grassroots Democracy Promotion in Asia: Global, Local, and Regional

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Introduction

This paper examines a process of democracy promotion becoming a global norm and the efforts of the United Nations to translate the norm into practice, particularly at the local level, by gradually incorporating civil society and bottom-up approach into the norm. In doing so, the paper focuses on the United Nations Democracy Fund (UNDEF) as a symbolic mechanism to promote an expanded norm and its activities globally and particularly in Asia. The paper then discusses, based on the experiences of the Asia Leadership Fellow Program (ALFP), the possibility in pursuing democracy promotion and mutual understanding and cooperation at citizen's level in plural Asia.

1. Global—UN's Promotion of Democracy

The United Nations (UN) is a global organization created to unite member states, now numbering 193, in order to achieve common global goals, namely international peace and security, human rights, and development (UN Charter).[1] While democracy is not explicitly included in the Charter as its principal work, it has become an increasingly common form of governance for its member states,[2] and it has been recognized as an ideal and a basic condition needed to realize other principal areas of the UN's work. Democracy is a political ideology and associated governance system for which there is neither a common, agreed definition nor a single model that is agreed to by the UN member states. In the early years of the UN, democracy was promoted as civil and political rights of individuals, and explicit promotion as a political ideology was refrained as there were clear differences among the key member states when the organization was born. Since then, definitions of democracy and democratic practices have been developed based on accumulated theories and practices, mainly outside of the UN. The theoretical definition of democracy ranges from a "minimalist approach"—focusing on contested, regular, and fair election as a mechanism to translate the will of people via voting,[3] to a more comprehensive approach comprised of both vertical (civic control of governance), and horizontal (check and balances control among different branches of governments).[4] The

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[1] The Charter of the United Nations, signed on June 26, 1945, in San Francisco, and came into force on October 24, 1945.

[2] Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), *Democracy Index 2017*. 19 countries are full democracy, 57 flawed democracy, 39 hybrid regime, 52 authoritarian, among 167 countries.

[3] Robert Alan Dahl, *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973).

[4] Larry Diamond and Leonardo Morlino, eds., *Assessing the Quality of Democracy*, (Baltimore: JHU Press, 2005).

conditions to foster democracy have also been broadly defined, including civil liberties, equality among people, media freedom, protection of human rights, and the rule of law.

Around the 1990s, when a paradigm shift in international relations, i.e. the end of the Cold War occurred, democracy became much more explicit global agenda. Countries first promoted democracy "outside" of the UN. The first International Conference of New and Restored Democracy (ICNRD)[5] was held in Manila in 1988, where the People Power Revolution had taken place in 1986, and the conference was continued up to its 6th meeting in Doha, Qatar in 2006. At their second meeting in Managua, Nicaragua, in 1994, participating member states requested the UN to support such countries in establishing and restoring their democracies, and in responding the UN started to discuss democracy explicitly, through submission of the Secretary-General's report and associated resolutions in 1995.[6] While the norm setting of democracy promotion outside of the UN continued, as manifested in the creation of Community of Democracies (CoD) in 2000[7] with countries in advanced democracies included, the UN as a system started to implement their work programs. For example, the UN's Electoral Assistance Division was created within the Department of Political Affairs (DPA) in 1991; the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) applies the principles of democracy and good governance to their development support on the ground, and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) works to realize citizen's political rights, the rule of law, and access to justice. Broadly speaking, most organizations of the UN contribute to or benefit from the promotion of democracy, whether directly or indirectly.

In 2000, the Millennium Summit of the UN[8] which adopted the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) declared "we will spare no effort to promote democracy and strengthen the rule of law, as well as respect for all internationally recognized human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the right to development" (para 24); "to strengthen the capacity of all our countries to implement the principles and practices of democracy and respect for human rights, including minority rights" and "to work collectively for more inclusive political processes, allowing genuine participation by all citizens in all our countries" (para 25). Furthermore, in 2005, the World Summit reaffirmed that "democracy is a universal value based on freely expressed will of people to determine their own political, economic, social and cultural systems and their full participation in all aspects of their lives."[9] The Declaration also stated that "democracy, development and respect for all human rights and fundamental freedom are interdependent and mutually reinforcing." However, it also pointed out that "while democracies

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[5] Petru Dumitriu, "The History and Evolution of the New or Restored Democracies Movement," Paper commissioned for the Fifth International Conference of New or Restored Democracies, (Mongolia, 2003).
[6] The United Nations General Assembly Resolutions
49/30, 50/133, 51/31, 52/18, 53/31, 54/36, 55/43, 56/96, 58/13, 58/281, 60/253, and 61/226
[7] See https://community-democracies.org/?page_id=32, (accessed November 19, 2018).
[8] A/RES/55/2. September 18, 2000.
[9] Para 135 of General Assembly Resolution 60/1 and reaffirmed by 62/7 Support by the United Nations system of the efforts of Governments to promote and consolidate new or restored democracies.

share common features, there is no single model of democracy."[10] While recognizing strong interlinkages between democracy and development, the UN believes that development is more likely to be achieved "if people are given a genuine say in their own governance, and a chance to share in the fruits of process."[11]

The UN has worked to translate these broad definitions and guidance into practice, using its characteristics as an intergovernmental body, focusing on "good governance" and "rule of law" within the structures and functions of government and public sectors—a top-down approach. At the same time, democracy cannot be achieved without full participation of people. Therefore, the UN has also been focusing on people's side as well, and the United Nations Democracy Funds is one entity that relies on a bottom-up, grassroots approach.

2. Grassroots Democracy in Action—the UN Democracy Fund

Given the UN's history and practice within an evolving overall framework to promote democracy, the United Nations Democracy Fund (UNDEF) is one of consolidated efforts on the part of the UN. UNDEF was agreed to be created as a general trust fund of the Secretary-General at the World Summit in 2005.[12] In fact, in 2004 then the US President George W. Bush proposed establishing a democracy fund within the United Nations.[13] With other member states' support (notably India, which claims as the world's largest democracy), the fund's creation was agreed on by General Assembly resolution 60/1. One notable point is the UNDEF is only entity in the UN system that has "democracy" in its name.

The UNDEF has following special characteristics:

- It focuses on grassroots democracy—national, regional, or even smaller communities (villages) with a belief that people are more likely participate directly and actively in their closer communities.
- It focuses more on the demand-side of democracy, focusing on citizens (as compared to the supply-side of democracy, which works mainly with governments and in which the UN traditionally has more comparative advantage).

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[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid., 2.

[12] Para 136, A/RES/60/1

[13] The White House Office of the Press Secretary, "President Speaks to the United Nations General Assembly," https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2004/09/print/20040921-3.html, September 21, 2004 (accessed July 31, 2018). "Because I believe the advance of liberty is the path to both a safer and better world, today I propose establishing a Democracy Fund within the United Nations. This is a great calling for this great organization. The fund would help countries lay the foundations of democracy by instituting the rule of law and independent courts, a free press, political parties and trade unions. Money from the fund would also help set up voter precincts and polling places and support the work of election monitors. To show our commitment to the new Democracy Fund, the United States will make an initial contribution. I urge other nations to contribute, as well."

- It works almost exclusively with local civil society organizations (CSOs)—with a strong belief that CSOs focus on people, work with people, and know problems and possible solutions.
- It works from New York, with help from other UN organizations; UNDEF does not have any local offices and works with CSOs directly, utilizing information and communication technologies.

From 2005 to 2017, UNDEF has received over US$ 186 million in purely voluntary contributions from 45 member states.[14] With such contributions, UNDEF has implemented over 700 projects worldwide, mainly focusing on country projects, with a smaller number of regional and global projects that address regional and global issues and present regional or global solutions. UNDEF has been receiving approximately 2,000–3,000 applications annually, which clearly indicates a high demand for their assistance.

While UNDEF focuses on broader areas of democracy, one thing is clear: UNDEF supports civil society organizations in increasing voices or participation of citizens or people's organizations. The projects can contribute ultimately to development, gender equality, rule of law, and anti-corruption, but UNDEF's main priority is how the projects enable people's participation and empowerment as the most important actors in decision-making processes.

3. UNDEF Project Examples in Asia

This section introduces several examples of UNDEF projects in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Cambodia. These specific countries were included because each country faces specific democratic challenges recently and the author visited these countries in June 2018 and had a chance to discuss with our counterpart CSOs and participants of the projects.

1) Indonesia

Indonesia is one of—if not *the*—most diverse countries in Asia, composed of more than 13,000 islands, where over 260 million people (2017) live on 1,811,569 km^2 land. There are many ethnic groups, a majority Javanese (40.1%), Sundanese (15.5%), and other 13 groups (percentages ranging from 3.6–1.2%), and 15% other (2010 estimate). Islam is the dominant religion (87.2%), while there are significant portions of Christian (9.9%), Hindu (1.7%) and others (0.9%) (2010 estimate).[15] The country has a history of colonization and independence from the Netherlands, and Japan. While Indonesia has been achieving "unity in harmony" with tolerance, its journey has not always been smooth: the occupation and secession of East Timor and the independence movement of Aceh are notable examples. Extremism is one of the most serious recent concerns of the government and citizens.

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[14] "Status of Contributions" submitted to the UNDEF 27th Advisory Board Meeting, May 2, 2018.
[15] Central Intelligence Agency, "The World Factbook: Indonesia," (accessed July 30, 2017).

In Indonesia, the CSO Institute for Social and Economic Research, Education and Information (LP3ES) is currently trying to cultivate a concept of conflict monitoring, prevention, and resolution for youth in three areas of the country: Jakarta, Makassar, and Papua.[16] LP3ES argues that the prevalence of violent conflicts among people, particularly youth, is one of the hindrances to consolidating democracy. Prior to the project, a conflict prevention model was developed at a theoretical level, and the project tried to translate this theoretical model into practice, particularly to youth. LP3ES then developed an online platform of conflict monitoring and reporting, training youth and asking them to monitor and report conflict in a form of mini-research and conflict reporting. Finally, the project was able to train youth groups to mitigate and resolve conflicts.

In the past, there was a project that focused on indigenous populations and their natural resource governance in Aceh.[17] Local CSO Perkumpulan Prodeelat tried to revitalize an indigenous governance mechanism called Mukim to protect their indigenous natural resources. The local CSO supported mukims try to negotiate with local governments and private companies for investment policies in the lands that they believe traditionally belong to their communities. After the project ended, however, its external evaluation report[18] was not positive, saying Mukim "lacks visions, skills, orientations and strategies to build equal relations with" formal local authorities," and that "the project was not effective in that most planned activities were not implemented as foreseen," and that "Mukim experienced personal awareness, but the project did not change rather reinforced the perception of Mukims' weaknesses by the indigenous communities and local authorities."[19] This shows some difficulties in maintaining and advocating for traditional communities' governance systems, which are parallel to the formal governance system. This may be because, somehow, the traditional communities' governance systems are outdated and not able to be integrated into the formal process.

2) Malaysia

Malaysia is a federal constitutional monarchy, consisting of two regions: Peninsular Malaysia and Malaysian Borneo. It also has a history of colonialism: it became independent in 1957 as Malaya, and then united with Sabah, Sarawak, and Singapore to become Malaysia in 1963 (with a subsequent expulsion of Singapore from the federation in 1965.

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[16] UNDEF Project Document, Empowering Youth to Develop Democracy without Violence in Indonesia (UEF-15-688-INS) (project period May 1, 2017–April 30, 2019).

[17] UNDEF Project Document, Developing Alternative Models of Natural Resource Governance with Indigenous Community Participation in Aceh, Indonesia (UDF-INS-12-510) (project period May 1, 2014–April 30, 2016).

[18] Florence Burban and Laila Kholid Alfirdaus, Evaluation Report of UDF-INS-12-510: *Developing Alternative Models of Natural Resource Governance based on Indigenous Community Participation in Aceh, Indonesia*, The United Nations Democracy Fund, July 22, 2016, https://www.un.org/democracyfund/sites/www.un.org.democracyfund/files/indonesia_-_udf-12-510-ins_-_evaluation_report.pdf (accessed August 19, 2019).

[19] Ibid., 2.

Among a population of 3.3 million (2017) living in 328,657km^2 land, about 9.6% (3.3 million) are non-citizens. The country is multiethnic and multicultural: 67.4% Malays and certain indigenous populations (called Bumiputera), 24.6% Malaysian Chinese, 7.3% Malaysian Indians, and 0.7% others.[20] The affirmative actions to Bumiputera are tolerated, in order to advance their social and economic status. The country's constitution ensures religious freedom but recognizes Islam as the established religion of the state (61.3%) over other religious such as Buddhism (19.8%), Christianity (9.2%), and Hinduism (6.3%) (2010).[21]

A change in government in May 2018 brought former Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad back to the office of prime minister at age 92. I observed in June 2018 that many people expressed very positive sentiments about the change and high hope for a positive future.

Currently, a local CSO in Sabah called PACOS Trust is implementing a project to empower indigenous youth in Sabah, to help them recognize their cultural heritage, exercise their rights, and maximize their potential for the betterment of their communities.[22] Due to external cultural and religious influence, many indigenous populations, particularly indigenous youth, do not maintain important cultural assets, including language and customs, which PACOS (created by the majority indigenous Kadazan/Dusun people) worry about. At the same time, PACOS feels that empowering ethnic youth and enabling their participation in decision-making would be a key to a sustainable and flourishing future. For the May 2018 election, PACOS mobilized youth to register and vote, and it continues to empower youth by improving their awareness and project management skills so that they can demonstrate their importance and their ability to carry out community development initiatives by themselves. Another CSO, Malaysian Care, started a project in December 2019 with an aim to enable indigenous populations in Malaya Peninsular Orang Asli to protect their land rights.

In the past, the Malaysian NGO, Sisters in Islam, tried to propose modern interpretations of Muslim family laws, to align them with the evolving family structure and power dynamics within a family.[23] The project was designed to train women groups and journalists on Muslim family laws, to raise awareness on possible changes in interpretations and reforms, and to conduct meetings and forums to discuss possible changes to the family law. The organization, however, faced a series of challenges in implementing the project, including threats from extremist groups, and was not able to achieve successful results.

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[20] Department of Statistics, Malaysia, Official Portal (accessed July 31, 2018).

[21] Central Intelligence Agency, "The World Factbook: Malaysia," https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/print_my.html (accessed July 30, 2018).

[22] UNDEF Project Document, Empowering Indigenous Youth in Sabah, Malaysia, (UDF-15-670-MAL) (project period May 1, 2017–April 30, 2019)

[23] UNDEF Project Document, The National Campaign towards Muslim Family Law Reform in Malaysia (UDF-12-512-MAL) (project period May 1, 2017–April 30, 2019).

3) Cambodia

Compared to Indonesia and Malaysia, Cambodia is more homogenous. The country's official religion is Buddhism, practiced by 96.3% of population. The population is 16 million (2017 estimate) who is living on 176,515 km^2 land. The majority of ethnic groups is Kumer (97.6%) followed by Chams (1.2%), Chinese (0.1%), and Vietnamese (0.1%) (2013 estimate).[24]

After becoming independent from France in 1953, the country experienced a long period of turmoil, including an invasion during the Vietnam War (1969–1973), a genocide by Khmer Rouge (1975–1979), and the UN peace keeping mission (UNTAC) from 1991 to 1993.

Cambodia is a kingdom, headed by king, and the head of the government is prime minister. The current Prime Minister Hun Sen and his Cambodian People's Party (CPP) have been ruling since 1985. In 2017, the Supreme Court of Cambodia dissolved an opposition party—Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP), and its leader was detained in prison on an allegation of treason. Despite opposition inside and outside Cambodia to such actions of dissolution, the national election was held on July 29, 2018, which elected the CPP as the ruling party and Hun Sen as prime minister again.

Under the current political tension, local CSOs are currently implementing two UNDEF projects in Cambodia. One is the Cambodian Development Resource Institute (CDRI), which empowers women and women's groups to promote and advocate for climate change adaptation initiatives.[25] The project targets four provinces in the country, trains local women, and forms climate change groups to analyze climate change risks to their communities and to propose ways to enhance resilience against negative effects like landslides, floods, and severe droughts. While women groups submit their specific proposals to commune councils, they also try to implement their own small-scale initiatives, supported by the project's small grants. Another CSO, Advocacy and Policy Institute (API) focuses on the current decentralization efforts and the improvement of service delivery through the participation of citizens.[26] API has developed a Citizen Scorecard Methodology through a mobile app, and through it over 2,000 citizens provide their feedback on the current quality of public service delivery, and propose their ideas of how to improve the services.

In the past, there were five projects implemented in Cambodia. For instance, API implemented another project[27] to try to institute a system in commune governments to release information and to respond to the public's request to access to information. Another CSO, Cambodia Health Education Media Service, aimed to improve the ethical standards of

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[24] Central Intelligence Agency, "The World Factbook: Cambodia," (accessed July 30, 2017).

[25] UNDEF Project Document, Empowering Women for Climate Resilience in Cambodia (UDF-15-665-CMB) (May 1, 2017–April 30, 2019).

[26] UNDEF Project Document, Enhancing Local Democratic Governance in Cambodia (UDF-16-714-CMB) (March 1, 2018–February 29, 2020).

[27] UNDEF Project Document, People's Access to Public Information (UDF-10-381-CMB) (November 1, 2011–October 31, 2013).

mainstream media.[28] Other CSOs, Neutral and Impartial Committee for Free and Fair Election in Cambodia (NICFEC) and Committee for Free and Fair Elections in Cambodia (COMFREL)—specialized in electoral monitoring—tried to address more long-term democratic challenges beyond the election monitoring activities. The former implemented a project to increase the involvement of youth, women, and marginalized populations in the electoral processes,[29] and the latter implemented a project to encourage citizens to engage in democratic dialogues using media advocacy.[30]

From the above examples, we could know that in spite of the challenges that individuals and CSOs are facing in uncertain and sometimes oppressive environments, people on the ground are very creative, managing multiple risks and sensitive situations. With their dedication and ability, they have brought about successes and significant change in their communities. The most important lesson from the UNDEF projects is that people know their own problems and possible solutions better than anyone else; if they can implement their own initiatives, the impact is more likely to last.

Despite these efforts, however, civil society space has been shrinking recently in many countries in Asia and across the globe. There is an increasing number of countries that have adopted laws limiting the activities of CSOs, such as restricting the acceptance of foreign funding or requiring multiple layers of government approval to establish a CSO, blocking opening of a bank account to receive foreign currencies, restraining to assemble people or to disseminate messages publicly. Some countries are limiting people's right to gather. However, even under such difficult circumstances, UNDEF's civil society partners are fighting quietly and persistently and finding ways to work and achieve their goals.

There are also alarming concerns about the rise and persistence of authoritarian governments in Asia, taking actions such as eliminating the strongest opposition party, limiting space for civil society and people's gatherings, suppressing freedom of the press, and limiting people's free access to information and their freedom of expression. Democracy may not be the perfect solution for all, but at the very least, involving people and incorporating their voices in the decision-making processes is a fundamental starting point for maintaining a harmonious society comprised of many different individuals.

Conclusion: Pluralism and Democracy Promotion in Asia

Asia itself is a diverse region: most countries have their own languages, and many have more than two official languages. It is also religiously diverse, as Islam, Buddhism, Christianity,

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[28] UNDEF Project Document, Improving journalism ethics in Cambodia through monitoring and a Media Watch TV Show (UDF-11-446-CMB) (December 1, 2012–November 30, 2014).

[29] UNDEF Project Document, Supporting Cambodia Democratization (UDF-09-319-CMB) (January 1, 2011–December 31, 2012).

[30] UNDEF Project Document, Strengthening Citizen's Participation in Democratic Governance (UDF-07-175-CMB) (December 1, 2008–November 30, 2010).

Hinduism and many other religions co-exist within a country. Even within one country, there are wide regional differences. Indigenous populations, and ethnic minorities live in many different parts of society. While there are several long-lasting sub-regional organizations such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) or the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), in Asia there is no over-arching "regional' organization such as the European Union (EU) or the African Union (AU). Since Asia is so diverse, it may be difficult to establish and sustain such a comprehensive regional organization that would require the harmonization of political, economic, and social systems.

The dictionary definition of pluralism in the context of this paper includes "a theory of society in which members of diverse ethnic, racial, religious, or social groups maintain and develop their traditional culture or special interest within the confines of a common civilization."[31] The UN reaffirmed pluralism in democracy that while there is no single model of democracy, democracy requires pluralism at decision-making levels. The UNDEF practices such thinking at grassroots levels, focusing on citizens' perspectives and their participation so that their voices, however different as they are, can be heard.

Countries in Asia and the Pacific have varying levels of diversity. They cannot be viewed within a "diverse" versus "not diverse" dichotomy, but rather in a framework of "gradation," from less to more diversity. A diverse society has more challenges as it must accommodate different views; thus, it needs to have multiple avenues to absorb diverse opinions on different subject matters.

If a society is composed of people with different cultural and social backgrounds, such as Indonesia and Malaysia, there should be more than one choice of political platform, i.e. multiple political parties. If there are many choices from among which people can choose— choices that are close to their views—it is more likely that they would accept final decisions and outcomes, even if they opposed them. More diverse countries have faced and continue to face constant challenges, in accommodating different views and in making collective decisions. The process requires a high level of inclusivity and tolerance and takes longer and is more complicated than the processes of less diverse societies. Even more homogenous countries, such as Cambodia, require more than one political party as well as contested elections, as people's views and preferences are significantly different. Japan may fall in the less diverse category in Asia, but there are still very different groups, for instance, in terms of gender, age, and region. Due to the declining population, Japan may need to open its doors to more immigration, and the Japanese society may need to react to such demographic changes. For that purpose, Japan should certainly learn from other Asian countries' examples. Practices of pluralism at social and political levels in more diverse countries would be very good lessons for most Asian countries looking to live and work in harmony.

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[31] Merriam-Webster dictionary web version, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/pluralism (accessed July 29, 2018).

UNDEF tries to call for proposals that address regional challenges through regional solutions. So far, a limited number of projects have been implemented. For instance, Forum Asia, based in Bangkok, implemented an initiative to bring a number of ASEAN NGOs into the human rights discussions at the ASEAN forum. As another example, the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) Asia-Pacific implemented a project targeting journalists in South Asia in the areas of digital story-telling and online data and information protection, thus promoting sub-regional collaborations including a sub-regional online publication. While these initiatives have been successful, it is still difficult to find common problems in terms of democracy in the region. This suggests that local or national approaches are better suited to generate significant and concrete changes in a limited time-frame. At the same time, there may still be possible regional endeavors, for example, advocating a better model of legal and policy frameworks that support civil society activism in the region.

As we grow to understand people from different countries personally, we tend to see more commonalities than differences. I believe this is because we see the individual through a "personal" lens rather than through a "national" or other "identity" lens. Yet, building meaningful and sustainable personal relationships remains challenging and time consuming, even in this era of social media; we can easily be connected within a social network, but building in-depth and sustainable relationship is still difficult and, becoming even harder than in the past. In the future, our human connections will be fewer due to the prevalence of Artificial Intelligence (AI). How to maintain meaningful, satisfying human relationships with a reasonable number of people will become a challenge for many.

Throughout Asia, there are a number of significant historical pasts, including international and domestic wars and colonialism. Facts can be controversial, and memories might be subjective. Due to the actions committed during war and other conflicts in aggressor countries and victimized countries alike, people throughout Asia have been hurt, and their wounds are still healing. There are efforts to preserve memories, no matter how painful they may be, in order to avoid repeating the mistakes of the past and to remember human atrocities which must be avoided in future. Some countries are working to preserve physical evidence such as burnt buildings or statues, while others construct museums to hold collective memories. Both ways, people will not forget their painful memories, and their grief will grow deeper as time goes by. Such pain may even be passed onto subsequent generations as indirect experiences through stories, photos, videos, and sometimes tangible evidence, but these experiences will be different compared to the direct sufferings of those who were part of that history. People will not forget, but they will remember in different ways.

Every time I visit Asian countries, I encounter a person who can speak Japanese, my mother language, or talk about his or her memories of Japan, my country, during the occupation. Even though I was not yet born at the time, I could not help feeling embarrassed. We should remember by understanding the past through historical records so that, as citizens of the nation

we represent, we may construct a positive and lasting relationship with other countries in Asia. Visiting as many countries as possible and experiencing how others live and view the world is highly valuable, since people are indeed different. Doing so would make a strong contribution to understanding what others are feeling and would make it possible to achieve mutual understanding and to live in harmony within an incredibly diverse world.

NOTE: This article was prepared by the author in her personal capacity. The views expressed in this article are the author's own and do not reflect the view of the United Nations.

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