Regional Cooperation

Asia faces many non-traditional security challenges at the subnational level that are closely linked to domestic, economic, and political issues in different countries. These have important ramifications beyond national borders: from environmental degradation, natural disasters, and trafficking-in-persons to maritime security, ethnic and religious conflict, and failed systems of governance. The Asia Foundation’s Regional Cooperation Program works to strengthen relations among Asian nations and their peoples in the effort to foster peace, stability, prosperity, and effective governance.

PROMOTING ISSUES OF CRITICAL IMPORTANCE IN FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Recognizing the importance of Washington, DC as a policymaking hub, The Asia Foundation engages government, academic, and civil society leaders in thought-provoking and engaging discussions on issues that affect Asia. The Southeast Asia Roundtable brings together a select group of Southeast Asian specialists from policy, think tank, academic, diplomatic, business, and NGO communities to discuss salient issues about Southeast Asia and the importance of these issues to United States’ interests in the region. The Foundation’s Asian Ambassadors series is a venue for the Asian diplomatic and policy communities to explore issues of significance in United States-Asia policy in a candid setting, while providing an opportunity to exchange views on challenges facing the region. The Asian Perspectives seminar series has provided an avenue for leading Asian voices to present and discuss issues that are both country specific and transcend national boundaries with audiences in Washington, DC. For more than 15 years, Asian experts have presented their views on many topics including a yearly panel on the future of Asian Regional Architecture and the influence of the United States on this architecture throughout the Asia-Pacific.

FOSTERING REGIONAL COOPERATION IN ASIA

The Asia Foundation supports government and civil society to strengthen regional cooperation in order to deal with cross-border challenges and prevent conflict. The Foundation promotes regional cooperation in Southeast, Northeast, and South Asia through country and region specific programs—addressing needs on a case-by-case basis and rapidly providing assistance in the most efficient manner.

In Southeast Asia, the Foundation works with Asian governments and international law experts to increase security cooperation in Southeast Asian waters through forums addressing law and best practices for maritime boundary delimitations, maritime security, and counter-piracy. The Foundation also works with government, NGOs, and small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)
in fostering regional cooperation by organizing workshops that address various facets of disaster-risk preparedness.

In South Asia, 25 percent of the world’s population lives where water and climate change challenges could lead to regional instability. To mitigate the possibility of calamity, the Foundation improved the ability of civil society to monitor, collect, and disseminate data associated with transboundary-rivers by utilizing right to information laws and transparency provisions in environmental legislation, and providing this information to the public via web-based platforms. Climate change increases the likelihood of large-scale natural disasters. To better prepare countries in South Asia to deal with this threat, the Foundation is strengthening disaster management training, communication, and cooperation to minimize future impact.

In Northeast Asia, the Foundation works to strengthen security architecture. We support the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific (CSCAP), the leading Track II forum that focuses on security issues in the Asia-Pacific region. The Foundation funds efforts to support dialogues on non-proliferation, transparency, and broader confidence-building measures throughout the Asia-Pacific region. Given the increasing rise of urbanization in Asia, the Foundation organized the Third Northeast Asia Mayor’s Forum held in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, to discuss issues important to the socio-economic development of cities; particularly the role of NGOs in service delivery as it is increasingly more difficult for city governments to be the sole provider of social services.

**BUILDING CAPACITY IN FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

For more than six decades, The Asia Foundation has built capacity in foreign affairs in every Asian nation where we have worked. By providing training to mid-career Asian diplomats through graduate-level coursework at universities in the United States and work placements at key government agencies and Congressional offices, foreign diplomats from countries such as China, India, Laos, Myanmar, and Thailand gain tools needed to improve their government bureaucracies, advance international relations, and continue on to distinguished careers.

To strengthen ASEAN’s chairmanship, the Foundation has conducted workshops and exchanges to enhance the capacity of officials to successfully meet the logistical challenges of this influential position. A strong tomorrow starts with the youth of today. The Foundation works with youth initiatives such as the U.S.-supported Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative (YSEALI) and the Australian-based Australia-ASEAN Emerging Leaders Program (A2ELP) to improve lives, create opportunities, and motivate youth throughout Southeast Asia.