



## **Towards a Politics of Identities and Democracy: Building a Social Democratic Future of Diversity and Unity**

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Democracy and diversity around the world are under threat. Right-wing populist politics and parties are on the rise and are being propelled by the calculated and purposeful weaponization of divisions in our societies. The diversity in our societies in terms of religion, culture, ethnicity, and race has been cynically used and weaponized by the forces on the right to sow divisions. Similar to the campaign of polarization employed in Europe, right-wing populism in the Asia-Pacific region has also employed fear, hate and disinformation as potent tools to advance a hateful and antidemocratic vision for our societies.

We condemn the cynical and malicious use by right-wing populists of religion, race, ethnicity, gender, nationality and other identities as means to create divisions and fractures in our societies. We must also recognize that such campaigns of hate and division have been accelerated by the multiple crises our region has faced. Absent a holistic and progressive response, the pandemic, economic crisis, the climate crisis, and wars have created conditions of insecurity and are pushing people to embrace extreme nationalism, religious extremism, and misogynist politics.

As a global family of social democrats and progressive political parties, especially in the Asia-Pacific region, we have always celebrated the diversity that defines our societies as a pillar of the progressive politics which we practice. The majority of the peoples in this region as it is in other parts of the world, have long been able to live with each other in peace, with mutual respect and with peaceful dialogue and exchange between peoples. We must see the recognition and respect of our diversity as important values that our societies have long held important and fundamental. This flies in the face of the campaign of hate and division which the rightwing populists have been waging. The embrace of diversity is not only a progressive value. It is a universal human value. This however, has not deterred the forces on the far-right to misappropriate the discourse on identity to advance their political agenda.

In countries such as India, the forces of right wing populists have launched a campaign of exclusion and hatred against religious and ethnic minorities as a centerpiece of their efforts to propel their autocratic vision for the country. In Malaysia, the religious and racial divisions have long been used as pillars for the kind of politics practiced by the powerful to deter the Malaysian people from advancing a

progressive vision for their country. Other countries across the globe are also seeing the use of racial, religious, cultural, and ethnic divisions by rightwing and authoritarian political forces to advance their interests. We see ultranationalist rhetoric and politics gaining momentum to the detriment of democracy, diversity and the rule of law. Identity politics, specifically the kind as defined by the far-right and right-wing populists, has been a potent tool to fracture social unity and cohesion.

Here now is the challenge for social democrats.

Social democrats must recognize that identities are an important component of a person's agency and dignity. No person can be robbed of their identity or be excluded from society because of this.

As social democrats, we reiterate our strong opposition to discrimination. We will continue our fight against social injustice and exclusion based on identities. We will not allow efforts to deprive religious, cultural, racial, ethnic, and gender minorities from the full enjoyment of their human rights.

As social democrats, we must challenge the far-right's monopolization of the discourse on identities. Our differences in culture, religion, race, ethnicity and gender, should never be seen as barriers to unity. Rather, they must be seen as an invitation for discourse between communities and a challenge to build a shared vision for peaceful coexistence, solidarity, and democracy..

Also, we must build a broad alliance and networks of solidarity to confront the systems of social and economic injustices that deprive different peoples of the full enjoyment of their human rights. Such systems have created fertile grounds for discontent and disenchantment that the far-right has taken full advantage to spread their ideas of hate.

The growing discourse, debate and dialogue on identities should only serve to strengthen social democrats' resolve to champion the universal application of human rights for all. The promise of unity amid diversity and unity because of diversity can become reality.