MORE THAN 180 REPRESENTATIVES OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS FROM ASIA AND EUROPE WILL PARTICIPATE AT THE FIRST PRE-ASEM SUMMIT CONSULTATION

More than 180 representatives from civil society groups from Asia and Europe will attend this consultative conference which will be opened with keynote speeches by HE Dr Surin Pitsuwan, Member of the World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalisation, Former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Thailand; HE J.P. Dirkse, Director General, Constitutional Affairs and Royal Relations, Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, Netherlands; and Ilmo. Sr. José Eugenio Salarich, General Director of Foreign Policy for Asia and the Pacific, Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The efforts of Civil Society actors, such as NGOs, Trade Unions, Universities, Research institutes, Think Tanks, Foundations, and Resource Organisations are indispensable to the building of a community sense in the two regions. Connecting the civil societies is therefore a key element for a greater and more fruitful cooperation between Asia and Europe.

Recognising the importance of bridging civil societies in Asia and Europe, the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF), Casa Asia (Spain), the International Institute for Asian Studies (The Netherlands), and the Japan Center for International Exchange (JCIE), are co-organising a conference on “Connecting Civil Society of Asia and Europe” from 16 to 18 June 2004, in Barcelona, Spain.

The two-day meeting will bring high-level representatives from prominent Civil Society groups in Asia and Europe together to discuss issues of mutual concern, such as human rights and governance, environment and urbanisation, labour and social issues, international relations and security issues, trade and development co-operation, migration as well as interfaith dialogue.

It will provide a platform for constructive dialogue on the future direction of civil society co-operation between Asia and Europe. The Asia-Europe Foundation will then convey the outcome of this consultation to the ASEM governments, a few months before the leaders of the 25 Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) member countries meet for their Fifth Summit in Hanoi, Vietnam.

"Civil Society organisations can make a unique contribution to the political, socio-economic and cultural development in Asia and Europe in the preparations to the next ASEM Summit in Hanoi this October", said Bertrand Fort, co-ordinator of the conference.

For further information about the programme, please visit www.asef.org or www.casaasia.es/ccs or contact

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The Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) seeks to promote better mutual understanding between Asia and Europe through greater intellectual, cultural and people-to-people exchanges. ASEF was established by 10 Asian nations, the 15 member states of the European Union and the European Commission on 15 February 1997. The foundation is based in Singapore and reports to a Board of Governors, appointed by the 25 ASEM member states and the European Commission. To promote exchanges in the three areas – intellectual, cultural and people-to-people – ASEF organises conventions, symposia, seminars, public lectures, youth camps, art competitions, performances, exhibitions, and others. ASEF has completed over 300 projects involving more than 10,000 participants in the past seven years of promoting multilateral relations. Website: http://www.asef.org

Casa Asia was founded in 2001 with the objectives of promoting actions and projects that could contribute to a better understanding between societies in the Asia-Pacific region and Spain. As a public institution representing the national, regional and local administrations of Spain, Casa Asia intends to promote and co-ordinate activities in the academic, economic, institutional and cultural fields with the intention of encouraging the contacts between Asia and Spain and strengthening the Spanish presence in Asia and the Pacific regions. Casa Asia seeks the participations of public authorities, universities, the business communities and other social and cultural groups in its activities, covering the aforementioned areas in the form of academic exchanges, scholarships, conferences, seminars, language and cultural courses, cultural exhibitions, economic meetings, the creation of data bases etc. Website: http://www.casaasia.es

The International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS) is a postdoctoral research centre based in Leiden and Amsterdam, the Netherlands. Its main objective is to encourage the study of Asia and to promote national and international cooperation in this field. In its aim to achieve and continue to build on a broad, high-quality level of knowledge of Asia, the Institute co-ordinates research programmes, organizes seminars, workshops, and conferences, and publishes a newsletter with a circulation of over 21,500 copies. The IIAS founded the ASEM Research Platform (ARP) in September 2002, which has since grown into an online network of Asian and European institutions and individuals, promoting bi-regional engagement through the ASEM process. Website: www.iias.nl, see also our ARP website at www.iias.nl/asem

The Japan Center for International Exchange (JCIE) founded in 1970, is an independent, non-profit, and non-partisan organisation dedicated to strengthening Japan's role in international networks of policy dialogue and cooperation. JCIE has played an important role in broadening debate on Japan’s international responsibilities by conducting international and cross-sectoral programs of exchange, research, and discussion. JCIE creates opportunities for informed policy discussions; it does not take policy positions. JCIE programs are carried out with the collaboration and co-sponsorship of many organizations. JCIE’s activities are organized into three interrelated and mutually reinforcing programs: Global ThinkNet, CivilNet, and the Political Exchange Program. Website: www.jcie.or.jp

Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) is an intergovernmental informal dialogue process that was launched in 1996 at a summit of 25 heads of states from Asia and Europe and the European Commission, with the objective to strengthen relations between Asia and Europe at the political, economic, cultural and social level. ASEM comprises, on the Asian side, Brunei, China, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam and the 15 European Union countries and the European Commission.

Encl. Draft programme

1 Asia: Brunei, China, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, (the) Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. Europe: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, (the) Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and (the) United Kingdom. The European Commission also a separate partner in the ASEM dialogue.