



PARLIAMENTARY CENTRE OF ASIA
Strengthening Parliamentary Capacity

Fact Sheet

Parliaments in the COVID-19 response and recovery

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Parliaments in the COVID-19 response and recovery

In the ASEAN region, parliaments played an active role responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, and during the post-COVID recovery. In these efforts, Parliaments took action at both the national and regional levels, contributing to government policies through their key democratic functions – representation, legislation, oversight, and parliamentary diplomacy.

The Role of National Parliaments

Individually, the Parliaments of AIPA member countries have played significant roles in COVID-19 response and recovery efforts. Throughout the region, parliament as a key democratic institution has persevered, representing the views of their diverse constituents, pursuing the legislative agenda, and conducting necessary oversight amidst the pandemic and recovery. The list below is meant only to provide an overview that includes a few examples from each AIPA Member Parliament of their work during the COVID period, and is by no means exhaustive.

- **Legislative Council of Brunei:**

Following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, Brunei's Legislative Council debated and approved COVID-19 control measures in response to the needs and concerns of citizens during parliamentary sessions. Notably, after an 11-day deliberation, the Parliament approved a USD 5.86 billion budget for financial year 2021/2022 that provided for strengthened testing capacity, vaccination programmes, and healthcare services (1).

- **Parliament of Cambodia:**

The National Assembly and Senate of Cambodia passed a series of measures to prevent the spread of the virus, with MPs participating in discussion on response strategies and advocating for measures to address specific public health, economy, and social welfare issues. The Parliament has also conducted inquiries, scrutinised budget allocations, and advanced legislation and policies to support and enhance the government's recovery efforts (2).

- **Parliament of Indonesia:**

The Indonesian Parliament took steps including to declare a public health emergency and enact a law initiating a National Economic Recovery Program (3). Indonesia's People's Consultative Assembly and Regional Representative Council held hearings, conducted discussions and debates on these and other COVID-19 response and recovery plans including stimulus packages, vaccination campaigns, policies and strategies, involving stakeholder engagement to assess their effectiveness.

- **National Assembly of Lao PDR:**

Approved laws on disease prevention and disaster management, with Members contributing to policy discussions and decision-making processes informed by interactions with citizens. The National Assembly has conducted discussions on and overseen COVID-19 health measures, vaccination campaigns, stimulus packages, and economic recovery plans (4).

- **Parliament of Malaysia:**

In the context of a state of emergency invoked by Prime Minister effective from 12 January 2021 to 1 August 2021 (4), the Malaysian Parliament played a contributing role to scrutinise and pass the COVID-19 Act as well as participating in discussions and debates on additional COVID-19 response plans and policies⁴. The Parliament also provided input and oversight for pandemic-related stimulus packages, vaccination campaigns, and others, involving hearings and stakeholder engagement to recommend adjustments and assess their effectiveness.

- **Myanmar Union Parliament:**

The Parliament of Myanmar has been suspended during the COVID-19 pandemic and recovery.

- **The Philippines Congress:**

The Congress enacted Bayanihan to Heal and Recover in addition to proposing additional legislation to support response and recovery efforts (5). The Congress has also established special committees to monitor the government's response and monitor the allocation of funds for pandemic-related initiatives.

- **Parliament of Singapore:**

The Parliament passed the Temporary Measures Act and the Temporary Measures Control Order (6). Members participated in debates and reviewed emergency budgets, actively engaged in questioning and scrutinising the government's COVID-19 strategies. Parliamentary select committees have also examined specific aspects of the recovery planning and implementation, gathering expert opinions, and making recommendations.

- **Parliament of Thailand:**

Thailand's House of Representatives and Senate approved a Communicable Diseases Act and an Emergency Decree on Public Administration in Emergency Situations (4). The Parliament has also worked to oversee government actions and outcomes, has actively monitored the government's response, and conducted inquiries, field visits, and public hearings to assess the progress of recovery efforts.

- **National Assembly of Vietnam:**

The Vietnamese Parliament enacted, among others, a law on medical examination and treatment, as well as engaging in discussions and debates on the government's policies and measures, including testing strategies, vaccination campaigns, and economic recovery plans (4).

The Role of AIPA

The Member Parliaments of the ASEAN Inter-parliamentary Assembly (AIPA) adopted two resolutions during their online 2020 General Assembly to address the COVID-19 pandemic, focusing on the role of

AIPA in health emergency responses and in promoting a cohesive economic recovery in the region (6). These were followed in 2021 by two recovery related resolutions that focused on women’s economic empowerment through digital and financial inclusion, and on the recovery of the hard-hit tourism sector. There was a return to a face-to-face General Assembly in 2022, during which Member Parliaments adopted resolutions on strengthening social health protection, on women’s empowerment and the role of tourism-related MSMEs in a sustainable economic recovery, and on the creation of a regional working group to promote transparent data and knowledge sharing to strengthen preparations and responses to health emergencies.

The AIPA Secretariat also promoted cooperation through joint webinars on COVID-19 topics. Among these was the first virtual meeting between the Norwegian Parliament and AIPA Member Parliaments in February 2021 focused on ensuring health and welfare, while the EP-AIPA Inter-Regional Parliamentary Dialogue in June 2021 focused on addressing the pandemic's negative effects (7).

COVID/Health Related AIPA Resolutions 2020-2022

Resolution Number	Title	Proponent	Year Adopted
RES.41GA/2020/Soc/03	Resolution on Enhancing AIPA Role in Supporting ASEAN Socio Cultural Community in Responding to COVID-19	Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam	2020
RES.41GA/2020/Eco/01	Resolution on The Role of Parliaments in Promoting ASEAN Cohesiveness And Economic Recovery Post COVID-19	Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam	2020
RES.42GA/2021/WAIPA/01	Resolution on Promoting Women’s Economic Empowerment in the Future of Work and Post Pandemic Recovery Through Digital and Financial Inclusion	Brunei Darussalam	2021
RES.42GA/2021/Eco/02	Resolution on the Post – COVID-19 Economic Recovery: Tourism Cooperation in ASEAN	Thailand	2021
RES.43GA/2022/Eco/03	Resolution On Optimizing the Participation of Micro, Small And Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in The Tourism Sector For Economic Recovery	Indonesia	2022
RES.43GA/2022/WAIPA/02	Resolution On Gender Equality and Women Empowerment for A Sustainable, Inclusive and Resilient COVID-19 Recovery	Cambodia, Vietnam	2022
ES.43GA/2022/Soc/03	Resolution On Strengthening Social Health Protection to Address the Challenges In ASEAN	Thailand	2022

RES.43GA/2022/Org/11	Resolution on Creation of Annual Consultative Working Group Co-facilitated by AIPA and PCAsia to Promote Transparent Data and Knowledge Sharing in Health Emergency Preparedness and Responses	AIPA Secretariat	2022
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Risks to effectiveness and options for Parliament

The COVID-19 response and recovery efforts in AIPA Member Parliaments have faced several impediments, including a lack of capacity and expertise among parliamentary staff, limited access to a diversity of timely and reliable information, insufficient oversight and accountability during emergency implementation, limited public participation, resource constraints, and lack of coordination among parliaments. To help address these issues, parliamentarians can consider capacity-development programmes, additional public consultations, increased regional engagement in transparent and regular information and data sharing with experts and affected stakeholders, a strengthening in the role of oversight committees, and the allocation of adequate resources for research, staffing, and technology infrastructure.

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