



IX. United Nations Advocacy

FORUM-ASIA uses the UN human rights mechanisms to pressure national authorities to improve their performance on fundamental freedoms and human rights in the region. It acts as a bridge between official and geopolitical discussions at the HRC and ground realities by connecting its members and partners in Asia to diplomats, UN officials and civil society groups in Geneva.

Focus on Sri Lanka

Despite the end of Sri Lanka's civil war in 2009, justice and accountability for its victims remain elusive. The final months of the war were marked by mass human rights and humanitarian law abuses allegedly committed by the Sri Lankan armed forces and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Rather than abating, the human rights situation has continued to deteriorate. In 2014 HRDs and the press were intimidated and silenced while attacks on religious minorities spiraled and the militarisation of the north and east of the country, where ethnic Tamils live as a majority, has surged. As President Rajapakse who oversaw the last stages of the war entrenched himself and his family in the economic and political structures of the country, national institutions and the judiciary lost their independence as the democratic credentials of the country disintegrated.

Immediately after the end of the war the HRC passed a resolution that congratulated the country and overlooked wartime abuses. This was considered one of the lowest points in the Council's history. It took many years of intense advocacy by civil society groups inside and outside the country including FORUM-ASIA and its partners to convince the body to scrutinise the country. It was only in 2012 that the HRC passed its first resolution seeking accountability in Sri Lanka. The Sri Lankan government has consistently opposed all calls for international measures towards accountability in the country and refused to cooperate with the UN in this regard.

In this context FORUM-ASIA advocated for accountability during the March session of the HRC and worked with other civil society groups in the global South in developing a joint statement aimed at HRC Member States from

the global South. FORUM-ASIA welcomed the resolution that established a comprehensive investigation in to gross and systematic human rights abuses committed during and after the civil war. However that with the exception of South Korea, all the Asian Members of the HRC either voted against or abstained from voting on the resolution.

That the investigation was met with a lack of cooperation by the government of Sri Lanka, including by restricting access to victims and witnesses and threats to those who might cooperate with the investigation was of deep concern to FORUM-ASIA.

In October FORUM-ASIA together with the ISHR submitted a report to the UN Human Rights Committee in the context of its review of Sri Lanka in October. The report documents over 20 cases where HRDs have been attacked by State and non-State actors in connection with their work to promote human rights and pursue investigations and accountability for gross and systematic human rights abuses. FORUM-ASIA, together with global human rights organisations also called on the Sri Lankan government and Members of the HRC to address and condemn such instances of intimidation.

Ruki Fernando and Father Praveen



Poignant examples of reprisals against Sri Lankan HRDs include, Balendran Jeyakumari, a prominent campaigner against enforced disappearances, who was detained under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA); and the detention of activists, Rukshan Fernando and Father Praveen, also under the PTA, when attempting to investigate Ms. Jeyakumari's arrest.

Focus on Cambodia

While the political environment might have changed in Cambodia, the fundamentals of governance and human rights protection not. These were the concluding remarks of the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation on human rights in Cambodia, Prof. Surya Subedi, while presenting the final report of his 5-year term at the HRC's 27th session. For FORUM-ASIA, the lack of substantive response from the Cambodian government to any of its numerous communications over the past year is worrisome.

FORUM-ASIA, together with members, AD-HOC and LICADHO, appealed to the HRC not to lose sight of the human rights situation in Cambodia and urged the Cambodian government to show serious commitment to implement recommendations put forward by

the UN Special Rapporteur through several oral statements and open letters.

FORUM-ASIA also joined other organisations, including the World Organisation against Torture (OMCT), the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and World Alliance for Citizen Participation (CIVICUS), in organising a side event during the 27th session of the HRC, to brief UN Member States and civil society organisations on the situation of HRDs in Cambodia. Land rights activist Chan Puthisak was part of the panel and spoke of attacks and threats against grassroots defenders by security forces, companies and the judiciary. Chan was himself arrested and beaten when he joined a peaceful protest in January 2014 for an increase in minimum wages.

Focus on Burma

In March, FORUM-ASIA and Burma Partnership jointly produced a briefing paper on the situation of human rights in Burma, distributed ahead of the 25th regular session of the UNHRC. The paper highlighted the significant backsliding and lack of progress on various human rights issues, such as criminalisation of HRDs; use of repressive laws; systematic discrimination against ethnic and religious minorities, and human rights violations related to development and business investments.

The paper was part of a comprehensive advocacy strategy that FORUM-ASIA led together with other national and international civil society groups to be fed into the HRC's consideration of the human rights situation in

Burma. Prior to the 25th session, FORUM-ASIA with Burma Partnership and 43 other Burmese civil society organisations circulated an open letter to the Member States of the HRC urging it to continue monitoring the situation of human rights in Burma in order to provide the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of human rights in Burma a full monitoring mandate. A second call was also made in an oral statement delivered by FORUM-ASIA at the Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur, where FORUM-ASIA stressed the need for the Council's attention as serious human rights violations persist and remain unaddressed.



Supporting Civil Society during the Universal Periodic Review

FORUM-ASIA supported Maldivian and Mongolian CSOs during workshops organised in Malé and Ulaanbaatar for preparation of their stakeholder report for the second-cycle of the UPR. Mongolia and the Maldives will be assessed under the second-cycle of the United UPR in 2015. During both activities CSOs were able to identify challenges,

recommendations and lessons learnt from the first-cycle of the UPR and to formulate new advocacy strategies and follow-up tools for the second-cycle, with a view to ensure effective implementation of the recommendations.

Asian Perspectives on International Human Rights: Understanding the role of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation in human rights'

FORUM-ASIA launched its first paper in its new Working Paper Series. The series addresses Asian views on international human rights. Papers under this series are research and analysis based resources that

explore issues relevant to Asia in the international human rights context and open new vistas for debates, advocacy and further research.

The first paper in the series looks at the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). In recent years, the OIC has begun to take greater interest in human rights than during its early decades. It has also moved to create its own regional human rights body, the Intergovernmental Permanent Human Rights Commission. However at the same time it still maintains its relatively negative positions on human rights at international venues.

The OIC's entry into the human rights arena has the potential for significant impact on human rights issues that concern the global South, including in Asia where many countries are OIC members.

In this context, FORUM-ASIA's working paper attempts to cater to the increasing need for civil society, particularly in Asia, to understand OIC's working mechanisms, underlying norms and particularly the OIC's focus on human rights.



Strengthening Civil Society Capacity

UN Advocacy Training and Study Session for Asian HRDs (UNATS) VI

In December, FORUM-ASIA organised in Bangkok its 6th UNATS, a continuation of its ongoing training programme on UN mechanisms for Asian HRDs with little or no exposure to UN mechanisms. 18 Participants of the UNATS, drawn mainly from FORUM-ASIA members and partners focused on how they can use the UN mechanisms to

support their advocacy as well as support the advocacy of their counterparts in other Asian countries. During the 5-day training the trainees had the opportunity to participate at a regional consultation with the UN Special Rapporteur on FoAA.

Workshop on Human Rights and Diplomacy in Asia: Bringing the international to the national

In November, FORUM-ASIA launched a new initiative aimed at bridging the gap between international human rights decision making, foreign policy and national advocacy. The workshop on Human Rights and Diplomacy in Jakarta brought together 25 participants from Asia, Africa and South America to explore ways of working together on democratising in the global South.

Participants discussed how to strengthen civil society role in national foreign policy decision-making; and mapped regional and international groupings that can be the target of advocacy and a push for change, such as the OIC, SAARC, ASEAN and the Commonwealth of Nations. Specific country situations that warrant greater attention, namely Burma, Cambodia, North Korea, Sri Lanka and Thailand were also discussed in their geopolitical contexts.

The Workshop resulted in the formulation of strategies to democratise foreign policy-making at the domestic level and on advocating at the national level for human rights based international diplomacy on key crucial country and thematic situations.

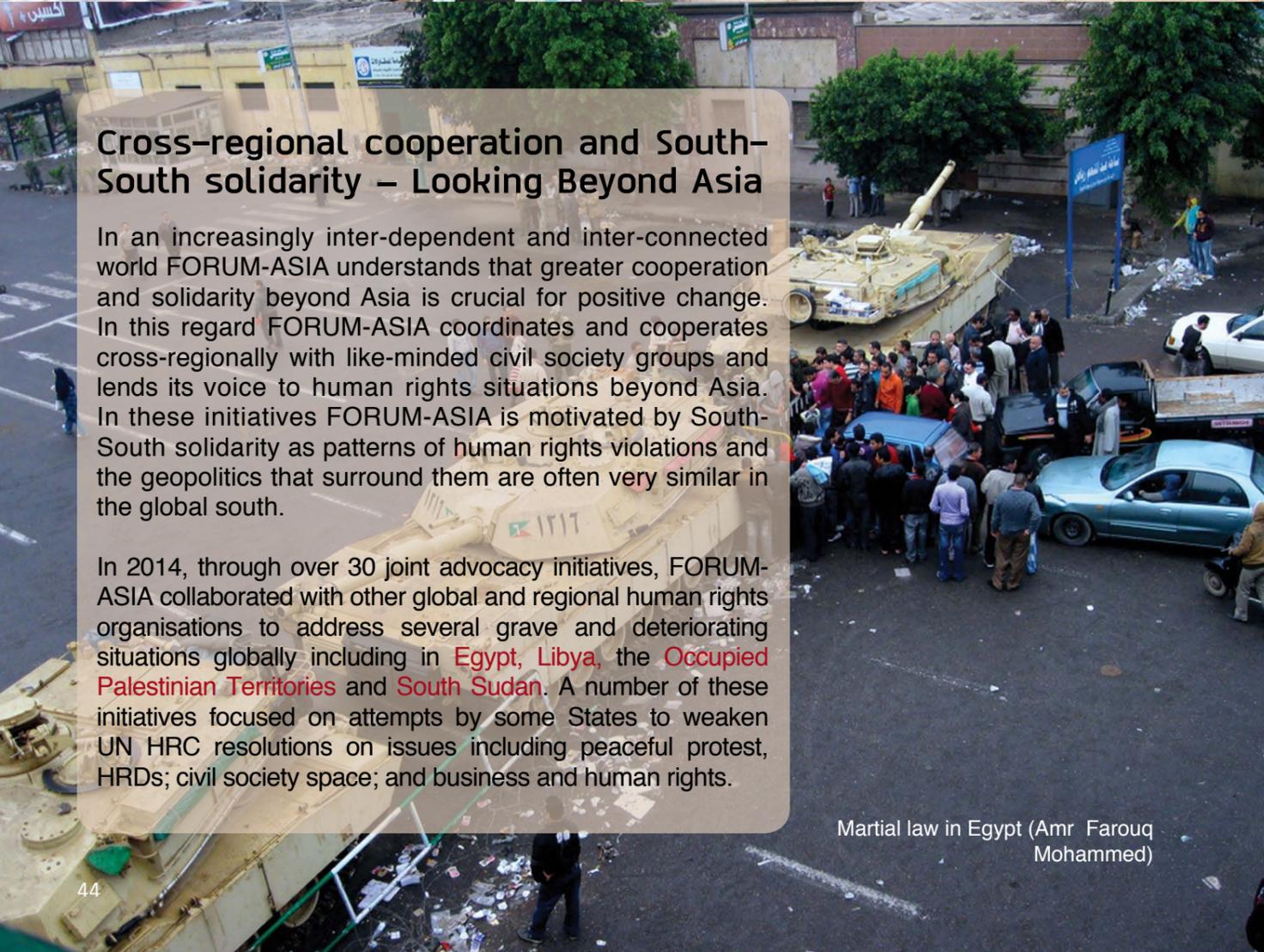




Lybian refugees in a camp in Tunisia



Internally Displaced People in a camp in South Sudan (UNHCR)



Martial law in Egypt (Amr Farouq Mohammed)

Cross-regional cooperation and South-South solidarity – Looking Beyond Asia

In an increasingly inter-dependent and inter-connected world FORUM-ASIA understands that greater cooperation and solidarity beyond Asia is crucial for positive change. In this regard FORUM-ASIA coordinates and cooperates cross-regionally with like-minded civil society groups and lends its voice to human rights situations beyond Asia. In these initiatives FORUM-ASIA is motivated by South-South solidarity as patterns of human rights violations and the geopolitics that surround them are often very similar in the global south.

In 2014, through over 30 joint advocacy initiatives, FORUM-ASIA collaborated with other global and regional human rights organisations to address several grave and deteriorating situations globally including in **Egypt**, **Libya**, the **Occupied Palestinian Territories** and **South Sudan**. A number of these initiatives focused on attempts by some States to weaken UN HRC resolutions on issues including peaceful protest, HRDs; civil society space; and business and human rights.

Palestinian man during Operation Protective Edge in Gaza (Basel Yazuri)

