



Rights groups convene Regional Conference on Freedom of Religion or Belief in Southeast Asia

From 30 September to 1 October 2015, the Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA), International Commission of Jurists (ICJ), and Boat People SOS (BPSOS) will jointly organize a conference in Bangkok to discuss pressing concerns on the promotion and protection of freedom of religion or belief.

The UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, Mr. Heiner Bielefeldt, will be joined by approximately 60-70 human rights defenders, members of religious groups, rights groups, UN agencies and representatives from the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights, ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Rights of Women and Children, National Human Rights Institutions and other government agencies.

The event will provide a multi-stakeholder platform to discuss key emerging issues, distinct and shared challenges faced by various Southeast Asian religious groups and advocates of religious freedom, identify advocacy strategies and best practices to overcome these obstacles, and to strengthen cooperation between the different stakeholders important in promoting freedom of religion or belief in Southeast Asia.

The event will also be an opportunity for participants to have a better understanding of the mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief.

Some of the key topics expected to be discussed include state control and regulation of religion, extreme interpretations of religion, and how freedom of religion together with other human rights are complementary or mutually reinforcing.

Upon the completion of the conference, the Special Rapporteur will hold a press briefing at the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Thailand (FCCT) at 7.30pm on 1 October 2015 to provide an overview of the status of freedom of religion or belief in Southeast Asia and how this right could be better protected and promoted.