

## Human Rights Defenders: Asian States Must Endorse the Decision of the Third Committee at the General Assembly Plenary Session

(Bangkok/Geneva 2 December 2015) - Despite several counter-productive interventions, the UN General Assembly (UNGA) Third Committee voted to adopt a resolution that calls upon Member States to protect Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) and facilitate an enabling environment for their work. FORUM-ASIA urges Asian states in particular as well as all other UN Member States to vote in favour of this resolution during its final adoption at the UNGA plenary this month.

The resolution titled '[Recognising the role of human rights defenders and the need for their protection](#)' encourages Member States to take measures to protect and support HRDs, their family members, associates and legal representatives at all stages of their work. It also urges Member States to ensure that their legitimate work is not criminalised or obstructed. The resolution further reaffirms the right of HRDs – individually and as a collective – to unhindered access and communication with international bodies including the UN bodies such as the Human Rights Council and their representatives. It also calls upon national human rights institutions to pay special attention to HRDs and regularly engage with them.

The African group along with China and Iran had proposed 39 amendments to the original resolution that Norway had sponsored. A group of [150 non-governmental organisations](#) including FORUM-ASIA, had raised several concerns about the proposed amendments that would have substantially weakened the resolution. After Norway introduced a final text with some changes designed to facilitate a consensus, the African group withdrew its amendments. Unfortunately that the resolution could still not be adopted by consensus and had to go down to a recorded vote on the insistence of China and Russia.

*"We appreciate the stand of the 114 countries who voted to support the work of HRDs but would also like to note with concern the attempts made to dilute core principles of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders,"* says Evelyn Balais-Serrano, Executive Director of FORUM-ASIA. *"It is now important that the UNGA adopts this resolution in its plenary to reaffirm its obligation and support for HRDs, who bravely continue to work for human rights and accountability in the face of grave dangers. All Member States should take urgent steps to implement the resolution at the national level in order to provide protection for HRDs and thereby facilitate their important work."*

Apart from China and Russia, 12 other Member States, including 6 Asian states voted against the resolution - Burundi, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Iran, Kenya, Nigeria, Myanmar, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Sudan, Syria and Zimbabwe. Another 40 Member States including 14 Asian states abstained from the resolution. The Plenary session of the UNGA will provide another opportunity for these states to positively vote for the resolution. Noting South Africa's pledge to vote positively at the UNGA Plenary, Evelyn Balais-Serrano says *"Iran, North Korea, Syria, China, Russia, Myanmar, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia should follow South Africa's example and pledge to vote in favour of the resolution."* She further adds that *"It is imperative that Asian states that voted in favour of the resolution at the Third Committee do not change their position at the Plenary."*

About FORUM-ASIA:

*FORUM-ASIA is a Bangkok-based regional human rights group with 47 member organisations in 16 countries across Asia. FORUM-ASIA has offices in Bangkok, Jakarta, Kathmandu and Geneva. FORUM-ASIA addresses key areas of human rights violations in the region, including freedoms of expressions, assembly and association, human rights defenders, and democratisation.*

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