

## FORUM-ASIA Statement on the 2015 International Human Rights Day

(Bangkok, 10 December 2015) – The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) joins the national and international community in celebrating today the 67<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the International Human Rights Day. Today, more than ever, FORUM-ASIA stands in firm solidarity with all human rights groups and movements that are restlessly striving for better promotion and protection of human rights in Asia.

The 2015 International Human Rights Day coincides also with the launch of a special campaign for the 50th anniversary of the two International Covenants on Human Rights – the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which, together with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, form the International Bill of Human Rights.

This year also marks the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by the leaders of 193 countries. Being party to these lofty Goals, the leaders have reiterated their commitment to putting all efforts together to realise a development agenda that is guided by human rights principles of universality, participation, accountability, non-discrimination and equality. More recently, on 25 November 2015 the United Nations General Assembly adopted a draft resolution on “Recognizing the role of human rights defenders and the need for their protection”, highlighting the vital role of advocacy and work of human rights defenders in contributing to sustainable development.

However, the other side of the human rights coin is not benign. Civil society organisations and human rights defenders around the world continue to face constant threats and reprisals just because of their resolve to promote the respect for human rights in everyday life. From India to South Korea, the space for civil society is shrinking day by day. Human rights organisations are facing numerous restrictions imposed by various forms of repressive laws. As a result, such basic freedoms such as freedom of expression, assembly and association are severely curtailed. Human rights defenders, especially those working on issues of corporate accountability, land rights and environment issues, have been particularly vulnerable as Asia continues to report cases of extra-judicial killings, enforced disappearances and unfair trials.

As we celebrate the International Human Rights Day, it is worrying to note that many Asian Governments fail to live to their human rights commitments and obligations. The failure is glaring in their unwillingness or denial to investigate into the cases of human rights violations, establish accountability for the violations, and provide justice to the victims.

FORUM-ASIA believes that promoting the respect for human rights is a must to build a society based on equality, peace and justice. It reiterates its full appreciation and support to the efforts of human rights organisations, defenders, and other civil society groups to this end, and calls on all Asian Governments to take earnest measures to translate their human rights pledges into action. The Governments of Asia are reminded to:

- Implement State obligations under international human rights treaties they have become party to, and ratify the remaining core human rights treaties without further delay;
- Take earnest measures to meet the targets of the newly adopted SDGs;

- Take concrete steps to ensure a safe and enabling environment for human rights defenders, in conformity with relevant international human rights standards such as the United Nations Declaration on human rights defenders;
- Eradicate the culture of impunity by investigating threats, attacks, reprisals and intimidations against citizens, civil society organisations and human rights defenders, and holding those responsible to account; and
- Fully collaborate with national, regional, and international human rights institutions and mechanisms to ensure a better promotion and protection of human rights.

**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, Geneva, Jakarta and Kathmandu. FORUM-ASIA addresses key areas of human rights violations in the region, including freedoms of expressions, assembly and association, human rights defenders, and democratisation.*