

## FORUM-ASIA Statement on the 2016 International Human Rights Day

(Bangkok, 10 December 2016) - Today the Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) joins the international community in celebrating the 68th International Human Rights Day. On this important day, FORUM-ASIA reaffirms its commitment to stand up for solidarity and human rights for all, and expresses its gratitude and support to all activists and groups advocating for human rights in Asia and beyond.

68 years ago the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) recognised the fundamental principle of the universality of human rights by adopting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The idea of the universality of human rights and the relation between civil and political rights and socio-economic development, is what inspired a group of Asian human rights activists and experts to come together to establish FORUM-ASIA 25 years ago in Manila, the Philippines.

Blatant human rights violations continue to take place today. Marginalised groups, like the Rohingya in Burma/Myanmar, are victims of alleged mass atrocities and grave violations, and have been dragged into a humanitarian crisis that the international community cannot ignore anymore. The wave of extra-judicial killings in the Philippines, where drug dealers, users or also mere suspects are slaughtered on a daily basis and the President publicly threaten to kill human rights activists<sup>1</sup>, reinforce the need for Asian civil society groups to come together and advocate for the promotion and protection of human rights for all. In Cambodia, still today, [five HRDs](#) are victims of legal harassment and currently detained in violation of basic principles of the due process and the rule of law. At the same time, too many people across Asia have already paid with their lives for their efforts to uphold human rights or simply expressing themselves, like online activists and [bloggers in Bangladesh](#). In this context of repression and criminalisation, civil society groups across Asia face increasing challenges to operate because of restrictive laws and complex processes to access financial resources from foreign countries, curtailing their fundamental right to freedom of association. Civil society movements are also often prevented from coming together and expressing their right to freedom of assembly through peaceful expressions of dissent.

FORUM-ASIA believes that if there is a chance to uphold human rights in this region, it is because of the brave and tireless work of thousands of human rights defenders (HRDs) and women human rights defenders (WHRDs) across Asia. FORUM-ASIA expresses its admiration and solidarity to all HRDs and WHRDs who are contributing to create more just, fair and equitable societies in Asia. For this, FORUM-ASIA calls upon all Asian Governments to eradicate the culture of impunity by investigating threats, attacks, reprisals and intimidations against HRDs and WHRDs. In addition to this, FORUM-ASIA urges Asian Governments to implement their State obligations stemming from international human rights treaties they have become party to.

1 <http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/848933/duterte-threatens-to-kill-human-rights-activists-if-drug-problem-worsens>

During its 25 years of existence, FORUM-ASIA and its members have appreciated the importance of movements and solidarity, which were behind all the progresses that have been gained for human rights over these years. Only if we stand together through civil society groups and movements, and we inspire the youth to be the next generation of HRDs and WHRDs, we will be able to continue our struggle for human rights.

**About FORUM-ASIA:**

*FORUM-ASIA is a regional human rights group with 58 member organisations in 19 countries across Asia. FORUM-ASIA has offices in Bangkok, Jakarta, Geneva and Kathmandu. FORUM-ASIA addresses key areas of human rights violations in the region, including freedoms of expression, assembly and association, human rights defenders, and democratization.*