



Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development  
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**34<sup>th</sup> Regular Session of the UN Human Rights Council**  
**Item 3: Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development – General Debate**

**Oral Statement Delivered by Rosanna Ocampo on behalf of  
Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)  
Friday, 10 March 2017**

Mr President, FORUM-ASIA is concerned at the rapidly closing democratic space in many Asian countries.

We share the concerns of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders over rising threats to safety and security of HRDs, and restrictions on their work. In Cambodia, four HRDs from Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association (ADHOC), Ny Sokha, Yi Soksan, Nay Vanda, and Lim Mony, and an official of the National Elections Committee, Ny Chakrya, have been in arbitrary pre-trial detention for over 10 months on trumped up charges<sup>1</sup>. The judicial harassment of land rights defender Tep Vanny continues<sup>2</sup>. In Thailand, the military government uses draconian criminal provisions to silence HRDs and government critics. Recently, student democracy activist Jatupat Boonpattaraksa (Pai)<sup>3</sup> was arbitrarily arrested and remains in detention charged with violating lèse-majesté provisions. In South Korea, the criminal conviction of labour rights activist Sang-gyun Han<sup>4</sup> had a chilling effect on peaceful activism. In Malaysia exceptionally applied censorship laws have been used to target Lena Hendry a WHRD. We call on all governments to repeal or review repressive laws used to criminalise the legitimate work of HRDs.

Religious sensitivity is used to restrict freedom of expression in many Asian countries. The Special Rapporteur on the right to freedom of religion or belief reported an increase in attacks and hate crimes by state and non-state actors. Several countries in Asia criminalise or restrict legitimate expression on the pretext of blasphemy, religious hate speech or insult to religion and religious sensitivities.<sup>5</sup> Religious and sexual minorities, women, human rights defenders, artists and journalists are most at-risk of being intimidated, harassed, physically attacked or killed for expression deemed to violate religious, moral or social prescriptions.<sup>6</sup> Attacks against secular bloggers, online activists, journalists and LGBTI activists in Bangladesh<sup>7</sup>, and disappearances of secular activists and dissidents in Pakistan<sup>8</sup> show the gravity of these threats. Pervasive impunity for these crimes emboldens perpetrators. We call on governments to repeal blasphemy laws, review existing legislation that restrict fundamental freedoms on the pretext of religion, and ensure transparent investigations of religious hate crimes and hold perpetrators to account.

Thank you

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1 FORUM-ASIA, Press Release, Cambodia: Civil Society Condemns Charging of Human Rights Defenders, 2 May 2016, <https://www.forum-asia.org/?p=20642>

2 FORUM-ASIA, Press Release, Cambodia: Halt the Judicial Harassment of Tep Vanny, 23 February 2017, <https://www.forum-asia.org/?p=23173>

3 iLaw Documentation Center, <https://freedom.ilaw.or.th/en/case/756>

4 FORUM-ASIA, Press Release, South Korea: South Korea: Unjust convictions given to Trade Union Leader Sang-gyun Han, 11 July 2016, <https://www.forum-asia.org/?p=21201>

5 Desecrating Expression: An account of freedom of expression and religion in Asia <https://www.forum-asia.org/?p=21941>

6 Ibid

7 FORUM-ASIA, Press Release, Bangladesh: Uphold the Rule of Law to Fight Extremism, 7 July 2016, <https://www.forum-asia.org/?p=21194>

8 FORUM-ASIA, Press Statement, Pakistan: Investigate the disappearances of human rights activists, 12 January 2017, <https://www.forum-asia.org/?p=22536>