



Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development  
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**37<sup>th</sup> Regular Session of the UN Human Rights Council**  
**Item 3: Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief**  
**Oral Statement Delivered by Rosanna Ocampo on behalf of**  
**Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)**

**Friday, 02 March 2018**

Mr. President, FORUM-ASIA welcomes the report of the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief. We share his concerns that restrictions on freedom of religion or belief often also violate freedoms of opinion, expression, peaceful assembly, and association; and that anti-blasphemy laws are used to target dissidents and secular thinkers. We echo his recommendations that anti-blasphemy laws must be repealed, and that domestic legal frameworks must be aligned with guarantees of freedom of religion or belief.

We draw the Council's attention to the rising systematic restrictions to this freedom in several Asian states:

In Pakistan, individuals accused of blasphemy charges face custodial torture and are often denied a fair trial. For instance, Junaid Hafeez was arrested in March 2013 for allegedly committing blasphemy on Facebook and has been kept in solitary confinement since May 2014 without a fair trial<sup>1</sup>, while Patras Masih and Sajid Masih were reportedly tortured following allegations of blasphemy in February 2018.<sup>2</sup> In October 2017, Nepal passed a law criminalising religious conversion. In India, religious minorities have faced intimidation, physical attacks, lynching, and murders in the backdrop of a resurgent Hindu nationalism and on the pretext of cow protection. In Maldives, secularist activists and bloggers continue to face intimidation and in some cases have been disappeared such as Ahmed Rilwan, or murdered such as Yameen Rasheed.

In Malaysia, section 233 of the Communication and Media Act penalises hurtful messages online, and section 298 of the penal code criminalises causing religious disharmony. The Indonesian government has increasingly used Law No. 1/PNPS/1965 – the Blasphemy Law) – which has contributed to an environment of intolerance in Indonesia and threatened freedom of religion or belief. Recent cases under this law include the sentencing of the former Governor of Jakarta Basuki Tjahja Purnama to a two year prison term last year<sup>3</sup>. In Burma/Myanmar, systematic restriction of freedom of religion or belief has led to Rohingya Muslims and Kachin Christians being subjected to gross and serious violations.

Thank you.

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<sup>1</sup><https://www.forum-asia.org/?p=25563>

<sup>2</sup><https://www.forum-asia.org/?p=25712>

<sup>3</sup><https://www.forum-asia.org/?p=23820>