



Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development
<http://www.forum-asia.org> una@forum-asia.org

37th Regular Session of the UN Human Rights Council
Item 4: Human rights situations that require the Council's attention – General Debate
Oral Statement Delivered by Rosanna Ocampo on behalf of
Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)

Wednesday, 14 March 2018

Mr. President, FORUM-ASIA expresses concern over human rights situations in several Asian countries where elections are expected this year. In Cambodia human rights defenders, critics, and members of the political Opposition have faced serious threats. If current conditions persist, national elections in July will likely be compromised. We call on this Council to urgently deliberate on Cambodia and at minimum act on calls for an intersessional debate on Cambodia before June.

Malaysia faces systematic restrictions on freedom of expression, assembly and association ahead of upcoming general elections. We are concerned by plans for a new legislation to curb “fake news” ahead of elections despite serious concerns from the civil society and media organisations.¹ The proposed new law due for debate during the current session of the Parliament² would further stifle freedom of expression and media while existing laws including the Sedition Act, Communication and Multimedia Act, Printing Presses and Publication Act and the Penal Code are regularly invoked against human rights defenders, journalists and opposition activists. The government should drop the Bill and urgently create an enabling environment for free and fair elections.

Bangladesh will face elections later this year. Enforced and involuntary disappearance remains a key challenge in the country. In 2017 alone, 60 cases of abduction and disappearances were reported.³ Between 2009 and 2017, law enforcement agencies have been allegedly involved in over 400 cases of disappearances⁴ - most of which involve political opponents and dissidents.⁵ The cabinet's approval of the Digital Security Act 2018 has further added to concerns over restrictions on freedom of expression and the media. While this repeals the draconian Information and Communication Act 2006, once adopted it would add measures that would muzzle free speech and impede independent journalism.⁶ Bangladesh should take urgent steps to curb violations and work towards a conducive environment for free and fair elections.

The current state of emergency in Maldives has seriously undermined prospects for a free and fair election later this year. The government must take immediate steps to lift the state of emergency, release political prisoners and lift all restrictions on freedoms of expression, association and assembly.

Thank you.

1 <http://www.lawyersforliberty.org/flf-governments-special-committee-to-combat-fake-news-raises-serious-concerns/>

2 <http://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/nation/2018/03/06/journalism-body-proposed-fake-news-law-threatens-media-freedom/>

3 <http://www.askbd.org/ask/2018/01/17/enforced-disappearance-january-december-2017/>

4 <https://www.forum-asia.org/?p=25280>

5 <https://www.forum-asia.org/?p=24796>

6 <https://www.ifex.org/bangladesh/2018/02/01/draconian-digital-security-act/>;
<http://www.thedailystar.net/frontpage/draft-digital-security-act-approved-gag-freedom-expression-1527013>