

Pakistan: Immediately withdraw the expulsion notice ordering 18 INGOs to halt operations and leave the country

(Kathmandu/Bangkok) - 10 October 2018: The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) is gravely concerned over the expulsion notice issued to 18 INGOs by the Pakistan Ministry of Interior. On 2 October 2018, the 18 INGOs were asked to close their operations within 60 days informing that their registration applications had been rejected. FORUM-ASIA urges the government of Pakistan to reconsider its decision, which lacks reasonable justification.

In Pakistan, international civil society organisations support government departments as well as national and grassroots civil society organizations. They provide services in healthcare, education, humanitarian work, sanitation, advocacy, research and initiatives on legal reforms and even law and order. International organisations also work in partnership with local organisations on basic rights, such as gender rights, labour rights, rights of minorities and the disabled. In 2017, the INGO sector as a whole reached 34 million people with humanitarian relief and development assistance.

FORUM-ASIA is informed that after the launch of the INGO registration policy framework in 2015, 141 INGOs applied for registration. However, only 66 INGOs got approval by the end of 2017. It is also informed that a decision on the second batch of 29 INGOs is pending.

The whole process of INGO registration is marred with serious legal and administrative flaws and also lacks fairness and due process. Civil society organisations in Pakistan have condemned this move. Several embassies have also urged the government to review the order.

The Government of Pakistan already faces challenges and criticism at international forums for its regressive policies vis-à-vis human rights, particularly in relation to freedom of association and expression. This incident will further isolate Pakistan internationally and will hamper its international development cooperation with other countries.

The expulsion notice violates the framework of the Right to Freedom of Association, which is enshrined in Article 17 of the Constitution of Pakistan, guaranteeing freedom of association, among others. FORUM-ASIA urges the government of Pakistan to immediately withdraw the expulsion letters issued to the INGOs and allow them to continue their activities in the country. The government should review the 2015 INGO Registration Policy Framework through a consultative process involving civil society organisations. Furthermore, FORUM-ASIA urges the government of Pakistan to strengthen democratic and civic space in the country without creating barriers and repressive laws against civic engagement.

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.

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