

## India: Ensure security for women human rights defenders in West Bengal

(Kathmandu/Bangkok, 30 January 2019) – The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) is deeply concerned over the threat, intimidation and verbal abuse of women human rights defender Shila Bewa, 28 years old. Shila is an active member of Banglar Manabadhikar Suraksha Mancha (MASUM), a member of FORUM-ASIA, which works on human rights issues in the border areas of West Bengal, India. FORUM-ASIA condemns the continuous harassment of Shila, and urges the authorities to take immediate action against the perpetrators.

Shila was distributing posters on 25 January 2019 in river bank areas of in Toltoli village in Ghospara Gram Panchayet in West Bengal, India. She was verbally abused, threatened, and intimidated for distributing the posters, which is a peaceful human rights activity. Threats, intimidation and harassment of a women human rights defender for distributing posters is a clear violation of her fundamental rights of rights to expression guaranteed under article 19 of Constitution of India.

FORUM-ASIA is concerned that women human rights defenders are increasingly facing gender-based violence and harassment for carrying out peaceful human rights activities across India. FORUM-ASIA urges both the State and Central Government to conduct an investigation and bring the perpetrators to justice.

FORUM-ASIA calls on the National Human Rights Commission to exercise its power under the Protection of Human Rights Act (1993) to intervene in this case taking cognizance of the two communications sent on 26 and 29 January 2019 by MASUM. It should also address the issue of increasing attacks on human rights defenders, such as of MASUM advocating for constitutionally guaranteed fundamental human rights.

### About FORUM-ASIA:

*FORUM-ASIA is a regional human rights group with 67 member organisations in 21 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 democratisation.*

**For further information, please contact:**

- South Asia Programme, FORUM-ASIA, [sasia@forum-asia.org](mailto:sasia@forum-asia.org)