

**45<sup>th</sup> Regular Session of the UN Human Rights Council**

**Item 4: General Debate on human rights situations that require the Council's attention**

**Oral Statement Delivered by Dhwani Nagpal  
On behalf of the Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)**

**Thursday, 24 September 2020**

Madam President, we call for the Council's attention on human rights situations in several Asian countries.

We remain concerned by the human rights crisis in Kashmir. Since India revoked constitutional autonomy of Jammu and Kashmir last year, fundamental freedoms continue to be severely curtailed with ongoing reports of violence by police and security forces including the continued use of pellet guns against protestors, torture and custodial deaths. The new domicile law, which would fundamentally alter the demography of Kashmir, adds to these concerns. We call on India to ensure human rights defenders and journalists are allowed unfettered access to Jammu and Kashmir to carry out their legitimate work freely, without fear and reprisal; release human rights defenders (HRDs) and political leaders detained without charge; remove restrictions on freedoms of expression, association and assembly; and fully restore internet access in the region. We further call on India and Pakistan to grant access to OHCHR and other independent observers to Kashmir.

We echo the High Commissioner's concerns at the beginning of the session on the Sri Lankan government's backtracking on its commitments to the Council on reconciliation, accountability and human rights as outlined in the resolution 30/1. Since the election of the new government last year, there has been a sharp increase in attacks on minorities, arrests and reprisals against human rights defenders (HRDs), lawyers, journalists and families of the disappeared, and militarisation of civil administration. Furthermore, the recently proposed 20<sup>th</sup> amendment to the Constitution would undermine the independence of the judiciary and other independent institutions, and the right to fair trial and remedy. Given this rapid deterioration in the situation, we call on the Council to enhance the scrutiny of the situation and utilise international options to ensure accountability in Sri Lanka.

Finally, we urge the Council to closely monitor the situation in Thailand, where several human rights defenders and youth activists have been arrested and several more face criminal charges amid the ongoing student-led peaceful protests calling for democratic reform and protection of fundamental freedoms. We call on Thai authorities to end intimidation and judicial harassment of human rights defenders (HRDs) and pro-democracy activists and uphold its obligations to guarantee rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and freedom of expression. Thank you.