

Summary Report:

9th Asian Regional Human
Rights Defenders Forum

FORUM-ASIA



AHRDF9 Notetakers

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About FORUM-ASIA

The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) is a network of 82 member organisations across 23 countries, mainly in Asia. Founded in 1991, FORUM-ASIA works to strengthen movements for human rights and sustainable development through research, advocacy, capacity development and solidarity actions in Asia and beyond. It has consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council, and consultative relationship with the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights. The FORUM-ASIA Secretariat is based in Bangkok, with offices in Jakarta, Geneva and Kathmandu.
www.forum-asia.org



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Introduction

"Governments rise and fall. Democracy comes and goes ... [but] I don't think you can ever lose hope. Because at the end of the day, there are more and more people working in human rights now. More and more people getting involved. ... The people are ready."

- Mary Lawlor, UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders during the opening session of the 9th Asian Regional Human Rights Defenders Forum

The Asian Regional Human Rights Defenders Forum (AHRDF) is a biennial gathering of human rights defenders (HRDs) and their allies across the region. Its objective is to improve the protection of defenders by providing a safe space for Asian defenders to gather and connect with each other and their allies, including regional and international solidarity networks, experts, academics, donors, and UN agencies, such as the special procedures mandate holders. The Forum also aims to facilitate an exchange of insights from various perspectives on the protection of defenders and to share innovative strategies on navigating new challenges that contribute to shrinking civic space.

This year marks the 20th anniversary of the first AHRDF, and despite all the challenges this year posed, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and its restrictions on travel,

FORUM-ASIA organised the 9th AHRDF (AHRDF9) in an online format from 14 to 17 June 2021. This publication, "Summary report: 9th Asian Regional Human Rights Defender Forum," highlights the key points discussed and provides the key recommendations made at the Forum.

Opening Session

AHRDF9 started off with a live performance by singer and activist Mai Khoi, which was followed by opening remarks from FORUM-ASIA, a keynote speech by the United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur on the situation of HRDs, Mary Lawlor, and a panel discussion featuring prominent defenders from Asia: Aruna Roy, Maria Ressa and Aung Myo Min. They each discussed the human rights situation in their respective country.



Mary Lawlor

UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of HRDs



Aruna Roy

Co-Founder of the Workers and Peasants Strength Union and right to information movement leader in India



Maria Ressa

Co-Founder, CEO and President of Rappler



Aung Myo Min

Human Rights Minister of the National Unity Government of Myanmar



Performance by Mai Khoi

Vietnamese singer, artist and activist



Shamini Darshni Kaliemuthu

Executive Director of FORUM-ASIA

Key highlights included:

- Hostilities against HRDs are experienced across Asia, with COVID-19 exacerbating the situation.
- The Special Rapporteur's key tools for responding to violations are communications and press releases. HRDs are encouraged to use these tools, and the Special Rapporteur is committed to constantly improving them;
- Solidarity is an important tool for protection—the human rights community should work together strategically to bridge gaps in this work;
- The role of technology in human rights should not be underestimated. It is a useful tool but it also presents new challenges the human rights community must be ready to respond to: online smearing of HRDs' reputation and increased surveillance through spyware, among others;
- It is critical that the human rights community see human rights as intrinsically linked to democracy and encompassing not only civil and political but also economic, social and cultural rights. Human rights movements should reflect these values and put more effort into reaching out to those working on economic, social and cultural rights; and
- The international community plays an important role in amplifying the voices of HRDs and in lobbying stakeholders, and they should use their platform strategically.

Thematic Sessions

Over the following days, 35 parallel sessions took place, 18 of which were unique thematic sessions. Each session was designed based on FORUM-ASIA's analysis of the situation of HRDs in Asia, as well as a survey and interviews conducted with members and partners of FORUM-ASIA prior to the Forum. The topics are outlined below.

1 Defending in Numbers, Report Launch & Trends of Harassment Against HRDs in Asia

This session focused on the monitoring and documentation of violations committed against HRDs across the region. FORUM-ASIA launched [Defending in Numbers – A Message of Strength from the Ground](#), the fourth edition of a biennial publication that analyses the patterns of harassment against Asian defenders over the past two years. Between 2019 and 2020, over 1,000 cases of violations against HRDs were documented across 21 Asian countries. Judicial harassment, intimidation and threats, and physical violence were the most common violations recorded. The most affected

groups of defenders included pro-democracy defenders, women human rights defenders (WHRDs), and land and environmental defenders. Government responses to the outbreak of COVID-19 resulted in further increases in the number of violations committed. Speakers also shared their experiences of being targeted with administrative harassment and smear campaigns, among other forms of attacks. Key recommendations to improve monitoring and documentation of violations against defenders included calls to:

- Enhance the capacities of HRDs on the ground, including their digital skills and security;
- Create visual materials that make it easier to disseminate and digest information documented;
- Translate the information documented into local languages; and
- Hold regular discussions among FORUM-ASIA members and partners to share methods used to document human rights violations and hold staff trainings on how to document cases.

2 Growing Resistance and Solidarity Against Repressive Laws in Asia

This session analysed the regional context regarding repressive laws and the development of related solidarity initiatives in Asia. Recent years have seen a rise in the enactment of laws that criminalise legitimate dissent and curb citizens' rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly. Under the pretext of national security and the COVID-19 pandemic, Asian governments have intensified their control and repression of HRDs and critics, including in online spaces. In the Philippines, defenders are commonly labelled as terrorists and face attacks from state and non-state actors. In Bangladesh, a widespread culture of impunity makes HRDs an easy target for state-sponsored violations, and the restriction of freedom of expression online is commonly sanctioned under draconian laws. Participants in the session also shared emblematic examples about how digital attacks, from misinformation to surveillance, undermine the work of civil society actors in Taiwan. Despite these attacks, cross-regional solidarity initiatives and networks are increasing. Digital spaces help movements to mobilise large numbers of individuals and to enhance the resilience of HRDs and civil society. Key recommendations in response included calls to:

- Strengthen solidarity actions, using a bottom-up approach;
- Use platforms and networks to disseminate counter-narratives to state-sponsored misinformation; and
- Call for the adoption of universal guidelines on



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the protection of freedom of expression in online spaces.

3 COVID-19's Impact on HRDs' Work: Reflections and Lessons Learned

The pandemic has created new challenges for defenders and civil society in Asia who already operate in restrictive environments. This session therefore focused on how the human rights community—from defenders to funders—can respond to these challenges, adapt to the new normal, and build back better. A key focus of the discussion was the need to adapt human rights work to online spaces. This raised important questions about how this can be done: (a) inclusively, to account for those with limited internet access and to account for generational gaps; (b) safely, considering the rise in digital threats; and (c) effectively, despite difficulties in measuring impacts of online activities. Defenders also noted that funding during COVID-19 has mostly been re-directed to pandemic related work and, as a result, financial support for HRDs and civil society to continue their human rights work has reduced. Key recommendations made in response included calls to:

- Be creative in maximising the positive aspects of online tools: use platforms and their outreach to engage more stakeholders and to create different narratives about human rights;
- Engage with a younger generation of defenders for new ideas, technologies, and tools to respond to new challenges; and
- Ensure financial resources are available to support HRDs in conducting their work beyond those related to the pandemic, and for donors to be flexible in their engagement with HRDs, especially in the pandemic, but also in the long-term to account for the complex context HRDs work in.

4 Well-Being and Welfare of Defenders in Asia

In this session, the discussion focused on the role of well-being as part of the holistic security of HRDs. Central to this discussion was the key challenges defenders faced in integrating well-being practices individually, organisationally and within their communities. Some participants shared, for example, that self-care is often associated with feelings of guilt and self-indulgence, causing defenders to feel reluctant to engage with it. Such feelings are further exacerbated by social norms around the heroism of HRDs and the self-sacrifice of women, as well as the stigma of discussing emotions.

Despite this dynamic, there are best practices that are in place to ensure the self-care of HRDs, such as making personal well-being plans and taking more breaks. Funders have also responded to this need by considering the working conditions that affect the well-being of HRDs they support and engaging in dialogue with grantees about well-being needs, including their right to rest or leisure as well as the right to health. Recommendations to further ensure well-being is prioritised included calls to:

- Donors to financially support organisations that institutionalise well-being (e.g., the development and implementation of well-being policies, and capacity building of staff and leadership on well-being);
- Create a healthier well-being culture at various levels. This could mean allocating resources for well-being at an organisational level, creating safe spaces to discuss hardships at the community level and taking rest at an individual level;
- Deconstruct cultural expectations and norms we have for ourselves and others in terms of the amount of work we produce and our relationship to well-being; and
- Have more spaces to discuss well-being, such as a well-being conference or an online gathering with exposure to nature.

5 Effective Protection to Defenders through Emergency Assistance

Emergency assistance is a key component of the support HRDs at risk can seek, and in the past few years, an increasing number of Asian HRDs have applied for it. This session reviewed the current models of emergency assistance and discussed points for improvement. In terms of available support, many organisations have expanded the scope of their protection mandate to include, for example, families of HRDs or the psychosocial well-being of defenders. There is also greater consideration of preventive and non-financial support, like trainings and security planning. The short-term duration of funding was, however, identified as the main limitation of emergency assistance. Other limitations include funders' limited background knowledge on the situation defenders are facing, bureaucracy and language barriers. Key recommendations to improve emergency assistance to HRDs included calls to:

- Organisations to expand their support beyond emergency situations or crises of six-month periods, including by providing more general assistance such as accompaniment of and check-ins for defenders, as well as support for those in exile;

- Always include a gender perspective and to couple emergency assistance to HRDs with advocacy work;
- Donors to have a more flexible approach towards organisations and their activities, including by promoting defenders' holistic security and reducing the administrative burden of seeking funding. Regular communication is also key to understanding the needs of HRDs; and
- HRDs to support one another and implement security practices, such as the development of emergency and security protocols and contingency measures.

6 Building Positive Narratives on HRDs and Civil Society

This session illustrated how to build positive and alternative narratives to challenge dominant narratives against HRDs that aim to discredit and vilify them. A narrative is defined as a common understanding of an event or series of events resulting from a collection of related stories, consistently framed with the same qualities. A dominant narrative can influence the behaviours and attitudes of a society and creates or reinforces a popular agreement on a belief or idea in the dominant culture. A positive alternative narrative plays a role in social change. It requires a strategy, summarised by the speakers as follows, to:

- Conduct a problem analysis by identifying the mainstream narrative, the actors pushing it and their reasons for doing so;
- Define the purpose of the counter-narrative, or the change the alternative narrative aims to achieve;
- Define the counter-narrative framework, including the field of intervention, targeted groups, and methods of action. The intervention should communicate ideas like resistance, empathy, and hope;
- Create the message for the narrative change—it should be a positive story to delegitimise extremist propaganda. The focus of the message should move from fear to love; and
- Embrace the ideals of human rights for all, dignity, and democracy, as well as the values of community and humanisation.

7 Milk Tea Alliance and Emerging Models of Transnational Solidarity Movements in Asia

The past few years have seen the rise of authoritarianism in Asia. In this context, the Milk Tea Alliance (MTA) was formed, starting an unprecedented and innovative regional solidarity movement, generally led by but not limited to social media-savvy, young emerging movement leaders. This session provided an overview of the MTA and discussed its room for improvement. The MTA is a decentralised and distributed network, whose goal is to advance regional solidarity across grassroots movements for democracy, freedom and self-determination. Its core values include the support of human rights, democracy and inclusion, and opposition to authoritarianism and state violence. Agreement on such values is key to MTA's leaderless—or more aptly, leaderful—nature, as is its openness to participation from actors across Asia and beyond. The mobilisation of MTA members includes sharing knowledge and practices ranging from protest tactics and campaign strategies to security guidelines and digital activism, all from different contexts. The movement holds regular meetings where members share information with a creative and playful approach which involves fostering mutual care and well-being among activists, community organisers and defenders. The following recommendations for improvement were identified to:

- Sustain and deepen knowledge and understanding of each other's political and cultural contexts and histories of movements and struggles to identify similar trends and areas for coaction;
- Support emerging movements like MTA to think and act more strategically and in the long-term to better position itself to be able to engage in decision- and policy-making avenues such as the UN, and to clearly articulate shared demands and alternatives;
- Have a better balance between conducting work online and offline to expand outreach to rural areas and the most marginalised communities and to overcome language barriers; and
- Address the generational gap, recognising that younger and older members tend to focus on different priorities but should respect each other's expertise and experiences.



8 Temporary Relocation Mechanisms (TRMs) for HRDs: A Cross-Regional Dialogue

This session discussed the existing relocation mechanisms available for HRDs and the challenges and best practices of implementing TRMs in different regions. The situations in Nepal and Indonesia were discussed, where efforts are being made to establish a structured relocation mechanism for defenders at risk. Key challenges to establishing this mechanism related to the overall political situation in the region, where HRDs are under threat, as well as limited access to funding. Learning from Africa, where TRMs are more established, participants highlighted the importance of viewing relocation as a strictly last resort option and of having a holistic approach to relocation as best practices. This involves thinking through all stages of relocation from pre-departure to return and the possibility of exile. The positive role universities can play in supporting relocation were also emphasised by HRDs and academics, despite bureaucratic challenges that may be encountered. Key recommendations made to strengthen TRMs in Asia included calls to:

- Ensure psychosocial support is made integral to relocation mechanisms;
- Host organisations to develop a plan for reintegration for HRD return and plans for when they are unable to return;
- Increase capacity of host organisations to support relocation of HRDs;
- Strengthen partnerships with universities and a range of other stakeholders, including by getting buy-in from the government, such as in Nepal and which has been done across Africa;
- National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) to take a proactive role in supporting relocation initiatives; and
- Donors to make funding accessible to organisations with safe houses, including support to maintain operational costs.

9 How Can NHRIs Better Protect WHRDs?

WRHDs have long played a central role in the advancement of human rights. This session aimed to learn from WHRDs' and NHRIs' challenges and best practices in supporting and protecting WHRDs in carrying out their work. Common challenges that WHRDs and NHRIs mentioned were: the distrust between NHRIs and civil society, and relatedly, the difficulty of ensuring the independence of NHRIs from the government, who are often the perpetrators of the violations; the lack

of women's representation in administrative positions and the limited adoption of a gender lens; as well as the limited resources the NHRIs have to carry out their mandate. Key recommendations for NHRIs to better support WHRDs included calls to:

- Understand the needs of WHRDs for holistic protection and adopt a gender perspective that is respectful of diversity and intersectionality across their work;
- Empower WHRDs and improve their visibility by raising people's awareness on the important work they do;
- Forge strategic partnerships with a range of stakeholders for advocacy, protection, accountability, and transformative change. This can include fostering trust with NGOs, communities, corporations, and even having cross-border collaborations between NHRIs; and
- Ensure the active participation of women in NHRIs and the involvement of WHRDs in initiatives designed for their protection.

10 Role of Business in Protecting Defenders/Business and Human Rights & HRDs: Better Together

HRDs working in the field of business and human rights (BHR) are commonly targeted by attacks. According to [FORUM-ASIA's records](#), there were 205 cases of human rights violations against land and environmental HRDs between 2019 and 2020 alone. In this session, speakers reflected on challenges, insights, and strategies to advance human rights and HRD protection in the context of BHR. A few countries in the region have adopted normative tools to enhance defenders' protection: Mongolia was the first country in Asia to enact a national law on HRD protection, but it contains some controversial provisions, while Thailand adopted its National Action Plan (NAP) on BHR, in line with the UN Guiding Principles on BHR. Despite placing the protection of HRDs as one of its central pillars, the NAP has been poorly implemented. In the region, powerful business actors commonly violate international human rights standards, oftentimes in collusion with governments. Key recommendations in response to such violations included calls to:

- Develop a regional database mapping the flow of funding and investments to corporations committing human rights abuses;
- Conduct international advocacy to ensure that HRD protection mechanisms are actually enforced;
- Increase engagement with institutions that have not been proactive in supporting HRDs, like NHRIs; and

- Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) to empower grassroots organisations through networking and campaigns and by bridging the gap between them and regional and international actors.

11 Shooting the Messenger: Reprisals Against Human Rights Defenders Who Cooperate with the UN – A Tragedy in Asia

Asia is the region where reprisals against HRDs engaging with UN human rights mechanisms are the most common. This session sought to create recommendations to governments and the UN on how to prevent reprisals against HRDs and hold perpetrators accountable. Several Asian governments have been responsible for physical attacks, intimidation and threats, arbitrary detention, and killing of HRDs engaging with UN bodies. Defenders frequently resort to self-censorship as a result, while others refrain from engaging for fear of repercussions. Although the contribution of HRDs is crucial to the success of UN bodies, institutional and procedural shortcomings prevent the latter from taking action to facilitate and support safe and secure participation of HRDs at these bodies or hold perpetrators accountable. Numerous recommendations were made by speakers and participants in this regard to:

- Increase advocacy and campaigns with the Human Rights Council and its members to raise greater awareness at the UN-level of reprisals against HRDs;
- Have more proactive research and documentation of cases of reprisals by The Assistant Secretary-General;
- Diplomats and progressive governments to take a more active role as alternative entry points in raising the issue of reprisals against HRDs when UN response is inadequate in providing protection for HRDs;
- Increase the flexibility of communication processes and procedures for reporting cases of reprisals to relevant UN mechanisms, such as accepting the consent provided by HRDs to third parties; and
- Prioritise the safety of HRDs in responding to cases of reprisals and holding perpetrators accountable.

12 Impunity Against HRDs: Countering Killings, Torture and Enforced Disappearances

Impunity for violations against defenders in Asia is widespread. Authorities commonly fail to investigate the perpetrators or to provide HRDs with the protection requested. This session discussed the situations

in three Asian countries and tried to identify best practices for countering impunity. In Indonesia, legal provisions protecting victims and witnesses are poorly implemented, state actors maintain bias towards HRDs, and the understanding of the national protective framework for HRDs is still low. In Sri Lanka, cases of enforced disappearances of HRDs reflect the broader context of impunity in the country. Relatives of victims face a hostile political environment and often engage with multiple actors to seek support and solidarity. In Bangladesh, repressive laws allow state actors to perpetrate violations against HRDs with impunity and to deny their responsibility. Similar trends across the three countries include a failure to bring perpetrators to justice and the use of prolonged court cases. The following recommendations were made to:

- Monitor impunity cases affecting HRDs regularly and conduct advocacy for these cases at the international level;
- Call proactively for international support on impunity cases, which has proven useful but inconsistent;
- Empower victims and their families with moral, legal, and financial support; and
- Raise awareness of the public, in particular students and youth, on the role of HRDs.

13 Operating in Conflict Areas: Experiences from WHRDs on the Ground

This session was held to discuss the situation of WHRDs operating in conflict/post-conflict areas and explored ways to better protect them and support their work. The discussion focused on the situation in Kashmir, West Papua, Afghanistan, and the deep south of Thailand. WHRDs shared that digital threats were a common challenge: governments have reportedly surveilled WHRDs and unknown assailants have hacked their personal data. Internet shutdowns were also a common strategy used to limit defenders' access to support and information. Moreover, in conflict and post-conflict settings, movement across different areas was mentioned as difficult, which was also exacerbated by COVID-19 restrictions; while cases of physical violence and killings remained widespread. WHRDs were mentioned as a disproportionately affected group by violations, and additionally faced gender-based challenges, such as sexual assault, domestic violence and carrying additional caregiving responsibilities. Key recommendations included calls to:

- The international community and States to take seriously the protection of WHRDs and to prioritise it above all else;



- Adopt a holistic view of the situation of defenders in conflict areas, which includes physical and digital security, psychosocial well-being, economic precarity, and social stigmatisation; and
- Develop stronger partnerships and regional alliances among WHRDs (in conflict and post-conflict settings) and other allies, such as NHRIs, CSOs, and communities within Asia, as a strategy for protection.

14 Protection of LGBTIQ+ Human Rights Defenders in Asia

This session aimed to foster an exchange of experiences and views of LGBTIQ+ defenders on their role in defending rights and its implications for their own safety and well-being. Working in contexts where the existence of LGBTIQ+ persons continue to be socially, religiously, culturally, and legally challenged, LGBTIQ+ defenders often face harassment that targets them not only for their work but for who they are. These violations have severe implications for both their physical and digital safety. Despite these risks, there is a noted lack of access to protection mechanisms for many LGBTIQ+ defenders. To address this gap, key recommendations were made to:

- Increase access to a greater range of protection mechanisms and emergency support systems for LGBTIQ+ defenders, their partners and families;
- Establish a regional temporary relocation shelter to protect high risk LGBTIQ+ defenders;
- Advocate for institutional and legal changes to recognise the existence of and codify non-discrimination towards LGBTIQ+ persons to better address the root causes of discrimination; and
- Build HRD alliances that encompass a diverse range of people, including LGBTIQ+ people.

15 Art as Resistance: Artists in Action – Artistic Interventions that Fight for Human Rights

This session discussed the challenges and risks facing artists who focus on human rights. Censorship and violations against freedom of expression were a common threat felt across Asia, with governments across the region—from Vietnam and Hong Kong to Pakistan—shutting down events, taking down artwork, and banning artists from presenting work deemed to challenge state authority. As one of the panellists explained: “You can produce work about how we are living in difficult times,

but never about why.” Often, acts of censorship are coupled with other violations, such as arbitrary arrest and detention, intimidation, threats, or worse. Despite these immense challenges, the panellists also shared the importance of continuing to use creative ways to engage with human rights through their art—whether through song, art installations, or creative protest. Specific resources for artists at risk were also shared, as can be seen [here](#). The participants in the session came to the conclusion that art is political, artists who work on human rights are HRDs, and the best way to respond to repressive forces is to continue to be creative in our approaches.

16 Artificial Intelligence (AI) & Human Rights – Risks and Opportunities

In this session, speakers shared their work involving AI tools and discussed challenges stemming from emerging technologies for human rights. AI can be a great tool for addressing human rights issues. For example, it has been used to promote human rights work, develop databases to document violations and connect people worldwide. AI has also become a critical tool for monitoring, detecting and potentially preventing hate speech. AI enables masses of data to be analysed to identify hate speech trends, patterns, and sources. These trends can be used as evidence to support human rights advocacy and find innovative solutions to human rights issues. However, AI can also be harnessed to perpetuate violations, through surveillance and the collection of personal information for exploitation. While the state's current understanding of AI remains limited, the risk of misuse is grave. Consequently, the following recommendations were emphasised with calls to:

- Use a human rights-based approach when implementing AI technologies or establishing legislation around AI to prevent its misuse;
- Consider the perspective of marginalised groups, such as minority ethnic groups and women, who are disproportionately targeted by hate speech and other online-based harassment; and
- The human rights community to better understand the ecosystem of AI to find ways to respond to its challenges.

17 Enduring and Fighting the Coup: Stock-Taking and Strategies in Myanmar

This session provided an overview of the situation in Myanmar four months after the 1 February coup. The

military continues to perpetrate mass violations daily, while the population is coping with other hardships, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The military also reversed some laws that protected people's right to privacy and freedom of expression and assembly. In this context, the youth are playing a leading role within the anti-coup movement. Participants highlighted issues related to cross-border cooperation from Thailand and India. It was also discussed that the central governments have been unresponsive to the anti-coup movement but that local authorities and CSOs have aided refugees and ethnic minorities living in border areas, places where many internally displaced persons have moved. Key recommendations in response included calls to:

- Conduct advocacy with progressive governments to recognise the National Unity Government (NUG) as the legitimate government, while cutting financial ties with the military and imposing an arms embargo;
- Include psychosocial well-being, equipment, and security advice in the support provided;
- Ensure flexibility from donors and create alternative crowdfunding sources to support defenders; and
- Increase coordination among CSOs, especially in border areas, in monitoring the situation and sharing accurate information.

18 Right to Culture and Human Rights: A Case Study of the Living Goddesses of Nepal

This session illustrated the traditional practice of the Kumari, held by the Newar community in Nepal, and discussed the relationship between cultural rights and other human rights. Kumari practice involves worshipping pre-pubescent girls as living goddesses. Under the lens of international human rights law, Kumari tradition has drawn concerns relating to the right of Kumari girls to education, development, and freedom of movement. Girls who are recognised as goddesses have certain restrictions, such as attending schools, visiting public spaces, or playing with other children. They are home-schooled and only allowed to play with their relatives. Based on these limitations, the session explored the relationship between the right to culture as a human right and other universal human rights practices, such as movement and liberty. International human rights law acknowledges that discrimination against women may lie in customs and cultural domains and emphasises children's right to participate in social and cultural life without discrimination. Nevertheless, it also highlights the cultural perspective that is associated with the identity of the community itself. Thus, activities like ethnographic research and dialogue with cultural practitioners are crucial for navigating these issues.

Holistic Security Session

In addition to the thematic sessions, security clinics were also available for HRDs throughout the Forum to learn more about and enhance their security. The clinics embraced a holistic approach that included a focus on the HRDs' physical and digital security, and psychosocial well-being.

Physical Security

In this session, the basic notions of physical security management were presented, including the related concepts of risk, threat, vulnerability, and capacity that apply to the work of HRDs. The main points discussed included:

- Introduction to context analysis and actor mapping, related to work and life; and
- Based on the context analysis, the development of a security plan to enhance the security of defenders with a series of preventive actions to take in order to mitigate or eliminate threats.

Digital Security

In this session participants were introduced to the idea of holistic security, with a focus on the digital component. The main points discussed included:

- An overview of digital hygiene, secure browsing, data back-up, use of devices, and social media, coupled with good practices that are as easy as they are important; and
- The concept of social engineering, a phenomenon where pieces of information from a person are put together by someone to exploit them, creating a security threat. Some examples of social engineering were identified in a bid to raise awareness and protect themselves from this practice.

Well-being

For the well-being session, HRDs were given an opportunity to learn about stress, trauma and common factors that affect the well-being of HRDs in the context of their work. The main points discussed included:

- HRDs are particularly exposed to stress because of their work, which often involves witnessing violations or experiencing them directly and facing overwork and instability;



The UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of HRDs, Mary Lawlor, and prominent defenders from Asia: Aruna Roy, Maria Ressa, Aung Myo Min, and singer and activist Mai Khoi, were among the opening speakers at the AHRDF9. Overall, the event brought together a diverse array of HRDs and allies to connect with one another.

- HRDs must prioritise well-being—the only way defenders can continue their work is if they take care of themselves; and
- HRDs were also given opportunities to self-assess their overall well-being and practice stress management techniques, including breathing and mindfulness exercises. To access documents from this training, including these tools on self-care, stress management, and identifying symptoms of stress, please see [here](#).

Networking Spaces

Connecting defenders with one another and key allies was a critical component of AHRDF9. As such, throughout the Forum, 'chill and chat' sessions were held that gave participants the opportunity to interact with one another in an informal way. These spaces connected people with one another and gave participants space to rest, play and de-stress in between different sessions. This design complemented other strategies built into the Forum that aimed to facilitate network building, such as the interactive design of the sessions, and the opportunities for one-on-one meetings and direct messaging made available on the platform.

Conclusion

4 days
60+ hour sessions
357 participants
857 public conversations

At the end of the four-day event, attended by over 300 HRDs and allies, AHRDF9 ended by inviting a few attendees of each of the sessions to outline key lessons learned from the Forum. All participants were then invited to reflect upon their experiences during AHRDF9. They were asked what made them happy and what they hoped for the future moving forward from this Forum, and to put it on a virtual post-it note. Key results from this activity are presented in the following pages.

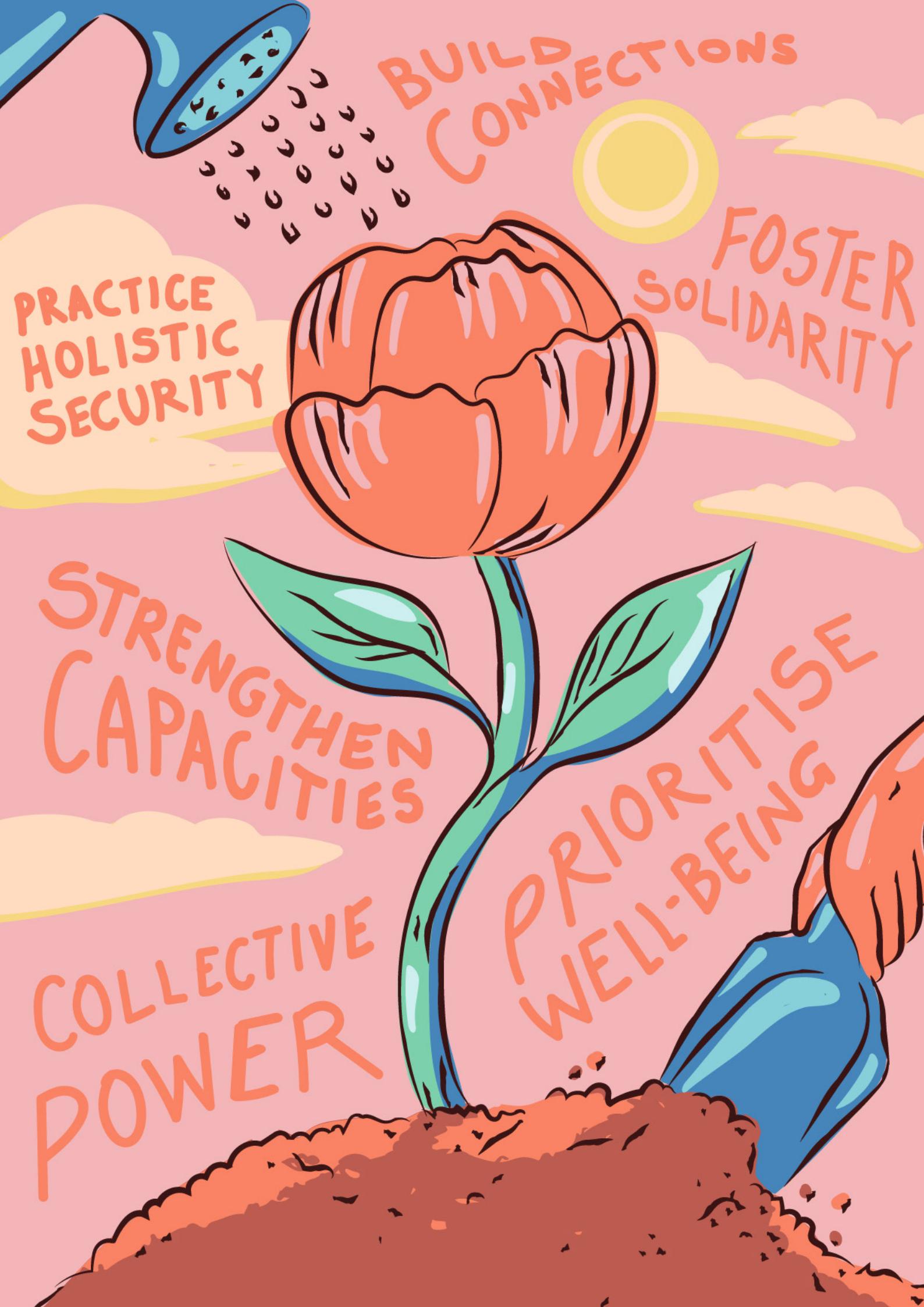
Key reflections from attendees on AHRDF9

I am happy

to connect with each other	to see old friends and meet new ones	to strategise collectively on key challenges	to see the diversity in topics covered and HRDs invited
to learn about different country situations in Asia	to be energised by everyone	that there are so many of us pushing to make change	to have joined this fun and educational event
to learn about holistic security	to build solidarity with HRDs from across the region	to learn about well-being and the importance of self-care	to be able to share experiences

I hope

to keep in touch with everyone	to have more access to emergency support beyond finances	for everyone to be safe and well	that no HRD will lose their lives
to be able to meet face-to-face	to build more from the knowledge I gained in AHRDF9	to get a summary report of AHRDF9	for more collective action
to have follow-up action from discussions	to have more capacity building activites for HRDs	for more well-being support provided to HRDs	to keep the fire burning, despite new challenges



PRACTICE
HOLISTIC
SECURITY

BUILD
CONNECTIONS

FOSTER
SOLIDARITY

STRENGTHEN
CAPACITIES

COLLECTIVE
POWER

PRIORITISE
WELL-BEING

