

Joint Communiqué

FORUM-ASIA 10th General Assembly, Bangkok, 29 September 2022

Members of the Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) convened at Holiday Inn, Bangkok, Thailand from 26 – 29 September 2022 for the organization's 10th General Assembly. The in-person gathering was a follow-up to the first part of the Assembly which was held online.

The members of FORUM-ASIA:

1. **Recognised** the important and legitimate work of civil society across Asia comprising: human rights defenders including women human rights defenders and environmental defenders, social and democratic movements particularly those of youth, regional and national networks (formal and informal) and other formations who are facing challenges such as structural challenges/risks due to shrinking civic space, democratic backsliding, human rights violations and abuses online and offline.
2. **Were cognizant** of the current landscape in Asia, characterised by uncertainties and changes, including democratic backsliding, erosion of the rule of law resulting in widespread violations of human rights, the disruptive impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and emerging diseases, global financial crises, the worsening climate emergency and environmental degradation, and overall shrinking civic space.
3. **Were deeply disturbed** by the rising cases of violation and abuse against human rights defenders and civil society members across Asia. In particular, FORUM-ASIA members have expressed solidarity and call for the immediate and unconditional release of Kashmiri human rights defender Khurram Parvez, coordinator of the Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons (APDP), who was arrested and jailed since November 2021. under the Indian draconian counter-terrorism legislation Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA). His arbitrary detention is part of a longstanding list of human rights violations committed by Indian authorities against human rights defenders, civil society organisations, journalists, and activists in Jammu and Kashmir.
4. **Welcomed** the adoption of the Organic Law of the Control Yuan National Human Rights Commission ('Organic Law') and the establishment of a National Human Rights Institution (NHRI) in Taiwan. FORUM-ASIA **also welcomed** the enactment of the Human Rights Defenders Protection Law in Mongolia in recent years. However, FORUM-ASIA members **expressed deep concerns** over Thailand's plan to enact the "Draft Act on the

Operations of Not-for-Profit Organizations” which contains provisions that would have a deeply damaging impact on those joining together to advocate for human rights in the country, in violation of their right to freedom of association and other rights. The members of FORUM-ASIA also, **calls** on the Indian authorities to repeal the recent amendment to the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA), which had led to further shrinking Civic space.

5. **Expressed solidarity** with civil society operating in particularly challenging situations including Myanmar, Sri Lanka. Members also noted with approval strides made towards the realisation of rights for all people and bright spots in the region but emphasised that more work needs to be done.
6. **Noted** with alarm the proliferation of non-state actors, particularly companies involved in the extractive and manufacturing industries across the region, taking advantage of increasingly constricted civic space and amplifying threats, intimidation, and harassment against civil society actors voicing concern against their operations, leaving vulnerable and marginalised groups easily expose.
7. **Observed** that the focus of human rights advocacy often quickly shifts from one crisis to the next in a reactive manner as situations develop and new challenges arise, and that sustained efforts are imperative.

On strengthening cooperation to advance human rights across Asia:

8. **Resolved** to create and reinforce meaningful and structural linkages among members to foster a vibrant and resilient Asian civil society where human rights defenders can continue their work for human rights, civic space, and democracy in a safe and sustainable manner.
9. **Encourages** efforts to build civil society actors' capacities to address cross-cutting issues such as climate change, gender mainstreaming, and business and human rights, to address challenges through a holistic, interconnected approach.
10. **Urges** authorities across Asia to immediately release all detained human rights defenders and drop the unfounded charges against them.
11. **Recommends** the strengthening of grassroots networks, and intergenerational knowledge transfer to emerging youth actors to support the development of youth movements.

12. **Further recommends** sustained focus and effort on human rights crises as well as coordinated advocacy to ensure sustainable progress and holistic approaches to advancing human rights and democracy in all countries across Asia.

13. **Callson** the diplomatic community including embassies, missions and state missions' representatives at international and regional human rights mechanisms from across the world to influence the agenda, discussions and outputs in favour of Asian civil society and marginalised communities.