



Statement on the Asian NGOs Network on National Human Rights Institutions' (ANNI) position on attending the SEANF's 2nd Technical Working Group Meeting which included the participation of the Myanmar National Human Rights Commission (MNHRC)

On 20 July 2023, the Asian NGOs Network on National Human Rights Institutions (ANNI) participated in the second Technical Working Group meeting of the Southeast Asia National Human Rights Institution Forum (SEANF) in Bangkok, Thailand.

ANNI participated in an interface dialogue with the SEANF, which included a presentation on the work of the ANNI network, its concerns on human rights issues in Southeast Asia, and opportunities for potential collaboration between ANNI and relevant SEANF member national human rights institutions (NHRIs). With regards to this event, ANNI wishes to share its position on the attendance and participation of the Myanmar National Human Rights Commission (MNHRC), which is one of the six member NHRIs of the SEANF.

ANNI, alongside its members in Myanmar, has consistently condemned the atrocity crimes of the military junta. Since the attempted coup on 1 February 2021, ANNI and its members have repeatedly highlighted the silence and inaction of the MNHRC on the grave human rights violations committed by the Myanmar junta. We have expressed this through letters, statements, publications, and in NHRI forums at the sub-regional, regional, and international levels. We have also communicated these concerns with the SEANF previously as well as shortly prior to the event.

On the continued participation of the MNHRC in NHRI forums

The MNHRC, by commission and omission, continues to ignore the extreme human rights abuses in Myanmar since the attempted coup. At the same time, it has been issuing statements of support to the military junta.

The MNHRC's actions—or inactions—as an NHRI merit condemnation as they render the MNHRC a complicit partner in the junta's heinous crimes. Such actions also do not make the MNHRC a legitimate, Paris Principles-compliant NHRI that is representative of the will of the people of Myanmar. Despite these alarming facts, NHRI networks seem unwilling to take a decisive position on suspending the MNHRC from their membership or disinviting them from events.

We are utterly disappointed with how NHRI networks continue to engage with the MNHRC despite the overwhelming evidence of its silence on—and allyship with—the illegal military junta that continues to commit grave human rights violations in Myanmar with impunity.

This, despite the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions' Sub-Committee on Accreditation's (GANHRI-SCA) recognition of these concerns and decision in March this year to place the MNHRC under review. ANNI remains deeply concerned about the message this sends to those fighting for justice, human rights, and genuine federal democracy in the country.

We have chosen to attend the event primarily to highlight civil society voices and concerns from the region in such forums which remain largely inaccessible to our members. We recognise that events like these are important for advocating for NHRIs' meaningful engagement with civil society in various countries. Likewise, we acknowledge that accessing NHRI-related forums is necessary for our collective work and advocacy as well as for occupying spaces that are not often available to civil society voices.

In situations like this, where the MNHRC has been allowed to participate in a human rights forum organised by a network of NHRIs and where ANNI is not an organiser, we wish to state that we are accountable to our membership in the countries where we work.

Despite the circumstances beyond our control which may place us in the same space, it is essential to highlight that MNHRC's presence does not equate to our acknowledgment of, or interaction with, them. We remain firm in our position against any engagement or connection with the MNHRC in all future events and engagements.

Call to Action

Until definitive action is taken on the MNHRC's accreditation status and continuing participation at NHRI forums, we will persist in raising our valid concerns if this approach continues to be taken by NHRI forum organisers. Such an approach of continuing to invite military-controlled institutions like the MNHRC has been and can still be utilised to claim legitimacy. We wish to reiterate that whenever we are invited to such events, ANNI would only utilise these platforms to present our advocacy and strategic priorities to concerned stakeholders present. We will continue to raise concerns regarding the invitation to the MNHRC to participate.

ANNI will never engage with the military-controlled MNHRC in any way or form, and we will not recognise it as a legitimate institution. If the MNHRC is part of a network or body, ANNI would engage bilaterally with other concerned stakeholders within such networks for our advocacy. This is in line with our and our members' consistent stance on the matter.

We urge sub-regional, regional, and international networks of NHRIs to reconsider their continued association with—and acceptance of—the MNHRC's continued membership in human rights bodies, and to hold the MNHRC accountable.

ANNI calls on NHRI networks to take a principled stand and stop inviting the MNHRC to their upcoming events and engagements.

We will continue to raise the alarm on the grave human rights violations and atrocity crimes committed by the junta as well as the MNHRC's complicity in shielding and enabling the military through its inaction and silence.

Through this statement, ANNI firmly reiterates its position on the matter. We kindly request other organisations to refer to this statement as part of your due diligence in your reporting, publications, or communications.

About ANNI:

About the Asian NGOs Network on National Human Rights Institutions (ANNI)
The Asian NGOs Network on National Human Rights Institutions (ANNI) was established in December 2006. It is a network of Asian non-governmental organisations and human rights defenders working on issues related to National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs). ANNI currently has 33 member organisations from 21 countries or territories. ANNI members work on strengthening the work and functioning of Asian NHRIs to better promote and protect human rights as well as to advocate for the improved compliance of Asian NHRIs with international standards, including the Paris Principles and General Observations of the Sub-Committee on Accreditation (SCA) of the Global Alliance of NHRIs (GANHRI). The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) has served as the Secretariat of ANNI since its establishment in 2006.

Website: <http://l.forum-asia.org/ANNI>

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