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About FORUM-ASIA
The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) is a Bangkok-based regional network of 85 member organisations across 23 countries, mainly in Asia. We have a consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council as well as a consultative relationship with the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights. 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 sub-regional offices in Geneva, Jakarta, and Kathmandu.

About the Cover Art
Our 2023 cover art illustrates FORUM-ASIA’s commitment to diversity and inclusion. It is a celebration of our shared challenges as well as victories, the differences that make us stronger, and above all, the universality of human rights. Regardless of our respective backgrounds, we all deserve to access and enjoy our fundamental rights and freedoms.

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FOREWORD

In 2022, human rights defenders and civil society at large bravely triumphed over some of the greatest challenges to democracy and sustainable development in Asia. FORUM-ASIA and its member organisations kept a watchful eye on the region’s most pressing cases of human rights violations, igniting awareness and combating the spread of disinformation surrounding abuses of power.

Together, we conquered roadblocks and celebrated victories with regard to our efforts to speak out against injustices; end the prevailing culture of impunity across different parts of Asia; safeguard, support, and empower defenders; and contribute to social good through sound policy recommendations and in-depth research.

In Myanmar, for example, we bolstered our campaign to hold the junta accountable for its atrocities. Similarly, we condemned the Taliban’s crimes in Afghanistan. In Indonesia, Bangladesh, Nepal, Thailand, and the Philippines, to name a few, we raised the alarm on repressive policies that trample upon people’s fundamental freedoms.

Throughout Asia, we denounced the excessive use of force against protestors; the silencing of journalists; the discrimination against minority groups; the judicial harassment against activists; and the dismantling of democratic institutions.

The rise in racism and religious extremism is seriously impacting human rights and democracy in many countries. The need to defend the universality of human rights is even more dire for a world where no one should ever be left behind.

FORUM-ASIA embarked on fact-finding missions to seek justice for workers whose labour rights were violated; for families whose health and livelihoods were compromised by corporate greed and government inaction; for women and LGBTIQ+ individuals who were forced to endure systemic gender-based discrimination; and for communities whose right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment was blatantly disregarded.

Throughout the year, we fostered stronger collaboration through consultations, open dialogues, capacity-building and knowledge-sharing workshops where our members and partners came together to share ideas, skills, and stories of hope. Their heartfelt dedication and unwavering determination to revitalise Asia’s civic space motivate us at FORUM-ASIA to keep going and growing as an organisation.

In 2022, we persevered through the obstacles posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. We embraced innovative ways of working to better address new and long-standing human rights issues in Asia. FORUM-ASIA also celebrated the next generation of defenders and the important causes they champion. After all, we entrust them with the formidable task of leading people’s movements toward the right direction in the years to come.

In September, we convened our 10th General Assembly in Bangkok, welcoming a new Executive Committee. Together, we released a joint communique emphasising the crucial role of civil society.

At 136 cases, FORUM-ASIA delivered its highest number of emergency assistance provided to human rights defenders in a single year. We also conducted a series of groundbreaking consultations with our South Asian members regarding the impact of COVID-19 on fundamental freedoms and civic space.

In addition, we held a national consultation with the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of assembly and association in India. Throughout the year, we carried out capacity-building workshops for human rights defenders and maintained productive engagements with relevant policymakers across the region.

There have been encouraging signs of progress for human rights in the Asia-Pacific region, with modest advancements in the rights of women and LGBTIQ+ individuals across several countries. Notably, Pakistan has taken a significant step forward by enacting a new law that criminalises torture, signaling a positive development in their commitment to human rights.

The growth of democracy has seen some governments changing hands. This offers hope for institutional reforms that FORUM-ASIA stands ready to work with in the name of human rights change. Unfortunately, many governments also squander these opportunities because of the lure of populism and the greed of corruption which ultimately dismantle the many possibilities for rights realization.

We hope this annual report provides readers with a comprehensive insight into the human rights situation in Asia. May this document also inspire collective action: Together, let us continue to strive for equality, justice, and human rights for all as there is still a long road to human rights for all.

Jerald Joseph
Chairperson

FORUM-ASIA Annual Report 2022
Thriving in Diversity, Solidarity, and Change
LIST OF ACRONYMS

ANNI  
ASEAN  
CSO  
FoAA  
FORUM-ASIA  
GANHRI  
HRC  
HRD  
LGBTIQ+  
NHRI  
NGO  
WHRD  
SAARC  
SOGI  
UN

ANNI  
ASEAN  
CSO  
FoAA  
FORUM-ASIA  
GANHRI  
HRC  
HRD  
LGBTIQ+  
NHRI  
NGO  
WHRD  
SAARC  
SOGI  
UN

Asian NGO Network on National Human Rights Institutions  
Association of Southeast Asian Nations  
Civil Society Organisation  
Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and of Association  
Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development  
Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions  
Human Rights Council  
Human Rights Defender  
Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer, and other Sexually or Gender-Diverse Persons  
National Human Rights Institution  
Non-Governmental Organisation  
Woman Human Rights Defender  
South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation  
Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity  
United Nations

GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS

Civic space  
An environment—both physical and digital—where individuals, groups, and communities can freely exercise and enjoy their rights and fundamental freedoms. It is a space where people can participate in public affairs; express their opinions; assemble peacefully; and engage in activities that contribute to the well-being of society.

Fundamental freedoms  
These are freedoms that all people have from birth. These include freedom from fear; freedom of speech and expression; freedom of thought, conscience, belief, and practice; freedom of association and movement; freedom to vote and choose; and other rights that enable individuals to act, think, and speak on their own terms and accord without fear, hindrance, or discrimination.

Human rights  
All human beings have human rights regardless of their sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, language, age, or any other status. Basic human rights include our right to life, liberty, food, health, privacy, opinion and expression, information, work, education, worship, among other rights that recognise and protect human dignity, equality, and fairness.

Human rights defender (HRD)  
Any person who advocates, protects, and promotes human rights in non-violent means, and recognises the universality of human rights.

Human rights violations  
Any actions that deprive or restrict individuals from practising and enjoying their fundamental freedoms and human rights. These violations can include arbitrary arrests; detention without trial; enactment of repressive legislation; denial of a fair trial; intimidation; harassment; torture, discrimination, and other forms of actions that infringe upon human rights.

Gender responsiveness  
Recognising and addressing the negative impacts of gender-based discrimination and inequality. It encompasses taking into account the diverse needs, perspectives, and experiences of individuals based on their sex, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression. By eliminating gender-based discrimination, organisations can ensure fairness, equality, and inclusivity in their work.

Judicial harassment  
Encompasses judicial actions or state actions under the pretext of legality that are intended to intimidate, harass, or interfere with the work of individuals and organisations protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms. It includes arbitrary arrest and detentions; enactment of repressive laws; denial of a fair trial; and other forms of charges, prosecutions, and judicial processes that undermine the rights and activities of human rights defenders.

National Human Rights Institution (NHRI)  
Independent bodies—established by law or constitution within a country—that promote and protect human rights. They assist states to fulfil their human rights obligations under international law. They monitor and report on the human rights situation in their countries; provide recommendations; investigate complaints; and raise awareness about human rights issues.

Paris Principles  
International minimum standards that provide guidance for the establishment and functioning of effective and credible NHRIs. These principles set out the key criteria that NHRIs should meet to effectively promote and protect human rights in their respective countries.

Transparency  
Openness and willingness to provide accurate and sufficient information to the public. This allows the public to make informed decisions and hold those in positions of power to account, resulting in better human rights governance.
ABOUT
FORUM-ASIA

The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development

FORUM-ASIA is a membership-based regional network of human rights organisations in Asia.

Our collective strength draws from our extensive network of 85 member organisations across 23 countries, mainly in Asia. We promote and protect human rights, civic space, and democracy in the region. We do this by empowering civil society and marginalised communities.

FORUM-ASIA holds a consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council as well as a consultative relationship with the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights, reinforcing our regional purpose.

VISION

To help build democratic, just, equitable, and sustainable societies in Asia—where human rights of all individuals, groups, and peoples are fully realised in accordance with international human rights standards and norms.

MISSION

To strengthen movements for human rights and sustainable development in Asia through research, advocacy, capacity-building, and solidarity actions with human rights defenders and civil society organisations.

VALUES

• Transparency & Accountability
• Diversity & Inclusion
• Relevance & Impact
• Creativity & Learning
• Safeguarding Wellbeing
• Empathy & Compassion

OUR STORY

In 1991, FORUM-ASIA was founded in Manila. Its founding members—19 organisations from nine countries—wanted to amplify the Asian voice in the global human rights landscape.

FORUM-ASIA recognised the need to enable and encourage human rights defenders to tell their own stories as they fight injustice and inequality in Asia.

Through the collaborative efforts facilitated by FORUM-ASIA, civil society organisations found a common space to unite and collaborate in unveiling and addressing the various challenges that impede democracy and sustainable development across the region.

In 1992, we established our Regional Secretariat in Bangkok, serving as a central hub for our operations. We have also set up offices in Geneva, Jakarta, and Kathmandu. While our physical presence is anchored in these locations, our work spans across Asia, reaching communities far and wide.

OUR JOURNEY CONTINUES

FORUM-ASIA provides a wide-reaching platform for Asian human rights organisations to speak in a unified voice. We provide a safe space for human rights defenders to share their advocacies, ideas, grievances, and support for one another.

Our network has since grown not only in number but also in collective strength, expertise, and determination to uphold the fundamental freedoms and human rights of all.

As we continue our journey, we remain committed to learning from our members and partners. We strive to keep up with the ever-evolving landscape of issues that influence and impact human rights in Asia.

In 2022, we dedicated ourselves to demonstrating our ability to adapt to change; face new and emerging challenges; embrace diversity, inclusion, and intersectionality; and cultivate the next generation of human rights defenders.

Together with our members, partners, and supporters, we will continue to champion human rights in Asia and work tirelessly towards building resilient communities that stand united in the face of adversity.
OUR PROGRAMMES

Human Rights Defenders (HRD) Programme
hrd@forum-asia.org
- Fosters a safe environment for HRDs through advocacy, documentation, and research.
- Provides emergency assistance for HRDs at risk.
- Trains the next generation of HRDs.
- Strengthens the network of HRDs at national and regional levels.

East Asia and ASEAN Programme
ea-asean@forum-asia.org
- Supports member organisations’ work on policy advocacy.
- Increases the resilience of member organisations so they may effectively engage in national, regional, and international levels of advocacy for the promotion and protection of civic and democratic spaces and human rights.
- Increases civil society capacity to monitor and respond to issues related to fundamental freedoms and civic space in East and Southeast Asia.
- Strengthens civil society participation, with the goal of raising awareness on and enhancing the effectiveness of ASEAN human rights mechanisms.

South Asia Programme
sasia@forum-asia.org
- Monitors and intervenes on issues related to fundamental freedoms and civic space in South Asia.
- Provides capacity-building opportunities for HRDs and CSOs.
- Supports the work of member organisations through solidarity actions at the national level.
- Conducts research and documentation for evidence-based advocacy at national and international levels.

National Human Rights Institutions (NHRI) Programme
anni@forum-asia.org
- Coordinates the work of the Asian NGO Network on National Human Rights Institutions (ANNI), a network of Asian non-governmental organisations and HRDs working on issues related to NHRIs.
- Advocates for the establishment of efficient NHRIs.
- Promotes NHRIs’ compliance with the Paris Principles.

United Nations Advocacy Programme
una@forum-asia.org
- Supports member organisations in their strategic use of UN human rights mechanisms.

Development and Knowledge Management
dkm@forum-asia.org
- Connects FORUM-ASIA’s work to business and human rights as well as environmental issues.

Communications and Media Programme
communications@forum-asia.org
- Maximises the organisation’s reach through media linkages, multimedia content, original publications, and various communication and advocacy tools.

Resource Mobilisation Programme
rm@forum-asia.org
- Coordinates resource mobilisation efforts to grow and sustain funding base.

Planning, Monitoring, and Evaluation
pme@forum-asia.org
- Strengthens the organisation’s internal planning, monitoring, and evaluation systems.
- Leads donor reporting and documentation processes.

Finance Programme
- Oversees the organisation’s financial resources.

Administration Programme
- Enhances the organisation’s administrative management.
HOW WE WORK

At FORUM-ASIA, we employ a range of strategies to effectively achieve our goals and create a lasting impact. These strategies include:

- **Documentation and Research**
- **Advocacy**
- **Solidarity Actions**
- **Capacity Building**
- **Coalition Building**
- **Institutional Capacity Consolidation**

As a membership-based network, FORUM-ASIA is governed by its organisational statutes and by-laws. These guiding documents outline the organisation’s objectives, means of intervention, organs, roles and functions, condition of membership, financial controls, reporting and auditing processes. These governance frameworks provide a solid foundation for our work and ensure accountability and transparency in all our activities. It is important to note that these living documents adapt with changing trends and challenges on the ground.

WHERE WE WORK

FORUM-ASIA ORGANS, FUNCTIONS, AND RESPONSIBILITIES

- **General Assembly**
  - Participate in
  - Approves
  - Recommends
  - Reports

- **Executive Committee**
  - Reports/Supports
  - Oversees
  - Elects

- **FORUM-ASIA Secretariat**
WHO WE WORK WITH

OUR MEMBERS IN 2022

Afghanistan
Civil Society and Human Rights Network (CSHRN)
Safety and Risk Mitigation Organisation (SRMO)

India
Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons (APDP)
Banglar Manabodhikar Suraksha Mancha (MASUM)
Centre for Communication and Development Studies (CCDS)
Dalit Foundation
Human Rights Alert (HRA)
Jananeethi
People’s Watch (PW)
Quill Foundation
Rights Education and Development Centre (READ)
South India Cell for Human Rights Education and Monitoring (SICHREM)

Indonesia
Alliance of Independent Journalists (AJI)
Commission for the Disappeared and Victims of Violence (KotraS)
Human Rights Working Group (HRWG)
Indonesian Human Rights Monitor (Imparsial)
Indonesian Legal Aid and Human Rights Association (PBHI)
Indonesia Legal Aid Foundation – Yayasan Lembaga Bantuan Hukum Indonesia (YLBHI)
Institute for Policy Research and Advocacy (ELSAM)
Yayasan Sekretariat Anak Merdeka Indonesia (SAMIN)

Kyrgyzstan
Bir Duino

Malaysia
Education and Research Association for Consumers Malaysia (ERA Consumer Malaysia)
Pusat KOMAS
Suara Rakyat Malaysia (SUARAM)

Maldives
Maldivian Democracy Network (MDN)

Japan
Human Rights Now

Kazakhstan
Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law (KIBHR)
Dignity – Kadyr-kassiyet (KK)
International Legal Initiative Public Foundation (ILI)

Myanmar
Equality Myanmar (EQMM)
Progressive Voice (PV)
Women’s League of Burma (WLB)

Nepal
Community Self Reliance Centre (CSRC)
Informal Sector Service Centre (INSEC)
Jakriti Child and Youth Concern Nepal (JCYCN)
Karnali Integrated Rural Development and Research Centre (KIRDARC)
National Alliance for Human Rights and Social Justice – Nepal (Human Rights Alliance)
Women’s Rehabilitation Centre (WOREC)
Youth Action Nepal (YoAC)

Pakistan
Association of Women for Awareness & Motivation (AWAM)
Awaz Foundation Pakistan – Centre for Development Services
Bytes for All, Pakistan (B4A)
Defence of Human Rights (DHR)
Forum for Dignity Initiatives
National Commission for Justice and Peace (NCJP)
Potohar Organization for Development Advocacy (PODA)
Society for the Protection of the Rights of the Child (SPARC)
The Awakening

New Zealand
Human Rights Measurement Initiative (HRMI)

Bangladesh
Ain O Salish Kendra (ASK)
Madaripur Legal Aid Association (MLAA)
Odikhak
Resource Integration Center (RIC)
Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU)

Cambodia
Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights (LiCADHO)
Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association (ADHOC)
Worker’s Information Centre (WIC)

Mongolia
Equality Myanmar (EQMM)
Progressive Voice (PV)
Women’s League of Burma (WLB)

Malaysia
Education and Research Association for Consumers Malaysia (ERA Consumer Malaysia)
Pusat KOMAS
Suara Rakyat Malaysia (SUARAM)

Maldives
Maldivian Democracy Network (MDN)

Japan
Human Rights Now

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Potohar Organization for Development Advocacy (PODA)
Society for the Protection of the Rights of the Child (SPARC)
The Awakening

New Zealand
Human Rights Measurement Initiative (HRMI)
In September 2022, FORUM-ASIA successfully convened its 10th General Assembly in Bangkok, wherein members from all over Asia elected the following representatives to be part of our new Executive Committee. This in-person gathering concluded with the release of our joint communiqué, honoring the importance of civil society.

The Executive Committee serves as FORUM-ASIA’s policy-making body, which supervises the work of the Secretariat.
OUR PARTNERS IN 2022


GLOBAL PARTNERS - Amnesty International · Artist at Risk Connection – PEN America · Asia Pacific Network of Environment Defenders (APNED) · Business & Human Rights Resource Centre · CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation · Civil Rights Defenders · Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI) · DefendDefenders - University of York · Diplomacy Training Program (DTP) · Front Line Defenders · Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI) · Human Rights Watch · International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL) · International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) · International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) · International Service for Human Rights (ISHR) · Internex · International Research & Exchanges Board (IREX) · Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights · Pact · Reporters Without Borders (RSF) · The UN Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association · The UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders · TrustLaw · UN Environment Programme · World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) · ACLED (The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project) · The Asia Foundation

REGIONAL PARTNERS - ALTSEAN Burma · Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact (AIPP) · Asia Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions (APF) · Asian Federation Against Involuntary Disappearances (AFAD) · Asian Research Institute for Environmental Law (ARIEL) · Center for Environmental Concerns (CEC) · EarthRights International · Heinrich Boll Foundation · ILGA Asia · Mekong Cultural Hub · Southeast Asia Public Interest Lawyers Network (SEAPIL) · Urgent Action Fund for Women’s Human Right

COUNTRY PARTNERS - India - Human Rights Defenders Alert · Indonesia - Centre for Strategic and International Studies · Protection International Indonesia · Philippines - Legal Rights and Natural Resources Center · Medical Action Group · Sri Lanka - Centre for Policy Alternatives · Thailand - Institute of Human Rights and Peace Studies, Mahidol University · Protection International · Sangsan Anakot Yawachon

OUR DONORS IN 2022
Why FORUM-ASIA?
AMPLIFYING VOICES OF THE PEOPLE

At FORUM-ASIA, we believe that the discourse on human rights should transcend the boundaries of offices, courtrooms, classrooms, and computer screens. Such conversations belong to everyone and not just an elite few.

Since its founding in 1991, FORUM-ASIA has acted in solidarity with human rights defenders, grassroots movements, civil society organisations, and local communities all over Asia.

We encourage people to tell their own stories, free from the dictates of gatekeeping. We believe in the power of truth-telling, collective action, and the very people we serve.

Who else would know best about the plight of workers other than the workers themselves? Who else could come up with the best solutions to the problems communities face other than the community members themselves? Who else are in a better position to decide on their future other than the people themselves?

FORUM-ASIA applauds and supports the strength of people’s movements. We want to highlight—as well as nurture and protect—the robustness of such movements in Asia.

THRIVING IN DIVERSITY

FORUM-ASIA’s uniqueness lies in our wide network of human rights organisations operating on the ground across different parts of Asia.

Each of our member organisations brings their own field of expertise, pool of partners and talents, as well as unique histories and ways of working.

FORUM-ASIA members are brought together by a shared desire for social change, justice, and equality. While our similarities keep us close, our differences also make us stronger. We thrive in the diversity of our members. The fight for human rights, after all, transcends geographical boundaries, culture, religion, ethnicity, age, gender, and all other facets of identity.

We are proud to have member organisations working on environmental protection; business and human rights; gender equality; labour rights and economic justice; health and education; peace and security; press freedom and freedom of expression; fair elections and good governance among several other human rights issues.

THE ASIAN VOICE

FORUM-ASIA strives to ensure that the Asian voice remains relevant in the global human rights discourse.

The human rights situation in Asia comes with its own set of challenges. To better understand and address the latter, FORUM-ASIA brings together some of the region’s most credible human rights organisations to work alongside each other towards building open, democratic, and resilient communities across Asia.
WHAT HAPPENED IN 2022?
KEY ISSUES WE WORKED ON

The year 2022 witnessed a combination of setbacks and challenges to human rights in Asia as certain governments continue to pursue repressive policies against its own citizens. Despite these, FORUM-ASIA relentlessly pursued justice and equality in Asia’s human rights landscape. We actively contributed to seeking viable solutions, advocating for accountability, and fostering transparency.

Outlined below are some notable human rights issues that we and our dedicated members have focused on throughout the year.

THREATS TO GOOD GOVERNANCE

Transparency and accountability are the bedrock of good governance. FORUM-ASIA continues to monitor the region, ensuring that such bedrock remains intact.

Myanmar

One year since the military seized power and overthrew the country’s democratically-elected government

FORUM-ASIA applauds the people’s movement in Myanmar for remaining steadfast in their fight for their rights. Despite the tumultuous year following the attempted coup, protestors have persevered with non-violent means of restoring democracy in their beloved country. Peaceful protests, however, were met with brutal military action resulting in imprisonments, displacements, enforced disappearances, deaths, and the dismantling of democratic institutions. Since then, FORUM-ASIA has bolstered its #SolidarityForMyanmar campaign to keep the world attuned to the human rights violations happening in Myanmar. Our campaign also combats disinformation, which we consider to be a serious threat to democracy.

Through joint statements and open letters, we have firmly expressed our call to hold the junta accountable for its atrocious crimes. We have also asked to block the junta from accessing UN and ASEAN platforms. We urged the ASEAN to engage with and recognise the National Unity Government as Myanmar’s democratically-elected government. In addition, FORUM-ASIA has worked internationally to further delegitimise the junta and deny its recognition by the UN and other international forums. We also called to bar the junta-controlled NHRI from regional and international networks of NHRs.

Indonesia

The country’s new Criminal Code subverts democracy and undermines civil liberties

The new Criminal Code was passed by the Indonesian Parliament despite massive protests against certain provisions which could trample upon people’s freedom of expression and right to peaceful assembly, among other fundamental freedoms. Such provisions, for example, punish those who ‘insult’ public officials, go against state ideology, and commit blasphemy. These could be used to criminalise dissent, potentially disrupting the work of human rights defenders as well as the safety of religious minorities.

Premarital sex and cohabitation—if reported by parents and children of those involved—are also sanctioned to up to one year in prison. This is a violation of privacy; furthermore, sex between consenting adults should not be a criminal offence. Such provisions could also be misused to criminalise sexual assault survivors and discriminate against LGBTIQ+ individuals and same-sex couples. FORUM-ASIA called on the Indonesian Government to amend or repeal such repressive provisions.

Afghanistan

One year since the Taliban took over and escalated the country’s human rights crisis

The Taliban’s return to power escalated the human rights crisis in Afghanistan, causing poverty, malnutrition, deaths, violence, and oppression. Human rights defenders—including journalists, academics, lawyers, activists, and artists—have either been silenced, persecuted, or killed. Without press freedom, the people of Afghanistan have been restricted from sharing their truth to the world as well as accessing life-saving information. Women and girls have been deprived of their fundamental freedoms, with the Taliban limiting their movement and access to education, employment, healthcare, among other social services.

FORUM-ASIA condemned the human rights violations committed by the Taliban, including its dissolution of Afghanistan’s Independent Human Rights Commission, Ministry of Women’s Affairs, and Independent Bar Association. We called on the international community to hold the Taliban accountable for violating the fundamental freedoms of millions of Afghans.
TARGETING OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS (HRDs)

HRDs put their own lives—as well as their families—at risk in their pursuit of protecting fundamental freedoms; documenting human rights violations; and investigating and exposing wrongdoings.

FORUM-ASIA has been raising the alarm on judicial harassment—among several other forms of abuse—faced by HRDs working across Asia.

We have consistently demanded for fair trials, immediate release, dropping of charges, protection and justice for HRDs who have been on the receiving end of trumped-up charges, false accusations, arbitrary arrests and detention, physical violence, intimidation, and threats. Below are some of the HRDs we have advocated for in 2022:

- Dang Dinh Bach, Vietnamese lawyer and environmental rights defender
- Leila de Lima, former Filipino senator
- Sukhgerel Dugersuren, Mongolian HRD
- Kirsten Han and Rocky Howe, Singaporean HRDs
- Estia Maulidiyanti and Harris Arhat, Indonesian HRDs
- Khurram Parvez, Kashmiri HRD
- Gokarakonda Naga Saibaba, Indian professor
- Wanchalearm Satsaksit, Thai pro-democracy HRD
- Teesta Setalvad, Indian social activist and journalist
- Fahad Shah, Kashmiri journalist
- Chhim Sithar, Cambodian union leader
- Sombath Somphone, Lao civil society leader
- Chow Hang Tung, Hong Kong lawyer
- Filipino HRDs belonging to CSOs Karapatan, GABRIELA, and the Rural Missionaries of the Philippines
- Odhikar and its staff, Bangladeshi human rights organisation
- People’s Watch, Indian human rights organisation

While their names may not be on the list, FORUM-ASIA expresses its concern and support for all HRDs in Asia. It is important to note that many cases involving the targeting of HRDs remain underreported.

FREEDOMS UNDER ATTACK

Human rights is a universal and unalienable right. FORUM-ASIA reminds governments of their obligation to protect people’s right to fair elections, peaceful assembly, and free speech, among all other fundamental freedoms. Together with our members, we aim to protect and vitalise the region’s already shrinking civic space.

In Bangladesh, we opposed the government’s crackdown against opposition political parties in the lead-up to the national elections. We also urged the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to look into the Bangladesh Government’s crackdown against journalists and activists.

In Sri Lanka, we condemned a similar pattern of suppression in Sri Lanka, where peaceful protests were met with excessive force. Journalists covering these protests were also targeted by authorities.

In Nepal, we expressed concern over the Election Commission’s policy to monitor social media content as the national elections neared.

In Cambodia, we demanded the government to scrap a policy that could undermine people’s internet freedom. In Timor-Leste, we asked the government to ensure that journalists and human rights defenders can carry on their work without fear or hindrance.

In India, we condemned the harassment of minority rights activists who spoke out against state-sponsored attacks and discrimination targeting Muslims and other minority communities. In Kazakhstan, peaceful protests—a culmination of people’s frustration over the country’s widening inequality—were met with violence and baseless accusations of terrorism.

We denounced the government’s persecution of its citizens’ dissenting voices.

In Thailand, we expressed how the conviction of a protestors—who placed a sticker over the Thai King’s portrait—sets a disturbing precedent for civic space. We reiterated our call to repeal laws that curtail freedom of expression.

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STRENGTHENING DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS

National human rights institutions (NHRIs) are independent bodies that protect people’s political, civil, social, and cultural rights. FORUM-ASIA believes that NHRIs are essential in helping countries meet their human rights obligations under international law. Hence the need to ensure their compliance with the Paris Principles, which set the standards for effective and credible NHRIs.

Through the Asian NGO Network on National Human Rights Institutions (ANNI), we asked the Government of Bangladesh to strengthen its NHRI’s ability to fulfill its mandate as well as to implement greater transparency in its appointment procedures. In Malaysia, we issued a similar call for transparency in its NHRI’s appointments. Likewise, we expressed concern for the government and Human Rights Commission of Malaysia’s delays in publishing annual reports. In Pakistan, we questioned why its NHRI remains non-functional, highlighting the need for urgent action to rectify the situation.

SEEKING ACCOUNTABILITY

For far too long, cases of corruption, misgovernance, and human rights violations go unpunished because the very leaders who are entrusted to uphold the rule of law are the ones who abuse power and violate such laws.

In July 2022, then President Gotabaya Rajapaksa fled Sri Lanka for Maldives amid protests and the country’s worsening economic crisis. FORUM-ASIA condemned the Maldives authorities for aiding Rajapaksa escape from accountability. We considered Rajapaksa’s decision to flee as a deliberate attempt to evade accountability for the war crimes and corruption he was alleged of.

One notable outcome at the 51st session of the UN Human Rights Council is FORUM-ASIA’s successful advocacy to extend the mandate of the UN/ OHCHR accountability project in Sri Lanka, which aims to collect and preserve information related to gross violations and abuses of international human rights and humanitarian law in the country for future accountability processes. This development provides hope for those seeking accountability for past atrocities committed in the country.

Five years after the genocide committed against the Rohingya, FORUM-ASIA reaffirmed its commitment to act in solidarity with the Rohingya. We supported the call to end the impunity of the Myanmar military, to seek justice for the Rohingya, and to ensure the restoration of the Rohingya’s rights. The world ought to know that the Myanmar military should be held accountable for the massacre, torture, rape, and forced displacement inflicted upon the Rohingya population.

In the Philippines, we urged the government to cease its unlawful ‘war on drugs,’ repeal the Anti-Terror Law, and end the red-tagging of human rights defenders. FORUM-ASIA asked the International Criminal Court to resume its investigations into the country’s alleged crimes against humanity in relation to the ‘drug war.’ Those responsible for extrajudicial killings and arbitrary arrests should be held to account.

In Malaysia, we urged the government to rethink its immigration detention policies since the deprivation of liberty among those seeking safety and asylum is a human rights violation. In Cambodia, FORUM-ASIA called to investigate and abolish so-called ‘slave compounds,’ where human trafficking is suspected to take place. In Nepal, we appealed to the local government to cease its forceful mass evictions of informal settlers whose peaceful protests—demanding alternative housing options—were met with harsh demolition drives.

During the 49th session of the UN Human Rights Council, we actively supported the call to end the prevailing culture of impunity in Bangladesh. We condemned the human rights violations committed by the elite force Rapid Action Battalion. Likewise, we opposed the government’s repressive laws, which limit people’s right to information and freedom of expression.
IN NUMBERS: VIOLATIONS AGAINST HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS (HRDs)

The following data is from FORUM-ASIA’s records of violations against HRDs from 1 January 2021 to 31 December 2022 across 22 monitored Asian countries.

- 1,636 violations against HRDs were recorded within two years.
- The highest number of violations were logged in Myanmar (205 cases), followed by Thailand (182) and India (168).
- Judicial harassment is the most common violation experienced by HRDs in Asia.
- 33% of violations involved student and youth defenders.
- Majority of violations were committed by the police.
- Pro-Democracy Defenders were at the highest risk among all defenders in Asia.
- Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) were the 2nd most targeted group of defenders.
- Among WHRDs, there were 443 recorded violations.
- In 2022, 76% of violations against WHRDs were committed by State Actors.
- Among Media Workers, 384 violations were recorded, including judicial harassment, threats, and violence.
- They are the most affected by physical violence among all defenders.

AMPLIFYING VOICES. FORUM-ASIA puts community members at the front and centre of every program we undertake. A protest march by The Federation of University Teachers’ Associations (FUTA) in Galle, Sri Lanka.

Photo Credit: Sakuna M Gamage
### TIMELINE: KEY ACTIVITIES IN 2022

- **31 January**
  - Online press briefing with FORUM-ASIA members and partners regarding the one-year anniversary of the attempted coup in Myanmar

- **21-23 February**
  - 15th Regional Consultation of ANNI

- **28 February-1 April**
  - 49th regular session of the UN Human Rights Council

- **March**
  - Submission of stakeholder reports for the Universal Periodic Review of India
  - Submission of stakeholder reports for the Universal Periodic Review of Indonesia

- **18 March**
  - Members’ coordination meeting in Nepal

- **26 April**
  - Online report launch and panel discussion: ‘Making Institutions Count: Strengthening Support for WHRDs in Asia by NHRI’

- **April-September**
  - Online report launch and panel: Research: Implications of repressive measures related to the COVID-19 pandemic on human rights and civic space in South Asia

- **5 May**
  - Online event: ‘Beyond ASEAN’s Five-Point Consensus: Humanitarian Assistance to Myanmar’

- **4-6 May**
  - ANNI CSO Consultation - Myanmar

- **12 May**
  - Launch: ASEAN Human Rights Advocacy Toolkit

- **1 May-30 July**
  - Analysis: Laws and judgments related to freedom of peaceful assembly in India
  - Documentation: Prominent cases across selected states in India

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- **6-10 June**
  - Online event: How internet shutdowns and disruptions affect the work of HRDs and how to navigate such challenges during RightsCon 2022

- **7 June**
  - Members’ Coordination Meeting in Afghanistan

- **13-16 June**
  - Fact-finding mission: Dinagat Islands, Philippines

- **13 June-8 July**
  - 50th regular session of the UN Human Rights Council

- **20-24 June**
  - Fact-finding mission: Didipio, Philippines

- **26 July**
  - Members’ Coordination meeting in Sri Lanka

- **4-17 July**
  - Fact-finding mission: Kyrgyzstan

- **11-22 July**
  - Central Asia scoping mission: Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan

- **14 July**
  - Members’ coordination meeting in Nepal

- **16 July-4 August**
  - Fact-finding mission: Myanmar

- **25-29 July**
  - Monitoring and evaluation training and learning exchange meeting for MISEREOR/DKA Partners

- **26-27 July**
  - National consultation on civic space in Nepal

- **26-29 July**
  - Fact-finding mission: Manila, Philippines

- **28-29 July**
  - (Thailand) Learning and exchange meeting with holistic security project partners

- **18-19 August**
  - Consultation: Thailand national action plan on business and human rights

- **August-October**
  - Online training: Increasing journalists’ public awareness on the Electronic and Information Transaction Law revision for press freedom in Indonesia

- **15-25 August**
  - Fact-finding mission: Pakistan

- **31 August**
  - Members’ Coordination meeting in Pakistan

- **6-7 September**
  - ANNI CSO Consultation in Nepal

- **9-11 September**
  - (Thailand) Youth Workshop: Right to protest, freedom of assembly and of association, and human rights mechanisms

- **12 September-7 October**
  - 51st regular session of the UN Human Rights Council

- **14 September**
  - (Switzerland) Side event on Afghanistan’s human rights crisis at UNHRC 51

- **15 September-15 October**
  - Fact-finding mission: Sri Lanka

- **19 September**
  - Online event: Crackdown against people’s movements in Sri Lanka

- **26-29 November**
  - Fact-finding mission: Indonesia

- **7 October**
  - National Consultation with the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of peaceful assembly and of association in India

- **25-27 October**
  - (Thailand) Asia Pacific Environmental Human Rights Defenders Forum

- **24-26 October**
  - Facilitated participation of CSOs in the 2nd ASEAN-EU Civil Society Forum on Human Rights in Jakarta and the 4th ASEAN-EU Human Rights Dialogue

- **2-4 November**
  - (Cambodia) ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ASEAN Peoples Forum (ACSC/APP)

- **6-9 November**
  - Capacity-building and knowledge-sharing workshop for second-generation of human rights defenders from Bangladesh

- **7-18 November**
  - 41st session of the Universal Periodic Review Working Group: Review of India, Indonesia, and the Philippines

- **8 November**
  - Universal Periodic Review (UPR) side-event on Indonesia: ‘Human rights situation in Indonesia: critical engagement through UPR’

- **16 November**
  - (South Korea) Launch: ANNI Report - Korea Country Chapter

- **27 November-3 December**
  - Universal Periodic Review: Pre-sessions on Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and Republic of Korea

- **28-29 November**
  - (Nepal) South Asian consultation on the impact of COVID-19 on fundamental freedoms and civic space

- **5-7 December**
  - Asia regional consultation with the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of peaceful assembly and of association

- **8-14 December**
  - (Thailand) 4th edition of the Global Advocacy Learning Programme (GALP) on human rights and development
SNAPSHOT: PUBLICATIONS IN 2022

Fact-Finding Mission Reports

- The Hands That Feed Us: Struggles of Farm Agricultural Workers in Thailand
- Bent Roads: Exploring the Impact of Discrimination against Women in Nepal
- Mining Away Freedoms: Traditions of Community Rights for Their Rights in the Philippines
- Justice in Waiting: Kumtor and a Community’s Struggle for Their Rights

On Upholding Fundamental Freedoms

- 2021: FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS IN SOUTH ASIA
- The ASEAN Human Rights Advocacy Toolkit

On Protecting Human Rights Defenders

- Defenders in Asia: Holding the Line Amid Mounting Challenges

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AT A GLANCE: PROGRAMME

MILESTONES IN 2022

**Human Rights Defenders (HRD) Programme**

- Supported **136** cases of emergency assistance for HRDs at risk
- **5** urgent appeals on emblematic HRD cases submitted to UN Special Procedures Mandate Holders

1 amicus submitted on the South Korea National Security Act

- Received the ‘HRD of the Year Award’ from SRMO (Safety and Risk Mitigation Organisation) for contributing to HRD protection in Afghanistan.
- Co-organised the 2nd Asia Pacific Environmental Human Rights Defenders Forum.
- Facilitated **2** global discussions on the HRD situation.
- Trained CSOs on providing direct rapid response assistance for HRDs.
- Organised holistic security trainings in **3** Asian countries.

**National Human Rights Institutions (NHRI) Programme**

- **15th** ANNI Regional Consultation brought together members and advisors from **11** Asian countries
- **3** national ANNI CSO consultations (Myanmar, Nepal, India)

- Launched a report and panel discussion on the role of NHRIs in protecting women human rights defenders.
- Joint stakeholder submission on the performance of the National Human Rights Commission of India to GANHRI’s Sub-Committee on Accreditation (GANHRI-SCA).

**South Asia Programme**

- **27** second-generation HRDs trained
- **7** South Asian countries covered by our research on the impacts of repressive COVID-19 measures on human rights and civic space

- Conducted a series of national and sub-regional level consultations with HRDs on fundamental freedoms and civic space issues.
- Facilitated a national consultation with the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of assembly and of association in India.
- Engaged with influential policymakers—including parliamentarians, parliamentary committees, and the former Chief Justice of Nepal—regarding fundamental freedoms and civic space issues.
- Organised a series of members’ meetings with South Asian members—especially in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Maldives, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Pakistan.

**Development and Knowledge Management Programme**

- **22** young HRDs trained through our Global Advocacy Learning Programme (GALP) on Human Rights and Development
- **6** fact-finding missions completed, involving more than **200** participants (Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Philippines, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Pakistan)

- Our 2021 fact-finding report, ‘Tied Hands,’ played a pivotal role in shaping the visit of the UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Professor Oliver De Schutter, to Nepal in December 2021. Following his visit, De Schutter issued a statement highlighting the challenges of freeing bonded labour, including the Harawa Charawa. Subsequently, Nepal’s former Prime Minister, Sher Bahadur Deuba, made a historic announcement in 2022 acknowledging the freedom of the Harawa Charawa, citing the provisions of the Kamaya Labour (Prohibition) Act of 2001.
### Resource Mobilisation Programme

- **11** proposal submissions, surpassing the annual target of three
- **9** successful proposals, including **5** extension and expansion proposals for existing projects

- Updated internal Resource Mobilisation Process Guidelines to incorporate lessons learned and best practices.

### East Asia and ASEAN Programme

- **140** advocates in Indonesia trained on the EIT Law’s human rights implications
- **60** youth activists in Thailand trained on fundamental freedoms and human rights mechanisms
- **2** submissions on the Anti-Money Laundering Office and Not-for-Profit laws in Thailand

- Published a toolkit for ASEAN human rights advocacy, consisting of 6 modules and 1 e-learning guide.
- Researched on the impacts of COVID-19 on human rights in Malaysia.
- Delivered continuous updates on the civic space situation of Malaysia, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, Timor-Leste, and Singapore (in partnership with CIVICUS Monitor).
- Delivered monthly updates on the Myanmar crisis (in partnership with CoupWatch and ALTSEAN Burma).
- Delivered consistent updates on the human rights situation in Southeast Asia through [humanrightsinasean.info](http://humanrightsinasean.info).
- Held a national consultation in Thailand on business and human rights, and a regional consultation on freedom of assembly and of association.
- Conducted advocacy campaigns and webinars on key issues in East and Southeast Asia such as citizen empowerment and freedom of expression.
- Carried out awareness drives regarding the problematic provisions of Indonesia’s new Criminal Code.
- Conducted a baseline study on the ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework.
- Represented civil society in different engagements with the ASEAN.

### United Nations Advocacy Programme

- **52** HRDs supported to participate in UN meetings and regular sessions of the UN Human Rights Council
- **22** HRDs trained to engage with UN human rights mechanisms
- **6** Universal Periodic Review stakeholder submissions facilitated

- Delivered oral statements during the 49th, 50th, and 51st sessions of the UNHRC.
- Drew attention of the UN human rights mechanisms to the situation in Indian-Administered Jammu and Kashmir, India, Bangladesh, the Philippines, and Indonesia.
- Drew enhanced international attention and scrutiny of the situation in Myanmar through regular monitoring, reporting, and dialogue at the UNHRC.
- Supported the enhancement of the UN Human Rights Office’s monitoring and reporting on the situation in Sri Lanka, particularly on the impacts of corruption and economic crises on human rights.
- Contributed to the extension of the Special Rapporteur’s mandate on the human rights situation in Afghanistan as well as to the convening of an urgent debate of the UNHRC on the situation of Afghan women and girls.

### Communications and Media Programme

- **219** media mentions of FORUM-ASIA, including local and international outlets
- **15.5%** growth in social media engagement
- **83** advocacy statements published: media lines, press releases, open letters, FORUM-ASIA statements, and joint statements
- **9** original research publications supported
Staff Stories: Lived Experiences, Learnings, and Aspirations

The following collection of short essays offers a glimpse into the personal journeys of FORUM-ASIA staff members. Through their own words, they share their lived experiences, valuable learnings, and aspirations.

These stories not only reflect the diverse backgrounds and perspectives within our team, but also demonstrate how the individual advocacies of our staff contribute to and enhance our organisation’s overarching goals, core values, and ideologies. We hope these narratives inspire critical thought, action, and compassion among readers.

A Transformative Journey
by Camikara Yuwono
Communications and Media Programme Associate

Joining FORUM-ASIA has been a transformative journey, one that has not only provided me with professional growth but also created a deep sense of belonging within the human rights organisation, its work, and the wider community.

From my beginnings in the organisation as an intern, to progressing as a fellow and now an associate, each step has allowed me to forge meaningful connections with like-minded individuals.

Within FORUM-ASIA, I have made friends, colleagues, and found kindred spirits who share a passion for fighting injustice. These relationships have become a source of inspiration and support, fuelling my determination to make a difference in the lives of those affected by human rights violations.

As someone working in communications, I understand the pivotal role of effective communication in advancing the mission of human rights organisations. Through communication, we can ensure that our voices are heard and that our work reaches the public. Though we are surrounded by devastating news about human rights violations almost everyday, by sharing our achievements, challenges, and aspirations, we can cultivate empathy, understanding, and a broader base of support for the cause.

Communicating for change through hopeful narratives has been my passion from the outset, and I am committed to further honing this skill. I firmly believe that storytelling, leveraging social media platforms, and community engagement are powerful tools for elevating the human rights discourse. By amplifying voices, advocating for justice, and disseminating our work, we can inspire action and bring about meaningful societal transformation.

In my journey with FORUM-ASIA, I have not only found a place where I can contribute to meaningful change but also one where I truly belong. The shared values, dedication to human rights, and the collective spirit of the organisation have provided me with a sense of purpose and fulfillment. It is within this community that I have found a home, surrounded by individuals who inspire me, challenge me, and support me in my pursuit of justice and equality.

Being part of FORUM-ASIA has allowed me to align my personal convictions with my professional aspirations, solidifying my belief that this is where I belong and where I can make a lasting impact on the world.
I grew up during the war in Afghanistan.

My lived experiences from the international and domestic upheavals of my country, coupled with my journey in exile, have taught me what it takes to be an actual human rights defender (HRD). It is a constant and tough fight, but it brings so much value.

On a personal level, advocating for human rights can sometimes directly threaten your own life. You cannot know what might happen to you or your family tomorrow—you might get arrested, deported, or even killed. There is also a disturbing dilemma that comes with either being a silent observer or risking your own life to speak truth to power.

Unfortunately, many HRDs have no audience nor platforms to speak their truths and address their concerns. Some HRDs also do not have access to adequate resources and opportunities necessary for the protection of their very own rights and freedoms. As an HRD myself, I have come across these challenges in one way or another.

In June 2022, I joined FORUM-ASIA while in exile, working remotely on Afghanistan’s human rights issues.

Ten months after the Taliban takeover, I—like many other HRDs—was struggling. I was in a state of confusion, helplessness, and anger.

From morning till night, I was receiving calls, messages, and emails from family, friends, colleagues, and fellow HRDs who were seeking help and protection from the Taliban’s violence in Afghanistan.

Individual efforts were of not much use, almost all government programmes were stuck, and the Taliban have been increasingly silencing advocates. I desperately needed technical, institutional, and professional support to help myself and others. FORUM-ASIA—especially its HRD and UN Advocacy programmes—provided me with the opportunity, capacity, and resources to gain more knowledge, hone my skills, and strengthen my advocacies.

The friendly environment and trust bestowed among colleagues also helped me expand my network, allowing me to gain new perspectives and ideas from a very diverse group of experts coming from different parts of the globe. Through this network, I learned about the best practices in human rights advocacy and developed a more cosmopolitan understanding of human rights issues.

The global human rights regime today is challenged by power imbalances between nation states. The politicisation and securitisation of human rights values—as seen now in countries like Afghanistan, Myanmar, and Taiwan—downplay the role of human rights organisations, advocates, and HRDs.

An effective human rights advocacy, therefore, requires a dedicated and well-trained team in order to empower and expand the roles of HRDs and people’s movements as well as to open more inclusive avenues for fostering meaningful collaboration among individual advocates and organisations.

I am thankful for having found this team through FORUM-ASIA.
**Feminist-in-Progress**
by Prarthana Rao
Development and Knowledge Management Programme Officer

What does it mean for an organisation to be feminist?

How deep do we need to delve into the values and behaviours of our donors, employees, partners, vendors, and consultants to say that we 100% adhere to the principles of feminism and gender equality?

As a feminist, these are questions I have often grappled with. After years of working in different places, I have realised that one of the most important values for any organisation that strives to be feminist is its willingness to learn, grow, and act.

And that is what sets FORUM-ASIA apart. The openness with which FORUM-ASIA approaches the subject leaves space for dialogue, critical reflections, and learning.

FORUM-ASIA does not hesitate to look internally first and re-evaluate its policies and practices to be more gender-inclusive. At the same time, it also tries to make all programmes and activities sensitive to the needs of individuals belonging to diverse genders. There is recognition that this is a continuous process and that every experience is a learning to get us one step closer to the ideal.

The management at FORUM-ASIA is always willing to turn to younger and more knowledgeable colleagues for advice on integrating a gender lens into our organisational strategy and programmatic work. This creates an environment for those with lived experience and greater expertise to contribute to shaping our work to ensure real inclusivity.

It is natural for all membership-based organisations to face challenges, but our common beliefs allow us to work towards greater representation in all our work with our partners. We consciously support organisations, activities, and projects that are inclusive. And this commitment is re-enforced in FORUM-ASIA’s Strategic Plan, which places gender equality at the core of our work.

This is what makes FORUM-ASIA a ‘feminist-in-progress’ organisation that focuses on continuous self-improvement and a supportive workplace for all.

**A Culture of Genuine Listening**

by Nichapa Chanwisitkul
East Asia-ASEAN Programme Associate

Every day at work, have you ever counted how many times you hear the question, ‘What do you think?’

In FORUM-ASIA, it feels as if this question is on repeat–echoing throughout our meetings. Sometimes it can be a bit overwhelming, but I am grateful for it because it is among the best parts of our work culture.

I feel valued in this organisation precisely because of FORUM-ASIA’s culture of genuine listening wherein every staff member—including myself—is heard and respected.

I am also grateful for our organisation’s leaders who truly value our individual voices, hence creating an inclusive environment where everyone can freely and comfortably express their thoughts.

FORUM-ASIA’s commitment to genuine listening creates an incredibly democratic work environment. It is not just empty words, but a genuine effort to ensure that each and every one of us is heard in those meeting rooms. I feel empowered knowing that my opinions matter and that they contribute to the decisions we make as an organisation.

In my experience, this culture of genuine listening is a small but powerful action that creates a safe space within our organisation. It encourages open dialogue and embraces diverse perspectives. It makes me feel included, seen, and valued regardless of my identity or background. I am grateful for being part of such a diverse and inclusive team, where I can express myself and contribute to our collective goals.

Moreover, the presence of our staff union plays a significant role in creating this positive environment. It provides a platform where I feel supported and represented. I am thankful for the union’s efforts in promoting democracy and ensuring that everyone’s voice is heard regardless of their position, age, or level.

By embracing this culture of genuine listening, FORUM-ASIA has taken inclusivity to another level, and I am proud to be part of it. It is a testament to the power of democracy in creating a space where every voice matters and has the opportunity to contribute for the better.
FORUM-ASIA’s STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES
OBJECTIVE 1
EMPOWERING CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS (CSOs) AND HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS (HRDs)

FORUM-ASIA is committed to empowering CSOs and HRDs across Asia. We aim to facilitate their active and meaningful participation in policy-making processes related to human rights, democratic governance, and sustainable development. We do so by organising policy dialogues, stakeholders’ consultations, capacity-building, and knowledge-sharing workshops among civil society actors and policymakers at national, regional, and international levels.

DOCUMENTING TESTIMONIES AND SEEKING ACCOUNTABILITY

In 2022, FORUM-ASIA and its member organisations conducted comprehensive fact-finding missions to call attention to cases of power imbalance, gender inequality, environmental degradation, and intimidation against HRDs and local communities. Through these efforts, we aimed to document testimonies, raise awareness, and advocate for accountability.

In Pakistan, we shed light on the struggles of women agricultural workers. Despite being at the forefront of feeding the nation, they suffer from sexual and gender-based harassment, low wages, and food insecurity. FORUM-ASIA urged the government to recognise the valuable contributions of women agricultural workers. We also called for the development of policies that actually uphold women’s right to decent work and fair compensation.

In China, the Philippines, and Kyrgyzstan, we dug deep into the detrimental effects of mining on the environment as well as people’s health and livelihoods. We also highlighted testimonies that allude to alleged collusion between mining companies and governments in silencing dissent and prioritising business interests over people’s well-being. We urged both parties to put human rights at the centre of everything they do.

Meanwhile, in Myanmar, we looked into the harmful impacts of so-called ‘development projects,’ which—under the guise of economic growth—infinge on the rights and freedoms of local communities.

The launch of the fact-finding mission reports was attended by representatives from the media, governments, mining companies, local communities, and CSOs, among other stakeholders. These reports facilitated productive discussions on business and human rights, environmental policies, labour rights, sustainable development, and fundamental freedoms.
PUTTING THE SPOTLIGHT ON FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

Threats against free expression and artistic freedom in Asia are rising, with artists, writers, and activists becoming more vulnerable to violent attacks, censorship, and persecution.

In solidarity with the region’s most courageous truth-tellers, FORUM-ASIA—together with the Mekong Cultural Hub and PEN America—produced a comprehensive report on the state of artistic freedom in Asia. The report is based on a workshop where participants expressed their growing anxieties around repressive security laws, the spread of ‘fake news,’ and the criminalisation of free expression.

We also carried out a consultation on the impacts of COVID-19 on civic space and freedoms of expression, association, and assembly in South Asia. In addition, we published a report on the shrinking civic space in Afghanistan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka.

Together with the Alliance of Independent Journalists, FORUM-ASIA campaigned for the revision of Indonesia’s Information and Electronic Transactions Law and Draft Criminal Code. These laws pose a threat to people’s freedom of expression and right to information. Our campaign sought to ensure that the rights of journalists and activists are protected, and that their important work is not hindered by restrictive legislation.

RAISING AWARENESS. In Mongolia, FORUM-ASIA gathered the testimonies of herders and communities whose health, livelihoods, and overall well-being were impacted by mining.

EMBRACING THE NEXT GENERATION OF DEFENDERS

FORUM-ASIA recognises the need to nurture and equip HRDs with the skills and knowledge necessary for tackling emerging challenges.

As part of our pledge to cultivate the next generation of defenders, we successfully conducted the 4th edition of our Global Advocacy Learning Programme (GALP) on Human Rights and Development in Thailand from 29 November to 5 December 2022. GALP provides a comprehensive curriculum covering human rights advocacy and mechanisms, business and human rights, gender equality, and environmental justice. We received over 300 applications from across Asia and carefully selected 22 outstanding participants to join #GALP2022.

In addition, we urged NHRIs to step up their efforts in protecting women human rights defenders (WHRDs), the second most targeted group of defenders. Our report, ‘Making Institutions Count’ discussed the growing gender-based violations endured by WHRDs in Asia, the role of NHRIs in their protection, as well as our recommendations on how NHRIs can be more gender-responsive in their efforts to create a safe and enabling environment for WHRDs.

STRENGTHENING NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS INSTITUTIONS (NHRIs)

As the Secretariat of ANNI, FORUM-ASIA conducted national-level consultations with NHRIs and CSOs in Nepal, India, and Myanmar to foster stronger collaboration between these stakeholders. These consultations served as platforms to discuss issues of mutual concern and explore opportunities for joint advocacy and action.

Together with the Korean House for International Solidarity, we launched South Korea’s country chapter of ANNI’s biannual report on the performance of Asian NHRIs. The launch event included a panel discussion on the transparency of the selection and appointment processes within NHRIs as well as their independence and engagement with civil society.

In addition, we urged NHRIs to step up their efforts in protecting women human rights defenders (WHRDs), the second most targeted group of defenders. Our report, ‘Making Institutions Count’ discussed the growing gender-based violations endured by WHRDs in Asia, the role of NHRIs in their protection, as well as our recommendations on how NHRIs can be more gender-responsive in their efforts to create a safe and enabling environment for WHRDs.
FOSTERING A BETTER ENVIRONMENT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS PROTECTION, DEMOCRACY, AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN THE REGION

OBJECTIVE 2

FORUM-ASIA works to create institutional and policy changes that can have sustainable impact on the protection of human rights. We do this through evidence-based research, the provision of emergency assistance for defenders at risk, and by empowering human rights defenders. We also bring together key stakeholders such as civil society actors, governments, and the private sector through open dialogues.

Findings from our research were then used for policy briefings with the government and other stakeholders.

COLLABORATION. At FORUM-ASIA, we highlight the importance of consultations, open dialogues, and cooperation among our members, partners, stakeholders, and importantly, the communities we work with.

STRENGTHENING FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY AND ASSOCIATION

At FORUM-ASIA, we ensure that all our advocacy activities are anchored on facts. In India, for example, we advocated to strengthen people’s freedom of peaceful assembly by documenting cases from 2017 to 2021 wherein people’s right to protest was gravely violated. We also analysed laws and judgements related to freedoms of peaceful assembly and of association (FoAA). Findings from our research were then used for policy briefings with the government and other stakeholders, aiming to strengthen people’s fundamental freedoms.

In October, we organised a national consultation with the UN Special Rapporteur on FoAA in India. Through interactive online panel sessions, CSOs came together to discuss how legal restrictions on FoAA disrupt their work and access to resources. Such consultations aimed to strengthen collaboration among CSOs by creating avenues for advocacy with governments, thereby urging them to honor their international obligations to uphold fundamental freedoms.

In July, we organised a national consultation with FORUM-ASIA members and partners, policymakers, HRDs, CSOs, NGOs, lawyers, academia, and the media in Nepal regarding issues related to fundamental freedoms and civic space. The event was attended by the former Chief Justice of Nepal as well as key representatives from the parliament, the National Human Rights Commission, the National Women Commission, and the Federation of Nepalese Journalists.

The following month, we organised a sub-regional consultation with CSOs and FORUM-ASIA member organisations regarding the state of fundamental freedoms and civic space in South Asia in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The consultation generated national and regional advocacy plans, including recommendations to counter democratic backsliding during the post-pandemic stage.

In July, we organised a national-level consultation with FORUM-ASIA members and partners, policymakers, HRDs, CSOs, NGOs, lawyers, academia, and the media in Nepal regarding issues related to fundamental freedoms and civic space. The event was attended by the former Chief Justice of Nepal as well as key representatives from the parliament, the National Human Rights Commission, the National Women Commission, and the Federation of Nepalese Journalists.
SUPPORTING DEFENDERS AT RISK

FORUM-ASIA is dedicated to protecting all human rights defenders (HRDs), including pro-democracy defenders; women human rights defenders (WHRDs); media workers; SOGI rights defenders; land, indigenous, environmental, and community-based defenders; student and youth defenders; NGO staff; minority rights defenders; and artists. We provide vital emergency assistance to defenders facing risks and threats, which includes temporary relocation, accompaniment, family assistance, medical aid, security equipment and assessment, and relevant community activities.

In 2022, we supported 136 cases of emergency assistance, benefitting 360 individual HRDs, family members, and organisations. Around 44% of support went to WHRDs. In addition, we supported resettlement cases for Afghan HRDs to Canada, ensuring their safety and protection.

To enhance our documentation efforts, we established a formal collaboration with the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED), which collects real-time global data on reported political violence and protests. This collaboration further broadened the reach of FORUM-ASIA’s HRD Portal, which features a wide range of resource materials and a comprehensive database for documenting violations against HRDs in Asia.

OBJECTIVE 3

ENHANCING THE IMPACT OF ASIAN HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS’ ADVOCACY ACTIONS IN RELATION TO SAARC, ASEAN, AND UN HUMAN RIGHTS MECHANISMS

Through our civil society consultative status with regional and international human rights mechanisms, we highlight the Asian perspective on a global scale. FORUM-ASIA strives for an inclusive and participatory policy-making process that reflects the actual human rights situation on the ground, especially for the most vulnerable and marginalised communities.

Through our UN Advocacy Programme, we support and train HRDs in engaging with UN human rights mechanisms. Likewise, we provide technical and financial support for HRDs in their participation in UN meetings and regular sessions of the UNHRC.
In 2022, we facilitated the participation of FORUM-ASIA members and partners from Indonesia, the Philippines, India, Pakistan, and South Korea in the Universal Periodic Review of their respective countries. Through our consistent engagement with the UNHRC, we have contributed to highlighting the human rights situation in Myanmar, Sri Lanka, and Afghanistan.

In May, we launched the ASEAN Human Rights Advocacy Toolkit. This is an updated version of the ‘Rights Now’ training manual on ASEAN human rights mechanisms that was originally published in 2010. The toolkit reflects the recent developments on human rights and democracy issues in the region.

We encouraged CSOs to make the most of this toolkit for conducting capacity-building workshops and cultivating the next generation of human rights champions from Southeast Asia. The modules included in the toolkit can help civil society, academia, the media, and the general public better understand the ASEAN and its mechanisms.

In line with our commitment to supporting the ASEAN human rights advocacy, we produced educational posters about the ASEAN, the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights as well as instructions on how CSOs can better engage with ASEAN human rights mechanisms.

To ensure wide accessibility and relevance to diverse audiences, we employed innovative strategies such as ‘dark ads’ and targeted paid promotions. To maximise our reach and impact, we translated the posters into eight different languages and promoted them in eight targeted countries. This pilot project achieved remarkable engagement numbers on various social media platforms, marking it as the most successful endeavour of its kind. By harnessing the power of targeted advertising, we effectively disseminated vital information and empowered individuals across Southeast Asia to actively participate in human rights advocacy.

Meanwhile, our South Asia Programme organised a workshop for second-generation defenders from Bangladesh. In addition, we consistently conducted consultations and engagements with CSOs and relevant policymakers within the sub-region. Through such efforts, FORUM-ASIA is able to continuously strengthen the advocacy influence and reach of Asian HRDs as well as advance human rights at the global level.

We are dedicated to enhancing our institutional and operational capacity as a regional umbrella organisation, ensuring effective representation and service to our constituencies. FORUM-ASIA prioritises the adoption of standard policy practices, financial sustainability, strong managerial capacity, and a culture of continuous learning.

We do this through our Planning, Monitoring, and Evaluation Programme, which serves to improve our organisation’s transparency, sustainability, gender mainstreaming as well as the professional growth of staff. We use a results-based programme management model with the goal of strengthening our organisational effectiveness and accountability towards our members, partners, and donors.

In July, we conducted a capacity-building and knowledge-sharing workshop on monitoring, evaluation, and resource management. The workshop provided valuable training to our member organisations from Nepal, Myanmar, and the Philippines. Participants gained skills on project management, proposal writing, stakeholder analysis, budgeting, implementation strategies, among other useful monitoring and evaluation tools.
**FINANCIAL OVERVIEW**

All amounts in US Dollars

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Financial Item</th>
<th>Amount ($)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Opening balance on 1 January 2022</td>
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<tr>
<td>Income 2022</td>
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<tr>
<td>Expenses 2022</td>
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<td>Currency conversion adjustment</td>
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<td>Balance as on 31 December 2022</td>
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**INCOME IN 2022**

Donors & Partnerships $2,146,631.16  
Interest $1,946.32  
Other sources $67,799.85  
Total $2,216,377.33

**EXPENDITURE IN 2022**

General Organisational Costs  
Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Programme (PME)  
Communication and Media (CM)  
South Asia Programme (SA)  
East Asia and ASEAN Programme (EA-A)  
UN Advocacy Programme (UNA)  
Human Rights Defenders Programme (HRD)  
East Asia and ASEAN (EA-A) Programme (ASEAN)  
National Human Rights Institution Programme (NHRI)  
Development and Knowledge Management (DKM)  
Gender Mainstreaming & Partnership and Resource Mobilisation

Total $3,400,469.02

**FUNDING PARTNERS IN 2022**

- **Sida (Sweden)** $565,060.25
- **EIDHR** $428,549.25
- **International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL)** $309,649.75
- **Open Society Foundation** $303,180.04
- **MISEREOR** $147,213.74
- **Freedom House** $108,149.73
- **Bread for the World** $96,577.67
- **EU (Umbrella)** $94,256.88
- **Other** $52,989.31
- **CIVICUS** $22,598.87
- **Heinrich Boell Stiftung** $18,405.67

Total $2,146,631.16

**EXPENDITURE OF ACTIVITIES BASED ON ORGANISATIONAL OBJECTIVES**

- Objective 1: Empowering civil society organisations and human rights defenders across Asia  
- Objective 2: Fostering a better environment for human rights protection, democracy and sustainable development in the region  
- Objective 3: Enhancing the impact of Asian human rights defenders’ advocacy actions related to human rights mechanisms  
- Objective 4: Strengthening FORUM-ASIA’s institutional and operational capacity as a regional umbrella organisation

Total $1,144,386.78
Our strategic plan for 2023-2027 is based on the principle that human rights are universal and are not geographically bound. In this strategy, FORUM-ASIA adopts a new organisational mantra: ‘Realising human rights for all, reclaiming civic space and strengthening democracies in Asia.’

FORUM-ASIA will continue to protect and build the capacity of Asian civil society, human rights defenders, and marginalised communities in a more structured and coordinated manner. We hope to create more spaces for open dialogues and meaningful engagement on policies and regulations that impact civic space and democracy. This includes increasing the participation of Asian CSOs in international and regional human rights mechanisms; strengthening the advocacy of NHRIs in line with the Paris Principles; and raising awareness on human rights issues within the region.

In addition, we will strive to expand our meaningful partnerships at national, regional, and international levels in order to foster stronger cooperation; avoid the duplication of efforts; and optimise resources for civil society protection work.

FORUM-ASIA will place special emphasis on engaging with and working for the rights of vulnerable communities including women, LGBTIQ+ individuals, and all those facing SOGI-based discrimination.

Expanding our work on business and human rights, we will look into the interconnections among human rights violations, climate change, environmental degradation, and policy-making in the region.

Through these strategic goals, we envision a future wherein vibrant civic spaces are thriving across Asia.
The publication has been made possible with the generous support of the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency and the European Union.

The contents of this publication are the sole responsibility of FORUM-ASIA and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of donors.