

## **Terms of Reference**

### **Research Consultant for Afghanistan**

#### **1. About FORUM-ASIA**

The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) works to promote and protect human rights, including the right to development, through collaboration and cooperation among human rights organisations and defenders in Asia and beyond.

FORUM-ASIA is a network of 85 members in 23 countries across Asia. It was founded in 1991 in Manila, the Philippines. Its Secretariat was established in Bangkok, Thailand in 1992. Since then, offices have been opened in Geneva, Jakarta, and Kathmandu. FORUM-ASIA has had consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC Status) since 2004, and a consultative relationship with the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) since 2017.

#### **2. Context**

Afghanistan has seen a regression in human rights and a rise in violations in the past years, particularly since the Taliban takeover of the country in 2021. With the regime change, violation of rights and freedoms by Taliban have become systematic and institutionalised, leading to “gender apartheid” and “genocidal attacks” against people of Afghanistan, particularly women and ethnic and religious minorities. These patterns continue to exacerbate the human rights situation, with violations spanning all areas protected under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Afghanistan's national obligations.

Women and girls face denial of education, employment, health services, and humanitarian aid, while ethnic and religious minorities experience forced displacement and collective punishment. The country also suffers from restricted civic spaces, denial of fair trials, and access to justice. Human rights defenders (HRDs), including protestors, lawyers, journalists, artists, and education activists, endure harassment, intimidation, censorship, and arbitrary detention, impacting them and their families. Only in a few cases, HRDs are able to work from hiding in Afghanistan, under dire safety and economic conditions.

The so-called de facto authorities in Afghanistan have notably failed in upholding fundamental rights and freedoms. Furthermore, the efforts of the international community in this regard have been insufficient.

HRDs who seek refuge in neighbouring countries continue to face challenges, including police abuse and forced deportations, impacting their well-being and security. The insufficient support from the international community and continued repressions and

retaliations by some governments who host HRDs from Afghanistan, have further impacted defenders and family members, endangering their safety.

Meanwhile, Afghan defenders who have resettled in countries with comparatively greater security and stability continue to face significant challenges. Key among these concerns are their overall well-being and the ability to sustain their human rights work while in exile.

### **3. Objective**

The primary objective of this research is to examine the current situation of Afghan human rights defenders, particularly emphasizing support for the Afghan human rights movement in exile, including women human rights defenders (WHRDs). This study aims to evaluate the challenges and conditions faced by HRDs since the Taliban's 2021 takeover of Afghanistan. Additionally, the research seeks to offer actionable recommendations to the international community on effective strategies to assist Afghan HRDs, enabling them to persevere in their human rights work amidst various challenges and constraints. A key aspect of the research will involve garnering insights and inputs from Afghan WHRDs.

### **4. Description of tasks and deliverables**

The Research Consultant is expected to deliver the following tasks and responsibilities:

- a) Conduct comprehensive desk research on the status of human rights defenders from Afghanistan, both in exile and within the country, with a special focus on women human rights defenders (WHRDs) in transitional countries and their final resettlement destinations, including European and North American countries. The research should cover their psycho-social, financial, security, and immigration situations, and may also include the experiences of relocation processes. Additionally, it should touch on the Taliban's imposed restrictions on civic space and the rights and freedoms of these defenders.
- b) Provide a detailed analysis of the conditions of HRDs in exile, assessing their work environments, the challenges they encounter, and potential methods to enhance their ability to continue human rights work under current conditions.
- c) Conduct interviews with HRDs and/or civil society organizations actively engaged with these defenders.
- d) Develop a set of recommendations and feasible strategies aimed at various stakeholders, both state and non-state, to support the ongoing efforts and sustainability of Afghan HRDs, both those operating in exile and within Afghanistan.
- e) Deliver a comprehensive research report, ranging between 6,000 and 9,000 words, by the deadline of 31 May 2024.
- f) Assist and participate in a roundtable discussion focusing on the situation of HRDs from Afghanistan in Exile, prior to the completion of the research.

## 5. Timeframe & Budget

The research project is scheduled to begin in January 2024 and conclude by 31 May 2024. The consultant will work for a total of 40 days, at a rate of 150 USD per day, amounting to a total of 6,000 USD. Payments will be disbursed in tranches, corresponding to the completion of milestones as determined by FORUM-ASIA.

<b>Task</b>	<b>Duration</b>
Research Outline	3 days
Desk research and interview	20 days
Participation/ facilitation in roundtable	3 days
Report writing	10 days
Report finalisation	4 days
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>40 days</b>

## 6. Working relationship and contractual arrangements

The consultant will work under the supervision of the Human Rights Defenders Programme of FORUM-ASIA.

- FORUM-ASIA will handle the contractual arrangements and facilitate payment for the consultancy.
- The Consultant is accountable for completing all tasks outlined above within the established deadlines.
- Confidentiality is a crucial obligation for the consultant. All information and data disclosed during the research are to be used and distributed exclusively by FORUM-ASIA. The consultant's name will be credited in the publication.

## 7. Qualifications and requirements

- A minimum of three years of experience in conducting research and engaging in human rights work and activities in Afghanistan.
- Demonstrated expertise in the research topic, with a clear understanding of the human rights situation and key issues in Afghanistan, especially following the Taliban's takeover.
- Proficiency in both spoken and written English, as well as Dari/Pashto, for conducting interviews with research participants and facilitating focus group discussions.
- The minimum educational qualification is a Bachelor's degree in a relevant field; Master's degree will be considered an advantage.
- The ability to work effectively in a multicultural environment with minimal supervision.

Interested candidates are invited to submit a cover letter, curriculum vitae, and writing samples to [applications@forum-asia.org](mailto:applications@forum-asia.org) by 22 December 2023, midnight Bangkok Time

(UTC+7). The email subject line should read "Research Consultant for Afghanistan: [Applicant's Name]". Please be aware that late applications will not be accepted.

**Only short-listed candidates will be invited to an interview.**