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PRESS RELEASE

**ASIAN WOMEN SEEK TO APPLY UN SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION
1325 IN THEIR REGION**

Women working in conflict areas in Asia met on 27-28 November in Bangkok to discuss how to apply UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 to the different conflict situations they face in their countries.

Twenty women from 10 countries in 12 different conflict areas participated in the workshop entitled, “UN Security Council Resolution 1325: Making it work in Asia”, organised by Women’s Rights and Gender Programme of FORUM-ASIA. The workshop aimed to raise issues women face in armed conflicts in the region, discuss how to apply the resolution, and to facilitate networking among human rights defenders working in conflict situations.

In his welcome remarks to the participants, FORUM-ASIA Executive Director Anselmo Lee said that “the workshop was organised because not enough attention is being given by the human rights movement on the work of protection in armed conflict, particularly on women’s concerns”.

During the workshop, women also shared about the situations they face and their work in conflict. Their reports, from Aceh to Mindanao to Sri Lanka, shared underscored fact that the challenges women face in conflict areas are the same, no matter what the cause of the conflict.

“The scenes are strikingly similar - down to the tents being used by internally displaced people”, observed Sunila Abeysekera in the synthesis of the sharing session. Abeysekera, who was the overall facilitator of the meeting, is the Executive Director of Information Monitor (INFORM), a FORUM-ASIA member organisation in Sri Lanka.

Participants also discussed the relationship of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and their work as human rights defenders with UNSCR 1325.

Participants agreed that the resolution is an “important tool” that they can use in their work in conflict situations, as it does not only concern protection of women in armed conflict, but also seeks for participation in peace negotiations and post-conflict reconstruction. The resolution recognises the important role of women in conflict prevention and peace building, and pushes for better women’s participation in government.

“I was not aware of the relevance of UNSCR 1325 earlier in the context of work we are doing. It gives us good backing and support”, said Sushobha Barve, a participant working in the Kashmir region of India.

Among the participants only about one third actually used the resolution in their work. Among this small group only women's groups of the Women's League of Burma were able to engage the international mechanism for the resolution. The UNSC has a regular yearly discussion by the Security Council that sees the participation of non-governmental organisations. Burmese women have utilised the UNSCR 1325 mechanisms to push for a Security Council discussion and an intervention on the lengthy crisis of military rule in Burma that has lasted for 45 years.

Participants drew up various strategies for applying UNSCR 1325 to the varied contexts - peace negotiations, post-conflict reconstruction, addressing impunity and protection internally displaced women. They stressed that work of pushing to apply the resolution must take place simultaneously at the local, national, regional and international levels.

Education and popularisation were identified as key priority areas of work at the national level. Moreover, women's groups also saw the need to link up with peace advocates and human rights groups for the resolution's implementation in different countries. At the regional and international level, networks working on and using the resolution need to be established and linked in order to build solidarity and be more effective in influencing the Security Council's discussions on the resolution.

UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security was unanimously passed by the UN's most powerful body in 2000 to address women's concerns in different phases of conflict and to integrate a gender perspective to the UN's peacekeeping work. However, as observed by participants, the resolution has been rarely utilised in Asia despite the conflicts.

One important reason why UNSCR 1325 is not used in the region is the refusal of Asian governments to label different situations in their country as "armed conflict" because this will entail the application of international humanitarian law (IHL), a set of standards has been designed to protect the rights of non-combatants including civilians. Governments fear that situations will be internationalised, once a particular situation is labelled an "armed conflict" under IHL. At the minimum, internationalisation of a conflict means that its conduct will be monitored by the International Committee on the Red Cross, which is mandated to oversee the application of IHL, and more significantly can be included in the mandate the UN Security Council.

Many conflicts in Asia have been left unresolved and continue to simmer for decades, including the Kashmir conflict at the India-Pakistan border and the Karen insurgency in eastern Burma. Both have lasted for about 60 years.

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