



**26th Regular Session of the UN Human Rights Council
Panel Discussion on the safety of journalists (Human Rights Council decision 24/116)**

**Oral statement delivered by Ms. Gayathry Venkiteswaran on behalf of
Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)**

Wednesday, 11 June 2014

Mr. President, FORUM-ASIA makes this statement in solidarity with the Southeast Asian Press Alliance (SEAPA). We welcome this initiative at the international level to discuss the important issue of the safety of journalists and hope that this contributes to ensuring the safety of journalists and ending the extrajudicial execution of journalists with impunity. In this regard we also welcome the 2013 General Assembly Resolution 68/163, adopted in December. We hope that it will provide the much needed commitment and momentum for states to end threats to the safety of the media.

Violence against journalists and the media and high levels of impunity for state violations of the right to freedom of expression continues to be a pressing concern in Southeast Asia. For example in the Philippines, 142 journalists have been killed since 1986, of which 24 of them since July 2010.¹ Six of those occurred after the UN resolution was adopted in December 2013. The brutal murder of 58 people including 32 media workers on 23 November 2009, in Southern Philippines is a stark testimony to the consistent danger in which journalists live in the region.² Continuing violence remains a concern owing to weak law enforcement, corruption, a slow justice system and a pervasive gun culture.

Another example is that of Indonesia, where there are 8 unsolved cases of journalists' deaths since 1996, while an average of 40 cases of violence against media personnel and offices have been recorded annually.³ These threats, like those in the Philippines are primarily work-related, and every single case that is not investigated adequately or fairly could potentially mean more new threats against the media.

To quote a third example, in Vietnam, the government has continued its crackdown on bloggers with at least 12 recorded cases of attacks, arrests and jail terms for those who serve as alternative channels of information.⁴ These actions are taken with little or no accountability, leading to the blatant abuse of laws in order to silence dissent. Articles 88 and 258 of Vietnam's Criminal Code, which criminalises any purported act against the state, provide sweeping powers to the government and have been frequently invoked to crackdown on bloggers and free speech.⁵

We therefore recommend, in the spirit of the UN General Assembly resolution 68/163, the UN Human Rights Council resolution 21/12 while taking note of the report of the UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression (A/HRC/20/17), that:

- States should take appropriate immediate steps to conduct effective and impartial investigations into attacks on journalists, media workers, and human rights defenders and resource authorities appropriately to ensure that perpetrators are identified and swiftly brought to justice and that victims or next of kin are fully compensated;
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¹ Southeast Asian Press Alliance, [Annual media freedom report on the Philippines prepared by the Centre for Media Freedom and Responsibility \(CMFR\)](#), 2 May 2014

² Committee to Protect Journalists, [Attacks on the press in 2013 in the Philippines](#), 2013

³ Southeast Asian Press Alliance, [Annual media freedom report on Indonesia prepared by Aliansi Jurnalis Independen \(AJI\)](#), 2 May 2014

⁴ Southeast Asian Press Alliance, [States: A problem and solution to impunity](#), 23 November 2013

⁵ Human Rights Watch, Vietnam: [Escalation of Persecution of Bloggers](#), 19 June 2013



- Judicial reforms should be in place domestically to facilitate speedier trials involving impunity killings of human rights defenders taking into account UN resolutions, conventions and standards, including those pertaining to the safety of journalists and freedom of expression;
- Laws that restrict freedom of expression should be repealed or reviewed with a view to promote freedom of expression and access to information in full compliance with international human rights norms and standards; and
- The international community should work with Southeast Asian governments and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations to implement Resolution 68/163 (2013) and the Guidelines on Safety of Journalists.