

PRESS RELEASE

BANGKOK, THAILAND, 7 NOVEMBER 2014 – **Impunity Watch**, together with **swisspeace** and **Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)**, is pleased to announce that its event, "Memorialisation as an Alternative or Complementary TJ Measure - Exchange and Policy Development in Asia" took place the past week, from Monday 3 November to Friday 7 November in Bangkok, Thailand.

Civil society organisations and victim's groups from Burma/Myanmar, Cambodia, Indonesia, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Timor-Leste explored how memorialisation can be used as a complementary or alternative transitional justice process (TJ), and/or as a step towards institutionalised processes of TJ such as trials and truth commissions.

During the week, the participants used the Impunity Watch Guiding Principles of Memorialisation to have a greater understanding of memorialisation and how memory initiatives can be used as part of Transitional Justice processes. At the end of the week they developed strategies and policy recommendations and presented the following joint statement as an outcome of the Exchange:

JOINT STATEMENT

Following a five day exchange on memorialisation as an alternative or complementary transitional justice measure, participants from Burma/Myanmar, Cambodia, Indonesia, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Timor-Leste shared the following experiences and lessons learned in addressing past and ongoing human rights violations.

The prevailing situation and the long-term fight for justice in the countries represented in the exchange highlight past and on-going situations of rights-violations with limited means to address genuine transitional justice.

Common problems in all States include denial, lack of acknowledgement and silence on issues of past human rights violations. In failing to address the root causes of the conflict, a culture of impunity continues to prevail, leading to recurring and sustained human rights violations.

Given the abovementioned prevailing situation in which the participants operate, there is an urgent need to adopt holistic, democratic and participatory approaches to transformative justice and facilitating civil society space to address human rights violations including through memorialisation initiatives. This also entails avoiding re-victimization and ensuring protection of the most vulnerable as well as preventing the destruction of memorials that are meaningful to affected communities.

In this context, memorialisation becomes an important alternative and/or complementary mechanism for truth, justice, reparations and non-recurrence, but also opens up space for greater and inclusive discussion at the local and societal level on the needs of affected communities, with special emphasis on gender based violence and youth education. Nevertheless, attention should also be paid to the dangers and risks of memorialisation initiatives since they can potentially divide communities, rather than unite.

States have the primary responsibility to address past and present violations. However, other stakeholders, such as national and regional human rights institutions, international organisations and the media also have a critical role to play in ensuring those violations are addressed.

Diplomatic, financial and technical support are crucial elements to acknowledging the importance of sustainable assistance in the long-term process of transitional justice and ensuring that donors engage in a two-way dialog with community and grassroots organisations to ensure local ownership.

In conclusion, the gathering emphasised the importance of continuing exchanges and solidarity amongst civil society actors towards the common goal of greater accountability and an end to impunity in the region.