

FORUM-ASIA ORAL STATEMENT
ON THE OCCASION OF TASK FORCE DETAINEES' 40TH ANNIVERSARY
*(Delivered by Evelyn Balais-Serrano, FORUM-ASIA Executive Director during the TFDP
Officers and Staff Grand Reunion on June 1, 2014, St Joseph's College, Quezon City,
Philippines)*

The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) extends its warmest congratulations to Task Force Detainees – Philippines (TFDP) on the occasion of the commemoration of its 40th anniversary with the theme 'Love, Commitment and Service to Human Rights and Human Dignity'.

FORUM-ASIA is proud and honored to be present and to participate in one of TFDP's commemorative activities, the grand reunion of former TFDP officers and staff, to pay tribute to human rights defenders who served as TFDP's workforce for the past forty years of its service to human rights victims, their families and communities.

FORUM-ASIA traces its beginning when TFDP convened a regional conference in Manila in 1991 which became the founding congress of FORUM-ASIA. TFDP served as the secretariat of FORUM-ASIA for the next three years before it was decided to be moved to Bangkok in 1994 due to the volatile political situation in the Philippines brought about by series of coup d'états by the military against the new government led by Cory Aquino.

As a leading and pioneer member of FORUM-ASIA, TFDP assisted FORUM-ASIA in setting up its initial program of human rights documentation and training. Later in 1995, TFDP and the Philippine Alliance of Human Rights Advocates (PAHRA), also a member of FORUM-ASIA, provided the much needed assistance in developing FORUM-ASIA's advocacy program to respond to human rights situations arising in many parts of the region during that time-in Burma, Cambodia, Indonesia, Timor L'este, etc. Such partnership resulted in the formation of the ALTSEAN-Burma, Asian Network for Free Elections (ANFREL) and Asian Network for Democracy in Indonesia (ANDI) – the first few networks that FORUM-ASIA helped establish.

TFDP has gone a long way in contributing to human rights promotion and protection not only in the Philippines but regionally and internationally. Through FORUM-ASIA and other venues, TFDP has shared its experiences in human rights work, notably in documenting human rights abuses and undertaking advocacy campaigns to respond to human rights situations in the region. In recent years, TFDP has initiated and supported the formation of a national network of human rights defenders. Such initiative will serve as another example for other countries in the region to explore in search of effective mechanism for protection of human rights defenders.

FORUM-ASIA expresses its gratitude to TFDP's important contribution in the founding and establishment of the regional network. It is grateful to TFDP and to the human rights movement in the Philippines for all the expertise shared and the inspiration it continues to provide to the regional and international human rights work.

The continuing task to build and strengthen the human rights movement in Asia remains an important challenge not only for FORUM-ASIA but for all institutions, groups and advocates in the region. TFDP, being an active actor in this field for the past 40 years can contribute significantly to this task. FORUM-ASIA stands ready to be a consistent partner and collaborator in achieving our common vision, mission and goals.

MABUHAY ang TFDP sa kanyang ika-40 Taon ng gawain at paglilingkod para sa mga detenidong pulitikal at iba pang biktima ng paglabag ng karapatang pantao sa Pilipinas at sa iba pang bahagi ng rehiyong Asya at sa buong mundo!

TFDP is one of FORUM-ASIA's 47 member-organizations in 16 countries across Asia. For more information about FORUM-ASIA, visit our website: www.forum-asia.org.