

## World Press Freedom Day 2016 – FORUM-ASIA Statement

(Bangkok, 3 May 2016) - The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) joins the international community today in commemorating World Press Freedom Day (WPFDD). FORUM-ASIA values freedom of the press as a key component of democratic governance and the vital role of free and independent press as a key ally in the promotion and protection of human rights. It also reiterates its call to all Asian governments to ensure the protection of the right to freedom of expression as guaranteed by Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.<sup>1</sup>

Press freedom contributes to transparent and accountable governance and forms the basis of an open, democratic, and pluralistic society. However, press freedom in Asia is increasingly threatened by repressive laws, which block the access to offline and online information and punish the expression of critical opinions. These threats and attacks against press freedom are also leading to an increase in the practice of self-censorship for fear of reprisals or attacks by governments and non-state-actors.

Informed and empowered people, as well as free and independent media, do not fit into the authoritarian setting that several Asian countries are trying to establish and consolidate. Laws, such as the 2006 Information and Communication Technology Act in Bangladesh, the 1948 Sedition Act in Malaysia, or the 1948 National Security Law in South Korea, impose sweeping restrictions on the right to freedom of expression both online and offline and help generate violations of fundamental freedoms.

In this grim context, media play a crucial role in exposing abuses of power and human rights violations, while providing people and civil society organisations a sounding board for expressing concerns. However, because of their work as watchdogs, journalists continue to be targets of violence and intimidation.

In 2015 alone, FORUM-ASIA has documented various types of attacks, including killings, against 23 journalists and media workers in Burma, China, India, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Thailand.<sup>2</sup> These attacks were usually combined with high levels of impunity,<sup>3</sup> resulting in a climate of injustice and insecurity for those exercising their right to freedom of expression.

Ensuring press freedom should be a priority for all Asian Governments, as an indispensable pre-condition for the enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms and a flourishing democracy. To realise this, FORUM-ASIA reiterates its call today to governments across Asia to:

- Repeal all laws that restrict the right to freedom of expression and guarantee its protection *de jure* and *de facto* in compliance with international human rights norms and standards;

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<sup>1</sup> Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers'. (<http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>).

<sup>2</sup> [https://asianhrds.forum-asia.org/?s=Journalist&post\\_type=events](https://asianhrds.forum-asia.org/?s=Journalist&post_type=events)

<sup>3</sup> <https://cpi.org/reports/2015/10/impunity-index-getting-away-with-murder.php#table>

- Promote and ensure a safe and enabling environment for journalists and media workers, as well as all who exercise their right to freedom of expression; and
- End impunity and bring to justice the perpetrators of crimes against journalists, media workers, and all those who exercise their right to freedom of expression.

**About FORUM-ASIA:**

*FORUM-ASIA is a Bangkok-based regional human rights group with 58 member organisations in 19 countries across Asia. FORUM-ASIA has offices in Bangkok, Geneva, Jakarta and Kathmandu. FORUM-ASIA addresses key areas of human rights violations in the region, including freedoms of expressions, assembly and association, human rights defenders, and democratisation.*