



37th Regular Session of the UN Human Rights Council
Item 3: Interactive Dialogue with UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders,
Mr. Michel Forst

Oral Statement Delivered by Sejin Kim on behalf of
Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)

Thursday, 1 March 2018

Mr. President, FORUM-ASIA appreciates the report of the Special Rapporteur (A/HRC/37/51), and notes concerns on safeguarding the rights of those defending people on the move – particularly those displaced due to violations of their rights. We echo his call for states to ensure that visa regimes and other policies and practices should not hinder relocation initiatives for defenders at risk. Defenders in Asia often have no other choice but to relocate temporarily for their safety and security, which is essential for them to continue their work. Systematic harassment against human rights defenders is the root cause for such journeys and this must end.

Across Asia human rights defenders have been regularly targeted simply for carrying out their legitimate human rights work. In some instances they face immediate and extreme risk such as enforced disappearance and killings. For instance¹, Maldivian defender Yameen Rasheed was stabbed to death by assailants in April last year after receiving death threats. In Pakistan, Raza Mahmood Khan, a peace activist from Lahore, went missing on 2 December 2017² like many others in the country³. In 2017, FORUM-ASIA documented 24 cases where defenders lost their lives due to their work and 23 cases of abduction and disappearances⁴.

Judicial harassment against defenders is one of the most common types of harassment to delegitimise their work. In January 2018 eight Thai human rights defenders who joined the peaceful march 'We Walk' were charged by authorities for allegedly violating a ban on political gatherings⁵. In January 2018 two Cambodian environment rights defenders Hun Vannak and Doem Kundy were convicted and sentenced to one year imprisonment for filming two large vessels suspected of illegal sand mining⁶.

Thank you.

¹As reported in the communications report of special procedures (A/HRC/37/80)

² Pakistan: Government must ensure safe return of disappeared activist, Raza Khan, 8 December 2017, <https://www.forum-asia.org/?p=25297>

³ Pakistan: Investigate the disappearances of human rights activists, 12 January 2017, <https://www.forum-asia.org/?p=22536>

⁴ Asia Human Rights Defenders Portal, Monthly Statistics, <https://asianhrds.forum-asia.org/?cat=655>

⁵ Thailand: Urgent call to dismiss all allegations against the eight human rights defenders from the peaceful march, 'We Walk', 26 January 2018, <https://www.forum-asia.org/?p=25550>

⁶ Joint Statement – CSOs Call for Immediate Release of Mother Nature Cambodia Activists Hun Vannak and Doem Kundy, 14 November 2017 <https://www.forum-asia.org/?p=25164>