



**40<sup>th</sup> Regular Session of the UN Human Rights Council**  
**Item 4: General Debate on human rights situations that require the Council's attention**

**Oral Statement Delivered by Ahmed Adam on behalf of**  
**Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)**  
**Tuesday, 12 March 2019**

Mr. President, FORUM-ASIA calls for the Council's attention on several worrying human rights situations in Asia.

In Bangladesh, the parliamentary elections in December 2018 were marred by reports of violence, and gross irregularities, and were neither free nor fair. Several opposition leaders and their supporters were reportedly arbitrarily detained before the election.<sup>1</sup> Freedom of expression and space for dissent are severely restricted under the 2018 Digital Security Act. The Council must closely monitor the situation and act urgently to prevent further decline.

We are deeply concerned by the increasing threats to freedom of expression in the Philippines, and the systematic targeting of journalists, independent media, and human rights defenders who have reported on the estimated over 27,000 deaths in the government's 'war on drugs', including the politically motivated charges against journalist Maria Ressa. We call on the Council to respond to the lack of accountability at the domestic level and urgently initiate an independent international investigation into the killings, as well to mandate the High Commissioner to monitor and report on the government's descent toward authoritarianism.

In Cambodia, the closure of democratic and civic space, with restrictions on civil society and independent media, and harassment and attacks against human rights defenders, journalists and government critics remains a serious concern. The government's recent public assertions about easing restrictions on civil society and media have not made real improvements on the ground.<sup>2</sup> It is imperative that the Council and its mechanisms respond appropriately to ensure restoration of democracy and removal of restrictions on rights to freedom of expression, assembly and association in Cambodia.

In India, human rights defenders, activists and journalists are routinely threatened and harassed online for their lawful expression against corruption and communal violence, while hate speech against minorities by organised groups continue to escalate unchecked.

Finally, we call on the Maldives government and law enforcement authorities to act proactively to ensure protection of human rights defenders, journalists, and social media activists from all forms of attacks, harassment and incitement to violence by religious extremists. We are further concerned at the attempts by the parliament to obstruct independent investigations into the murder of human rights defender Yameen Rasheed and the disappearance of journalist Ahmed Rilwan. Thank you.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.forum-asia.org/uploads/wp/2018/12/Pre-election-report\\_Odhikar-dec-18.pdf](https://www.forum-asia.org/uploads/wp/2018/12/Pre-election-report_Odhikar-dec-18.pdf), also see <http://www.askbd.org/ask/2018/12/23/elections-centric-violence-places-setting-fire-religious-minorities-houses-ain-o-salish-kendra-asks-concern/>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.forum-asia.org/uploads/wp/2019/02/LICADHO-Activities-Report-2018\\_Final-Feb.pdf](https://www.forum-asia.org/uploads/wp/2019/02/LICADHO-Activities-Report-2018_Final-Feb.pdf)