

## World Press Freedom Day 2019: Press Freedom in Asia under Pressure

**(Bangkok, 3 May 2019)** – In December 1993, the UN General Assembly adopted 3 May to be World Press Freedom Day. It aimed to raise awareness about the freedom of the press and celebrate the fundamental principles of press freedom. Now, more than a quarter of a century later, we find press freedom, along with freedom of expression, greatly under pressure in Asia.

It is a harrowing reminder of civic space and fundamental freedoms being hallowed out across the region. On this day, the Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) stands in solidarity with reporters, journalists, editors and other media personal in recognition of the key role they play to realise and promote democracy and human rights in our region.

Though there is positive development such as the repealing of anti-fake news law in Malaysia, across Asia we have seen the rise in authoritarianism, which has come with a crackdown on dissenting voices. This crackdown has come in the form of censorship, arrests, violence, killings and disappearances. Such violations have been an effective tool to silence opposing and critical voices, and has particularly affected journalists and human rights defenders. This situation has been exacerbated by the culture of impunity and the lack of political will in the region.

Another area of concern has been the increasing use of disinformation and ‘fake news’ narratives to undermine the legitimacy and credibility of the media. Such attacks on reporters and editors affect their livelihoods, as well as their safety and that of their families and loved ones. Moreover, they undermine the belief of society in the media as a whole, and with that contribute to the corrosion of the cohesiveness of society.

The frequent personalised and sexualised attacks on female reporters is particularly disturbing. While male journalists do also face harassment and attacks, the gender-based violence against women in the media comes at a devastating cost to their safety, well-being, and ultimately the number of women in the media.

Press freedom is essential for journalists to carry out their work without fear of prosecution, and a free and vibrant media is a crucial pillar of any functioning democracy. The undermining and attacks on the press across Asia are an indication of how human rights and fundamental freedoms are at risk. So on this day, and all days of the rest of the year, FORUM-ASIA stands in solidarity with media from all corners of Asia to demand better protection and promotion of press freedom and freedom of expression.

### **About FORUM-ASIA:**

*FORUM-ASIA is a regional human rights group with 81 member organisations in 21 countries across Asia. FORUM-ASIA has offices in Bangkok, Jakarta, Geneva and Kathmandu. FORUM-ASIA addresses key areas*

*of human rights violations in the region, including freedoms of expression, assembly and association, human rights defenders, and democratisation.*

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