



43rd Regular Session of the UN Human Rights Council
Item 3: Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, Michel Forst

**Oral Statement Delivered by Syme de Leon on behalf of
Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)**

Wednesday, 4 March 2020

Madam President, FORUM-ASIA welcomes the Special Rapporteur's report on defenders operating in conflict and post-conflict settings and echoes his concerns on the extreme hostilities they face. Examples of this include the arbitrary arrest and detention of hundreds of HRDs in Indian-administered, Jammu and Kashmir during the on-going blockade²; the spate of killings of HRDs in increasingly militarised areas of the Philippines²; and intimidation and threats against HRDs in West Papua³.

We also share the Special Rapporteur's concerns on the heightened risks faced by particular groups such as HRDs based in remote areas that have high exposure to risk but limited access to protection mechanisms, and WHRDs who face gender-based harassment. For example, in the past few years, a group of WHRDs working to highlight human rights violations in Southern Thailand were targeted with smear campaigns that vilified them through sexist and misogynist language.⁴

We also appreciate the Special Rapporteur's report on his visit to Mongolia and agree with his concerns on threats and intimidation against land and environmental rights defenders. These include multiple threats against defenders from the "Save Onon River" movement⁵ and the attack against Ms Mungunkhun Dulmaa, who in 2018 was detained and sexually harassed by the security personnel of Steppe Gold company for protesting against their mining operation. These cases demonstrate the urgent need for comprehensive and robust legislations and policies for the protection of HRDs in Mongolia that are consistent with international human rights standards⁶

Lastly, we are alarmed by the growing trend of harassment and attacks against HRDs by religious extremists, particularly by non-state actors with tacit support from the state as in Maldives, India and Sri Lanka, and the use of Strategic Lawsuits against Public Participation (SLAPP) by business corporations as in Thailand⁷. What steps would the Special Rapporteur recommend to combat such forms of harassment and attacks? Thank you.

¹ <https://www.forum-asia.org/?p=29947>

² Examples of cases can be found in: [FORUM-ASIA's database](#)

³ Examples of cases can be found in: [FORUM-ASIA's database](#)

⁴ Communication report, Thailand JAL THA 6/2017,

<https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gld=23325>

⁵ FORUM-ASIA, Our Land: Fact-Finding Mission Report on the Impacts of Mining on Defenders and Environment in Khentii and Dornod Provinces, Mongolia, <https://www.forum-asia.org/?p=30163>

⁶ Open Letter: Enacting Law on the Legal Status of Human Rights Defenders in Mongolia, <https://www.forum-asia.org/?p=30797>

⁷ Between 2018 and 2019, total 49 SLAPP cases were documented in Thailand. 2019 Report: Recommendations on the Protection of Those who Exercise Their Rights and Freedoms from Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participations, Human Rights Lawyers Association (HRLA), page 9, http://naksit.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Final_TRANS-report-SLAPP_A5.pdf