



## **Afghanistan: ANNI condemns the killing of two human rights defenders**

(Bangkok, 1 July 2020) – The heightened violence and attacks against human rights defenders must be brought to an end if there is any hope for peace talks to be held in Afghanistan, a rights group said.

In a statement, the Asian NGO Network on National Human Rights Institutions (ANNI), an initiative of the Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA), condemned the killing of two staff members of Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) on 27 June, 2020<sup>1</sup>. Fatima Khalil, a donor liaison officer and Ahmad Jawed Folad, a driver, were killed in a targeted attack on the way to their office in Kabul when an explosive device attached to the AIHRC vehicle detonated<sup>2</sup>.

‘This incident adds to the grim pattern of targeted attacks against Afghanistan’s constitutionally-mandated national human rights institution. An immediate and impartial investigation into the killings of Fatima Khalil and Ahmad Jawed Folad must be conducted to bring the perpetrators to justice,’ said Shamini Darshni Kalietmuthu, FORUM-ASIA Executive Director.

Since its inception, the AIHRC has served to promote and protect human rights in Afghanistan despite the country’s challenging socio-political and security environment. In the past, AIHRC staff have been killed in targeted attacks for their human rights work. In September 2019, Abdul Samad Amiri, a human rights defender and senior member of AIHRC, was abducted and killed by the Taliban in the Jalriz district of Maidan Wardak province.<sup>3</sup> In 2015, two AIHRC staff members were killed and six others injured by a roadside explosive device in Nagarhahr province.<sup>4</sup>

‘It is crucial for AIHRC to be able to perform its duties with independence and impartiality, without interference or fear of reprisal. The Government of Afghanistan must fulfil its international obligations to ensure AIHRC an enabling environment to remain independent and to carry out its valuable work to restore and protect human rights in the country,’ said Shamini.

Human rights defenders in Afghanistan continue to face harassment, threats, intimidation, violence and even death for their work. Despite peace talks between the Government and the Taliban, there is a worrying trend of violation and abuses with impunity against human rights defenders.

FORUM-ASIA had documented at least 11 cases of attacks against human rights defenders in Afghanistan between 2019 and 2020. Five out of 11 of the cases detailed the killings of human rights defenders. Between 2018 and 2019, the Safety and Risk Mitigation Organization (SRMO) documented a total of 33 incidents of attacks against the human rights defenders community in Afghanistan, in which nine human rights defenders were killed and three were injured in targeted attacks.<sup>5</sup>

ANNI urges the Government of Afghanistan to guarantee the safety, integrity and wellbeing of all human rights defenders in the country. The Government, together with the AIHRC, should heed to the Marrakech

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<sup>1</sup> <https://in.reuters.com/article/afghanistan-attacks-rights/two-afghan-human-rights-workers-killed-in-blast-in-kabul-idINKBN23YOPP>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.aihrc.org.af/home/press\\_release/8905](https://www.aihrc.org.af/home/press_release/8905)

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia\\_pacific/a-young-afghan-pledged-to-better-his-country-then-he-was-shot-dead/2019/09/08/9640be50-d077-11e9-a620-0a91656d7db6\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/a-young-afghan-pledged-to-better-his-country-then-he-was-shot-dead/2019/09/08/9640be50-d077-11e9-a620-0a91656d7db6_story.html)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.asiapacificforum.net/news/afghan-commission-mourns-staff-killed-attack/>

<sup>5</sup> <http://srmo.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/Reports-19/SRMO-Annual-Report-State-of-HRDs-in-Afghanistan-2018-2019.pdf>

Declaration<sup>6</sup> and strengthen the protection of human rights defenders by putting effective protection systems in place.

‘Human rights defenders have an important and legitimate role in contributing to the realisation of peace and human rights for all. Their protection is imperative in Afghanistan’s endeavor to end ongoing wars and move towards peace processes,’ said Shamini.

**About the Asian NGOs Network on National Human Rights Institutions (ANNI):**

*The Asian NGOs Network on National Human Rights Institutions (ANNI) was established in December 2006. It is a network of Asian non-governmental organisations and human rights defenders working on issues related to National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs). ANNI has members that are national organisations from all over Asia. ANNI currently has 33 member organisations from 21 countries or territories. The work of ANNI members focuses on strengthening the work and functioning of Asian NHRIs to better promote and protect human rights as well as to advocate for the improved compliance of Asian NHRIs with international standards, including the Paris Principles and General Observations of the Sub-Committee on Accreditation (SCA) of the Global Alliance of NHRIs (GANHRI). The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) has served as the Secretariat of ANNI since its establishment in 2006. <http://l.forum-asia.org/ANNI>*

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<sup>6</sup> Marrakech Declaration on Expanding the civic space and promoting and protecting human rights defenders, with a specific focus on women: The role of national human rights institutions, <https://www.forum-asia.org/?p=30155&nhri=1>