



46th Regular Session of the UN Human Rights Council
Item 3: Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development – General Debate

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

Monday, 8 March 2021

Madam President, FORUM-ASIA draws the Council's attention to violence against human rights defenders in Asia including killings and threats. In 2020, FORUM-ASIA recorded 37 killings of defenders across Asia, with the highest number of cases documented in the Philippines, Pakistan, and Afghanistan.¹

The report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders presented to this session of the Council echoes concerns about the widespread killings of human rights defenders around the world.

Vilification and normalisation of violence against defenders, often through government narratives and persistent impunity for violations against defenders fuel the conditions that enable these killings to repeat. This includes, for example, the continued use of violence and excessive force against HRDs protesting peacefully. Emblematic cases can be seen in Thailand, where pro-democracy protesters were met with water cannons laced with chemicals and protest leaders, with judicial harassment;² and in India where tear gas and batons have been used to disperse protesters challenging repressive laws that threaten their lives and livelihoods.³ Similarly in the Philippines, vilification campaigns such as 'red tagging' by state actors, in particular against WHRDs, have resulted in the killings of many defenders. Most recently, Zara Alvarez, a prominent WHRD was gunned down by unknown assailants after being red tagged and receiving multiple threatening messages.⁴

We are also particularly alarmed by the escalating crackdowns against peaceful protesters in Myanmar since the recent military coup, including through use of excessive force and lethal weapons which have resulted in killings, arbitrary arrest and detention, and internet shutdowns.⁵

Human rights defenders are at the forefront of resisting government repression. Violence against defenders are often the first early warning signals of greater and more systematic restrictions of fundamental freedoms and human rights. The Council must pay closer attention to trends in violence against HRDs to prevent systematic and widespread human rights violations.

Thank you.

¹ Although these statistics alone are concerning, they only represent the emblematic cases that has been captured through FORUM-ASIA'S documentation. For more details on these cases and our statistics, please visit the [Asian Human Rights Defenders Portal](#)

² <https://www.forum-asia.org/?p=33374>

³ <https://www.forum-asia.org/?p=33846>

⁴ <https://www.forum-asia.org/?p=32519>

⁵ <https://www.forum-asia.org/?p=33889>