46th regular of the UN Human Rights Council
Item 2: General Debate on the High Commissioner's update

Oral Statement Delivered by Ahmed Adam
On behalf of the Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)

Thursday, 25 February 2021

Madam President, we thank the High Commissioner for her update and the report on the human rights impacts of COVID-19.

Governments across Asia have used COVID-19 pandemic to impose excessive restrictions and legitimise existing restrictions on fundamental freedoms and civic space. Several countries in the region, including India, Pakistan, Indonesia and Thailand, among many others, have used emergency measures to criminalise dissent as well as legitimate criticism of governments' response to COVID-19 on the pretext of combatting misinformation about the pandemic. Many governments have imposed complete bans on peaceful protests with serious criminal charges for non-compliance.

Such restrictions will have a long-lasting impact on human rights beyond the pandemic as governments continue to institutionalise them through legislation. We urge the Council and the High Commissioner to continue regular follow-up to report to prevent serious long-term implications of COVID-19 on civic space and fundamental freedoms.

Finally, we reiterate grave concerns about the ongoing human rights crisis in Jammu and Kashmir where restrictions on fundamental freedoms continue more than one and half years after the revocation the constitutional autonomy. Raids in October 2020 on homes and offices of human rights defenders and NGOs by India's anti-terrorism authorities are clear attempts at intimidation which have contributed to further escalation of the crisis. We call on India to remove all restrictions on fundamental freedoms and allow human rights defenders and civil society to continue their legitimate work without fear of reprisals. We urge the High Commissioner to continue to monitor and regularly report to the Council on the human rights situation in Kashmir. Thank you.