Our Struggle for Human Rights

Report on the 25 years of FORUM-ASIA Anniversary Event

8 January 2016, Bangkok, Thailand
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In 2016 the Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) celebrated its 25th Anniversary. A milestone that was celebrated with a year-long campaign that included a publication, an online version of the same, an exhibition, many social media postings and much more.

This report summarises the presentations and discussions that took place during the 25 Years FORUM-ASIA Anniversary event that kick-started the year-long celebration. The event was held at the Pridi Banomyong Institute in Bangkok, Thailand on 8 January 2016. In line with the rest of the campaign, the event focused on 25 years of promoting and protecting human rights in Asia. Over the course of the day, people reflected on what FORUM-ASIA did over those years, what lessons were learnt, and what speakers and participants saw as priorities for the future.

During the day, the anniversary publication, ‘Our Struggle for Human Rights – 25 Years of FORUM-ASIA’ was launched, both the print and online version. At the end of the day, the anniversary exhibition was unveiled.

The event was attended by some 160 participants, including FORUM-ASIA members, but also representatives of various civil society organisations, academic institutions, inter-governmental organisations, and Governments from across Asia and beyond. Participants came from countries, ranging from Mongolia and South Korea to Timor-Leste, Vietnam and Myanmar to Pakistan, Bangladesh, the Maldives and Afghanistan. Institutions that were represented included the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UN Women, the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), the European Union Delegation, and several Embassies, specifically from Malaysia, the Netherlands, Germany, the United States of America, Canada, Belgium, Sweden and Norway.

The anniversary event was divided in different discussion panels and enriched by videos which were compiled from interviews with numerous human rights defenders from across Asia. The first panel gave insight into the history of FORUM-ASIA and developments over the past 25 years. The second session reflected on the future of human rights in Asia, while the third panel discussion focussed on the new generation of human rights defenders, but also gave the floor to two of the main donors of FORUM-ASIA, and the newly elected Chair. The day ended with a reception for old friends to catch up, make new contacts and check-out the anniversary exhibition.

1 Please click here for the online version of the publication
2 All videos can be found here. Additionally you can find extracts of single interviews with various human rights defenders from across Asia which were conducted in 2015 as preparation for the 25 years Anniversary Campaign.
3 Click here for the video ‘Celebrating 25 years of FORUM-ASIA’
4 Click here for the video ‘The Future of Human Rights’
5 Click here for the video ‘Advising the new generation of HRDs’
6 Click here for the video ‘The role of FORUM-ASIA’
The Anniversary Event was opened by Angkhana Neelapaijit, the founder and President of the Justice for Peace Foundation (JPF) and member of the National Human Rights Commission of Thailand, together with Henri Tiphagne, the former Chair of FORUM-ASIA (2012-2016) and Executive Director of People’s Watch, India.

They emphasised the development of a great sense of community among human rights activists in Asia over the last decades. It took a lot of determination and integrity to do so, and involved the hard work of human rights defenders from across the region. FORUM-ASIA played a role of great significance in that process. Taking some time to reflect on 25 years of human rights struggle should be both a moment of celebration and reflection.

The work for human rights needs to and will be continued everywhere in Asia. It is a necessity, not a choice. Human rights defenders are personally targeted. This is further intensified by the impunity which is enjoyed by many perpetrators of human rights violations, as well as by the delay of the administration of justice by the State in many countries across the region. The struggle for justice and equality will be continued without compromising with the surrounding pressures.

They also thanked many people that were involved with, part of and significant for FORUM-ASIA over the years. Particular mention was made of: the original founding members; experts that served as advisors or donors; those who were part of the Executive Committee; and current and former members of the Secretariat staff. Only because of all those people that committed themselves over the years, did FORUM-ASIA manage to grow into what it is today.

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7 Henri Tiphagne also contributed to the FORUM-ASIA Anniversary Publication with his chapter about ‘People’s Watch and its ongoing struggle for justice for torture victims in India’ (p.221-228).
FORUM-ASIA’s Executive Director, Evelyn Balais-Serrano introduced the key-note speaker of the day, Shui-Meng Ng. Shui-Meng is the wife of Sombath Somphone, a Lao civil society leader who disappeared on 15 December 2012.¹

Shui-Meng talked about her personal experience with human rights violations, stemming from the abduction of her husband, Sombath.

Sombath is a Laotian development worker, who is widely known for his support of the rural poor community. Although his abduction was caught on CCTV, and it shows him being taken away by policemen, the Laotian Government denies any involvement in it. In spite of all the evidence provided by his family and support from activists from all over the world, no transparent investigation has been conducted in his case.

Besides her own personal experience, Shui-Meng also talked about the experiences of Angkhana Neelapaijit in Thailand and Irom Sharmila in India. Those, and many others, highlight the devastating results of the failure to protect human rights.

‘I tell you this to remind you that beyond every human rights struggle there is a wound. Each human rights violation is also a wound for the victim’s family and for the entire human family.’

Shui-Meng Ng

Human rights violations happen in countries all across Asia, continued Shui-Meng. Even more, a rise in human rights violations and the denial of truth of justice is visible everywhere. They mainly affect the poor and marginalised groups, such as minorities. Human rights abuses do not only happen under authoritarian regimes, but also occur in multi-party democracies. Shui-Meng called it: ‘a modern version of rule of law where human rights violations actually protect the people in power.’

¹ To learn more about Sombath Somphone and what happened to him, visit [www.sombath.org/en](http://www.sombath.org/en).
Shui-Meng also reflected on FORUM-ASIA’s work over the past 25 years. She specifically talked about aspects needed to do human rights work in Asia: partnerships; regional as well as global progress; and perseverance when facing challenges and difficulties.

Shui-Meng finished her speech with some suggestions regarding the future of FORUM-ASIA:

1) **To demystify the human rights discourse and make it less academic.** The language of human rights conventions and instruments is difficult. Different interpretations make them even harder to understand. Many people in Asia live under challenging circumstances. They have to face realities which should be addressed by human rights. But since they are not aware of their rights, they cannot claim them. FORUM-ASIA should help them know and claim their rights, and to be able to do that we need to use language that the people understand.

2) **Campaigns must continue in a sustained manner.** People should learn the basic principles of their rights. They need to gain awareness about institutions and mechanisms that have been set-up to protect their human rights. As such information becomes common knowledge it will contribute to a greater defence of justice. This takes time and effort. And campaigns aimed at making this happen need to be sustained for a long time.

3) **The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are going to be at the heart of the human rights discourse** for the coming years, and we, human rights activists need to make them our own, our goals for justice and development.

Shui-Meng closed by stressing that she hoped that FORUM-ASIA would lead the advocacy for and interpretation of human rights even more effectively in the coming decades.
IV. Panel Discussion: reflecting on the past - 25 years of FORUM-ASIA

The anniversary event continued with a panel discussion focussed on ‘Reflecting on the past – 25 years of FORUM-ASIA’. The four speakers each represented different involvements with FORUM-ASIA over the years: Subodh Raj Pyakurel, Chairperson of the Informal Sector Service Centre (INSEC), Nepal, spoke as one of the founding members of FORUM-ASIA; Chalida Tajaroensuk, Executive Director of People’s Empowerment Foundation, Thailand, reflected based on her time as staff of the Secretariat; Mike Hayes, lecturer at the Institute of Human Rights and Peace Studies, Mahidol University, Bangkok, Thailand, reflected as a long-time partner of the organisation; and Sayeed Ahmad, Asian Protection Coordinator, Front Line Defenders, Bangladesh, represented someone who has been both trainee, fellow, staff, member and partner. The session was chaired by Marte Hellema, Information, Communication and Publication Programme Manager of FORUM-ASIA based in Bangkok.

Subodh RajPyakurel, one of the founding members of FORUM-ASIA, shared that FORUM-ASIA was originally established for the promotion of social justice, a mandate that still stands today. To realise that dream FORUM-ASIA members should be or should become leaders in the human rights discourse. More so, the translation of human rights into progress comes through the democratic process and rule of law. Dialogue and struggle are needed to achieve these goals.

Chalida Tajaroensuk talked about her experience as the first staff member of FORUM-ASIA. The first years of the organisation, after its establishment, were obviously focussed on raising funds and finding supporters. During this time, FORUM-ASIA and its members were figuring out what issues needed to be addressed and how to do so. This resulted in an initial focus on capacity building and human rights education.
With time the organisation grew, and ideas and objectives changed. All of this resulted in FORUM-ASIA being a truly regional human rights organisation, a movement.

As an example of the kind of activities that FORUM-ASIA worked on, during her time with the Secretariat, Chalida talked about two Ustas from Southern Thailand, who had been accused and convicted of involvement with terrorist activities in Cambodia, and FORUM-ASIA’s efforts to have them be released. She explained it was an example of how being involved with human rights can be difficult, sensitive and how it takes time and effort to make a difference.⁹

Mike Hayes, a long-term partner of FORUM-ASIA, highlighted that there were only a few organisations in the region that were working on human rights in 1991, the year FORUM-ASIA was established. The human rights discourse was much less prominent in the public debate across Asia. The United Nations (UN), while obviously working on human rights, were less focussed on the protection of human rights defenders, and the protection mandate thus fell on non-governmental organisations. Many organisations working in the region were not connected to the West, and only a few National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) had been established.

All this underscored the importance of the establishment of FORUM-ASIA at the time. Nowadays many things have contributed to the expansion and development of the human rights movement, among them information and communication technologies. Reaching wider audiences has become much easier, although still complicated, compared to earlier times.

Sayeed Ahmad talked about how his own involvement with FORUM-ASIA changed his career and life. His initial engagement with the organisation started when he joined a member organisation of FORUM-ASIA. In that capacity, he joined one of FORUM-ASIA’s trainings. A little while after, he became a Fellow at the office in Bangkok, stayed on as a Staff member, and now works for a key partner organisation of FORUM-ASIA, Front Line Defenders. He emphasised that, among other things, FORUM-ASIA connected him to a network of people. It was a big part of why he still is a human rights defender and part of the larger human rights movement today.

Relating to the development of FORUM-ASIA, as an organisation and network, he noted that the initial focus was on capacity building of human rights defenders. With time, regional and international campaigning and advocacy became a more central component of FORUM-ASIA’s work, among others through the establishment of the office in Geneva. Sayeed stressed the importance of bringing grass-roots voices to international political arenas.

He concluded by saying that FORUM-ASIA was established to enhance regional cooperation, something which remains crucial to this day. Something which, to be able to foresee challenges and prepare ourselves for these in the years to come, we need to strengthen even more.

⁹ This case is featured in the anniversary publication ‘Our Struggle for Human Rights - 25 Years of FORUM-ASIA’: ‘A Terrorist or a Victim – The Story of two Muslim Ustas from Yala’, by Chalida Tajaroenaks. (p. 269-270)
The panel discussion on the future of human rights in Asia was facilitated by Anselmo Lee, Co-convenor of the Asia Democracy Network (ADN) and former Executive Director of FORUM-ASIA. Speakers were: Adrien-Claude Zoller, Founder of the International Service for Human Rights (ISHR); Debbie Stothard, Secretary General of the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and Coordinator of ALTSEAN-Burma; Gayoon Baek, Coordinator of the Peace and International Solidarity Team at the People’s Solidarity for Participatory Democracy (PSPD), South Korea; Rafendi Djamin, Executive Director of the Human Rights Working Group (HRWG), Indonesia and first Representative of Indonesia to the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR); and Anoop Sukumaran, Regional Representative for Asia and the Pacific of the ACT Alliance.

After all speakers introduced themselves and highlighted their connection with FORUM-ASIA, Anselmo opened the discussion. He asked all speakers to give their view on the observation that there is shrinking political space for civil society, and in particular human rights defenders in Asia. He also asked them to reflect on the future of human rights in the region overall.

Gayoon Baek shared her views on the state of affairs in Northeast Asia. She presented three main issues that also dictate the primary areas of work of PSPD, which are: ending the war on the Korean Peninsula and the signing of a peace treaty; realising peace in East Asia, and Asia Pacific overall; and establishing a nuclear-free Northeast Asia.

From the perspective of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), Rafendi Djamin highlighted the changing global geo-political context as a major challenge.

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10 Read more about PSPD in the chapter in the anniversary publication by clicking here.
Asian economies are growing, and are changing their role at the international political stage. China and India are aggressive players both regionally and globally in this sense. Another development, which Rafendi mentioned, was the increasing number of international organisations in the region over the past five years. Finally, he also commented on the growing awareness and consciousness of Asian Governments about religious and indigenous minorities. ‘One of the most essential aspects for the future of human rights movements’, Rafendi said, ‘therefore needs to be how to engage with like-minded Governments, which are in favour of human rights and are willing to address the shrinking space for civil society.’

Asian Governments are becoming more and more active on the international level, for instance in UN Human Rights Council meetings. Key challenges, Anselmo summarised, are therefore: the shrinking space for civil society; and more confrontations with Governments.

Debbie Stothard\(^ {11}\) called the current time the Golden Age of human rights. While working in the human rights field was not socially accepted in the past, there is now a broader understanding of human rights in Asia, and it is starting to be considered ‘normal’. While this marks progress, it is important to recognise that this acceptance has not been equal for all human rights. The biggest challenge in the coming decades will continue to be to ensure that Governments respect, promote and protect human rights. Debbie was hopeful about future opportunities to do just that, but also said that we will need the support of donors. ‘Creating human rights magic’ and investing in building and sustaining movements are thus the main challenges for the future.

Adrien-Claude Zoller highlighted that while there have been many gains, when it comes to standard setting for human rights, there is still a lack of implementation and practice.

\(^ {11}\) Debbie Stothard also contributed to the anniversary publication. You can find her chapter about ‘ALTSEAN Burma – Changing Burma and the ASEAN region’ here. (p. 29-34)
Some of the main challenges for human rights in Asia are: repressive regimes that are not open to human rights; and the increasing forced movement of people, including migrants and refugees. There is shrinking space for civil society, and the global economy contributes to the increasing gap between the rich and the poor. As a solution Adrien stressed the importance of coalition-building.

Anoop Sukumaran reflected further on the changing developments in the context of migration. The concept of national identity is becoming a problem. The plight of forced migrants and refugees has become a major issue both regionally and globally. It requires a rethinking of humanity, one that looks beyond colour and race.

During the questions and comments part of the session, several audience members shared their reflections on what they thought the main challenges and developments were related to the future of human rights in Asia.

The issues of migration in the region, and in particular the plight of the Rohingya, came up once more. One of the most crucial challenges of our time is, without a doubt, the increasing number of refugees, both in Asia and in Europe. This will lead to additional challenges that we, as humanity, need to learn how to cope with, for example how to live together as multicultural societies. Among the refugees in Europe are those coming from Asia. This, together with other developments, highlights the need for cooperation between human rights defenders from all regions and corners of the world. Currently there is still a lack of equality in terms of the approach to refugees.

Another topic which came up during the discussion was the promotion and protection of human rights within the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). For this to be possible, it was said, it is crucial to connect the SDGs to the grass-roots level. The SDGS should be used as a tool to connect different groups into one agenda, and to give direction to and within the human rights movement.
At the same time, they are difficult to explain to grass-roots organisations. This makes connecting the global agenda behind the SDGs to the people on the ground one of the main challenges for the coming years.

The need to include people with disabilities in the human rights movement and to ensure they can enjoy their rights equally, was raised by other participants to the event. FORUM-ASIA, other organisations and movements should ensure that their activities and events are also accessible for disabled persons.

‘We need to rethink what humanity is. When we are talking about human rights, what are we talking about? Are we talking about human beings or are we talking about colour? Are we saying, if you have a passport of a particular country you should be treated differently? Fact is, (...) we see people differently. And unfortunately, many of us in our own work see that.’

Anoop Sukumaran

Finally, the shrinking space for civil society was mentioned and highlighted several times. Given that many human rights defenders across the region are facing shrinking political space in their countries, solidarity and connecting with each other was mentioned as being of increasing importance. Moreover, as a movement we need to make more efforts to reach out and collaborate with human rights defenders who are from, and work in, places that traditionally are restrictive of civil society.

The situation in Vietnam is a crucial example of such a place, as was emphasised by one participant who belongs to a human rights organisation from Vietnam. Because of the restrictions by the Government, there is a lack of systematic development and activities among civil society groups in Vietnam. On the grass-roots level there is no knowledge about regional possibilities to connect. Situations like this need to be addressed in the future so that grass-roots groups have more abilities to participate in regional as well as international discussions.
VI. Panel Discussion - The new generation of human rights defenders

The final panel discussion started with reflections from Dr. Gothom Arya, Associate Professor at Mahidol University in Bangkok and former Secretary General of FORUM-ASIA. He congratulated FORUM-ASIA for all it has done and accomplished over the last 25 years. And he expressed his well wishes, not just for the future of FORUM-ASIA, but for all people, persons with handicaps or disabilities, human rights defenders and all those who are not able to defend themselves. He stressed his hope that FORUM-ASIA would continue to promote human rights for all those groups in the future.

The final panel discussion itself featured two young human rights leaders, who shared reflections based on their views, work and experiences related to the new generation of human rights defenders. The speakers were: Wai Wai Nu, a young Rohingya woman, co-founder of Justice for Women, Myanmar, and founder and director of the Women Peace Network Arakan, Myanmar; and Suhaimee Dulasa from Patani, South of Thailand, former President of the Patani Federation of Students and Youth (PERMAS). The conversation was facilitated by Ruki Fernando, Advisor to INFORM Human Rights Documentation Centre, Sri Lanka and newly elected member of the Executive Committee of FORUM-ASIA.

Both young human rights defenders highlighted their own involvement and personal experiences with human rights violations, and gave input on how to involve the younger generation in the future.

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12 To learn more about Ruki and his work related to Sri Lanka, read his chapter in our anniversary publication by clicking here.
Suhaimee Dulasa talked about the tense situation in Thailand’s South, Patani, including his own personal background. He explained that Patani has a very long history, and how the way of life, culture and belief there differs from the rest of Thailand. To attempt to protect their own identity, the people of Patani have been claiming the right to live according to their own culture. This has been perceived and labelled as separatist, and at times even terrorist, by Thai authorities. In terms of building peace in Southern Thailand, Suhaimee emphasised the importance of allowing the people of Patani to represent their own identity.

In this process the assistance of international organisations is needed to support the involvement and growth of local communities in the peace process, as was, and is still being, done in Aceh and Mindanao.

‘If we want a country to be concerned about human rights or community identity rights, we should start by telling young people about this cause.’ Suhaimee Dulasa

Wai Wai Nu highlighted as one of the biggest challenges for the future in the region the acceptance of human rights as being universal, especially in some of the ASEAN member countries. Many Governments in the ASEAN region, such as Burma/Myanmar, still ignore basic human rights principles, among others by restricting the freedom of expression. While the tradition and culture of any given country needs to be respected, this should not be done at the expense of human rights. Specifically minorities and women are facing restrictions in their rights in many countries in the region, among them Malaysia and Burma/Myanmar, especially when it comes to their political rights.

The Rohingya are still not able to enjoy their rights as citizens in Burma/Myanmar.
Highlighting this through her own experience, she talked about her time as political prisoner. She was arrested and incarcerated because of her father being politically active and being part of the Rohingya community. Wai Wai stressed the crucial importance of protecting minorities, like her, in the democratic era in ASEAN.

Reflecting on potential opportunities for the future, communication, information and technological developments were particularly highlighted. They create possibilities for networking across various platforms on the national, regional and global level. New challenges arise from them as well though, including how to use them to promote democracy and human rights.

For this to succeed it is very important to have good coordination amongst the younger generation, and to use these channels most efficiently. It is essential to encourage the younger generation to actively take part in the human rights discourse. The key to promoting and protecting human rights is raising awareness and empowering young people. Young people nowadays are more organised and active, and want to take part in promoting democracy and human rights. Human rights values should be shared with fellow young people by informing them about the devastating consequences of not preventing human rights violations.

Manipulation through power is one of the main sources of threats to or violations of human rights. The influence of the leaders of extremist groups on society, as for instance in Burma/Myanmar, leads young people to become supporters of polarisation and hatred. It is crucial to create societies that respect human rights, and the role of human rights organisations is crucial in that process by educating the people and spreading human rights messages. The extent to which human rights violations are accepted in a society relates to the level of consciousness and awareness about them. The prevention of violations starts with teaching people how to recognise and to avoid them. This needs to start from education.
VI. Final Session - The future of FORUM-ASIA

The anniversary event concluded with reflections on the future of FORUM-ASIA by Anne Charlotte Malm, the Head of the Development Cooperation Section (Regional) Human Rights & Democracy of the Embassy of Sweden in Bangkok and Louis Bickford, Manager of the Global Human Rights Program at the Ford Foundation. The closing remarks were made by Urantsooj Gombosuren, Chair of the Centre for Human Rights and Development (CHRD), Mongolia and newly elected Chair of FORUM-ASIA.

Anne Charlotte Malm stressed the challenges that organisations like FORUM-ASIA nowadays face related to the shrinking space for civil society, which are manifested by restrictions to and the criminalisation of the freedom of expression, assembly and association all over the region. Even if in percentages poverty is declining in Asia, the sheer number of people falling below the poverty line in the region means that there are still too many who are affected and face an expanding inequality gap. People living in poverty are the most vulnerable to injustices and violations of their human rights.

The welfare systems of European countries such as Sweden and Germany are under pressure of refugees escaping armed conflicts such as those in Syria and Iraq. This has led to a decline in resources available for development aid. The role of civil society organisations is therefore more important than ever. The effective protection of human rights standards and human rights defenders is essential, and civil society organisations play an important role in that. The biggest challenge in the future is therefore sustainability in the promotion of human rights.
FORUM-ASIA, as a regional network, needs to support its members in that process, while remaining connected to what is happening on the ground. Anne Charlotta stressed her pride of representing Sweden as having been a constructive partner of FORUM-ASIA, beyond mere financial support, for such a long time. She also expressed her desire that more countries would support more human rights organisations in Asia.

Anne Charlotta highlighted the crucial need for proper research as the precondition for effective work. She also emphasised the need for equality and promoting human rights regardless of gender. This does not only include the focus on girls and women, but on equal chances for boys and men as well. Anne Charlotte ended her reflections with an open question to the participants on how Governments like Sweden could support human rights defenders and organisations in a constructive way beyond mere financial support.

Louis Bickford reflected on new trends related to the human rights discourse and stated that FORUM-ASIA has all preconditions to be a serious human rights leader in the global middle. There are certain aspects which need to be considered in this context and form the main trends in development. Big international organisations are trying to be more grounded and engaged in the national context, while national organisations are attempting to reach the global level. These developments create a global middle which is very robust.

To be a serious human rights leader in the global middle, it is required to realise that the old level of transnational advocacy, in terms of the existence of big international organisations, has changed to favour national ones. Real solutions move away from ‘naming and shaming’ to actually trying to ‘think through’ policy solutions at a national level, where national organisations do much better than international ones. Networks benefit in this matter since they link experiences together across borders.

‘Looking at the next 25 years of FORUM-ASIA, the future is very exciting, very challenging, but very bright’.
Louis Bickford

Louis stressed the need to be problem-solvers, and emphasised not to ‘only use human rights’, but to be innovative, particularly considering the earlier mentioned shrinking availability of resources from Governments for non governmental organisations, created among others by the refugee crisis in Europe, which has led to the need for more pro bono solutions.
Urantsooj Gomboasuren, the newly elected Chair of FORUM-ASIA, closed the formal part of the event. She emphasised, on behalf of FORUM-ASIA, that we would do our best to improve the infrastructures of our societies in the region, to strengthen the ability of all people to demand and enjoy human rights.

She introduced the new Executive Committee Members of FORUM-ASIA: Rafendi Djamin, Human Rights Working Group (HRWG), Indonesia (Vice-Chairperson); Adilur Rahman Khan, Odhikar, Bangladesh; Sadia Hussain, Society for the Protection of the Rights of the Child (SPARC), Pakistan; Max de Mesa, Philippine Alliance of Human Rights Advocates (PAHRA), Philippines; Ruki Fernando, INFORM Human Rights Documentation Centre, Sri Lanka; and Adrian Heok, Think Centre, Singapore.

In closing, she expressed her sincere gratitude to the guests, partners and supporters for being part of the anniversary celebration, and invited everyone to the reception and exhibition afterwards.
After the formal part of the anniversary event was done, all participants were invited to join the reception. While having a drink and a snack, they were able to check out the anniversary exhibition.

The exhibition consisted of photos of numerous human rights defenders and experts from across Asia and beyond combined with quotes that reflected on 25 years of FORUM-ASIA, 25 years of human rights, as well as trends related to the future of our region.
Some 160 participants attended the anniversary event. A part from FORUM-ASIA members, participants included representatives of various civil society organisations, academic institutions, inter-governmental organisations, and Governments from across Asia. Participants came from countries ranging from Mongolia and South Korea, to Timor-Leste, Vietnam and Myanmar to Pakistan, Bangladesh, the Maldives and Afghanistan.

The event also represented an ideal occasion to network with different institutions and Embassies present. Institutions that were represented included the UNDP, UN Women, the UNFPA, the European Union Delegation, and several Embassies, such as Malaysia, the Netherlands, Germany, the United States of America, Canada, Belgium, Sweden and Norway.

The hashtag used during the event, as well as for the anniversary campaign for the rest of the year – #FORUMASIA25 – was top 5 trending topic in Bangkok at one point during the day, and top 10 trending topic in Thailand on Twitter. During the day itself, it was used by 94 users, mentioned in over 500 Tweets, and reached more than 170,921 accounts.

The whole event was, as mentioned in the beginning of this report, part of FORUM-ASIA 25th anniversary campaign and will be followed by different activities throughout the year 2016. The publication ‘Our Struggle for Human Rights – 25 years of FORUM-ASIA’ will be distributed during activities organised by FORUM-ASIA and its partners, while three other 25th Anniversary public events have been planned to take place in Geneva, Jakarta and Kathmandu.

The campaign will be constantly promoted on FORUM-ASIA Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, where stories, photos and videos related to FORUM-ASIA 25th anniversary will be shared throughout the year.
## Annex I - Agenda

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<td>08:15 – 09:00</td>
<td>Arrival and registration of participants</td>
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<td>09:00 – 09:30</td>
<td>Start of the conference and words of welcome by Angkhana Neelapaijit and Henri Tiphagne</td>
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<td>09:30 – 09:35</td>
<td>Introduction of the key-note speaker by Evelyn Balais-Serrano</td>
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<td>9:35-10:10</td>
<td>Key-note address by Shui-Meng Ng</td>
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<td>10:10-10:30</td>
<td>Presentation of the first copy of the Anniversary publication, Our Struggle for Human Rights – 25 Years of FORUM-ASIA, to Shui-Meng Ng by Evelyn Balais-Serrano, Angkhana Neelapaijit and Henri Tiphagne</td>
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<td>10:30 – 11:00</td>
<td>Coffee break</td>
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<td>11:00 – 12:30</td>
<td>Panel discussion – Reflecting on the past – 25 years of FORUM-ASIA</td>
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<td>Speakers: Chalida Tajaroen, Subodh Pyakurel, Mike Hayes, Sayeed Ahmed</td>
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<td>Facilitator: Marte Hellema</td>
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<td>12:30 – 13:30</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
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<td>13:30 – 15:00</td>
<td>Panel discussion – The future of human rights in Asia</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Speakers: Adrien-Claude Zoller, Debbie Stothard, Gayoon Baek, Rafendi Djamin, Anoop Sukumaran</td>
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<td>15:00 – 15:30</td>
<td>Coffee break</td>
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<td>15:30 – 16:30</td>
<td>Panel discussion – The new generation of human rights defenders</td>
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<td>16:30 – 17:00</td>
<td>The future of FORUM-ASIA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reflections by Louis Bickford and Anne Charlotte Malm</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Introduction to the new strategic directions and closing by the newly appointed Chair of FORUM-ASIA</td>
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<tr>
<td>17:00 – 20:00</td>
<td>Reception and unveiling of the anniversary exhibition</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Annex II: List of participants

1. Acehnese Civil Society Task Force (ACSTIF)
2. Act Alliance
3. Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK), Bangladesh
4. ALTSEAN-Burma
5. Asia Democracy Network (ADN)
6. Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network (APRRN)
7. Asian Institute of Technology (AIT)
8. Asian Network for Free Elections (ANFREL)
9. AWAZ Foundation Pakistan
10. Boat People SOS (BP SOS)
11. Burma Partnership (BP)
12. Bytes for All, Pakistan
13. Caritas Thailand
14. Center for Social Action Documentation Research & Training (ADHIKAR), India
15. Centre for South Asian Studies (CSAS)
16. Civil Rights Defenders
17. Civil Society & Human Rights Network (CSHRN), Afghanistan
18. Community Self Reliance Center (CSRC), Nepal
19. Cooperative Research Centre for Contamination Assessment and Remediation of the Environment (CRC)
20. Dalit Foundation, India
21. Embassy of Belgium
22. Embassy of Canada
23. Embassy of Malaysia
24. Embassy of Sweden
25. Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany
26. Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands
27. Embassy of the United States
28. Embassy of Norway  
29. European Union  
30. Focus on the Global South  
31. Ford Foundation  
32. Foundation for Community Educational Media (FCEM)  
33. Front Line Defenders  
34. Geneva for Human Rights  
35. Globe International Center (GIC), Mongolia  
36. HAK Association, Timor-Leste  
37. Human Development Forum Foundation (HDFF)  
38. Human Rights Alert, India  
39. Human Rights Documentation Centre (INFORM), Sri Lanka  
40. Human Rights Working Group (HRWG), Indonesia  
41. Indonesian Legal Aid and Human Rights Association (PBHI), Indonesia  
42. Indonesian Legal Aid Foundation (YLBHI), Indonesia  
43. Informal Sector Service Centre (INSEC), Nepal  
44. International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)  
45. Judicial System Monitoring Programme (JSMP), Timor-Leste  
46. Tanggol Kalikasan, the Philippines  
47. KontraS, Indonesia  
48. Korean House for International Solidarity (KHIS), South Korea  
49. Law and Society Trust (LST), Sri Lanka  
50. Mahidol University  
51. Mahila Sarvangeen Utkarsha Mandal (MASUM), India  
52. Maldivian Democracy Network (MDN), the Maldives  
53. National Human Rights Commission of Bangladesh  
54. National Human Rights Commission of Thailand  
55. Odhikar, Bangladesh  
56. Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)  
57. Open Global Rights  
58. Oxfam Great Britain  
59. Peace Resource Collaborative (PRC)
60. People Empowerment Foundation (PEF), Thailand
61. People’s Solidarity for Participatory Democracy (PSPD), South Korea
62. People’s Vigilance Committee on Human Rights (PVCHR), India
63. People’s Watch, India
64. Philippine Alliance of Human Rights Advocates (PAHRA), the Philippines
65. PILIPINA Legal Resource Center (PLRC), the Philippines
66. Potahar Organization for Development Advocacy (PODA), Pakistan
67. Pusat KOMAS, Malaysia
68. Ramkhamhaeng University, Thailand
69. Regional Cooperation Platform (RCP), Thailand
70. Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh (RMMRU)
71. Regional Initiative for a South Asian Human Rights Mechanism (RI-SAHRM)
72. SAMIN, Indonesia
73. Society for the Protection of the Rights of the Child (SPARC), Pakistan
74. Sombath Initiative
75. South Asia Initiative to End Violence Against Children (SAIEVAC)
76. South India Cell for Human Rights Education and Monitoring (SICHREM), India
77. Southeast Asian Press Alliance (SEAPA)
78. SUARAM, Malaysia
79. Taiwan Association for Human Rights (TAHR), Taiwan
80. Task Force Detainees of the Philippines (TFDP), the Philippines
81. The Indonesian Human Rights Monitor (IMPARSIAL), Indonesia
82. Think Centre, Singapore
83. United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)
84. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
85. United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women)
86. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugee (UNHCR)
87. UPR Info
88. Vietnamese Women for Human Rights (VNWHR),
89. Voice
90. Women Peace Network Arakan, Myanmar