2021
FORUM-ASIA
Annual Report
Charting a Year of Human Rights Resilience in Asia
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We are moving forward, and so is our logo. We are happy to launch our new FORUM-ASIA logo - a simple yet modern take on our previous logo, with key elements that convey our mission and long-standing reputation.

With a darker and cooler tone to reflect our professionalism and maturity; a modern font to channel our bold and dynamic character; and an oval shape to represent the network of solidarity and support for people’s movements in the Asian region and beyond, this new expression of FORUM-ASIA aims to inspire, enlighten, and serve as a symbol of hope and strength across the region for many years to come.
I am pleased to present this report covering the work FORUM-ASIA has accomplished over the past year, at a time when the importance of human rights has become more evident than ever before.

As I write this Foreword, I can’t but think of how far we have come from our humble beginnings back in 1991 – and yet, at the same time, stayed true to the vision that first brought us together.

When FORUM-ASIA was established, our goal was to create a regional membership network formed by Asian organisations, to take ownership of our stories and participate in the international human rights discourse.

We believed that everyone’s rights should be fully respected and realised, and that the concept of human rights is not western nor eastern, but universal.

Over 30 years on, that belief continues to fuel our efforts, mission, and values. If anything, it has become firmer, just as our community has grown stronger.

Amidst the mounting challenges for human rights defenders in the region, we have worked to provide a safe space for them to operate in, and built coalitions for the human rights movement to find the support it needs to flourish.

As you will find in these pages, we would have not been able to do so without the commitment of our members, partners, and everyone who has accompanied us along the way.

This annual report is dedicated to the stories of courage and inspiration we have forged together in 2021, and to our ongoing commitment towards fostering a fairer and more just society – in the present days and for the years to come.

Urantsooj Gombosuren, Chairperson of FORUM-ASIA
ABOUT
FORUM-ASIA
We are a network of 85 member organisations across 23 countries, mainly in Asia. Founded in 1991, we work to strengthen movements for human rights and sustainable development through research, advocacy, capacity development and solidarity actions, in the region and beyond.

VISION
To build democratic, just, equitable and sustainable societies in Asia and beyond, where human rights of all individuals, groups, and peoples are fully realised, in accordance with international human rights standards and norms.

MISSION
To strengthen movements for human rights and sustainable development in Asia through advocacy, capacity-development and solidarity actions with human rights defenders and civil society organisations.

VALUES
- Transparency & Accountability
- Inclusion
- Relevance & Impact
- Creativity & Learning
- Safeguarding Wellbeing
- Empathy & Compassion

Artwork: We Are Not Free Until Everyone is Free by Anina Takeff/CC-BY-NC-SA (original artwork modified)
We believe that civil society organisations and human rights defenders are grassroots champions of change, and crucial pivotal actors in the drive to building fairer, more inclusive, and just societies in the region and around the world.

In order to achieve such an equitable ecosystem, however, it is essential that states and non-state actors also play their part to bring human rights to the forefront of their policy-making process. It is only then that they can truly respond to the lived experiences of their people, including the most vulnerable and marginalised groups in their societies.

For tangible change to happen, civil society organisations and human rights defenders should be capable and able to work as a bridge between States and people, through constantly challenging state wrongdoing, facilitating constructive engagement between the two, and advocating for policy and institutional change based on the needs of and evidence from the individuals they work with.

FORUM-ASIA has several intervention strategies in place to promote political, social, and legal reforms for guaranteeing human rights in many countries across the region.
We work primarily with our member organisations, most of which are national or grassroots non-governmental organisations (NGOs) based in different countries in Asia. We also work closely with civil society organisations, human rights defenders and National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) to always have first-hand information about different human rights landscapes and be able to inform the policy-making process at all levels, including the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), and United Nations (UN) human rights mechanisms.

OUR GOVERNANCE AND PROGRAMMES

As a membership-based network, FORUM-ASIA is governed by its organisational statutes and by-laws, which guide the organisation’s objective and means of interventions, as well as listing out its organs, roles and functions, condition of membership, and financial controls such as reporting and auditing. The statutes and by-laws, along with the FORUM-ASIA governance manual, also lay the foundation for the development of other organisational policies and regulations that reinforce FORUM-ASIA’s commitments towards accountability and transparency for both its internal and external stakeholders.

FORUM-ASIA organs, functions, and responsibilities
Members of the Executive Committee 2019-2021

Chairperson,
Urantsooj Gombosuren,
Centre for Human Rights and Development (CHRD), Mongolia

Vice-Chairperson,
Sevan Doraisamy,
Suara Rakyat Malaysia (SUARAM), Malaysia

Treasurer,
Suresh Kumar Dhakal,
Community Self Reliance Centre (CSRC), Nepal

Asfinawati,
Indonesia Legal Aid Foundation (YLBHI), Indonesia

Dr. Nymia P Simbulan,
Philippine Alliance of Human Rights Advocates (PAHRA), Philippines

Shahindha Ismail,
Maldivian Democracy Network (MDN), Maldives
Programmes at the Secretariat

- Administration Programme
- Finance Programme
- Communications and Media Programme
- Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Programme
- Development and Knowledge Management Programme
- East Asia and ASEAN Advocacy Programme
- Human Rights Defenders Programme
- National Human Rights Institutions Programme
- South Asia Programme
- United Nations Advocacy Programme

WHERE WE WORK AND OUR MEMBERS

- 5 members in Central Asia
- 10 members in Northeast Asia
- 31 members in South Asia
- 38 members in Southeast Asia
- 1 member in the Pacific
85 members in 23 countries

• Full-fledged member
• Associate member
• Affiliate member

**Afghanistan**

- Civil Society and Human Rights Network (CSHRN)
- Safety and Risk Mitigation Organisation (SRMO)

**Bangladesh**

- Ain O Salish Kendra (ASK)
- Madaripur Legal Aid Association (MLAA)
- Odhikar
- Resource Integration Center (RIC)
- Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU)

**Cambodia**

- Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights (LICADHO)
- Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association (ADHOC)
- Worker’s Information Centre (WIC)

**India**

- Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons (APDP)
- Banglar Manabadhikar Suraksha Mancha (MASUM)
- Centre for Communication and Development Studies (CCDS)
- Centre for the Sustainable Use of Natural and Social Resources (CSNR)
- Dalit Foundation
- Human Rights Alert (HRA)
- Jananeethi
- People’s Watch (PW)
- Quill Foundation
- Rights Education and Development Centre (READ)
- South India Cell for Human Rights Education and Monitoring (SICHREM)

**Indonesia**

- Alliance of Independent Journalists (AIJ)
- Commission for the Disappeared and Victims of Violence (KontraS)
- Human Rights Working Group (HRWG)
- Indonesian Human Rights Monitor (Imparsial)
- Indonesian Legal Aid and Human Rights Association (PBHI)
- Indonesia Legal Aid Foundation – Yayasan Lembaga Bantuan Hukum Indonesia (YLBHI)
- Institute for Policy Research and Advocacy (ELSAM)
- Yayasan Sekretariat Anak Merdeka Indonesia (SAMIN)

**Japan**

- Human Rights Now

**Kazakhstan**

- Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law (KIBHR)
- Dignity – Kadyr-kassiyet (KK)
- International Legal Initiative Public Foundation (ILI)
Kyrgyzstan
- Bir Duino

Malaysia
- Education and Research Association for Consumers Malaysia (ERA Consumer Malaysia)
- Pusat KOMAS
- Suara Rakyat Malaysia (SUARAM)

Maldives
- Maldivian Democracy Network (MDN)

Mongolia
- Center for Human Rights and Development (CHRHD)
- Globe International Center (GIC)
- MONFEMNET National Network
- National Center Against Violence (NCAV)
- Psychological Responsiveness NGO (PSR)

Myanmar
- Equality Myanmar (EQMM)
- Progressive Voice (PV)
- Women’s League of Burma (WLB)

Nepal
- Community Self Reliance Centre (CSRC)
- Informal Sector Service Centre (INSEC)
- Jagriti Child and Youth Concern Nepal (JCYN)
- Karnali Integrated Rural Development and Research Centre (KIRDARC)
- National Alliance for Human Rights and Social Justice – Nepal (Human Rights Alliance)
- Women’s Rehabilitation Centre (WOREC)
- Youth Action Nepal (YoAC)

Pakistan
- Association of Women for Awareness & Motivation (AWAM)
- Awaz Foundation Pakistan – Centre for Development Services
- Bytes for All, Pakistan (B4A)
- Defence of Human Rights (DHR)
- Forum for Dignity Initiatives
- National Commission for Justice and Peace (NCJP)
- Potohar Organization for Development Advocacy (PODA)
- Society for the Protection of the Rights of the Child (SPARC)
- The Awakening

New Zealand
- Human Rights Measurement Initiative (HRMI)
85 members in 23 countries

- Full-fledged member
- Associate member
- Affiliate member

**Philippines**
- Balay Alternative Legal Advocates for Development in Mindanaw (BALAOD Mindanaw)
- Karapatan Alliance Philippines (Karapatan)
- Philippine Alliance of Human Rights Advocates (PAHRA)
- Philippine Collective for Modern Heroism (Dakila)
- Public Interest Environmental Law Office – Tanggol Kalikasan (TK)
- Purple Action for Indigenous Women’s Rights (LILAK)
- Task Force Detainees of the Philippines (TFDP)

**South Korea**
- People’s Solidarity for Participatory Democracy (PSPD)
- Korean House for International Solidarity (KHIS)

**Philippines**

**Sri Lanka**
- INFORM Human Rights Documentation Centre
- Law and Society Trust (LST)
- Rights Now Collective for Democracy (RN)
- Rights to Life Human Rights Centre (R2L)

**Timor-Leste**
- Judicial System Monitoring Program (JSMP)
- Association for Law, Human Rights and Justice – Hukum, Hak Asasi dan Keadilan (HAK)

**Singapore**
- Think Centre

**Vietnam**
- Vietnamese Women for Human Rights (VNWHR)

**Thailand**
- Asian Resource Foundation (ARF)
- Community Resource Centre (CRC)
- People’s Empowerment Foundation (PEF)

**Taiwan**
- Covenants Watch (CW)
- Taiwan Association for Human Rights (TAHR)
In 2021, as the COVID-19 pandemic continued to challenge our societies, many Asian governments responded by imposing stringent measures to curb infections that exacerbated the region’s already dire situation of fundamental rights and freedoms.

According to our documentation, individuals or groups who have been critical of such government policies, or actively engaged in the fight for democracy, have been most at risk of and exposed to repression and abuse.
In 2021 alone, we recorded at least 834 cases of rights violations or harassment against human rights defenders in 18 Asian countries.

296 people lost their lives because of their human rights work, and state actors were responsible for 84 percent of the rights violations.

We also observed a worrying trend of using laws and policies to institutionalise a system of authoritarianism in the region.
The National Security Law’s crackdown of the democratic movement in Hong Kong; the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act that criminalises defenders and their organisations in India; and the COVID-19-related measures that have been used to repress workers’ rights to strike in Cambodia are just some examples of how civic space has been under attack in the region.

Marginalised groups have been disproportionately impacted by the extreme measures imposed during the pandemic, often because of their pre-existing vulnerabilities. A number of governments, from Malaysia to Singapore, have utilised a xenophobic narrative against migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers. Similarly, the COVID-19 situation further exacerbated the conditions of the LGBTI+ community in the region, subjecting them to inhumane and degrading treatments.

The military coup attempt in Myanmar and the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan have also led to devastating humanitarian crises in Asia, making way for a wave of democratic regression in the region that has been made worse by the lack of effective responses from the international community.

Impunity for human rights violations remains at the core of the Asian region as a whole. Yet, despite all odds, people have continued to mobilise resources and networks to support each other and strive for more just and democratic societies – an aspiration many shared beyond countries’ borders.

The Milk Tea Alliance -- an online democracy and human rights movement consisting mainly of netizens from Hong Kong, Taiwan, Thailand, and Myanmar -- is one of the examples of how a digital solidarity network championed by youth has evolved into a dynamic transnational movement for democracy in the region.

Both offline and online, people’s movements in Asia have continued to flourish through demonstrations, artistic activism, and various ways of association or expression, with the hope that human rights will one day become a reality for everyone in the region.
KEY MILESTONES IN 2021
Civil society organisations engaged in policy forums: 354

Human rights defenders and civil society representatives who attended advocacy initiatives related to ASEAN, SAARC, and UN: 763

Dialogues and consultations on policy-related issues organised between civil society and governments: 45

Security trainings for human rights defenders: 7

Cases of human rights defenders at risk and their families supported through FORUM-ASIA’s protection plan: 132

Urgent appeals submitted to the UN Special Procedures Mandate Holders and communicated to Asian governments: 8

Oral statements joined or delivered by FORUM-ASIA, with 9 side events organised or supported during the Human Rights Council’s regular sessions: 26
Asian human rights defenders and member organisations supported to participate in the UN Human Rights Council’s sessions

Submissions to the Global Alliance of NHRI’s Sub-Committee on Accreditation. Among them, one led to the downgrading of Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka

Monitoring and evaluation tools FORUM-ASIA developed or adapted during 2021

Donor reports submitted

Media coverages

Increase of followers on Instagram, 59% on LinkedIn, 27% on Twitter, and 11% on Facebook

Rise in subscriptions to FORUM-ASIA’s e-newsletter
26 January
[Discussion] Outlook for ASEAN in 2021 – Agenda for Brunei’s Chairmanship

22-23 February
14th ANNI Regional Consultation

22 February - 24 March
46th regular session of the UN Human Rights Council

1-7 April
National Advocacy Learning Programme - Thailand

22 April
Southeast Asia People’s Summit on Myanmar

22 April
Public dialogue on ASEAN response to Myanmar

8-16 May
National Advocacy Learning Programme - Philippines

14-17 June
9th Asian Human Rights Defenders Forum

23-24 June
Regional Consultation for a South Asian Human Rights Mechanism

21 June-14 July
47th regular session of the UN Human Rights Council

12-15 July
Holistic security training in Nepal

21-23 July
Organisational mid-term review

9-10 August
[Conference] Human Rights in the time of COVID-19: Addressing the Crisis in Southeast Asia

11 August
South Asian Regional Consultation on Democratic Regression

24 August
Interface Dialogue with Southeast Asia NHRI Forum

2-30 September
ASEAN Human Rights Advocacy Academy

5-6 September
National consultation for a South Asian Human Rights Mechanism in Nepal

13 September-11 October
48th regular session of the UN Human Rights Council

11, 12, 13, 18, October
Consultation on civic space in India

15 October
ASEAN Civil Society Conference/Peoples’ Forum

20 October
Policy dialogue in Malaysia

25-28 October
Monitoring and Evaluation Training for members in South Asia

26-28 October
Comms Lab

3-25 November
Global Advocacy Learning Programme on Human Rights and Development

17 November
National consultation for a South Asian Human Rights Mechanism in Bangladesh

17 November
FORUM-ASIA 30th Anniversary Virtual Reunion

23 November
Consultation on NHRI in Pakistan

25 November
Consultation on NHRI in Taiwan

29-30 November
Regional capacity building workshop in South Asia

29-30 November
Policy dialogue in the Philippines

6-7 December
Consultation on NHRI in Indonesia

December
#HumanRightsMonth campaign
FORUM-ASIA’S STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES
Objective 1:

Empowering civil society organisations and human rights defenders across Asia
FORUM-ASIA works to enable Asian civil society organisations and human rights defenders to participate effectively in the policy-making processes related to human rights, democratic governance and sustainable development at national, regional and international levels.

We do so through organising policy dialogues, training, stakeholders’ consultations, and workshops that facilitate reflection and learning among civil society actors and policy makers alike.
To provide a safe space where we could share our knowledge on the issues and strategies related to human rights and development in the region, we organised the third Global Advocacy Learning Programme on Human Rights and Development between 3 and 25 November 2021. Held online for the first time, the event consisted of six interactive sessions and two self-work sessions, in which we covered topics ranging from COVID-19-related human rights implications and regional and international mechanisms to climate justice. Twenty young activists from across the region participated.
Similar capacity-building initiatives were rolled out by our Global Advocacy Learning Programme 2018 alumni at the national level in Thailand and the Philippines. Reflecting local priorities, the former adopted an overall feminist approach on human rights advocacy as well as land and environmental rights, while the latter centred on indigenous peoples’ rights and accountability mechanisms.

The topic of well-being was also on the agenda for both programmes.

Acknowledging both the need for advocates to actively participate in ASEAN advocacy and the limited public access to ASEAN human rights mechanisms, we also revived the ‘ASEAN Human Rights Advocacy Academy,’ a training programme first developed between 2010 and 2016 with the Solidarity for Asian People’s Advocacy.

Held in September 2021, the programme invited interested youth to join a 15-hour online capacity building workshop aimed at cultivating knowledge, sharing best practices, and facilitating collaboration among advocates, for an effective human rights advocacy in ASEAN.

A total of 20 young professionals including lawyers, paralegals, and activists joined this workshop.

Looking ahead, we hope that all participants to our educational events will be able to campaign with a deeper understanding of human rights and relevant mechanisms, and foster positive change in the region.
As the secretariat of the Asian NGO Network on National Human Rights Institutions (ANNI), we organised the annual regional consultation with our network members in 2021.

The impact of COVID-19 and the responses from each National Human Rights Institution (NHRI) were a main topic of discussion during the two-day meeting, as the human rights implications brought by the pandemic continued to be felt across the region, especially by vulnerable groups like prison populations, the elderly, women and the LGBTI+ community.

Through the regional consultation, we identified two advocacy priorities: civic space and the protection of human rights defenders; and a just selection and appointment process of NHRI committee members.

We facilitated country-level consultations in Taiwan, Pakistan, and Indonesia with the participation of ANNI members, civil society organisations, and NHRI experts. Introducing international standards to broader audiences and drawing lessons learnt from other countries, the consultations aimed to strengthen cooperation and coordination among stakeholders, to advocate for independent and functional NHRI that are compliant with the Paris Principles (the minimum international standards for ensuring independent, effective, and credible NHRI for the promotion and protection of human rights).

The launch of the ANNI Report on the Performance of National Human Rights Institutions was one of ANNI’s strategies for evidence-based advocacy. Led and authored by members from 11 Asian countries, the report highlighted some of the most pressing human rights challenges in the region, alongside responses from concerned NHRI, and country-specific recommendations.

To date, the report serves as an invaluable resource for anyone wishing to gain insight into the functioning and performance of NHRI in Asia.
Due to an increasingly restricted civic space and the prevalence of repressive laws in the region, it was important for FORUM-ASIA to continue to provide greater support to our member organisations in 2021, to help them conduct effective advocacy without jeopardising their safety.

In South Asia, we hosted a two-day virtual learning workshop in November with the aim to enhance members’ capacity in monitoring and documenting human rights violations, specifically regarding the rights to free speech, assembly, and association. The workshop facilitated peer-to-peer knowledge sharing and provided an overview of different advocacy mechanisms, such as the UN Human Rights Council. It was also an important step to generate evidence for the need to establish a regional human rights mechanism in South Asia.

In India, we organised a four-day virtual consultation on shrinking civic space, with focus on freedom of assembly and association, freedom of expression, the challenges facing human rights defenders, and the role of NHRCs. The event was led by our member People’s Watch and partner Human Rights Defenders Alert.

Despite most Asian States’ claims of democracy, almost all recent examples of successful authoritarian modernisation can be found in Asia. It is here that a culture of impunity has become a systemic obstacle for justice, leading to corruption, violence, and weakened accountability.

To better understand the causes and consequences of impunity in the region and build a knowledge base for advocacy and campaigning, we collaborated with members and partners to publish the Impunity in South Asia Report. Covering seven countries, the report illustrates that impunity leads not just to physical harm, but also psychological and societal setbacks.

We also published the South Asia Judicial Barometer on migrant workers, highlighting the challenges facing one of the most vulnerable communities in the region. Through the paper, we made a case for the need of legal reforms that prioritise the well-being and protection of migrant workers.

In Malaysia, we and Pusat KOMAS conducted a policy dialogue that engaged with parliamentarians, civil society, and the local NHRI to adopt a more rights-centred response to the pandemic.

In the Philippines, we supported our member Philippine Alliance of Human Rights Advocates to continue its research on violations related to fundamental freedoms amidst the COVID-19 response, and the impact of the Anti-Terror Law.

We also supported our members and partners in advocating the withdrawal of the cybernetic bill in Timor Leste, as well as partaking in solidarity campaigns for Myanmar, and the democratic movement in Hong Kong.
Objective 2:

Fostering a better environment for human rights protection, democracy, and sustainable development in the region
FORUM-ASIA works to create institutional and policy changes that can have a sustainable impact on the protection of human rights and the people we work with. We do so through evidence-based research, providing emergency assistance to defenders at risk and empowering them to mitigate threats.

We also bring together stakeholders such as civil society actors, government authorities and private sectors to actively involve them in the discussion.
Through the four-day Asian Regional Human Rights Defenders Forum held in June 2021, we provided safe spaces for defenders to gather and connect with each other and their allies, including regional and international solidarity networks, experts, academics, donors, and UN agencies. Some 307 participants attended a total of 35 parallel online sessions, addressing a wealth of different thematic topics.

The Forum identified several areas where defenders shared common concerns and opportunities. Among them were well-being as part of the holistic security of defenders; a flexible and holistic approach toward emergency assistance; the importance of building positive narratives; the emergence of transnational solidarity movements in Asia; and the significance of gender-responsive protection mechanisms.
In June 2021, we launched the biennial Defending in Numbers report, which identified regional patterns of violations against defenders, as well as presenting case studies that demonstrate their contribution to the human rights landscape and the risks they bear. The report also featured recommendations for States, businesses, and UN agencies on how to foster a safer environment for human rights advocacy in Asia.

In collaboration with PEN America’s Artists at Risk Connection and the Mekong Cultural Hub, we co-produced a podcast series titled Creating Artistic Resilience: Voices of Asia and the report Arresting Art in June to tell the lived experience of artists and cultural rights defenders in Asia, and explore how art is often used as a form of resistance in extremely repressive political climates.

We continued to provide security training to members in Nepal and other countries in Asia, covering topics such as physical and digital security, psychosocial and mental health, and other security measures at the individual and institutional level, to ensure the resilience and sustainability of human rights work.

As part of the broader alliance of NHRI s in the region and globally, we were able to contribute to the drafting of the Regional and Global Action Plans on Human Rights Defenders led by the Asia Pacific Forum of NHRI s and the Global Alliance of NHRI s, respectively. We also organised an interface meeting with member NHRI s of the Southeast Asia NHRI Forum, where we highlighted the crucial role NHRI s can play in addressing pressing human rights violations in the region.

The diverse stories and resources we strived to showcase through our work aimed to reflect the many, often vastly different realities on the ground, and help create an enabling, compassionate environment in which defenders can be free from fear and violence.
While the repressive civil and political space constrains many in the region, not everyone is impacted in the same way. The same goes for climate change. It is always the marginalised communities who suffer the most, due to systemic neglect, lack of access to resources, decision-making power, and sometimes, simply, for who they are.

Too often, there is a lack of attention to the rights of people living in poverty in the international discourse, even within the human rights and development sector. Considering this, we published two research pieces in 2021 that aimed to bridge the gap between poverty, climate change, and human rights. One looked at the lives of bonded labourers in Nepal, while the other examined the conditions of indigenous peoples and fisherfolk in Indonesia.

The report Tied Hands was a result of our collaboration with our member Community Self Reliance Centre to examine how the Harawa-Charawa system (agricultural bonded labour) in Dhanauji, Nepal, has been historically and culturally rooted in discriminatory state policies that have trapped bonded labourers in a vicious cycle of poverty. This deep-rooted discrimination is, ultimately, the reason why bonded labourers lack access to state support when floods or droughts occur in the area.

Partnering with our member Indonesia Legal Aid Foundation, the report Going Nowhere illustrates how Indonesia’s profit-driven development model is leading to deforestation in Central Kalimantan, as well as coastal reclamation and threats to livelihood towards the fisherfolk in North Sumatra and North Sulawesi.

Both reports feature first-hand testimonies from the communities they cover, and provide recommendations to respective ministries and authorities for a more human rights-based approach to development.
From above:
Harawa Charawa community in Nepal, 2021
Traditional fisherfolk housing in Kampung Nelayan Sebrang’s coastal, Medan, Indonesia, 2021
Objective 3:

Enhancing the impact of Asian human rights defenders’ advocacy actions in relation to SAARC, ASEAN, and UN human rights mechanisms
Through our civil society consultative status with regional and international human rights mechanisms, we highlight the Asian perspective on a global level, and advocate for an inclusive and participatory policy-making process that can reflect the human rights situation on the ground, particularly for the most vulnerable and marginalised communities.
The absence of a regional human rights mechanism in South Asia means that there is no separate procedure for cooperation on human rights in the region, except for a few regional conventions that are critically void of enforcement.

In 2021, we continued our effort to facilitate discussion with members and partners to develop collective strategies and build alliances for the establishment of a regional human rights mechanism in South Asia.
Our interventions in 2021 included:

- A South Asia regional consultation that brought together representatives from our membership, relevant UN committees, academia, and media to discuss advocacy. The participants adopted the Kathmandu statement, which paved the way for future research on the feasibility and possible modality of a regional human rights mechanism.

- A national strategy consultation in Nepal and Bangladesh respectively, which saw the participation of stakeholders from civil society, academia, media, and the respective NHRI.s. The primary objective of these consultations was to build a broad-based alliance to amplify advocacy for a regional human rights mechanism.

- A joint South Asia consultation with the Asian Democracy Network, member organisations, and civil society partners to counter democratic regression in the region and broaden alliances for joint advocacy in the future.

- A revamped resource book to illustrate the human rights situations in the region, the progress made so far, and opportunities moving forward.

We believe these initiatives might shed light on the common human rights challenges facing the region, help build strategic coalitions, and create a stronger advocacy force for establishing a regional human rights mechanism in South Asia.
As Brunei Darussalam took the chairmanship of ASEAN in 2021, we deemed important for the country to address the union’s current challenges, including improving regional resilience amidst the pandemic, human rights, and recovery plans. In light of this, we partnered with the Centre for Strategic and International Studies in Indonesia and facilitated an online discussion highlighting the outlook for ASEAN and what Brunei should prioritise during its chair tenure.

We also supported Southeast Asian Public Interest Lawyers as they conducted a legal review on the term of reference of the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR). The review will be used as evidence to advocate for a more human rights and people-centred ASEAN. In addition, we continued responding to the changing landscapes within the region.
Responding to the coup attempt in Myanmar

The attempted military coup in Myanmar and its humanitarian and human rights consequences largely set our advocacy priorities for ASEAN during 2021.

As a regional economic and political union that lacks a robust institutional framework able to hold its Member States accountable, ASEAN has not been able to respond to Myanmar people’s aspiration for democracy.

To build public pressure that could push the different ASEAN governments and the regional bloc to meaningfully address the crisis in Myanmar, we took a series of advocacy initiatives including:

- Participating in a civil society coalition that facilitated strategic interface meetings with ASEAN delegates and line ministries, to ensure that the situation in Myanmar would be on the agenda for the union.

- Contributing to a monthly coup watch in collaboration with ALTSEAN-Burma.

- Periodic diplomatic briefings with foreign missions to ASEAN to share insights on the grassroots situation in Myanmar and suggest recommendations to support the people affected.

- Participating in the Southeast Asia People’s Summit on Myanmar and fostering public dialogues to mobilise solidarity from civil society and spotlight the deteriorating human rights situation in Myanmar, demanding ASEAN to take action.

- Press conferences that publicised the analysis of ASEAN responses to the Myanmar crisis and its possible implications, and stressed the importance of international support.

- A dedicated Call to Action page on our website where we invited netizens to write letters to their governments and join our social media campaign to show their solidarity with the people fighting for democracy in Myanmar and the region.

One Vision, Different Responses: Public Dialogue on ASEAN responses to Myanmar

Thursday, 22 April 2021
2.00 – 5.30 PM (CET) / 7.00 – 8.30 PM (ICT)

Venue: Registration:
Responding to the pandemic

In response to the pandemic, ASEAN adopted the Comprehensive Recovery Framework in November 2020. Yet many ASEAN governments have continued using COVID-19 as a pretext to suppress dissents and civil society as a whole.

To ensure that ASEAN fulfills its commitments to protect human rights, we sought to strengthen engagement between the ASEAN Human Rights Commission, NHRIs and civil society organisations by convening a two-day virtual conference to share our assessment of human rights institutions and enhance coordination among stakeholder for human rights advocacy in the region.

Among the key concerns raised by civil society representatives were the human rights implications of government measures such as contact-tracing applications and repressive laws.

A summary of the conference’s discussion points and proposals for cross-sectoral collaboration was gathered in an outcome document, while the event’s proceedings were documented in a public report.

Responding to the peoples

The annual ASEAN Civil Society Conference/Peoples’ Forum has long been a platform for civil society organisations to strategise, show solidarity, and build cross-boundary alliances in the region. The agenda for 2021 was to address militarism, authoritarianism, and COVID-19, to develop collective action in the region.

As one of the convenors for the Forum, we led a plenary discussion that examined the worsening of the human rights situation in Southeast Asia, with a focus on how militarism and authoritarianism affect people’s access to freedom of expression, assembly and association.
FORUM-ASIA’s call has always been to ensure international action and scrutiny of the human rights landscape in Asia through investigations, monitoring and reporting; and the establishment of international mechanisms to hold perpetrators accountable for grave human rights violations and abuses.

Similarly, our primary mission at the UN has been to increase the impact and effectiveness of Asian human rights defenders and civil society’s advocacy, particularly at the UN Human Rights Council level, to galvanise international action and scrutiny of human rights situations in the region.

In 2021, our advocacy focussed primarily on the human rights landscape in Afghanistan, Cambodia, Myanmar, the Philippines, and Sri Lanka, among other Asian countries, and the shrinking civic space in the region at large.

During the 46th, 47th and 48th UN Human Rights Council sessions, we led or supported a total of 26 oral statements, two open letters, and nine side events, and engaged in negotiations on key resolutions for the Council on Myanmar, Sri Lanka, and Afghanistan.

Monitoring and delegitimising the Myanmar junta

Since 1 February 2021, the Myanmar military’s attempted coup has triggered serious violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law. The UN has noted that the military’s crimes may amount to crimes against humanity and war crimes.

Following the coup, FORUM-ASIA, together with members and partner organisations, called for a special session of the UN Human Rights Council that resulted in a unanimous condemnation of the Myanmar military for its attempts to subvert the democratic process.

In subsequent sessions, we successfully advocated for enhanced monitoring and reporting mandates to ensure the Council and the international community would be regularly updated on the situation.

Throughout the year, we also successfully advocated against any action that could be perceived to be legitimising the military junta, including allowing their representatives to speak at the Council. This advocacy effort led to postponing the adoption of the Universal Periodic Review outcomes of Myanmar.
In 2021, during its 46th session, the Human Rights Council adopted an important resolution to advance accountability for past rights violations and war crimes committed in Sri Lanka. The resolution also mandated the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to collect and preserve evidence of violations, as well as conduct regular reporting on the country.

Following the dramatic escalation of the human rights and humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan after the Taliban’s takeover in August 2021, we joined a call for a special session of the Council on the situation.

While the Council failed to develop an international investigative mechanism on Afghanistan as demanded by several civil society organisations, it mandated a Special Rapporteur to monitor and report on the situation - which is an important step to ensure international scrutiny of the crisis in the country.

Other areas of concerns

We continued advocating for the protection of human rights defenders in the region, and raised our concerns on worrying trends such as the rise of online hate speech, and the use of national security measures to clamp down on fundamental freedoms in South Asia. We also returned to shed light on the ongoing human rights crisis in Kashmir and the restrictions on civic space in Singapore, Thailand, and Hong Kong.
To monitor the performance of NHRIs in Asia, we collaborated with national partners and provided periodic stakeholder submissions to the Global Alliance of NHRIs’ Sub-Committee on Accreditation, which facilitates the peer-based accreditation process for NHRIs.

In 2021, we provided four submissions, which contributed to the reaccreditation of NHRIs in Malaysia and South Korea, and the downgrading of the NHRI in Sri Lanka. One of those submissions urged for a special review of the NHRI in India, given serious and rising concerns over the independence and effectiveness of the NHRI in fulfilling its mandate.

In Myanmar, we provided technical input to the draft of the Union Human Rights Commission Law developed by local civil society organisations to provide a legal foundation for the establishment of a new NHRI that can act effectively and independently protect human rights in the country.
Objective 4:

Strengthening FORUM-ASIA’s institutional and operational capacity as a regional umbrella organisation
FORUM-ASIA works to better serve and represent our constituencies through the adoption of standard policy practices, financial sustainability, strong managerial capacity, and the fostering of an organisational culture that encourages learning.
Monitoring and evaluation in the human rights and development sector

As a membership-based organisation, we renewed our commitment to creating learning opportunities for our member organisations through facilitating training, mobilising expertise, and navigating security risks related to the pandemic and the volatile political context in Asia.

In 2021, we collaborated with our member Bytes for All and organised a four-day training on planning, monitoring, evaluation, and learning with the participation of 15 member organisations from Bangladesh, India, the Maldives, and Pakistan. The training was guided by the human rights-based approach to results-based management principles. It also introduced user-friendly tools and systems to monitor and evaluate programme progress, and ways of incorporating learning into planning.

We also facilitated one-on-one coaching sessions for the participants and provided suggestions to help them improve their organisational monitoring framework and relevant systems. To further support coordination between members and the FORUM-ASIA Secretariat, we also shared the relevant accountability requirements and standards on our existing grants and partnership.
Through media advocacy, digital campaigning, and a myriad of innovative strategies, we believe communication has the potential to drive the creation of the just region we envision.

To foster a network where we can draw from each other’s strengths and collaborate effectively in campaigning and advocacy work, we piloted a three-day Comms Lab that connected communications professionals across our membership from 13 countries, ranging from Kyrgyzstan to Timor Leste.

In conjunction with Global Media and Literacy Week, the Comms Lab brought in external experts from the technology and media industry, who shared the latest trend and best practices in planning, executing, and evaluating communications activities. The concept of media advocacy and citizen journalism was introduced to amplify human rights stories from the ground.

To encourage the exchange of knowledge among members, we furthermore leveraged their expertise on digital security and hope-based communications, and identified each other’s strengths and opportunities for future collaboration.
To expand our outreach and audience engagement on human rights issues in Asia, we continued adopting interactive tools and tactics. Social media was a main area of focus.

In the lead-up to the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture on 26 June, we launched the #FAagainstTorture digital campaign, under which we premiered a documentary on torture in Sri Lanka, and presented a series of social media posters with our members in the country.

To mark the 30th anniversary of FORUM-ASIA in 2021, we also launched a series of rebranding and outreach strategies to revamp the organisation’s public image and tell the story of its evolution in Asia. Our aim was to raise awareness among our members and appeal to a new generation of human rights advocates.

The anniversary celebrations spanned a special edition of our annual report, a new organisational introductory video, and a month-long #FA30 human rights campaign in December. The campaign included a series of videos and infographics that showcased messages from our members, partners, and alumni; a virtual reunion event; and the promotion of our signature publications in conjunction with International Human Rights Day on 10 December.
#FA30 human rights campaign in December 2021

Story of change video ‘Standing up against torture in Sri Lanka’
Learning, measuring impact, and fostering staff development are essential aspects to ensure FORUM-ASIA continues to be effective in the work it does. Below are some of the key initiatives we adopted in 2021.
In 2021, we continued strengthening our fundraising and resource mobilisation efforts to identify viable funding opportunities.

We secured eight grant agreements, including three funding extensions from existing donors. We also benefitted from receiving impact investments which reflects our efforts to diversify our funding base. Additionally, we joined two major consortia, partnering with global and regional organisations to expand our reach. We continued to explore avenues for joint fundraising opportunities through establishing strategic partnerships with our members.

Lastly, to further systematise resource mobilisation efforts, we adopted dynamic databases to regularly monitor prospective funders and identify opportunities to leverage their priorities. Current tools were also updated to keep fundraising systems topical and relevant.
Balance of funds as on 31 December 2021

Opening balance on 1 January 2021: $1,665,921.12
Income 2021: $3,447,421.28
Expenses 2021: $3,282,864.95
Currency conversion adjustment: $101,514.79

Balance as on 31 December 2021: $1,728,962.66

Income in 2021:

- Donors & Partnerships: $3,410,141.57
- Interest: $3,233.64
- Other sources: $34,046.07
Total: $3,447,421.28
# Funding partners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Amount</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Open Society Foundation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA)</td>
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<td>International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL)</td>
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<td>Freedom House (Lifeline: Embattled CSO Assistance Fund)</td>
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<td>Heinrich Boll Stiftung</td>
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<td>DKA Austria</td>
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<td>CIVICUS</td>
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<td>Others</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Total - $3,410,141.57**
Expenditure in 2021

Total - $3,282,864.95

- Partnership and Resource Mobilisation
- Gender Mainstreaming
- Development and Knowledge Management Programme
- NHRI Programme
- Human Rights Defenders Programme
- UN Advocacy Programme
- East Asia and ASEAN Programme
- South Asia Programme
- Communications and Media Programme
- Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Programme
- Operating Cost

Total - $3,282,864.95
Expenditure of activities based on organisational objectives

Total - $ 1,390,921.68

Objective 1: Empowering civil society organisations and human rights defenders across Asia

Objective 2: Fostering a better environment for human rights protection, democracy and sustainable development in the region

Objective 3: Enhancing the impact of Asian human rights defenders' advocacy actions related to human rights mechanisms

Objective 4: Strengthening FORUM-ASIA's institutional and operational capacity as a regional umbrella organisation
Our Partners in 2021

Networks and Coalitions We are Part of: Asia Pacific Gathering on Human Rights and Extractives · Asian Democracy Network (ADN) · Asian NGO Network on NHRIs (ANNI) · Coalition for the International Criminal Court · European Union Temporary Relocation Platform (EUTRP) · Human Rights Commissions Network (HRC-Net) · International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN) · International Network for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ESCR-Net) · ProtectDefenders.eu · Vuka!

Global partners: Amnesty International · Artist at Risk Connection – PEN America · Asia Pacific Network of Environment Defenders (APNED) · Business & Human Rights Resource Centre · CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation · Civil Rights Defenders · Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI) · DefendDefenders · University of York · Diplomacy Training Program (DTP) · Front Line Defenders · Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI) · Human Rights Watch · International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL) · International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) · International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) · International Service for Human Rights (ISHR) · Internnews · International Research & Exchanges Board (IREX) · Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights · Pact · Reporters Without Borders (RSF) · The UN Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association · The UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders · TrustLaw · UN Environment Programme · World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT)

Regional partners: ALTSEAN Burma · Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact (AIPP) · Asia Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions (APF) · Asian Federation Against Involuntary Disappearances (AFAD) · Asian Research Institute for Environmental Law (ARIEL) · Center for Environmental Concerns (CEC) · EarthRights International · Heinrich Boll Foundation · ILGA Asia · Mekong Cultural Hub · Southeast Asia Public Interest Lawyers Network (SEAPIL) · Urgent Action Fund for Women’s Human Rights · India · Human Rights Defenders Alert · Indonesia · Centre for Strategic and International Studies · Protection International Indonesia · Philippines · Legal Rights and Natural Resources Center · Medical Action Group · Sri Lanka · Centre for Policy Alternatives · Philippines · Institute of Human Rights and Peace Studies, Mahidol University · Protection International · Sangsan Anakot Yawachon

Country Partners: India · Human Rights Defenders Alert · Indonesia · Centre for Strategic and International Studies · Protection International Indonesia · Philippines · Legal Rights and Natural Resources Center · Medical Action Group · Sri Lanka · Centre for Policy Alternatives · Thailand · Institute of Human Rights and Peace Studies, Mahidol University · Protection International · Sangsan Anakot Yawachon
Our Donors in 2021
Acronyms

AICHR, ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights
ANNI, Asian NGO Network on National Human Rights Institutions
ASEAN, Association of Southeast Asian Nations
NGO, Non-governmental organisations
NHRI, National Human Rights Institution
SAARC, South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
UN, United Nations
The publication has been made possible with the generous support of the European Union and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency.

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