

For Immediate Release**Asian Human Rights Defenders face increasing challenges and threats**

(Quezon City, 6 December 2014) – The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA), together with its members the Task Force Detainees of the Philippines (TFDP) and the Philippine Alliance of Human Rights Advocates (PAHRA) reiterated their call to Asian governments, as well as national, regional and international institutions to ensure an effective protection of human rights defenders (HRDs) in Asia.

More than 150 human rights defenders from 22 countries all over Asia gathered at the 6th Asian Regional Human Rights Defenders Forum (AHRDF) in Quezon City, Philippines (3-5 December 2014). The biennial event organized by FORUM-ASIA provides a platform for human rights defenders to discuss their work and advocacies, as well as share the experiences and challenges they face. During the event FORUM-ASIA launched a new website, “Asian HRDs Portal”¹, with the intent to increase public awareness on the situation of HRDs in Asia.

“Human rights defenders have a crucial role in the advancement, consolidation and sustaining of democracy, nevertheless they continue to face numerous threats and challenges in their work, from false criminal charges to enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings,” said Henri Tiphagne, Chairperson of FORUM-ASIA. HRDs promoting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender rights, Dalit and minority rights as well as economic, social and cultural rights are especially at risk in Asia, to the same extent as women human rights defenders. “Today more than ever in Asia the protection of HRDs should be strengthened through effective protection mechanisms at the national, regional and international level”, concluded Tiphagne.

Sister Crescencia Lucero, Executive Director of TFDP added that, “in Asia the space for HRDs to operate in is increasingly shrinking, and freedoms of expression, peaceful assembly and association have even retrogressed in recent years through the use of existing and the introduction of new repressive laws”. In analyzing the situation of HRDs in the Philippines, Sister Lucero highlighted that “there is no relent on the attacks against defenders in the country, as manifested in the growing statistics of human rights violations documented”.

The United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, Michel Forst, opened the event by noting that Asian HRDs are likely to be “threatened, intimidated or investigated, prevented from travelling, harassed or criminalized”. Such violations and denials of fundamental freedoms “are aimed to discredit, silence and eliminate human rights defenders”, added Mr. Forst. The participants of the 6th AHRDF identified supporting networks as a particularly efficient platform to confront the critical situation in the region. “Such networks allow for better protection and recognition of activists by society and are particularly useful for defenders at greater risk”, concluded Mr. Forst.

¹ asianhrds.forum-asia.org

About FORUM-ASIA:

FORUM-ASIA is a Bangkok-based regional human rights group with 47 member organizations in 16 countries across Asia. FORUM-ASIA has offices in Bangkok, Jakarta and Geneva. FORUM-ASIA addresses key areas of human rights violations in the region, including freedoms of expressions, assembly and association, human rights defenders, and democratisation.

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