

Calling for an Effective Human Rights Mechanism in South Asia

The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) and Informal Sector Service Centre (INSEC) organized the second Sub-Regional Workshop on a Human Rights Mechanism in South Asia on July 25 and 26, 2011, in Kathmandu, Nepal. Representing IMADR, President Nimalka Fernando participated and delivered a lecture during the panel discussion on challenges faced by human rights defenders in South Asia. We would like to share the achievements of the workshop by introducing a press release issued by FORUM-ASIA on July 27 in Kathmandu.

Rights Activists Call for Effective Human Rights Mechanism in South Asia and Civil Society Participation in SAARC

The Second Sub-Regional Workshop on Human Rights Mechanism in South Asia concluded with calls for the South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) to establish an effective regional human rights mechanism, enhance civil society's participation in the SAARC process and address challenges faced by the region from the human rights-based approach.

The two-day regional workshop discussed human rights challenges faced by the region and the prospects and opportunities for the path towards the creation of South Asian Human Rights Mechanism for the promotion and protection of human rights within the framework of SAARC.

It concluded to establish an informal working group comprising of eminent human rights experts from South Asia to initiate dialogue and engagement with SAARC on the promotion and protection of human rights in South Asia.

The two-day workshop was organized by the Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) and Informal Sector Service Centre (INSEC) on 25-26 July 2011.

Speaking in the workshop, Chairperson of FORUM-ASIA and INSEC, Mr. Subodh Raj Pyakurel stated that South Asia needs a strong human rights body to address the situation of gross human rights violations and abuses attributing to the culture of impunity. He further elaborated that the workshop has played a significant role in

bringing prominent civil society leaders, academia, and national human rights institutions (NHRIs) to work together towards the strong advocacy for a regional human rights mechanism in South Asia. Mr. Pyakurel reiterated the need for continuous engagement for the development of suitable human rights mechanisms and institutions in South Asian countries.

Ms. Hina Jilani, former UN special Rapporteur of the Secretary-General on Human Rights Defenders and Chair of the South Asians for Human Rights (SAHR), delivering key note remarks, expressed grave concern towards the deteriorating human rights situation due to anti-terrorism measures adopted in South Asian countries. She further pointed out the lack of rule of law in different countries of South Asian region.

Speaking in the workshop, Chairperson of the National Human Rights Commission of Bangladesh, Dr. Mizanur Rahman, stated that civil society organizations should collaborate and cooperate for the establishment of a regional human rights mechanism that can complement the role of the NHRIs.

Similarly Mr. Gauri Pradhan, Commissioner of the National Human Rights Commission of Nepal, shared the experiences for the protection and promotion of human rights and expressed the commitment of the National Human Rights Commission of Nepal to work with civil society organizations for the establishment of a regional human rights mechanism in South Asia. Justice J.S. Verma, former Chief Justice and Chairperson of the National Human Rights Commission of India, stressed that judiciary in the SAARC should play a vital role for the protection of human rights in adhering to justice and human dignity.

Mr. Miloon Kothari, former UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Housing, stressed that a regional human rights mechanism could be a useful platform for South Asian countries to utilize opportunities under the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) which is a new and unique monitoring mechanism of the members of UN countries' human rights mechanism.

Delivering keynote remarks, former Assistant Secretary General of the UN Mr. Kul Chandra Gautam, pointed out that despite the national human rights mechanism being the most important and effective mechanism for recognition and respect of human rights, the regional mechanism can complement the national mechanism, especially in

addressing cross border issues.

Mr. Rafendi Djamin, Chairperson and Representative from Indonesia for the ASEAN Inter-Governmental Commission for Human Rights (AICHR), expressed that the vibrant civil society organizations of South Asia can constructively engage with the SAARC process for the advocacy of regional human rights mechanism as civil society had played a significant role in the establishment of the regional human rights body in the ASEAN.

Speaking in the workshop, Ms. Jyoti Sanghera, Representative of the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in Nepal, expressed that OHCHR will cooperate with initiatives towards a regional human rights mechanism in South Asia.

The workshop was inaugurated by Constituent Assembly Chairman Mr. Subas Chandra Nemwang. The two-day workshop was attended by the prominent members of civil society, human rights defenders, national human rights institutions and academicians from India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. The meeting was also attended by the Indonesian representative to the ASEAN Inter-Governmental Commission for Human Rights (AICHR), Rafendi Djamin, who also serves as the Chair of the AICHR and other regional organizations.

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