

ASIAN NGOS JOINT PRESS STATEMENT

Thailand Must Take Clear and Decisive Action for Human Rights as New President of the UN Human Rights Council

Asian NGOs Urge the New Asian Member States of the Council - Malaysia, the Maldives, Qatar and Thailand to Strictly Comply with the Highest Human Rights Standards

(22 June 2010, Bangkok/Geneva) The UN Human Rights Council (Council) convened its organizational meeting yesterday on its fifth annual cycle (2010-2011) and elected Ambassador Sihasak Phuangketkeow, the Permanent Representative of Thailand to the UN Office and Other International Organizations in Geneva, as the President of the Council for a period of one year. We, the undersigned 55 national and regional human rights organizations across Asia, urge Ambassador Sihasak Phuangketkeow to demonstrate his utmost leadership and competency in order for the Council to fulfill its mandate and responsibilities effectively and ensure meaningful participation of NGOs.

We are of the view that there are underused work formats and tools at the Council, which can be rejuvenated by vigorous and inspiring initiatives by the President. Specifically, we call upon the President of the Council to make the most use of a President's Statement to ensure timely response to situations of human rights violations, but not in a manner of substituting or replacing resolutions. The urgent debate on the Gaza flotilla incident during the recently concluded 14th regular session of the Council demonstrated the creative capability of the Council in fulfilling its mandate. With the active facilitation by the President, such an example of a work format should be further explored and built upon consistently for other human rights situations that require the Council's attention. Furthermore, we urge the President to concretely work on ways to better protect and enhance the space available to NGOs as well as for greater representation and effective engagement of national and regional NGOs in the Council processes including the 5-year review of the Council.

The Presidency of the Council is not limited to the personal capacity of the Ambassador; the government of Thailand too must play an exemplary role in upholding the highest human rights standards and fully cooperating with the Council and other UN human rights mechanisms. The public image and credibility of the Council will be seriously undermined if it is chaired by a representative of the State that continues to impose unduly prolonged state of emergency in the country. We urge the government of Thailand to lift the Emergency Decree without any further delay and ensure full transparency and accountability for those human rights violations committed during the recent unrest in its capital.

As a way of setting an example as the Council President, Thailand should issue a standing invitation to all Special Procedures mandate-holders for official country visits, giving priority to the Special Rapporteurs on Extrajudicial Executions, Human Rights and Counter-Terrorism, Freedom of Opinion and Expression, Migrants as well as the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention. We call upon the government of Thailand to remain seized of the persistent human rights trends such as the rights of migrant workers, the right to freedom of expression and the human rights situation in southern Thailand, with the view that these should not be neglected during the national reconciliation process. In addition, the National Human Rights Commission and the judiciary must be further strengthened to ensure their independence and effectiveness.

Lastly, we repeat our call towards Asian States to push competitive slates to enable the General Assembly to be given a genuine opportunity to elect the most qualified States to the Council. While we regret the last Council elections in May were characterized by a pre-determined process, we strongly urge the new Asian member States of the Council, namely Malaysia, the Maldives, Qatar and Thailand to strictly comply with international human rights norms and standards and fully commit to engaging with national and regional human rights NGOs during their 3-year term. They must set clear indicators and timelines for their voluntary pledges and commitment with concrete action plans rather than aspirational targets.

List of Signatories (55 National and Regional Human Rights Organizations in Asia):

Regional Organizations

1. Alternative ASEAN Network on Burma (ALTSEAN-Burma), Thailand
2. Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact (AIPP), Thailand
3. Asian Federation Against Involuntary Disappearances (AFAD), Philippines
4. Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA), Thailand
5. Asian Legal Resource Center (ALRC), Hong Kong, China
6. Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI), India
7. Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women (GAATW), Thailand
8. International Women's Rights Action Watch Asia Pacific (IWRAW-AP), Malaysia
9. Migrant Forum in Asia (MFA), Philippines

National Organizations

10. Bahrain Centre for Human Rights (BCHR), Bahrain
11. Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK), Bangladesh
12. Odhikar, Bangladesh
13. Human Rights Education Institute of Burma (HREIB), Burma/Thailand
14. Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association (ADHOC), Cambodia
15. Indigenous Community Support Organization (ICSO), Cambodia
16. Banglar Manabdhikar Suraksha Mancha (MASUM), India
17. People's Watch (PW), India

18. Peoples' Vigilance Committee on Human Rights (PVCHR), India
19. Programme Against Custodial Torture & Impunity (PACTI), India
20. South India Cell for Human Rights Education and Monitoring (SICHREM), India
21. Human Rights Working Group (HRWG), Indonesia
22. Indonesia Legal Aid Foundation (YLBHI), Indonesia
23. Indonesian Association of Families of the Disappeared (IKOHI), Indonesia
24. International NGO Forum on Indonesian Development (INFID), Indonesia
25. The Commission for the Disappeared and Victims of Violence (KontraS), Indonesia
26. The Indonesian Human Rights Monitor (IMPARSIA), Indonesia
27. Centre for Orang Asli Concerns (COAC), Malaysia
28. Education and Research Association for Consumer (ERA Consumer), Malaysia
29. Suara Rakyat Malaysia (SUARAM), Malaysia
30. The Maldivian Democracy Network (MDN), Maldives
31. Centre for Human Rights and Development (CHRD), Mongolia
32. Globe International (GI), Mongolia
33. Human Rights Treaty Monitoring Coordination Committee (HRTMCC), Nepal
34. Informal Sector Service Centre (INSEC), Nepal
35. International Institute for Human Rights, Environment and Development (INHURED), Nepal
36. National Alliance of Women Human Rights Defenders (NAWHRD), Nepal
37. National Coalition for the International Criminal Court (NCICC), Nepal
38. Women's Rehabilitation Centre (WOREC), Nepal
39. National Commission for Justice and Peace (NCJP), Pakistan
40. Paglingkod Batas Pangkapapatiran Foundation (PBPF), Philippines
41. Philippines Alliance of Human Rights Advocates (PAHRA), Philippines
42. PILIPINA Legal Resources Centre (PLRC), Philippines
43. Task Force Detainees of the Philippines (TFDP), Philippines
44. Korean House for International Solidarity (KHIS), Republic of Korea
45. MINBYUN-Lawyers for a Democratic Society, Republic of Korea
46. People's Solidarity for Participatory Democracy (PSPD), Republic of Korea
47. The Refuge P Nan, Republic of Korea
48. Think Centre, Singapore
49. Law and Society Trust (LST), Sri Lanka
50. Information Monitor (INFORM), Sri Lanka
51. Taiwan Association for Human Rights (TAHR)
52. People's Empowerment Foundation (PEF), Thailand
53. US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI), Thailand
54. Working Group on Justice for Peace (WGJP), Thailand
55. Judicial System Monitoring Programme (JSMP), Timor Leste