



Asian Federation Against Involuntary Disappearances (AFAD)

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HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS: AMIDST THREATS

MANILA, 10 December 2016 - On this day, the 68th anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the Asian Federation Against Involuntary Disappearances (AFAD) pays tribute to all human rights defenders (HRDs) in the world.

While disrespect for basic human rights continues to increase and victims in all parts of the globe are still fighting for truth and justice, today, in commemorating Human Rights Day, the Asian Federation Against Involuntary Disappearances (AFAD) acknowledges and recognizes the fundamental work carried out by human rights defenders everywhere - particularly in South-East and South Asia.

Indeed, in 2016, we have seen an alarming rise in government repression in a number of South Asian countries, particularly in Pakistan, Bangladesh, and the Indian-occupied Jammu and Kashmir. Even in post-conflict Nepal, there are still considerable security risks posed by the current government.

States use various tools of repression against human rights defenders, including surveillance, imposing travel bans, restricting resources and mobility, putting administrative limitations to their work, harassment and threats, arbitrary arrests, extrajudicial killings, and enforced disappearances.

In the countries where AFAD has presence, there have been various instances of HRD being harassed.

In **Pakistan**, civil society groups and families of victims of enforced disappearance were shelled with teargas and attacked with batons during a peaceful protest on April 28, 2014. The Chairperson of Defense of Human Rights (DHR), Amina Masood Janjua, was herself arrested together with other protesters. Last year, on November 11, 2015, Rizwan Akram Niazi, a human rights activist and DHR coordinator for Faisalabad district, was disappeared in his residence.

Human rights defenders in **Bangladesh** face the same predicament. Per information gathered by Odhikar this year, AFAD's member-organization in Bangladesh, the use of unlawful detention and short-term disappearance has become the tactic of choice for dealing with anyone deemed a threat, including political opponents of the government of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

In **Nepal**, HRDs working and advocating on transitional justice issues and litigating conflict-related cases of serious human rights violations at national and international levels continue to receive direct and indirect threats by the political leadership and government agencies.

In Indian-administered **Kashmir**, HRDs are targets of continuous surveillance and harassment. Human rights organizations are subject to the increasingly oppressive use of the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act.

One concrete and very recent example is the case of arrest and detention of AFAD's Chairperson, Khurram Parvez. Parvez was barred from traveling to Geneva to attend the session of the Human Rights Council, and was later arrested. In his case, as in many others, he was charged with false and frivolous allegations in order to restrict his work as an HRD.

Reprisals and harassments are not anymore new to AFAD member-organizations. In 2004, the former Chairperson of AFAD, Munir Said Thalib, was poisoned with arsenic allegedly by members of the Military Intelligence Group while on his way to The Netherlands. He died on arrival.

Up until the recent change in government, HRDs in **Sri Lanka** used to receive frequent threats from the government.

In **Timor Leste**, although the government has slowly and carefully started to engage with civil society in recent years, the office of HAK – AFAD's member in the country – was raided last year, on the occasion of the visit of the Indonesian President, Joko Widodo.

The situation has deteriorated quickly in the **Philippines** since the recent election of Rodrigo Duterte to presidency. In a recent speech, the President has vowed to kill HRDs who oppose his bloody war on drugs.

Although States are bound by international law and their own constitutions to respect human rights and freedoms of all persons, these obligations are often disregarded in the name of national security, state of emergency and others.

Given this authoritarian turn of many countries in Asia and in the world, it is all the more important to support human rights defenders and strengthen regional and international solidarity among HRDs.

AFAD pays tribute to all human rights defenders everywhere, and congratulates them on their strength, high moral values and courage to keep fighting for the respect of human rights and dignity of all amidst the threats and difficulties faced daily.

For having chosen the path less trodden, human rights defenders have to be treated with utmost respect and be given the necessary protection due them.

Signed by,



KHURRAM PARVEZ
Chairperson



MARY AILEEN D. BACALSO
Secretary-General