



ASIA PACIFIC FORUM
ADVANCING HUMAN RIGHTS IN OUR REGION



**Human Rights and Equal
Opportunity Commission**
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TWELFTH ANNUAL MEETING OF THE ASIA PACIFIC FORUM OF NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS INSTITUTIONS

24th to 27th September 2007, Sydney, Australia

APF CONFERENCE CONCLUDING STATEMENT

Introduction

1. The Asia Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions (the Forum), consisting of the national human rights institutions (NHRIs) of Australia, Afghanistan, India, Indonesia, Jordan, Malaysia, the Maldives, Mongolia, Nepal, New Zealand, Palestine, Philippines, Qatar, Republic of Korea, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Timor-Leste, held this Twelfth Annual Meeting in Sydney, Australia from 24th to 27th September 2007.
2. The Forum conveyed their respect and special thanks to the elders of the Gadigal people of the Eora nation, the traditional owners of Sydney, who offered a warm welcome to their land to all participants.
3. The Hon Philip Ruddock MP, Attorney General of Australia and Mr John von Doussa QC, President of the Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission spoke at the opening ceremony. The speakers stressed the important roles of NHRIs and the Forum in the promotion and protection of human rights in the region.
4. The Forum Councillors expressed their gratitude to the Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission for hosting the meeting, to the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) for its co-sponsorship and to all the Forum's donors for their financial support. The Forum Councillors expressed their appreciation for the efforts of the President, Commissioners and staff of the Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission and the secretariat of the Forum for their work in the organisation of the meeting.
5. The Forum Councillors particularly welcomed the participation of the Advisory Council of Jurists and thanked them for their important work. They also welcomed, as observers, the representatives of the OHCHR, the Chairperson of the International Coordinating Committee of National Institutions (ICC), a representative from the Iranian Islamic Human Rights Commission, twenty five international, regional and national non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the representatives of the parliaments and/or governments of Australia, the Maldives and Philippines.

Conclusions

The Forum, during its open plenary sessions:

6. Expressed appreciation to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights for her message and for her leadership in supporting the establishment and strengthening of NHRIs. The Forum warmly welcomed the strengthened partnership with the OHCHR and looked forward to

enhancing this relationship and its participation in the UN human rights system, especially the Human Rights Council and its mechanisms.

7. Informed the conference of the outcomes of the Forum Councillor meeting held on 25th September 2007. The following decisions were highlighted:

- The unanimous election of Mr John von Doussa QC, President of the Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (as the current host institution of the annual meeting) to the position of Chairperson of the Forum, Tan Sri Abu Talib Othman, Chairman of the National Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (as the host institution for the next annual meeting) and Professor Kyong-Whan Ahn, Chairperson of the National Human Rights Commission of the Republic of Korea (as the immediate past Chairperson of the Forum) to the two positions of Deputy Chairpersons.
- Approval of the draft Rules of Procedure for (i) meetings of Forum Councillors; (ii) the Forum's Annual General Meeting and (iii) the Forum's Annual Conference, incorporating amendments that increased the proposed timeframes for submission of documents for Forum Councillors' meetings under paragraphs 3.1 and 3.2;
- Approval of the application for associate membership from the Human Rights Commission of the Maldives;
- The review of the associate membership of the Jordan National Centre for Human Rights. Forum Councillors congratulated the institution for the steps taken to comply with the Paris Principles and resolved to admit the institution as a full member of the Forum;
- The review the candidate membership of the Provedoria for Human Rights and Justice of Timor-Leste. Forum Councillors congratulated the Provedoria on the formation of a pluralistic advisory council and resolved to admit the institution as a full member of the Forum. As a result of these decisions, the Forum is now comprised of 14 full member institutions; and 3 associate member institutions;
- Agreement to make a reference to the Advisory Council of Jurists on the corporate accountability and government responsibility for the activities of transnational corporations which affect human rights and requested the secretariat to develop draft terms of reference, including a term concerning the obligation to respect and protect the legitimate activities of human rights defenders, for the consideration and approval of Forum Councillors. Forum Councillors also approved the proposal for a review of the role and functions of the ACJ and welcomed the offer of the National Human Rights Commission of India to host a meeting for this purpose in February 2008;
- A request that the secretariat examine options and make recommendations to enhance the effectiveness of the role of national institutions in the United Nations for the consideration and decision of Forum Councillors.
- A request that the secretariat examine options and make recommendations concerning the Forum's membership procedures and their relationship to the International Coordinating Committee accreditation process for the consideration and decision of Forum Councillors;
- A request that the ICC and OHCHR increase the provision of information on the activities of the Human Rights Council, treaty bodies and relevant human rights mechanisms to the secretariat for dissemination to all member institutions in a timely manner;
- The establishment of a governing structure for the Senior Executive Officers (SEO) network in line with the governing structure of the Forum. The Forum Councillors therefore welcomed the appointment of the SEO from Australia as Chair of the network, and the SEOs of Republic of Korea and Malaysia to the positions of Deputy Chairs; and
- Accepted with appreciation the kind offer of the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia to host the Thirteenth Annual Meeting in 2008.

8. Welcomed the reports of Forum members on their operations over the preceding year. Also welcomed the report of the Iranian Islamic Human Rights Commission and offered technical support from Forum members and the secretariat.
9. Noted the reports from Forum member institutions about regional cooperation activities. In particular they discussed and welcomed the progress of the national human rights institutions of Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines and Thailand to strengthen their cooperation towards the establishment of an ASEAN mechanism on human rights. The institutions from Afghanistan, Jordan, Palestine and Qatar expressed their interest in exploring sub-regional cooperation amongst national institutions within West Asia and requested the advice and assistance from the secretariat.
10. Welcomed the reports of governments and parliamentarians on the activities undertaken by States to protect and promote human rights including support for national human rights institutions.
11. Welcomed the reports of non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Forum Councillors expressed their appreciation for the constructive and coordinated contribution of NGOs to the work of the Forum. Forum Councillors thanked NGOs for their submissions, collective participation and advocacy at the meeting and stressed their commitment to furthering constructive dialogue and practical cooperation. In response, the NGOs expressed their appreciation to the Forum for the opportunity of actively participating in dialogue and discussion during the annual meeting. NGOs commended those APF members who held consultations with NGOs prior to the annual meeting and recommended that this practice be implemented by all APF member institutions for future annual meetings. Forum Councillors and NGOs requested that the Forum further consider:
 - Practical mechanisms to enhance NHRIs protection of human rights defenders;
 - The role of NHRIs and their coordination with States and NGOs in the UN Universal Periodic Review mechanism;
 - The role of NHRIs and the Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples;
 - The role of NHRIs in the implementation of the Convention Against Torture and its Optional Protocol, particularly given the requirement to establish a national preventative mechanism in compliance with the Paris Principles; and
 - A mechanism to review the implementation of the recommendations of the ACJ.
12. As a matter of urgency given the current demonstrations in Myanmar, agreed to request their national governments to negotiate with Myanmar to bring an end to human rights abuses.
13. Expressed disappointment at the actions of the Fiji Human Rights Commission that have undermined its independence. The Forum offered APF assistance to re-establish the Commission's independence. Forum Councillors urged all Forum members, especially in situations of conflict, to demonstrate independence as required by the Paris Principles.
14. Considered the role of national institutions in protecting and promoting the rights of people with disabilities. Forum Councillors resolved to establish a disability focal point in each institution to liaise and coordinate regionally. The SEO network also resolved to actively engage in this activity and to seek sufficient resources to support it. Forum Councillors requested the Forum secretariat to support and facilitate the work of this disability network.
15. Considered the issue of the right to environment, including the interim report of the Advisory Council of Jurists. The Forum warmly thanked the jurists for their expertise and the comprehensive scope of their report. Forum member institutions would carefully consider their recommendations and report on their implementation to the next meeting of the Forum. Forum Councillors also invited proposals from the jurists concerning both thematic issues for possible

future references and administrative issues to ensure the effective and efficient functioning of the Council.

16. Recorded their sincere appreciation to:

- Professor Kyong-Whan Ahn, Chairperson of the National Human Rights Commission of the Republic of Korea for his excellent Chairmanship of the Forum following the resignation of Fiji Human Rights Commission;
- Ms Diana Temby, former Executive Director of the Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, for her important contribution to the Forum; and
- Dr Purificacion Quisumbing for her long service as the Chairperson of the Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines, which will end before the next Annual Conference, and for her untiring support for the work of the Forum.

A report on the meeting will soon be available on the Forum website.

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