

## **Second Regional Workshop New Delhi, India 10 – 12 September 1997**

The second meeting of the Asia Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions was held in New Delhi, India from September 10 to 12 1997. This meeting was attended by the six national human rights commissions in the region from Australia, India, Indonesia, New Zealand, Philippines and Sri Lanka.

Government observers were invited from states with commissions and from those that have expressed interest in establishing a commission. On this occasion 18 governments were represented, regional human rights non government organisations were also invited and represented.

The workshop was organised by the National Human Rights Commission of India with input from the Forum Secretariat. Financial support for the workshop was provided by the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the New Zealand Government.

The workshop was opened by the Prime Minister of India, Sri Inder Kumar Gujral. It was addressed by the Special Adviser to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mr Brian Burdekin. The discussion over two days was very lively and practical, with the representatives of the commissions drawing from their own experiences, exchanging views and exploring new ways to cooperate in strengthening their own work and in assisting governments without commissions to establish them.

The workshop adopted a Concluding Statement which set out a commitment to joint action in many areas.

The New Delhi meeting reaffirmed the commitment of participants to the universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated nature of human rights contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international instruments. This is significant given the debate in the region about the Universal Declaration. In reaffirming the indivisible character of human rights, the Forum also emphasised that no category of rights takes priority over another and that national institutions should take a broad approach to their work, giving attention to economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights. The meeting considered that the Forum should increase its efforts as a focus of regional, multilateral and bilateral programs of practical technical assistance. Forum members gave special emphasis to the need to develop a culture of human rights through grass-roots work and wide dissemination of information about human rights and the role of national institutions.

While affirming the importance of thorough investigation of allegations of human rights abuse and effective redress, Forum members expressed concern about the rapidly increasing caseload of complaints experienced by many national institutions. Forum members also stressed the importance of collating, disseminating and developing human rights jurisprudence and agreed in principle to set up an international human rights law advisory panel. Forum members condemned the practice of child sexual exploitation as a gross abuse of human rights, undertook to collate and disseminate information on relevant laws and practices and supported the proposed Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on child sexual exploitation.