

REVIEW OF FORUM'S OPERATIONS - INFORMATION DISSEMINATION

INTRODUCTION

The following is a summary of the Forum's information dissemination activities since the Forum's Third Annual Meeting held in Jakarta, Indonesia in 1998.

One of the important objectives of the Asia Pacific Forum is to disseminate a wide range of information that will promote the strengthening of the institutional capacities of national human rights commissions of the region and encourage and assist governments of the region to establish national human rights commissions.

The Forum has recognised the importance of multi-media to achieve an effective distribution of information in relation to the activities of the regional national institutions and the Forum. Over the past twelve months, and under tight budgetary restraints, the Forum has produced and disseminated information material on the Internet, in print and via a video. The Forum's Annual Meetings also provide another important mechanism for distributing information about the Forum.

INTERNET

In the Concluding Statement of the Second Asia Pacific Regional Workshop of National Human Rights Institutions held in New Delhi, India in September 1997, Forum members gave special emphasis to the wide dissemination of information about human rights and the role of national institutions. Forum members requested the Secretariat of the Forum develop, by the end of 1998, a web site focusing on the work of the Forum and regional national human rights institutions. This web site (www.apf.hreoc.gov.au) was developed and launched at Forum's Third Annual Meeting held in Jakarta in September 1998. The web site also sets out to establish a network between regional commissions and includes links with the Australian, Indonesian and New Zealand Commissions.

In March 1999, the site was updated to include the Forum's third annual meeting agenda, ten background papers, summary of discussions, statement of conclusions and report. The site was also updated to include the first edition of the Forum's newsletter entitled the *Bulletin*. In addition, the Forum's site has increased its links to other human rights related sites by thirty percent. The Forum has also recently updated the web site to include the report and concluding statement of the regional workshop 'National Institutions and Non-Government Organisations: Working in Partnership' that was held on 26-28 July 1999 in Kandy, Sri Lanka.

The Forum encourages member institutions that do not have web sites to request the Secretariat to place information about their activities on the Forum web site.

PRINT

An important initiative of the Forum has been the development of a newsletter. The purpose of the Forum's newsletter, the *Bulletin*, is to keep national institutions informed of important policy, legal, legislative, administrative and training developments in the region and in the United Nations. The first edition of the Bulletin was published and distributed in March 1999. Around 1500 copies of this publication have been distributed to Forum members, regional and other governments, human rights non-government organisations, United Nations bodies and academic institutions. The next edition of the Bulletin will be issued in October 1999. The Editor of the *Bulletin* welcomes any contributions from Forum Members.

VIDEO

At its Third Annual Meeting in Jakarta, Indonesia, the Forum agreed to document the proceedings of the meeting using video. The video provided excellent material on the human rights issues

facing member commissions. It also included interviews with the United Nations Special Advisor Rights on National Institutions to High Commissioner for Human Rights, regional governments considering the establishment of a national human rights commission and non-government organisations including Amnesty International. In December 1998, the video was distributed widely across the region, including to all Forum member commissions, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Asia Pacific Human Rights Non-Government Organisation Facilitating Team and Amnesty International.

The second stage of the video proposal is the subject of a separate paper to the meeting.

REGIONAL MEETINGS

The Forum encourages the participation of governments and human rights non-government organisations in the Forum's annual meetings and regional workshops as participants and observers. This has been an important process to encourage the establishment of new institutions, strengthen the effectiveness of existing institutions and increase the general awareness of Forum activities.

Members of the Forum and Secretariat staff also promote the work of national human rights institutions and the Forum by attending and speaking at various international, regional and national seminars as well as through bilateral discussions with governments, regional and international organisations and NGOs.

ENQUIRIES

The Secretariat receives a variety of enquiries for information. Generally the requests for information are about the activities of the Forum, its members, regional human rights issues and national human rights commissions. Over the past twelve months the Secretariat received four hundred and eighty enquiries from Forum members, regional governments, non-government organisations, United Nations bodies, academic institutions and other regional governments.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Forum members at the 4th Annual Meeting of the Forum:

- Note the content of this report
- Consider the suggestion that Forum member institutions that do not have web sites request the Secretariat to place information about their activities on the Forum web site.
- Take note that the Secretariat welcomes any contributions from Forum Members to the Forum *Bulletin*.