

**SEVENTH ANNUAL MEETING OF THE ASIA PACIFIC FORUM OF
NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS INSTITUTIONS**

11th – 13th November 2002, New Delhi, India

CONCLUDING STATEMENT

Introduction

1. The Asia Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions, consisting of the National Human Rights Commissions of India, Australia, Fiji, Indonesia, Malaysia, Mongolia, Nepal, New Zealand, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Sri Lanka and Thailand, held this Seventh Annual Meeting in New Delhi, India from 11th to 13th November 2002.
2. The Forum expressed its gratitude to the National Human Rights Commission of India for hosting the meeting, to the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights for its co-sponsorship and to the governments of India, Australia and New Zealand for their financial support. The Forum paid tribute to Mr Brian Burdekin and thanked him for his exceptional work as Special Advisor to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. The Forum also expressed its appreciation for the efforts of the Commissioners and staff of the National Human Rights Commission of India and the Secretariat of the Forum for their work in the organisation of the meeting.
3. The Forum welcomed the participation of representatives as observers from the governments of Australia, Myanmar, New Zealand, Thailand and Timor-Leste, the institutions from Afghanistan, Iran, New Zealand and Palestine, and international, regional and national non-governmental organizations.
4. The Hon. Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Prime Minister of India, Justice J.S. Verma, Chairman of the National Human Rights Commission of India and the Chairperson of the Asia Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions and Mr Brian Burdekin, Special Advisor to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, addressed the inaugural session. In the opening statements the distinguished speakers recognised human rights as a vital constituent of the rule of law and an essential element of good governance. In this, the important role of national human rights institutions in protecting and promoting human rights was reiterated. Particular attention was drawn to the challenges posed by terrorism and the human rights issues associated with trafficking and disability.

Conclusions

5. The Forum reaffirmed that the structure and responsibilities of national institutions should be consistent with the Principles Relating to the Status of National Institutions adopted by the United Nations General Assembly (Resolution 48/134) commonly

referred to as the ‘Paris Principles.’ On this basis it admitted the national human rights institutions of Malaysia, Republic of Korea and Thailand as full members of the Forum, thereby increasing its membership to 12 institutions.

6. The Forum considered a discussion paper examining the category of ‘Associate Membership.’ The Forum agreed on two guiding criteria in considering applications for associate membership: namely the requirement to possess a broad mandate; and the desirability of admitting only one institution per member state of the United Nations.
7. The Forum considered it was important to strengthen strategic partnerships with human rights institutions. Invitations would be issued to relevant institutions / organisations to participate as observers depending on the focus of the meetings.
8. The Forum unanimously elected the National Human Rights Commission of India (as the current host institution of the annual meeting) to the position of Chairperson of the Forum. The National Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka (as the host institution for the last annual meeting) and the National Human Rights Commission of Nepal (as the host institution for the next annual meeting) were also elected unanimously to the two positions of Deputy Chairpersons.
9. The Forum elected the national human rights institutions from Australia, Fiji, Nepal and the Philippines to be the four regional representatives to the International Coordinating Committee of National Institutions. The Fiji Human Rights Commission will also serve on the International Coordinating Committee accreditation sub-committee.
10. The Forum welcomed the inaugural meeting of Senior Executive Officers of Forum member institutions. The Forum noted the outcomes of the meeting including the establishment of a working group to examine and implement measures to assist the effective and efficient functioning of national human rights institutions. The Forum also requested that the Secretariat assist the Forum Councillors in the development of new governance and management policies for the Forum.
11. The Special Advisor to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights emphasised the continuing commitment of the United Nations to promote the establishment and strengthening of national institutions. The Deputy Chairperson of the Forum provided a report on the Forum’s activities over the last year and the Forum expressed their appreciation for the work of the Secretariat. The representative of non-governmental organisations of the region stressed the importance of national institutions undertaking practical collaborative activities with non-governmental organisations at both the national and regional level for the protection and promotion of human rights.
12. Forum Councillors reported on their implementation of the recommendations of the Advisory Council of Jurists’ reports on the death penalty and child pornography on

the internet. A number of Forum Councillors specifically cited the successful implementation of the Advisory Council's recommendations. Forum Councillors decided to formulate a new reference to the Advisory Council of Jurists on the issue of the primacy of the rule of law in countering terrorism world-wide while protecting human rights and requested the secretariat to prepare draft terms of reference for the consideration and approval of the Forum.

13. The Forum discussed a proposal to develop a new international convention on the rights of people with disabilities. Forum institutions agreed to respond positively to the invitation of the United Nations Ad Hoc Committee to participate independently in the development of the possible new convention. The Forum adopted the recommendations contained in the discussion paper presented to the meeting and welcomes the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner's support in their implementation. In proceeding further, the Secretariat will keep in mind the comments made by all participants in the meeting.
14. The Forum considered the issue of trafficking, including the views of international experts and non-governmental organisations, and the report of the Advisory Council of Jurists on this issue. The Forum warmly thanked the jurists of the Advisory Council for their expertise and the comprehensive scope of their report which included items on i) ratification; ii) implementation; iii) enforcement; iv) victim protection; v) research and policy; vi) education; and vii) cooperation. Forum member institutions would closely examine the recommendations of the Advisory Council and report back on their implementation to the next annual meeting. The Forum further requested the Secretariat to assist in strengthening regional cooperation on this issue. The Forum also welcomed the agreement of the National Human Rights Commissions of India and Nepal to work together on this issue. The Forum also requested the Secretariat to be in touch with the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in respect to the need to keep more clearly in mind the human rights of victims of trafficking in the formulation of views and comments on this subject. The Forum recommends the reinvigoration of the network of focal points on trafficking within Forum member institutions.
15. The Forum gratefully accepted the kind offer of the National Human Rights Commission of Nepal to host the Eighth Annual Meeting of the Asia Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions in approximately twelve months time and further noted the kind offer of the Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission to act as a potential alternate host if necessary.
16. The Forum likewise noted with thanks the offer of the National Human Rights Commission of Mongolia and the National Human Rights Commission of Korea to host the Ninth Annual Meeting in 2004.

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

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