

**13TH ANNUAL MEETING OF THE ASIA PACIFIC FORUM OF NATIONAL HUMAN
RIGHTS INSTITUTIONS
30-31 July 2008**

**STATEMENT
BY THE INTERNATIONAL SERVICE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS**

Madam Chair,

This statement is made by the International Service for Human Rights, but received support from a number of national and regional non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and is one of the outcomes of the NGO Meeting on Engagement with National Human Rights Institutions that was organised in parallel to this meeting.

Unfortunately, we shall open this statement in the same way we did last year, by expressing concern at the situation of human rights defenders and women human rights defenders in Asia Pacific. They continue to face intimidation, harassment and attacks due to their human rights work. In the absence of a regional human rights body, defenders turn to national human rights institutions for support and protection. We would like to make a few comments and offer suggestions in relation to the work of this Forum in this regard.

We welcome the Forum's request that the Advisory Council of Jurists (ACJ) pay specific attention to the situation of human rights defenders in the context of the current reference on corporate responsibility. However, this would be of little value if it were to remain an isolated episode. We suggest that the Forum systematically **integrate the issue of human rights defenders and women human rights defenders** in any topic that it may request the ACJ to address.

We would also like to suggest that the Forum request member institutions to include a specific **section in their annual reports** on the work done for the protection of human rights defenders at the national level, following from the thematic discussion of the APF in Fiji in 2006.

The appointment of the chairperson of the Ugandan national human rights institution as new United Nations Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders provides a renewed opportunity for collaboration and interaction between this Forum and the UN mandate. We recommend that the APF consider holding a **dialogue with the Special Rapporteur**. Her national institution background could prove very valuable in assisting Forum members in strengthening their work in this regard.

We would like to draw attention to the comments on the **APF rules of procedures** that we submitted to the Chairperson last November seeking clarification on rule 4.4 on the participation of NGOs. While we understand that at this point in time an amendment to the rules in the sense we suggested is unlikely, we are pleased to observe that the practice of an open and inclusive dialogue with NGOs on all agenda items has been consolidated this year. We view this as confirming the commitment of Forum members to maintain it as an essential standard feature of its meetings in the future.

Madam Chair,

We are of the view that this Forum and the action of its members at the national level would benefit significantly from the existence of adequate **follow up** mechanisms. We see three main domains where follow up could be strengthened:

- In relation to the recommendations contained in the concluding statement of the **previous Annual Meeting**. The APF Secretariat informed NGOs attending the parallel NGO Meeting on the measures taken by the Secretariat in this sense. While we warmly welcome this, we consider it important that individual member institutions ensure implementation of those recommendations at the national level. This would add value to the work of the Forum, and would also provide incentive for sustained and constructive NGO engagement.
- Follow up must also be ensured in relation to the recommendations of the **Advisory Council of Jurists**. We welcome the Workshop on Strengthening the Advisory Council of Jurists that took place in New Delhi in February and the inclusion in this year's agenda of a specific item on follow up to ACJ recommendations, and we hope that this will be maintained in the future. We regret however that only a few institutions have submitted written reports on the implementation of ACJ recommendations. The Forum may also consider introducing an additional sub-item on the implementation of previous reports when relevant. This would ensure sustained attention to all ACJ reports.
- We welcome the consideration of the role of national institutions in relation to the new Universal Periodic Review on this year's agenda, as proposed by NGOs at last year's meeting. This Forum may also offer the opportunity for broader follow up to the recommendations stemming from **international mechanisms**, including not only the UPR but also the UN treaty bodies and the system of Special procedures, in particular when they visit the region. We would encourage separate reporting by member institutions under the first agenda item of the means to incorporate international recommendations into their activity plans and progress in implementation of such recommendations. We would also propose that such working methods be taken up by the meeting of Senior Executive Officers in 2009.

Recommendations, be they from the Forum itself, the ACJ or international bodies, are of value only if they are effectively implemented. We are convinced that increased attention of the Forum on follow up would contribute to increasing the effectiveness of the action of national institutions, and by extension the effectiveness of collaboration with NGOs through giving due effect to their recommendations, in their respective countries.

Thank you.