

ELEVENTH ANNUAL MEETING OF THE ASIA PACIFIC FORUM OF NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS INSTITUTIONS

31 July to 3 August 2006, Suva, Fiji

CONCLUDING STATEMENT

Introduction

1. The Asia Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions (the Forum), consisting of the National Human Rights Institutions of Fiji, Afghanistan, Australia, India, Indonesia, Jordan, Malaysia, Mongolia, Nepal, New Zealand, Palestine, Philippines, Qatar, Republic of Korea, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Timor-Leste, held this Eleventh Annual Meeting in Suva, Fiji from 31 July to 3 August 2006.
2. The Forum Councillors expressed their gratitude to the Fiji Human Rights Commission for hosting the meeting, to the 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 Commissioners and staff of the Fiji Human Rights Commission and the secretariat of the Forum for their work in the organisation of the meeting.
3. The Forum particularly welcomed the participation of the Advisory Council of Jurists and thanked them for their important work. The Forum also welcomed representatives, as observers, from the institutions of the Maldives and Saudi Arabia, fifty seven international, regional and national non-governmental organizations, the representatives of the governments of Australia, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, New Zealand, Pakistan, Philippines, South Africa, Tuvalu, United Kingdom, the representatives of the European Union, Pacific Islands Forum, Republic of China and the OHCHR, ILO, UNDP, UNICEF, UNESCO and WHO.
4. H.E. Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi, Vice-President of the Republic of the Fiji Islands and Roko Tui Bau, Mr Walter Rigamoto, immediate past Chairperson, Fiji Human Rights Commission and Mr Richard Dictus, United Nations Resident Coordinator, addressed the inaugural session and formally opened the annual meeting. The speakers stressed the importance of human rights and the role of national human rights institutions and called upon States in the Asia Pacific region, and in particular the Pacific, to establish and strengthen national human rights institutions and ensure their full compliance with the Paris Principles.
5. The Forum noted with appreciation the attendance, participation and support of a number of senior members of the government, judiciary, parliament and other dignitaries from the Republic of Fiji and other States in the region and encouraged their continued engagement and support of the Forum.
6. The Forum noted with appreciation the attendance of members of the media and welcomed their participation and advocacy in the promotion and protection of human rights.
7. The Forum conveyed their special thanks to the elders of the villages of Suva and Tamavua who offered a warm traditional welcome to the Forum Councillors.

Conclusions

The Forum, during its annual business meeting:

8. Noted the annual activity report of the Forum and expressed their appreciation for the work of the secretariat. Forum Councillors also reviewed the Forum's finances and administration and approved the Director's Financial and Audit report of the Forum for the period ending 31 March 2006. Forum Councillors highly appreciated the financial contributions made by (i) member institutions; (ii) the governments of Australia, India, New Zealand, Republic of Korea, Thailand, Sweden and the United States; (iii) donor institutions, including the Brookings Institution, MacArthur Foundation and the National Endowment for Democracy; and (iv) international agencies, including United Nations agencies.
9. Considered the Forum's draft strategic plan for the period 2007 to 2009 and agreed to submit comments and/or additional proposals on the draft with a view to finalising the plan by 1 November 2006. The Forum Councillors also welcomed input from other key stakeholders and invited representatives of governments, civil society and international agencies to submit comments and/or proposals.
10. Agreed to form a new working group on United Nations treaty body reform and requested that the existing working groups on (i) the United Nations Human Rights Council and (ii) Disability, continue their important work and submit proposals for the consideration and decision by Forum Councillors. Forum Councillors expressed their appreciation for the efforts of the members of these working groups and expressed their strong support for the advocacy on behalf of all members of the Forum.
11. Welcomed the report of the Fiji Human Rights Commission, the Forum's representative to the accreditation sub-committee of the International Coordinating Committee of National Institutions (ICC), and thanked the Forum's representative for her work. The Forum Councillors requested that the Fiji representative continue to serve on the ICC accreditation sub-committee until the finalisation of the ICC re-accreditation criteria which is scheduled to occur in October 2006. The national institution of the Republic of Korea will then assume the role as the Forum's representative on the ICC accreditation sub-committee.
12. Forum Councillors nominated the national human rights institutions of Australia, India, New Zealand and the Republic of Korea to be the Forum's representatives to the ICC. The national human rights institution of New Zealand will assume its role after the completion of the Fiji Human Rights Commission's term. Forum Councillors also proposed amendments to the rules of procedure of the ICC with regard to the election of the ICC's Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson.
13. Reaffirmed that the structure and responsibilities of national institutions should be consistent with the Paris Principles. Forum Councillors welcomed proposals to strengthen the accreditation guidelines of the ICC and recommended that, following the finalisation of the ICC accreditation guidelines, the Forum's own membership procedures be reviewed. Forum Councillors therefore resolved that the application for membership from the National Society for Human Rights of Saudi Arabia be deferred until these processes are finalised. In doing so, Forum

Councillors requested that the secretariat offer technical cooperation and assistance to the Society regarding compliance with the ‘Paris Principles’.

14. Decided to make a reference to the Advisory Council of Jurists on exploring the human rights dimension to the right to environment and requested that the secretariat develop draft terms of reference for the consideration and approval of Forum Councillors.
15. Commended the efforts of the Senior Executive Officers to assist in the effective and efficient functioning of national institutions. The Forum requested that the Senior Executive Officers continue to increase their cooperation and requested that they provide a report to the 12th Annual Meeting of the Forum on their activities and cooperation projects.
16. Unanimously elected the Fiji Human Rights Commission (as the current host institution of the annual meeting) to the position of Chairperson of the Forum. The National Human Rights Commission of Mongolia (as the host institution for the last annual meeting) and the Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (as the host institution for the next annual meeting) were also elected unanimously to the two positions of Deputy Chairpersons.
17. Expressed their deep concern that the representatives of the Palestinian Independent Commission for Citizens Rights could not attend the meeting due to the conflict in the Middle East and supported the UN Secretary General’s call for an immediate and unconditional ceasefire for all actors to end the human rights violations.

The Forum, during its open plenary sessions:

18. Expressed appreciation for the commitment of the OHCHR to strengthen sustainable partnerships with the Forum and welcomed the OHCHR’s proposal to meet with the Forum prior to the end of 2006 to jointly explore how this may be realised in the context of the strategic plans of both organisations. The Forum also welcomed the proposal of the OHCHR to hold a meeting of Asian States in 2006 to encourage the establishment and strengthening of national human rights institutions in compliance with the Paris Principles. Forum Councillors requested that a similar meeting also be held for the Pacific in association with the Forum and the Pacific Islands Forum. Forum Councillors called upon the OHCHR to work closely with the Forum secretariat in the planning and implementation of these meetings so as to ensure the active participation of Forum national institutions.
19. Welcomed the reports of Forum members and relevant institutions on their operations over the preceding year. Forum Councillors welcomed the participation of the representatives from the Maldives and Saudi Arabia and particularly welcomed initiatives to strengthen the institution in the Maldives towards compliance with the Paris Principles.
20. 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. Forum Councillors welcomed the proposal of the Government of Pakistan to establish a national human rights institution and

reinforced the need for it to be established in full conformity with the Paris Principles. The Forum offered its technical support for this to occur.

21. Welcomed the reports of non-governmental organisations. Forum Councillors appreciated the constructive and coordinated contribution of non-governmental organisations to the work of the Forum. Forum Councillors thanked non-governmental organisations for their submissions, collective participation and advocacy at the meeting and stressed their commitment to furthering practical cooperation.
22. Discussed initiatives for the establishment of both domestic and regional human rights mechanisms in the Pacific, especially national human rights institutions. Forum Councillors welcomed the initiatives of the Fiji and New Zealand national institutions in this area undertaken in association with the Pacific Islands Forum.
23. Discussed initiatives of the Fiji Human Rights Commission to work in the Pacific on the right to environment and was encouraged by the Government of Tuvalu statement to enter into further dialogue on the right to environment in the Pacific Islands States.
24. 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.
25. Considered the relevance of role of the International Labour Organization (ILO), and in particular specific ILO Conventions and Declarations, to the protection and promotion functions of national human rights institutions. Forum Councillors requested that the secretariat explore with the ILO the development of practical cooperation programs.
26. Heard presentations from representatives of international, regional and national non-governmental organisations on the rights of human rights defenders. The Forum Council affirmed the complementary roles of national institutions and non-governmental organisations as defenders of human rights and as human rights defenders themselves. It recognised the particular responsibilities of national institutions towards human rights defenders and visa versa. It requested the secretariat to explore how the members of the Forum can protect and promote the rights of human rights defenders more effectively at regional and national levels.
27. Considered the issue of the right to education, including the views of international agencies, experts and non-governmental organisations, and the interim report of the Advisory Council of Jurists. The Forum warmly thanked the jurists of the Advisory Council 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.
28. Heard presentations underlining the important role of national human rights institutions to assist the work of their governments in defining, promoting and monitoring the right to education. Forum Councillors welcomed the substantive

participation of representatives of UNESCO both in the activities of the Advisory Council of Jurists and the annual meeting and requested that the secretariat explore with UNESOC the development of practical projects to assist Forum members protect and promote the right to education and the implementation of the recommendations of the jurists.

29. Reported on their implementation of the recommendations of the Advisory Council of Jurists' reports on the death penalty, child pornography, trafficking, terrorism and torture. A number of Forum Councillors specifically cited the successful implementation of the Advisory Council's recommendations.
30. Gratefully accepted the kind offer of the Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission to host the Twelfth Annual Meeting in 2007.

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