



Advancing human rights **together**

**Fostering collaboration between national human rights
institutions and regional inter-governmental mechanisms**



ASIA PACIFIC FORUM
ADVANCING HUMAN RIGHTS IN OUR REGION



Advancing human rights together

To be treated fairly and with respect.

To live free from violence and discrimination.

To have opportunities and make choices in life.

To be part of a community that is just and inclusive.

This vision for human rights is deeply held by people from all countries across the Asia Pacific. And it is one that many institutions and organisations – at the community, national and regional levels – are committed to realising.

Our goal is to bring together two powerful agents for change in the Asia Pacific: national human rights institutions (NHRIs) and regional inter-governmental mechanisms.

By establishing regular platforms for dialogue, they will have new opportunities to share their human rights expertise and develop strategies that improve people's lives and build strong, resilient communities.

Dialogue for change

We will assist NHRIs in South-East Asia and the Pacific to engage with their respective inter-governmental mechanisms: the Association of South-East Asian Nations and its human rights institutions, and the Pacific Islands Forum.

We will bring together representatives of these groups for roundtable discussions on environmental rights and climate change issues facing communities in their sub-regions. We will identify good practice and promote evidence-based human rights policies. We will also convene blended learning programs for NHRIs, host online communities of practice and provide small grants to support targeted national projects.

Promoting partnerships across the region

Many of the most pressing human rights issues in our region today cross national borders: for example, empowering communities to take action on the impacts of climate change, environmental damage and biodiversity loss; ensuring safe pathways for migrants and migrant workers; breaking the criminal trade in human lives; and promoting fairness for all in the operations of business.

Unlike Africa, the Americas and Europe, there is no region-wide human rights protection system in the Asia Pacific – such as a court, commission or treaties – to address these issues in a comprehensive manner.

This makes it even more important that there is strong and strategic engagement between all institutions that have a responsibility to develop policies or take action to protect and promote human rights.

NHRIs: Upholding human rights at the national level

NHRIs are established by law, or in the national constitution, with powers to promote and protect human rights. Independent from government, they are uniquely positioned to drive change by:

- **Monitoring the human rights situation in the country** and making their findings available to the public
- **Providing advice to government** so that laws and policies reflect national and international human rights standards
- **Investigating and resolving complaints** so that victims of human rights violations can seek redress
- **Delivering human rights education programs** that help change attitudes and behaviour.

Our project will involve representatives from the NHRIs of Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Thailand and Timor-Leste in South-East Asia, and Australia, Fiji, New Zealand, Samoa and Tuvalu in the Pacific.

“... NHRIs play a key role in climate mitigation and adaptation by educating the public about the human rights impacts of environmental harms; monitoring these impacts; and advising governments to adopt human rights-based environmental policies.

They can also handle complaints and promote accountability, at a national level and through regional and universal human rights mechanisms.”

Michelle Bachelet

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

Inter-governmental mechanisms: setting a region-wide agenda

Inter-governmental mechanisms in South-East Asia and the Pacific seek to promote peace, prosperity and partnerships among their member States. In pursuing this vision, many of the issues they seek to address – directly or indirectly – focus on common human rights challenges facing communities across their sub-region.

Inter-governmental mechanisms rely on rigorous advice and analysis to shape region-wide policies that respond to these challenges and strengthen national and regional institutions. NHRIs can add significant value to these discussions, including to support the integration of rights-based approaches into policies and actions. NHRIs can also play a vital role to promote implementation of these policies and actions at the national level.

Our project will involve State representatives from the human rights mechanisms of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN), primarily the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights; and representatives from the Pacific Islands Forum.

“A safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment is the foundation of human life. But today, because of human action – and inhuman inaction – the triple planetary crises of climate change, pollution, and nature loss is directly and severely impacting a broad range of rights ... As these environmental threats intensify, they will constitute the single greatest challenge to human rights in our era.”

Michelle Bachelet
UN High Commissioner
for Human Rights

Priority focus: Environmental rights and climate change

One of the most urgent issues facing communities in South-East Asia and the Pacific is the impact of climate change and environmental harm.

Rising sea levels and extreme weather events are already having a profound impact on fundamental human rights. As a changing climate increases the risk of natural disasters, NHRIs often find themselves working at the front line with communities in crisis. The impact on vulnerable groups – including women, children, people with disabilities and indigenous peoples – is greatly magnified.

Our project will develop a foundation for engagement and collaboration between NHRIs and inter-governmental mechanisms with the goal of supporting communities respond to human rights impacted by environmental harm and a changing climate.

Through a series of strategic national activities, selected NHRIs will conduct research and engage with communities and other key stakeholders. They will share their analysis with their inter-governmental mechanism and discuss policy and planning measures that best respond to the issues they identify.

Building partnerships for human rights

In bringing together representatives from NHRIs and inter-governmental mechanisms for a series of facilitated roundtable discussions, we aim to:

- Build recognition of the unique and complementary roles of NHRIs and inter-governmental mechanisms to promote and protect human rights
- Develop a shared understanding of the means to address region-wide human rights issues
- Identify opportunities for collaboration between NHRIs and inter-governmental mechanisms on human rights issues of shared concern
- Generate positive sentiment about the value of collaboration and a commitment to ongoing dialogue in support of future joint initiatives.



Demonstrating the value of engagement and collaboration

With activities commencing in February 2022, our multi-year project seeks to demonstrate that human rights issues can be more effectively addressed by combining the unique mandates of NHRIs and inter-governmental mechanisms.

In collaboration with participating NHRIs and inter-governmental mechanisms, we will:

- Design and implement **blended learning courses** for NHRIs in South-East Asia and the Pacific on environmental rights and climate change
- Establish **online communities of practice** for NHRIs in South-East Asia and the Pacific to discuss effective approaches for engaging with their inter-governmental mechanism
- Establish a **small grants program** for selected NHRIs to support national research and stakeholder consultations on environmental rights and climate change
- Support NHRIs to establish **focal points** for engaging with their inter-governmental mechanism
- Support **roundtable dialogues** in South-East Asia and the Pacific for NHRIs and inter-governmental mechanisms, with a focus on environmental rights and climate change
- Support NHRIs and inter-governmental mechanisms to develop a **joint outcomes paper** on human rights and climate change.

Our goal is to lay the foundation for an ongoing, formalised relationship between NHRIs and inter-governmental mechanisms to address human rights issues in the Asia Pacific.



ASIA PACIFIC FORUM
ADVANCING HUMAN RIGHTS IN OUR REGION

Established in 1996, the Asia Pacific Forum is a coalition of 25 NHRIs from all corners of the region. We support the establishment and strengthening of independent NHRIs, recognising the powerful role they play to promote and protect human rights across the Asia Pacific.



**Funded by
the European Union**

This publication was produced with the financial support of the European Union. Its contents are the sole responsibility of the APF and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union.

Photo Credit Page 2. 2019 Leong Chee Wai. Suhakam Photo Competition.

To find out more [click here](#)

Follow us on social media



Asia Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions

GPO Box 5218, Sydney NSW 1042 Australia **E** apf@asiapacificforum.net **W** www.asiapacificforum.net