



ASIA PACIFIC FORUM
ADVANCING HUMAN RIGHTS IN OUR REGION

ANNUAL REPORT 2018–2019

An Asia
Pacific where
everyone enjoys
human rights



OUR VISION IS FOR AN ASIA PACIFIC WHERE EVERYONE ENJOYS HUMAN RIGHTS

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GLOSSARY

APF	Asia Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions
CESR	Center for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
GANHRI	Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions
LGBTI	lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex
NGO(s)	non-governmental organisation(s)
NHRI(s)	national human rights institution(s)
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
RRRT	Regional Rights Resource Team of the Pacific Community
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme

ABOUT THE APF

For almost 25 years, the APF has helped build an Asia Pacific where human rights are promoted and protected.

Over that time, our members – national human rights institutions (NHRIs) – have used their unique mandates to lead genuine and lasting change in their countries.

Established in 1996 with five members, our membership now includes 25 NHRIs from all corners of the Asia Pacific.

WHAT WE DO

We provide practical support so our members are as effective as possible in their work to promote and protect human rights.

We bring our members together and develop and implement strategies to address some of the most serious human rights challenges in our region.

We provide advice to governments and civil society groups and encourage their efforts to establish independent NHRIs.

We develop partnerships at the international and regional levels to advance human rights and amplify the voice of our members.

THE APF INCLUDES 16 FULL MEMBERS AND NINE ASSOCIATE MEMBERS DRAWN FROM ALL CORNERS OF THE REGION



Afghanistan
Independent
Human Rights
Commission



Australian
Human Rights
Commission



National Institution
for Human Rights
in the
Kingdom of Bahrain



National
Human Rights
Commission
of Bangladesh



National
Human Rights
Commission
of India



Indonesian
National Commission
on Human Rights



High Commission
for Human Rights
of Iraq



Jordan National
Centre for
Human Rights



National Centre for
Human Rights of
Kazakhstan



National Human
Rights Commission
of Korea



Ombudsman
of the
Kyrgyz Republic



Human Rights
Commission of
Malaysia



Human Rights
Commission
of the Maldives



National Human
Rights Commission
of Mongolia



Myanmar National
Human Rights
Commission



National Human
Rights Commission
of Nepal



New Zealand
Human Rights
Commission



Oman
Human Rights
Commission



Palestine
Independent
Commission for
Human Rights



Commission on
Human Rights
of the Philippines



National
Human Rights
Committee of
Qatar



Ombudsman
of
Samoa



Human Rights
Commission
of Sri Lanka



National Human
Rights Commission
of Thailand



Provedor for
Human Rights
and Justice of
Timor-Leste

INDEPENDENT NHRIs DRIVE CHANGE

NHRIs are independent bodies established to stand up for those in need of protection and to hold governments to account for their human rights obligations.

They are established by law, or in the national constitution, with powers to promote and protect human rights. Importantly, they operate independently from government.

They are uniquely positioned to make change happen 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
- **Receiving, 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
- **Engaging with the international human rights community** to raise pressing issues and advocate for recommendations that make a difference back home.



The depiction and use of boundaries, geographic names and related data shown on this map are not warranted to be error free nor do they necessarily imply official endorsement or acceptance by the APF

“IT TAKES COURAGE AND COMMITMENT”

The past year marked an important milestone that touches all our lives. On 10 December 2018, we celebrated the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

It is a document that simply and eloquently sets out our common aspirations as people, founded on the principle that each one of us is born free and equal in dignity and rights.

Some might argue that there is little to celebrate today when hundreds of thousands of people in our region have been forced to flee brutal violence or when members of our community are attacked and abused because of who they are or the faith they profess.

What is there to celebrate when some countries now seek to redefine or reprioritise human rights, or just walk away from the international community altogether?

We celebrate the Universal Declaration because it has endured for seventy years. And it has endured through turbulent times and political storms because people the world over continue to draw inspiration from its vision: for a life of dignity, equality, respect and opportunity.

Making that vision a reality, however, takes courage and commitment. It takes more than the effort of governments alone. It requires commitment and effort from all of us.

NHRIs play a vital role in helping build the strong, fair and inclusive communities that the Universal Declaration envisions.

In the past year, NHRIs across the Asia Pacific have stood shoulder-to-shoulder with individuals and communities who have faced discrimination, violence and harassment. They have advocated for justice and forged partnerships to bring about positive change.

They have done this by investigating complaints of human rights violations, monitoring places of detention, appearing before courts, advocating to parliaments and standing resolutely against the voices of prejudice and division, no matter how loud or powerful they may be.

They have been vocal in their opposition to extrajudicial killings. They have led community conversations on taboo subjects, such as tackling family violence and ensuring LGBTI people can live in safety and dignity. And many have done this in the face of serious threats and reprisals.



I am proud of the courageous work of my colleagues in NHRIs across the region and for what we have achieved collectively as the APF.

Our goal is to make a tangible difference in the lives of all people, especially those who are vulnerable to abuse and violations.

This annual report showcases the many practical ways the APF has made that difference and is helping realise our vision for Asia Pacific where everyone is ‘free and equal’ to enjoy their human rights.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rosalind Croucher".

Emeritus Professor Rosalind Croucher AM

President, Australian Human Rights Commission
Chairperson, Asia Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions



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WHAT WE ACHIEVED IN 2018–19

- Strengthened NHRIs in their work to promote and protect human rights, by providing professional training and support to more than 250 staff and Commissioners and leading capacity assessments with four NHRIs
- Promoted the establishment of independent NHRIs through scoping visits and advice to governments, especially with Pacific Island countries
- Fostered partnerships and practical collaboration between APF members by bringing together Commissioners, senior executive officers and human rights educators
- Encouraged our members as they took concrete steps to make gender equality a priority in their everyday work, by providing training, specialist advice and project-specific support
- Supported five NHRIs to develop and implement projects that better protect the rights of LGBTI communities
- Led NHRI advocacy on the international stage, with APF members presenting a joint statement to the Human Rights Council and contributing to UN forums in New York
- Assisted two APF members seeking international reaccreditation, with both retaining 'A status'
- Welcomed the Ombudsman of the Kyrgyz Republic as a member of the APF, bringing our membership to 25.

MAKING CHANGE HAPPEN

The goal of every NHRI is to strengthen communities and improve people's lives.

They work to build fair, just and inclusive communities where each person – especially those on the margins – can live with dignity, free from violence and discrimination.

Unlike the other regions, there is no court or protection system covering the Asia Pacific that people can turn to when their human rights are violated.

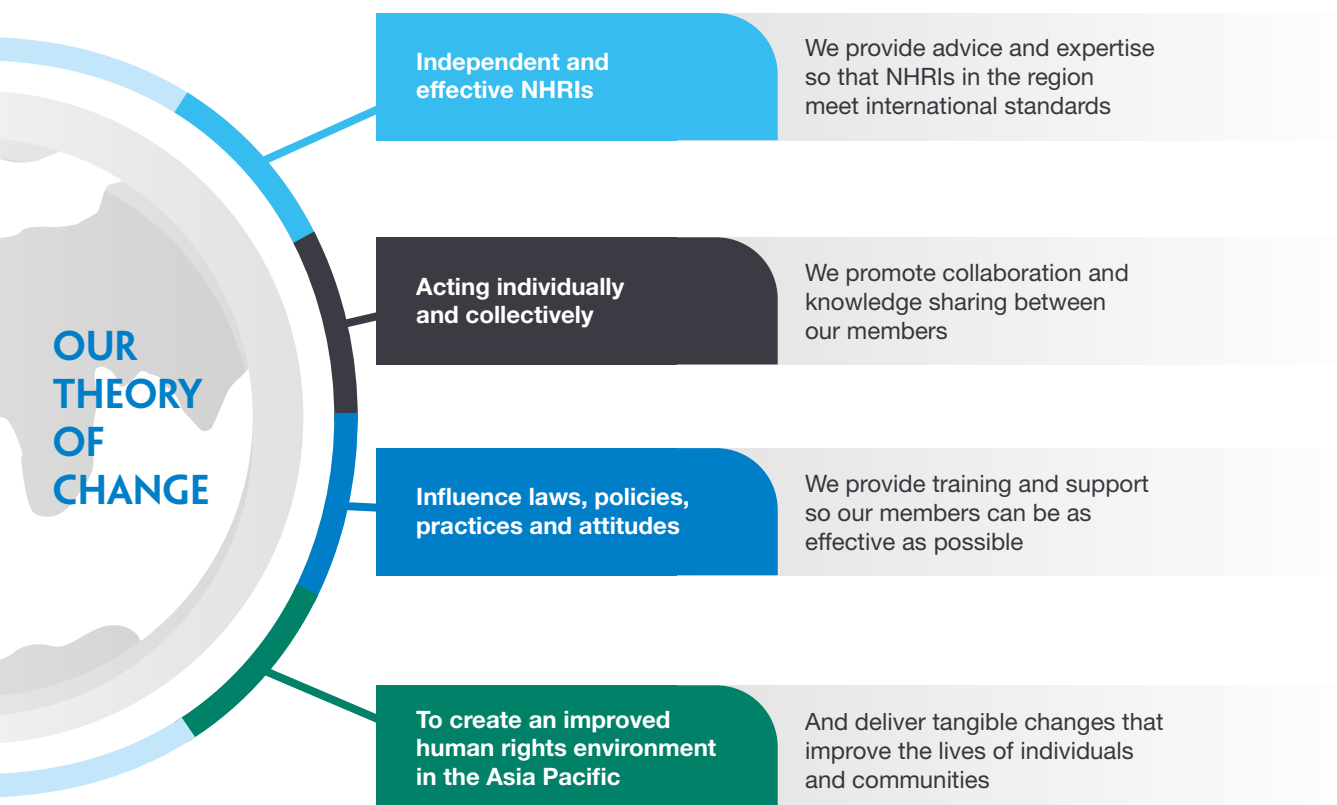
This makes the work of NHRIs in our region even more critical. For some people, NHRIs are the first and only avenue where they can seek justice.

OUR THEORY OF CHANGE

Some NHRIs in our region are newly established. Others operate in very challenging social, cultural or political environments.

We support our members so they can be as effective as possible to generate lasting change in the communities they serve. We also assist governments and civil society to establish new NHRIs.

We collaborate with a broad range of partners – including leading UN agencies and NGOs – that share our commitment to advancing human rights in the Asia Pacific region.





WHAT SETS US APART?

The APF is one of four regional coordinating committees of NHRIs. Regional coordinating committees have also been established to support the NHRIs of Africa, the Americas and Europe. Based in Geneva, the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI) promotes the establishment and operation of NHRIs in compliance with the Paris Principles.

What sets the APF apart is the breadth and diversity of the services we offer our members, including capacity development programs, opportunities for collaboration and specialist advice on NHRI legislation and international accreditation. We also continue to be a leader among NHRI bodies in promoting and monitoring gender equality.

PROTECTING PEOPLE FROM HARM

In 2019, the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (SUHAKAM) released a study documenting the serious discrimination transgender people face in work, study, housing and access to health services.

Many also experienced hate speech and violence, which had a significant impact on their mental health. A high number reported self-harm or suicide attempts.

SUHAKAM noted that religious and cultural sensitivities can make it difficult to address these challenges. However, it was adamant about the critical need “to uphold their rights as human beings and protect them against any discrimination, harm and violence”.

The study – conducted jointly with NGO partners – followed SUHAKAM’s participation in an APF-UNDP program that encouraged NHRIs and civil society to identify practical opportunities for joint action to advance the rights of LGBTI people.

PROVIDING ADVICE AND EXPERTISE

We know the profound difference that strong NHRIs have made, especially for vulnerable people, in those countries where they operate.

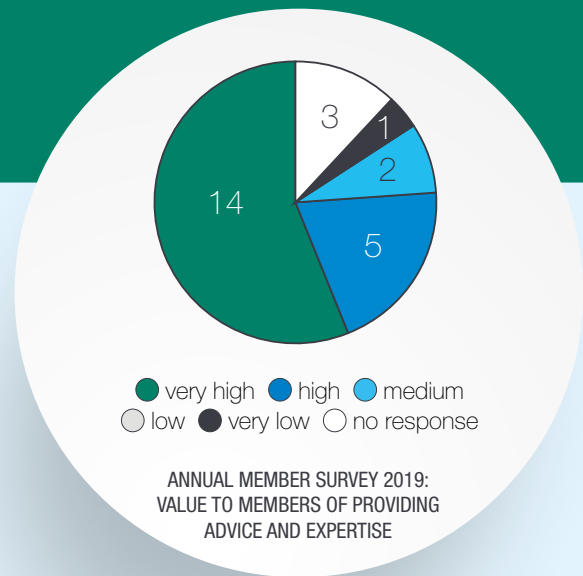
That is why one of our priorities is to assist governments and civil society organisations in the region to establish independent and effective NHRIs.

In May 2019, the APF partnered with the RRRT to conduct a scoping visit to the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM).

Building on discussions from a 2017 visit to the country, we met with governments and communities from the four states that make up FSM: Chuuk, Kosrae, Pohnpei and Yap. They all expressed their strong support to establish an NHRI that would play a practical role at both the national and state levels.

We will provide advice and support to the FSM National Government in the coming year as it considers the next steps for establishing an independent NHRI.

In addition to our legal drafting and support in 2017–18, the APF provided advice to the Government of Nauru on models of NHRI enforcement mechanisms and complaints-handling functions, which was well received.



WHAT WE ACHIEVED IN 2018–19

- Welcomed the Ombudsman of the Kyrgyz Republic as an APF member, bringing our membership to 25 NHRIs
- Provided support to two APF members seeking international reaccreditation, with the NHRIs of Nepal and Timor Leste retaining their 'A status'
- Responded to 57 requests for legal advice from APF members, GANHRI, governments, international organisations and civil society

ADVISING OUR MEMBERS AND PARTNERS

The APF provides specialist legal and policy advice to its members and other stakeholders. In 2018–19, we responded to 57 requests for advice – up from 41 requests in the previous year – from our members and APF Forum Councillors, as well as governments, civil society organisations, international agencies and GANHRI.

Our advice ranged from one-off legal policy questions through to complex pieces of work, such as assisting with the development of legislation to establish NHRIs and revising the legal framework for existing APF members.

During the year, the APF provided written advice to the Myanmar National Human Rights Commission on proposed reforms to the Commission's enabling legislation. We also took part in consultations on these reforms with parliamentarians, as well as meeting with key political and civil society stakeholders in country.

The APF also supported the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission by writing to the Afghan President to encourage him to finalise the process of appointing new Commissioners and ensure that the NHRI remains strong and effective.

A growing number of APF members said they place a 'very high' value on our advice and expertise, rising from nine members in 2017–18 to 14 members in the past year.

**10 December 2018 –
Human Rights Day – marked
25 years since the UN General
Assembly adopted the
Paris Principles.**

**The Paris Principles set out
the minimum standards that
NHRIs must meet.**

‘A STATUS’ FOR TWO APF MEMBERS

Two APF members – the NHRIs of Nepal and Timor Leste – were recredited with ‘A status’ by GANHRI during the year, with the APF providing detailed advice and support to both NHRIs.

Reaccreditation assesses the extent to which an NHRI complies with the Paris Principles, both in its legislation and its practice. ‘A status’ grants an NHRI the right to participate in the work of the UN Human Rights Council. It also strengthens the credibility of the NHRI at home.

GROWING APF MEMBERSHIP

Membership of the APF grew to 25 NHRIs, with the application of the Ombudsman of the Kyrgyz Republic accepted by the APF Forum Council at our Annual Meeting in September 2018. Established in 2002, the Ombudsman of the Kyrgyz Republic was accredited with ‘B status’ in 2012.

This is the second APF member from Central Asia, with more NHRIs in this sub-region likely to join in coming years.



BUILDING STRONGER NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS INSTITUTIONS

From conducting inquiries and investigating complaints through to running education programs and advising government on laws and policies, NHRIs work at the frontline to promote and protect human rights.

The APF provides a range of services to support our members to be as effective as possible, often in challenging political and social contexts.

During the year, the APF assisted the NHRIs of the Philippines (August 2018), Uzbekistan (September 2018), Myanmar (November 2018) and India (December 2018) to conduct a capacity assessment of their institutions.

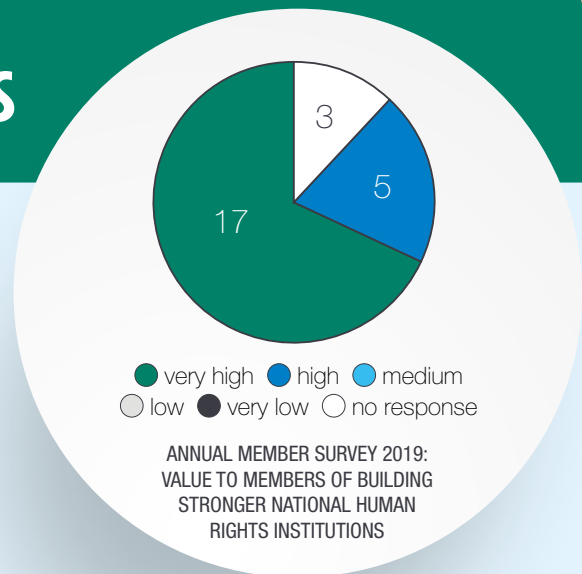
The goal is to support NHRIs to identify practical steps they can take to strengthen their institutions in order to deliver the human rights change they want to see, especially for vulnerable communities. A report with recommendations is provided to the NHRI at the conclusion of the capacity assessment.

The APF has conducted capacity assessments with 22 NHRIs in the region, facilitated in partnership with UNDP and OHCHR.

The commitment shown by NHRIs to implement capacity assessment recommendations demonstrates a genuine desire to strengthen their institutions and improve their effectiveness. Just 48 recommendations are yet to be implemented across all capacity assessments completed prior to this year, down from 239 in 2015 and 144 in 2016.

Many commended the quality of the report and full participation of the Commissioners and staff in the process, as well as making the report accessible to the public.

U WIN MRA
CHAIRPERSON, MYANMAR NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION



WHAT WE ACHIEVED IN 2018-19

- Supported four NHRIs to strengthen their institutional capacity to promote and protect human rights
- Provided 258 representatives from NHRIs and other organisations with training and capacity development opportunities
- More than 80% of APF members said they had improved capacity to do their work

Each year our members provide a self-assessment of their institutional capacity. This year, 18 of the 22 members (82%) that responded indicated their capacity was either 'a little higher' or 'a lot higher' than last year, with nine citing APF support as a factor in their increased capacity.





SUPPORTING OUR MEMBERS TO DRIVE CHANGE

In 2018–19, the APF delivered a broad range of professional training and networking programs to support our members.

A series of national workshops were conducted this year, reflecting our strategy to provide targeted support for APF members. This included programs on:

- Human rights investigations (Thailand)
- Human rights of women and girls (Timor Leste)
- Strategic planning (Afghanistan, Myanmar¹ and Samoa)
- Monitoring and evaluation (Samoa).

In addition, we conducted workshops on monitoring economic, social and cultural rights (for NHRIs in South Asia, in partnership with CESR), human rights communication and education (for NHRIs and governments in the Pacific, in partnership with RRRT) and promoting human rights in humanitarian action (for selected APF members, in partnership with OHCHR).

We also held meetings of the APF Senior Executive Officers Network and the APF Facilitators Network.

In February 2019, the APF hosted a High Level Dialogue for incoming Commissioners of the New Zealand Human Rights Commission to discuss their priority areas for action, the strategic planning process and the tools available to the Commission to achieve their goals.

A total of 258 people took part in 13 training, capacity building and networking programs, with a significant increase in the proportion of female participants (52% female, 48% male) from last year. All activities were rated very highly by participants.

APF trainers and facilitators ensure that issues related to gender are considered at every stage of the design and delivery of these programs.



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ADVOCATING FOR INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES

Five NHRIs from the Asia Pacific have been supported to work with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) communities to identify and address some of the pressing issues they face.

Each NHRI developed a country-specific project, which built on their participation in an APF-UNDP program on human rights and sexual orientation, gender identity and sex characteristics.

The projects focused on:

- Developing strategies to counter bullying of LGBTI school students (Timor Leste)
- Reviewing progress on the right to health for Fa'afafine & Fa'afatama communities (Samoa)
- Improving the Commission's delivery of services for the LGBTI community (Philippines)
- Advocating for legal gender recognition of transgender people (Bangladesh)
- Developing a national plan of action to address human rights challenges identified by LGBTI communities (Fiji).

The NHRIs received financial and mentoring assistance from the APF, as well as support and advice on data collection and research with LGBTI communities.



¹ The APF continues to provide strategic planning support to the Myanmar National Human Rights Commission, in partnership with UNDP. This is a follow-up activity to the capacity assessment we led in November 2018.

PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY

Across the region and around the globe, women and girls continue to face entrenched discrimination and grievous violations of their fundamental rights.

That's why it is critical that the APF equips our members to champion the rights of women and girls in all aspects of their work. We also encourage our members to advance gender equality within the internal operation of their NHRIs.

The APF Gender Strategy, now in its second year, supports our members to achieve these goals by:

- Providing APF-led training courses, roundtables and workshops on the human rights of women and girls
- Building understanding and skills in relation to gender mainstreaming within their NHRIs
- Strengthening partnerships with key UN agencies on gender-related activities.

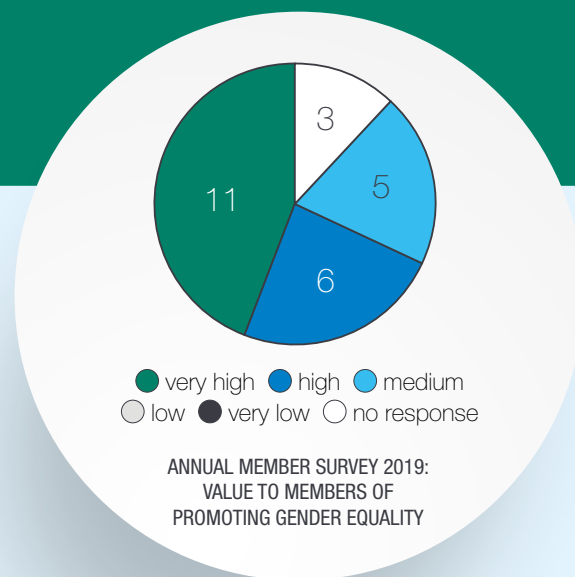
APF members reported a wide range of activities they had undertaken in the past year to make gender a part of their everyday work.

Following an APF workshop for staff and the leadership and team in May 2019, the **Provedor for Human Rights and Justice** (PDHJ) in Timor Leste appointed two senior members of staff as Gender Focal Points of the organisation. In addition, the PDHJ will ensure that gender considerations are incorporated across all the activities set out in its annual work plan.

The **Jordan National Centre for Human Rights** used a small grant from the APF to run a program to bolster the economic empowerment of women from two rural villages.

The **National Human Rights Commission of Nepal** has revised its complaint handling process to better accommodate the different needs of women and girls. Following their participation in an APF program on monitoring human rights, the Commission has also increased its efforts to end the traditional practice of 'chhaupadi', where women and girls are banished from their homes during menstruation.

In 2018–19, 13% of our budget went towards activities promoting gender equality.



WHAT WE ACHIEVED IN 2018–19

- Supported APF members – through training programs, practical assistance and guidelines – to make gender mainstreaming a part of their everyday work
- Facilitated a discussion between NHRIs, government and civil society in the Pacific on priorities to promote and protect the human rights of women and girls
- Updated key APF training resources to ensure there is a clear focus on gender

In Palestine, the **Independent Commission on Human Rights** conducted a gender audit that identified practical ways that gender considerations could be better integrated into the day-to-day operations of the NHRI and in its external work.

The **National Human Rights Commission of Mongolia** held consultations with medical professionals on reproductive health and human rights, with a focus on women with disabilities. The Commission also partnered with the United Nations Population Fund to conduct a field study on the sexual and reproductive health and rights of rural herder women.

In the past year, the APF developed guidelines to support NHRIs develop a strategy for gender mainstreaming in their everyday work. In addition, three APF training manuals – on national inquiries, on human rights education and on NHRI capacity assessments – were updated to better examine the gender dimensions involved.

“NOW IS THE TIME FOR ACTION”

Village councils across Samoa have begun passing by-laws to sanction family violence, after a landmark inquiry by the NHRI found the issue affected nearly all families in the country.

The Report of the National Inquiry into Family Violence, released in September 2018, included 39 recommendations for implementation by the government, village councils and churches.

The national inquiry gathered evidence and personal testimonies on an issue that had previously been hidden “behind a veil of silence”.

Samoa’s NHRI has shared the findings, recommendations and process of the national inquiry with other NHRIs and governments in the Pacific region, as well as at the 2019 GANHRI Annual Meeting.

The APF provided financial support and technical assistance for the national inquiry.

“Now is the time for action ... Together, we can end this scourge in our country.”

SUSUGA TUILAIPA SAILELE MALIELEGAO,
PRIME MINISTER OF SAMOA, AT THE REPORT LAUNCH



APF PACIFIC ROUNDTABLE

The APF Pacific Roundtable, held in September 2018, brought together representatives from the NHRIs of Australia, New Zealand, Samoa and Tuvalu, as well as from governments and civil society organisations in the Cook Islands, Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru and Samoa.

The Apia Statement, adopted at the end of the roundtable, identified priority areas to address systemic discrimination and human rights violations against women and girls.



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COLLABORATING FOR CHANGE

Despite the diverse social, cultural and political environments in which they operate, APF members face a raft of common human rights challenges.

One of the great strengths of the APF is the collegiality that exists between our members and their desire to collaborate and share their knowledge and expertise.

The APF convened meetings and professional networks that provided opportunities for collaboration among our members, including the:

- **APF Annual Meeting**, held to coincide with an international conference on equality in the Asia Pacific region, co-hosted by the APF and the Hong Kong Equal Opportunities Commission (September 2018)
- **Senior Executive Officers Network**, which explored strategies to strengthen the organisational culture and performance of NHRIs (January 2019, hosted by the National Human Rights Committee of Qatar)
- **APF Facilitators Network**, which included the development of guidelines on effective human rights facilitation (September 2018, hosted by the National Human Rights Commission of Thailand).

STRENGTHENING HUMAN RIGHTS FACILITATION

During the year, the APF Facilitators Network – which includes representatives from 16 APF members – finalised a comprehensive set of guidelines to support the human rights education work of NHRIs.

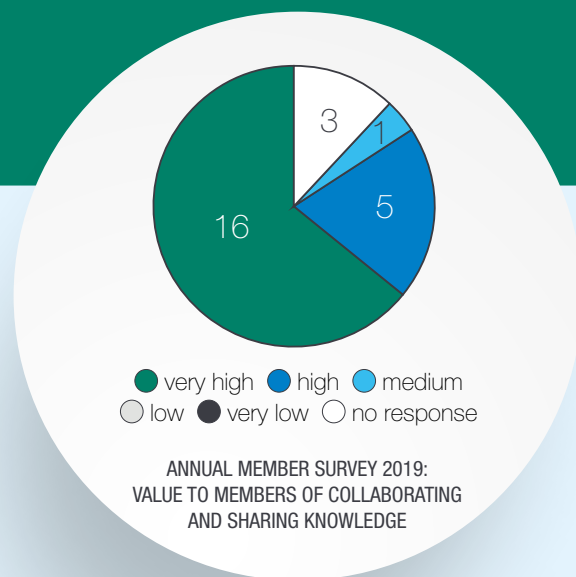
The Jakarta Guidelines for Human Rights Facilitators set out key principles to guide the practice of human rights facilitation with adult learners, as well as the necessary skills and attitudes of the individual facilitator.

The Guidelines stress the importance of considering gender when planning, leading and evaluating any human rights activity. They also describe effective approaches for working with diverse groups, such as religious groups and indigenous peoples' groups.

In addition, the Jakarta Guidelines include a competency framework for effective human rights facilitators.



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WHAT WE ACHIEVED IN 2018–19

- APF networks collaborated to produce good practice guidelines on NHRI management and on facilitating human rights education programs
- Coordinated a digital storytelling and mentoring project involving communications staff from five APF members
- Recorded a 15% increase in APF website sessions and page views



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My colleagues and I were so fortunate to have the opportunity to work with some incredible storytellers and to see how they overcome all types of barriers in their daily lives.

HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION
OF MALAYSIA

USING DIGITAL STORIES TO CONNECT WITH COMMUNITIES

With social media such a dominant mode of communication, it is vital that NHRIs have the skills to produce engaging content to start community-wide conversations on key human rights issues.

To support this work, the APF provided a small grant to five member institutions – the NHRIs of Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Mongolia, Nepal and Samoa – to undertake a digital storytelling project.

In addition, the APF provided mentoring and technical support when the digital stories were being developed, as well as during the interviewing and editing stages.

The topics touched on a wide range of issues, including the rights of people with disabilities, older people and children.

The stories – available on the APF’s YouTube channel – have been used by the NHRIs in their advocacy efforts with the community, government and service providers.



People watched the equivalent of 275 hours of APF videos and digital stories in 2018–19.

SUPPORTING NHRI MANAGEMENT

In January 2019, representatives from 20 NHRIs gathered in Doha, Qatar to take part in discussions of the APF Senior Executive Officers (SEO) Network.

The three-day meeting covered a wide range of practical topics on leading and managing NHRIs, including monitoring and evaluating NHRI performance, working with civil society and building staff capacity.

The SEO Network also adopted the Operational Good Practice Guidelines on Commissioner and SEO Working Relationships, which had been developed from discussions at the 2017 meeting of the group.

Following the meeting, a number of APF members reported on the practical steps they had undertaken to update internal NHRI policies and practices.



CONTRIBUTING AT THE NATIONAL, REGIONAL & INTERNATIONAL LEVEL

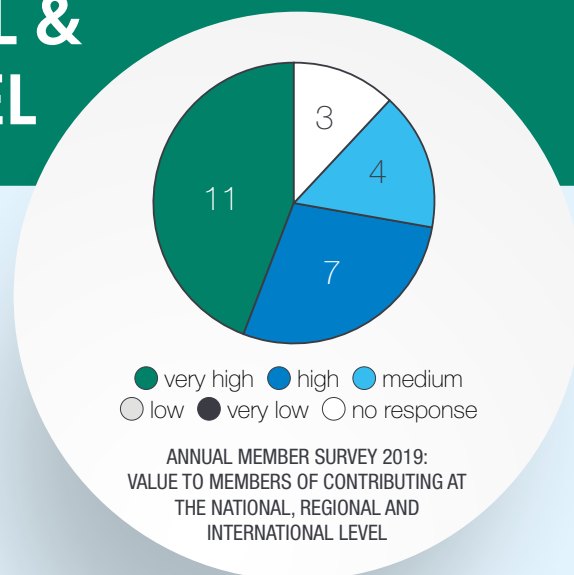
NHRIs make a unique and highly regarded contribution to the international human rights system. The independent information and analysis they provide ensures that pressing human rights issues can be rigorously debated by UN panels and targeted recommendations can be made to States.

'A status' NHRIs have been able to contribute to the work of the Human Rights Council and treaty monitoring bodies in Geneva for many years. After strong advocacy in recent years, the APF has helped secure equivalent participation rights for NHRIs in some General Assembly mechanisms in New York.

More than 20 NHRIs made written or oral submissions to the UN Open Ended Working Group on Ageing (April 2019), led by the National Human Rights Commission of Korea.

APF members also contributed to the work of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (April 2019) and the Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (June 2018).

In March 2019, the APF and GANHRI continued advocacy for independent NHRI participation rights at the 63rd session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW 63). Despite opposition from some States, we maintained recent gains recognising the unique role of NHRIs.



WHAT WE ACHIEVED IN 2018-19

- Presented a joint statement urging the Human Rights Council to extend the mandate of the Independent Expert on sexual orientation and gender identity
- Contributed to the work of UN bodies in New York and continued our advocacy for independent participation rights for NHRIs at the Commission on the Status of Women

APF attendance at CSW 63 also helped deepen our relationships with key partners, including UN Women and the United Nations Population Fund, with representatives from APF members addressing high-level panels and side events.



In March 2019, Dr. Ali Bin Samikh Al-Marri, Chairperson of the Qatar National Human Rights Committee, was elected to the role of GANHRI Secretary. Dr. Carlos Alfonso Negret Mosquera, Ombudsman of Colombia, was elected GANHRI Chairperson. Both will serve three-year terms.

FORGING CONNECTIONS WITH REGIONAL MECHANISMS

The APF believes that NHRI participation in regional mechanisms – in South East Asia, as well as in South Asia, the Pacific and among Arab nations – has the potential to strengthen understanding among States about human rights principles and inform policy-making.

While there is currently limited scope for NHRIs to engage with these mechanisms, the APF is exploring opportunities to initiate conversations with regional mechanisms in South East Asia and the Pacific on those human rights issues that are a priority for them.

We have begun to draft guiding principles – in partnership with OHCHR and RRRT – on engaging with States in the Pacific Community regarding the establishment of NHRIs.

The APF also works with OHCHR, UNDP and GANHRI to provide a regional program of support to five NHRIs in Central Asia: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

SUPPORTING THE INDEPENDENCE OF OUR MEMBERS

Independence and integrity are central to NHRIs being effective and trusted human rights defenders.

NHRIs in the region have faced a range of challenges in the past year, including budget cuts, reprisals and inaction from the government to their recommendations.

The APF mobilises support for our members when they face reprisals, where they request it. We also provide organisational support they might require and, when we visit countries in the region, engage in dialogue with government officials on strengthening the NHRI.



COLLABORATING WITH CIVIL SOCIETY

The APF values its cooperation with civil society partners, at the national level, in regional forums and on the international stage.

The Asian NGO Network on National Human Rights Institutions held a dialogue with APF members at our annual meeting in September 2018. APF members also held a side event with civil society organisations at the UN Open Ended Working Group on Ageing.

At the national level, APF members have forged close partnerships with civil society to broaden the reach, impact and scope of their work. In some cases, civil society groups are represented on NHRI advisory committees or support them to undertake projects with vulnerable groups.

APF MEMBERS MAKE JOINT STATEMENT

Eleven NHRIs from across the Asia Pacific expressed their support for the ongoing work of the UN Independent Expert tasked with addressing violence and discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity. The joint statement to the Human Rights Council in June 2019 – delivered by Maiava Iulai Toma, Ombudsman of Samoa – praised the important work of the Independent Expert since the mandate was established in 2016. The statement was made by the 'A status' NHRIs of Australia, India, Malaysia, Mongolia, Nepal, New Zealand, the Philippines, Samoa and Timor-Leste. It was supported by the NHRIs of Fiji and Tuvalu.

STRONG ORGANISATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

The APF is an independent, non-profit organisation, with a board of directors – the Forum Council – that reflects the regional diversity of our membership.

As an organisation, we seek to operate according to the highest levels of accountability, efficiency, transparency and member participation.

The APF secretariat manages the day-to-day operations of the APF and implements the decisions of the Forum Council.

RESPONSIVE AND STREAMLINED GOVERNANCE

A five-member Governance Committee, led by President of the Australian Human Rights Commission Emeritus Professor Rosalind Croucher, was elected at the 2018 APF Annual Meeting.

The Governance Committee will review and respond strategically to issues as they arise and provide recommendations to the APF General Assembly ('A status' members having voting and participatory rights and 'B status' members having participatory rights).

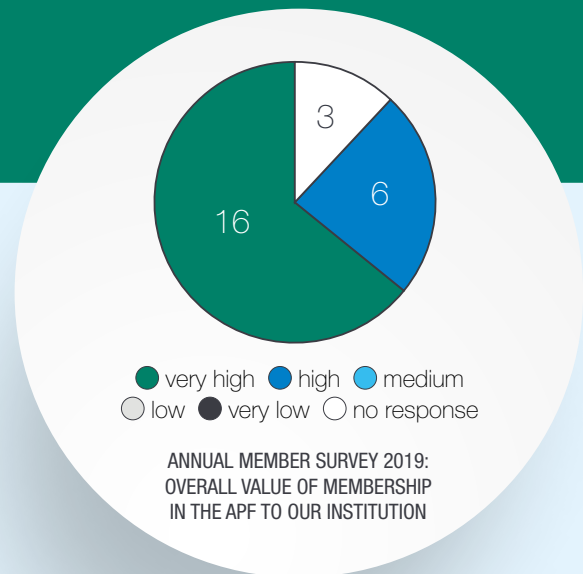
Representatives from the NHRIs of Mongolia (Deputy Chairperson), India, Jordan and Qatar were also elected to the Governance Committee for a two-year term.

INDEPENDENT EVALUATION PRAISES APF PERFORMANCE

Every five years, the APF's major joint partners commission an independent evaluation of the APF.

As part of this review cycle, an independent evaluation was undertaken from September to December 2018 that concluded:

- The APF is progressing strongly against all four of its strategic outcomes and has played a key role in raising the profile of NHRIs internationally
- The APF has strengthened its performance in a range of key areas, including gender mainstreaming and monitoring and evaluation
- The APF secretariat has displayed a very high level of capacity across all operational areas. However, the organisation is overstretched and this poses a risk to the APF's continued high level of performance.



WHAT WE ACHIEVED IN 2018–19

- Implemented new governance arrangements that will equip us to meet the needs of our growing membership and respond to emerging human rights challenges
- Facilitated an independent review that recognised the high quality of the APF's work to advance human rights outcomes in the Asia Pacific

The recommendations to the joint partners – the governments of Australia, New Zealand and Sweden – included increasing their funding support to the APF. The evaluation also suggested expanding the APF's presence in different sub-regions of the Asia Pacific.

The joint partner's final response to the evaluation is forthcoming.



CONFIDENCE AND COLLEGIALITY

Our members place significant value on their membership of the APF and rate their satisfaction with the APF's governance and organisational structure as 'high' or 'very high'.

They also said they were highly satisfied with the performance of the APF secretariat, reflecting the efficiency and professionalism of its small staff of seven.

Our members also expressed a strong sense of collegiality and 'ownership' of the organisation. This is an important marker of the organisation's effectiveness.

We will continue to take practical steps – through the delivery of APF services and networking opportunities, as well as in the implementation of our new governance arrangements – to ensure that 'A status' and 'B status' NHRIs feel able to contribute to the direction of the APF.

Three staff members recently commenced work in the APF's sub-regional office in Doha. This increased capacity will help us strengthen our links with APF members and governments in West Asia and provide the technical support that responds to their needs.

OUR FUNDING FOR 2018–19

The APF receives funding from governments, institutional donors and member contributions.

Total income and expenditure for 2018–19 was approximately AUD 3.1 million, which includes the contribution provided by the National Human Rights Committee of Qatar to subsidise the operations of the APF sub-regional office in Doha.

This total figure represents an increase of almost AUD 200,000 on last year's income.

A significant challenge for the APF, highlighted in the joint partner review, is to increase the size and diversity of our financial support in order to keep pace with the growing demand for our capacity building and advisory services.

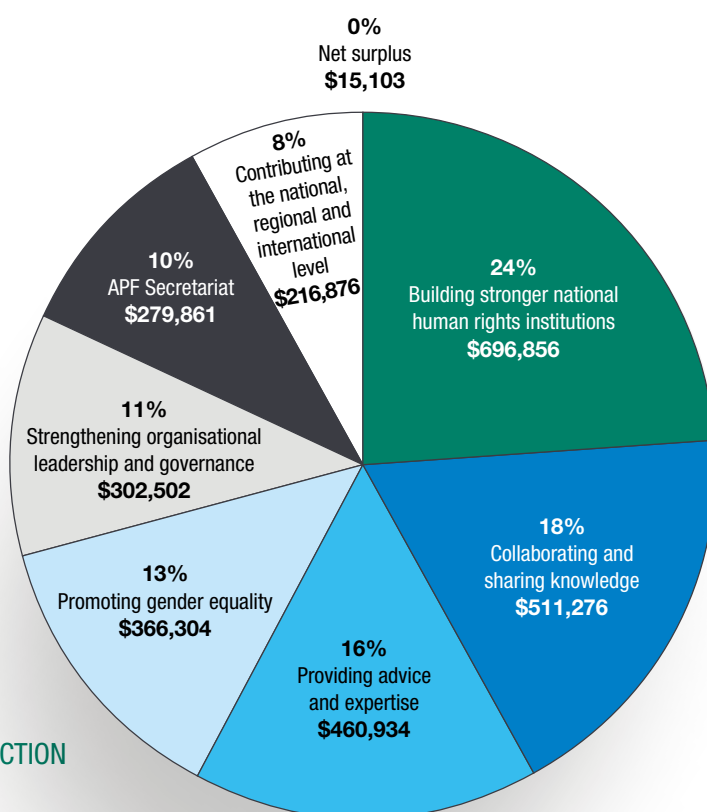


FIGURE: APF EXPENDITURE BY FUNCTION



**WE ARE GRATEFUL FOR THE SUPPORT OF
PARTNERS WHO SHARE OUR COMMITMENT
TO AN ASIA PACIFIC WHERE EVERYONE
ENJOYS HUMAN RIGHTS**



ASIA PACIFIC FORUM
ADVANCING HUMAN RIGHTS IN OUR REGION

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