

CONCEPT NOTE

Asia-Pacific Regional Dialogue for Human Rights 75

Wednesday, 11 October 2023 – 9:00 am - 5:30 pm
Bangkok, Thailand & Online

I. Background

In 1948, the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)** recognised that promoting and protecting human rights are the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world. Universal and indivisible, anchored in fundamental values that span every culture, religion and continent, human rights are tools to address the world’s current challenges, from the triple planetary crisis, to skyrocketing inequalities, gender discrimination and backlash, insecurity and conflict, as well as a rise in hate speech, disinformation and polarisation.

The 75th anniversary of the UDHR will be celebrated on 10 December 2023. This is an opportunity to rejuvenate the UDHR, demonstrate how it can meet the needs of our time and advance its promise of freedom, equality and justice for all. Ahead of this milestone celebration, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (UN Human Rights) embarked on the yearlong [Human Rights 75 Initiative](#) to rekindle the spirit, impulse and vitality of the UDHR and renew a worldwide consensus on human rights.

The Asia-Pacific Regional Dialogue is one of five regional dialogues mandated by the Human Rights Council to be held before the High-Level Event in December 2023. The results of the national and regional dialogues, High-Level Event, national and stakeholder pledges and other activities led by UN Human Rights and its partners will contribute to the High Commissioner’s Vision Statement for Human Rights and the 2024 Summit of the Future.

II. Theme

The theme of the Asia-Pacific Regional Dialogue centres around “**regional human rights mechanisms**”.

Regional human rights mechanisms have played an important role in the African, Arab, European and Americas regions, complementing national systems and enhancing regional standards while consolidating universal human rights. National human rights institutions (NHRIs) and civil society support regional mechanisms by serving as a bridge among diverse stakeholders. The Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action of 1993 recognised the important role of regional mechanisms in advancing human rights.

The Asia-Pacific is the broadest and most diverse region, but has been the one region that lacks any regional human rights court, commission or other framework that spans across the region. Discussions to establish a regional arrangement largely commenced in 1990, and for many years, Member States convened on a semi-annual basis under the Asia Pacific Framework for Regional Cooperation, under the auspices of a Human Rights Council resolution to promote regional mechanisms. Civil society efforts led to outcomes such as the 1993 Bangkok NGO Declaration of Human Rights and the 1998 Asian Human Rights Charter.

According to a report by the Human Rights Council Advisory Committee in 2018 (A/HRC/39/58), three main approaches were discussed as a potential model for a regional human rights arrangement in Asia. The first is a narrow approach with a smaller sub-regional arrangement that is geographically limited but might ensure a higher degree of commitment and leaves open the possibility for expansion. The second is a wide approach that encompasses the entire region but would reflect the lowest common denominator due to widely divergent cultural values, types of governance and State preferences. The third would be a networked approach that would combine multiple and overlapping sub-regional mechanisms among like-minded countries, similar to the mechanisms in Africa.

In this regard, some progress has been possible at the sub-regional level in the Asia-Pacific. This includes the establishment of mechanisms under the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), notably the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) and the ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children (ACWC), as well as the Independent Permanent Human Rights Commission (IPHRC) of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and the Arab Human Rights Committee (AHRC) of the League of Arab States (LAS). There are also cooperative platforms like the Human Rights and Social Development (HRSD) Division of the Pacific Community (SPC) and various Commonwealth initiatives. Some have developed their own regional charters. Ideas have also been advanced in the past for regional human rights forums under the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF).

Complementary to a regional mechanism, there has been strong development of national institutions and civil society in the Asia-Pacific, with NHRIs forming their own regional platforms such as the Asia Pacific Forum (APF) of National Human Rights Institutions, Southeast Asia National Human Rights Institution Forum (SEANF) and cooperation among national institutions in South Asia. Civil society have also fostered regional networks and platforms and continually organise forums alongside regional summits.

The Asia-Pacific Regional Dialogue for Human Rights 75 will provide an opportunity to take stock of these experiences, to share successes and challenges and to reflect on possible ways forward. It will also explore lessons learned from other regions and the good practices they suggest for increased Asia-Pacific regional cooperation on human rights.

III. Expected participants

The expected participants of the Regional Dialogue include representatives of Member States, regional inter-governmental organizations, NHRIs, UN agencies, Special Procedures mandate holders, civil society organizations, human rights defenders, youth organizations and academia, among others. The Regional Dialogue seeks to bring together a diverse spectrum of participants from all across the region including South Asia, Southeast Asia, Northeast Asia and the Pacific.

IV. Venue, language and registration

The Regional Dialogue will be conducted in **English** in **hybrid** modality, gathering participants in person in Bangkok, Thailand and online. A limited number of places will be open for in-person participation, at the UN Conference Centre of UNESCAP (Rajdamnern Nok Avenue, Bangkok). Online participation will be in webinar format, with the opportunity to submit questions.

Registration for participation is required at <https://indico.un.org/e/APRDHR75>.

V. Tentative agenda

Time	Activity	Tentative speakers
08:30-09:00	Registration	
09:00-09:30	Opening	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Video message • Opening remarks • Presentation of UDHR 75 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volker Türk, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (by video) • Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Thailand (TBC) • Human Rights 75 Youth Advisory Group: Kaeden Watts, Safayet Zamil Nowshan and Venus Aves
09:30-10:50	Session One: <i>Setting the scene – the evolution of a regional human rights architecture and where are we now?</i>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Panel discussion • Interactive dialogue with participants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • [Moderator] Ray Paolo (Arpee) J. Santiago, Executive Director, Ateneo Human Rights Center, Ateneo de Manila University; Secretary-General, Working Group for an ASEAN Human Rights Mechanism • Doo-hwan Song, Chairperson, National Human Rights Commission of Korea (NHRCK); Chairperson, Asia Pacific Forum of NHRIs (by video) • Gayoon Baek, Deputy Director of International Human Rights Division, NHRCK • Henri Tiphagne, Executive Director, People’s Watch • Neomai Maravuakula, Team Leader on Governance & Institutional Strengthening, Human Rights and Social Development Division, Pacific Community (online) • Sihesak Phuangketkeow, Former Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Thailand; Former President, UN Human Rights Council
10:50-11:10	Break	
11:10-12:40	Session Two: <i>Lessons learned and good practices from regional mechanisms</i>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Panel discussion • Interactive dialogue with participants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • [Moderator] Yuyun Wahyuningrum, Chair and Representative of Indonesia to the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights • Asila Wardak, Commissioner of Independent Permanent Human Rights Commission, Organisation of Islamic Cooperation • María Claudia Pulido, Assistant Executive Secretary for Monitoring, Promotion and Technical Cooperation, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights • Pauliine Koskelo, Judge, European Court of Human Rights (online) • Rémy Ngoy Lumbu, Chairperson, African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights

12:40-14:00	Lunch	
14:00-15:30	Session Three: Envisaging the way forward for Asia-Pacific regional cooperation on human rights	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Panel discussion • Interactive dialogue with participants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • [Moderator] Angkhana Neelapaijit, Member, Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances • Kaoru Obata, Professor of International Law, Graduate School of Law, Nagoya University • Melinia Nawadra, Social Inclusion Adviser, Policy Team, Pacific Islands Forum • Priya Gopalan, Chair-Rapporteur, Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (online) • Surya Deva, Special Rapporteur on the right to development (by video) • Vitit Muntarbhorn, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Cambodia (by video) • Secretary General, South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (TBC)
15:30-15:50	Break	
15:50-17:00	Session Four: Reflections and recommendations	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open floor statements to reflect on the discussions and propose concrete forward-looking actions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • [Moderator] Ian Fry, Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights in the context of climate change • Member State representatives • Regional organization representatives • UN representatives • Civil society and youth representatives
17:00-17:30	Closing	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summary of key points • Closing remarks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cynthia Veliko, Southeast Asia Regional Representative, UN Human Rights • Thomas Hunecke, Pacific Deputy Regional Representative, UN Human Rights • Rory Mungoven, Chief of Asia Pacific Section, UN Human Rights • Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Thailand (TBC)

Time provided in Indochina Time (ICT)