



## **Asian Federation Against Involuntary Disappearances**

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### **AFAD Observes the International Week of the Disappeared, 2019**

**May 26-31, 2019:** Every last week of May, the Asian Federation Against Involuntary Disappearances (AFAD) joins the global community in observing the International Week of the Disappeared. This year, AFAD remembers those who have been forcibly disappeared and strengthens its resolve to create a world free from enforced disappearances.

The human rights situation in Asia has been deteriorating as repressive regimes have come to power. Enforced disappearances in particular remain a pressing concern in the region. The right to truth, justice, and reparation is elusive in many countries.

In Bangladesh, the government continues to use enforced disappearances to suppress dissent. The government disappeared 92 persons in 2018. Of these 92 individuals, nine persons are dead, 58 have surfaced alive, and 25 still have unknown whereabouts. Those who returned alive were often traumatized and maintained silence over the details of their detention.

Despite Indonesia signing the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (Convention) in September 2010, the succeeding governments have not taken any concrete steps to ratify and implement it. The family members of the disappeared continue to struggle for years to know the truth.

In Indian-administered Kashmir, the Indian government continues to deny the 8000 disappearance cases. The Indian government issued ambiguous statements over 7000 unmarked mass graves in the region as well. The perpetrators continue to operate under a blanket of absolute impunity.

Laos is a country with restrictions on civil and political rights. There are still repressive controls over freedom of speech, association, and peaceful assembly. It is not possible to organize people to advocate for human rights issues as a collective unit.

A group of conflict victims in Nepal recently expressed their concerns over the government's ongoing appointment process of commissioners and members of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the Commission of Investigation on Enforced Disappeared Persons. The conflict victims demanded that the government first amend the Commission on Investigation of Disappeared Persons, Truth and Reconciliation Act 2014 before appointing members and chairpersons. Commission posts are currently vacant as their members retired last month.

The families of the disappeared in Pakistan are hopeful that their struggle will bear fruit as many victims are resurfacing. In May this year, 27 missing persons surfaced in Karachi. This was the result of a thirteen-day protest outside the residence of President Arif Alvi. While the human rights minister of the government promised an anti-enforced disappearance law in the country, the process of creating the legislation has been slow in these last five months. The government has also failed to ratify the Convention despite many promises. Many of the recommendations of the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances during its visit in 2012 remain unimplemented.

Recently, the Philippine government sent a delegation to the United Nations Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances session in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Without consulting the families of the disappeared, the delegation lobbied for the delisting of 625 unresolved disappearance cases in the country. The current administration also continues to gain power as no opposition candidates won in the senatorial elections earlier this May.

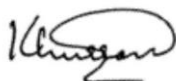
In South Korea, 516 confirmed cases of disappearances remain unresolved. These are post-war abduction cases by the North Korean government. North Korean government is responsible for abducting 100,000 civilians during the Korean War alone, and 3,835 more after the War.

The Sri Lankan government has now set up the Office of Missing Persons. This follows its ratification of the Convention back in 2016. The Office has received around 15,000 search applications but the process of addressing these cases seems to be slow.

The issue of stolen children and their reunification with their families is still full of challenges in Timor-Leste. Victims and their families continue to live in hopeless and marginalized conditions. Both the Indonesian and the Timorese governments are unwilling to establish the Missing Persons Commission despite clamor from civil society.

In these difficult conditions, AFAD and its member-organizations tirelessly work for truth and justice to prevail. While there are bright spots as seen in Pakistan and Sri Lanka, much work remains to be done. This International Week of the Disappeared, AFAD renews its commitment to stand in solidarity with the victims and their families in the struggle for a world without *desaparecidos*.

Signed by:



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