

Press Release

November 30, 2020

The Asia Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions Receives the 2020 Asia Democracy and Human Rights Award

The Taiwan Foundation for Democracy (TFD) announced today (11/30) that the 2020 Asia Democracy and Human Rights Award will be awarded to the Asia Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions (APF).

The Asia Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions is a unique regional organization the members of which are the national human rights institutions (NHRIs) from across the Asia Pacific region. The APF undertakes important work to strengthen the promotion and protection of human rights for the region's most vulnerable people. Founded in 1996 by the initiative of the NHRIs of Australia, India, Indonesia, and New Zealand, the Forum now has a total of 25 NHRIs as its members (16 official members and 9 associate members).

The founding purpose of the APF is to help the existing NHRIs in the region, many of which are under-resourced and lacking the necessary skills to effectively undertake their mandate, improve their effectiveness, and in those countries that do not yet have NHRIs, to encourage and provide assistance to the governments and local civil society to establish NHRIs in accordance with the minimum standards endorsed by the United Nations Principles on the Status of National Human Rights Institutions (the Paris Principles).

The Paris Principles were adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1993, setting out the main criteria for the establishment and functions of NHRIs. For example, an NHRI is required to meet high standards of formal and functional independence and pluralism, and to have a strong legal basis - under primary law or the Constitution - providing the institution with a broad human rights mandate.

NHRIs are periodically accredited against the Paris Principles before the Sub-committee on Accreditation (SCA) of the Global Alliance of NHRIs (GANHRI). As a result of this process, NHRIs under review receive recommendations for improvements from the SCA and are accredited with A, B, or no statuses. Those who receive A status, meaning they are found by the SCA to be fully compliant with the Paris Principles, are eligible to attain full

APF membership; those who receive B status, indicating that they are only partly compliant with the Paris Principles, are eligible for APF candidate membership; associate membership is available to those NHRIs which do not comply with the Paris Principles and are unlikely to do so within a reasonable period.

In the Asia Pacific region, with the assistance of the APF, the following states have established NHRIs that are seeking formal international accreditation – Fiji, Kuwait, Lebanon, Pakistan, Taiwan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

To achieve its goals, the APF has been building partnerships in the region, developing human rights dialogues, creating networks for exchanges, and holding practical programs, which all contribute towards a greater understanding and cooperation between countries and a more stable and peaceful region.

Since its establishment in 1996, the APF has become the pre-eminent regional mechanism for the promotion and protection of human rights. Its philosophical basis of inclusiveness and partnership is reflected in its programs. These are developed and delivered in cooperation with a network of institutional partners at the local, regional and international level. It has also developed significant partnerships with the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, regional governments, and international and local non-governmental organizations.

The major achievements of the APF include: the provision of advice and expertise to its member institutions to help them effectively perform their national mandates, the provision of advice and expertise to those states seeking to establish or strengthen a NHRI, the development of a comprehensive program of regional cooperation on human rights, which includes annual meetings, creating professional networks of NHRI staff including educators, policy and senior professional staff, establishing Advisory Council of Jurists (ACJ) which serves as the APF's judicial policy body which is comprised of eminent jurists to consider legal and policy issues, and coming up with common policy positions on issues such as internally

displaced persons, death penalty, HIV/AIDS, and racism, among others.

TFD Chairperson You Si-kun at today's press conference said that the Asia Democracy and Human Rights Award marks its 15th year anniversary this year after its establishment in 2006. "The award is a manifestation of Taiwan's democratic spirit and its determination to defend human rights," he stressed. The chairperson told the press conference that amid the COVID-19 pandemic, as many social activities have been greatly restricted, human rights and democracy work has also been facing new challenges. "Taiwan is lucky, with the effort of our government and our society, to have maintained the relative normality of day-to-day life. In this extraordinary time, we're lucky and honored to keep the Asia Democracy and Human Rights Award going and to continue encouraging the work of democracy and human rights activists in the region," Chairman You said.

The chairperson said granting this year's award to the APF is a recognition to its contribution to making regional governments understand the significance of human rights implementation, and the APF being the recipient of this year's award can also highlight the importance of NHRIs. He also pointed out that Taiwan's National Human Rights Commission has officially begun its operation on Aug. 1, with President Tsai Ing-wen, attending the Commission's inauguration ceremony on the same day, expressing her expectation that it could become the nation's conscience.

"Although Taiwan has not been able to participate in the UN human rights mechanisms, we have nevertheless been voluntarily conducting periodic reviews evaluating Taiwan's human rights status against UN human rights covenants or stricter standards. We are expecting that with the establishment of the National Human Rights Commission, we will be able to enhance and implement human rights in Taiwan further and to attain the support of the country and the international community," said Chairperson You.

Article 2 of the TFD's "Guidelines of the Asia Democracy and Human Rights Award" states that "[supporting] democratic development and promote human rights in the Asia region" is the foundational mission

for establishing the Award.

Dr. Shin Hae Bong, President of Japan's Human Rights Now, also a final review panelist for this year's Award, said the AFP "has acted as a pivotal international forum in helping launch, develop and fortify NHRIs in the Asia Pacific region over the past 25 years, providing invaluable technical and practical support to existing as well as emerging institutions across the region. The activities of the nominee organization represent, in itself, an exemplary model of best practices in international human rights community."

Mr. Derek Mitchell, President of the National Democratic Institute, said it is "an important time to spotlight the human rights and democracy commitments throughout the region, and enduring relevance of these values." "Taiwan is a beacon in Asia for these values, granting this award would affirm regional solidarity and Taiwan's leadership in support of democracy and human rights in Asia," he added.

The Asia Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions was named the Award winner by a two-stage reviewing process (See Annex I). The TFD convened a preliminary review panel meeting facilitated by TFD President Huang Yu-lin to discuss and shortlist the finalists. The finalists' names and credentials were then sent to the final review panel for a final decision. This year's nominees included individuals and organizations from Australia, India, and the U.S. that have made respective contributions in the fields pertaining to human rights protection and democracy promotion.

Due to COVID-19, the Taiwan Foundation for Democracy will not be hosting a physical award ceremony this year. Pre-recorded videos instead will be published on the TFD official website and social media platforms on Dec. 10, the International Human Rights Day.

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Annex I

Preliminary Review Panel

1. Mr. Kao Yu-Jen, Chairman, 21st Century Foundation
2. Dr. Wei Chien-Feng, Supervisory Board Member, Taiwan Foundation for Democracy
3. Dr. Michael Hsin-Huang Hsiao, Distinguished Research Fellow, Institute of Sociology, Academia Sinica
4. Dr. Eric Yu, Associate Professor, Department of Political Science at National Chengchi University
5. Ms. Chi Hui-jung, Former Chief Executive, Garden of Hope Foundation / Control Yuan Member
6. Ms. Rebecca Wang, Former Chairperson, Taiwan Aid
7. Dr. Huang Yu-Lin, President, Taiwan Foundation for Democracy

Final Review Panel

1. Mr. Derek Mitchell, President, National Democratic Institute
2. Mr. Arch Puddington, Distinguished Fellow for Democracy Studies, Freedom House
3. Mr. Pierre Haski, President, Reporters Without Borders
4. Dr. Shin Hae Bong, President, Human Rights Now
5. Mr. Antoine Madelin, Director of International Advisory, FIDH (International Federation for Human Rights)
6. Hon. You Si-Kun, Chairman, Taiwan Foundation for Democracy
7. Dr. Huang Yu-Lin, President, Taiwan Foundation for Democracy