

1.1 The Asian Human Rights Commission: Its purpose and mandate

The Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) is dedicated to the promotion and protection of human rights in line with international norms and standards based on the UN conventions. Its work is focused in countries where rule of law systems have very serious problems. This requires understanding and the capacity for spontaneous adaptation of its work to fit specific needs of human rights issues in these countries.

The AHRC's work on the promotion of civil and political rights

At the core of human rights work is the capacity to make complaints, process them and reach out to a targeted audience with an aim to secure a remedy. The promotion and fulfillment of international norms and standards for civil and political rights requires the development of adequate systems of policing on which the people can depend for their lawful protection.

The capacity to make complaints regarding human rights violations and have them investigated and processed is a prerequisite to achieving redress as envisaged by international norms and standards. This capacity is to a high degree hampered by the prevalent fear of state institutions, which is mostly permeated by the use of force, in particular the use of torture. Working against torture is thus a conscious decision made by the organization to effectively address human rights issues in the region.

The extremely ineffective systems of policing in Asian states remain a key obstacle for the realization of human rights. Added to this are issues in the prosecution and judicial systems; politicization of these systems often prevents the development of a proper framework of protection against human rights violations. Delay in the process of adjudication, the lack of witness protection, the absence of competency in policing, prosecution and the judiciary and manifold forms of corruption hinders the administration of justice in Asia.

Therefore, in the work of the protection and promotion of human rights, the organization by its mandate is compelled to engage in issues relating to the systems of policing, prosecution and judiciary in the region. This is necessary to enable people to have adequate protection under the rule of law; for their rights to be protected.

Illegal arrest, detention, torture, rape, the denial of the right to fair trial in manifold forms, the denial of freedom of expression and association, and the freedom to choose a government are some of the prominent human rights violations found in the region. Extrajudicial executions, forced disappearances and other forms of the denial of the right to life with statutory impunity are frequent in many countries. Dealing with these problems is part of the core work relating to civil and political rights.

While all people in the region are affected by the problems of justice institutions, it is important for the organization to be extremely sensitive to the concerns of women, given the milieu of inequality, discrimination and the culture of fear that exists in Asia. The organization is involved in a considerable number of interventions involving women victims. Such involvement has sharpened the organizations' gender sensitivity in its work.

The AHRC's work on the protection and promotion of economic, social and cultural rights

Economic, social and cultural rights are often violated in extreme forms by enforced poverty, distress migration, corruption and discrimination. The denial of the right to food, water, education, as well as gender and racial equality are part of the region's daily reality.

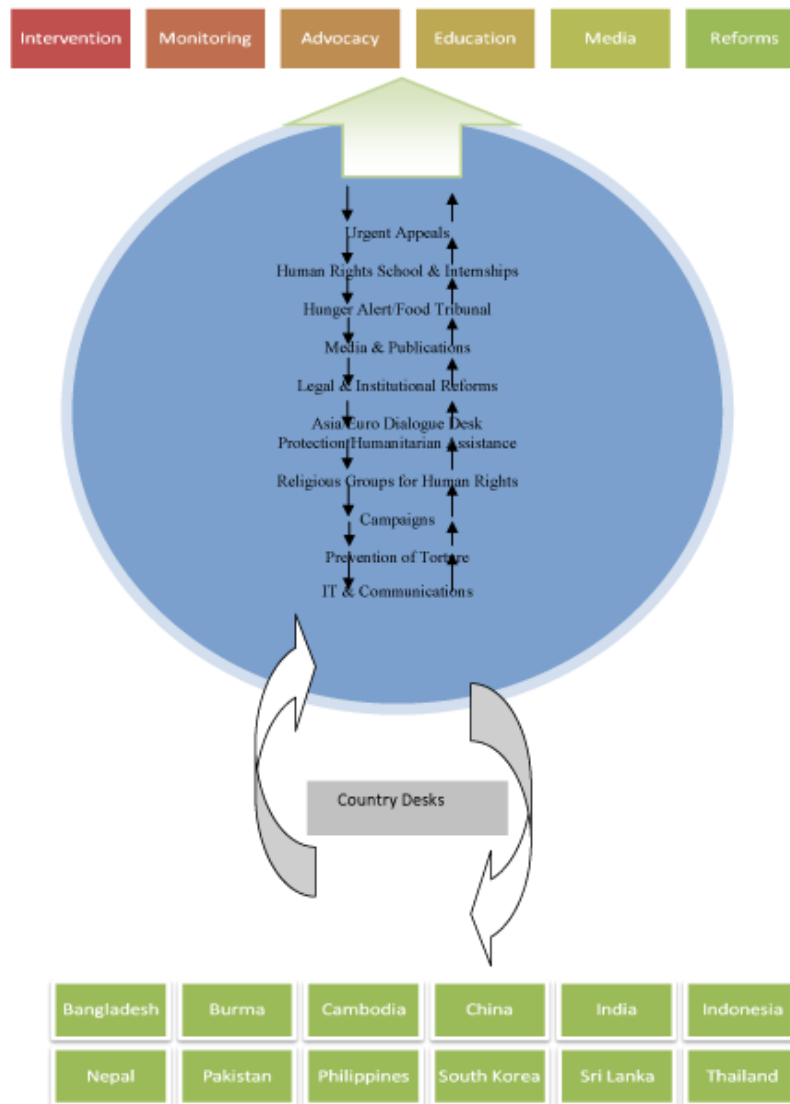
The concerns expressed above relating to civil and political rights directly affect economic, social and cultural rights as well. A state in which normative standards of justice do not exist cannot cater to the economic, social and cultural needs of its population. Women, children--in particular the girl child--and minorities face the maximum brunt in this context. It is within the organization's mandate to intervene in a way so as to empower weaker sections of society and to promote reforms that could improve their living conditions. Constant advocacy of human rights issues and the use of modern technologies, particularly information technology, to facilitate opportunities for seeking redress in economic, social and cultural rights is also within the mandate of the organization. This mandate has been practically articulated and developed over the last 25 years and has led to the development of strategies, methodologies and means of interventions used at present.

The mandate of the AHRC is carried out through interventions, monitoring, media, advocacy, education and reforms related to human rights protection and promotion. These functions are mentioned in the diagram of the AHRC's working model. The country desk work forms the bedrock and initiation point of the organizations' engagement.

The work generated from the countries are processed by the following desks to shape it into an effective, meaningful, and sustainable campaign. They are: the Urgent Appeals and Hunger Alert Desks; Human Rights School and Workshops; Media and Publications; Legal and Institutional Reforms; the Asia-Europe Dialogue Desk; Protection and Humanitarian Assistance; the Religious Groups for Human Rights; Campaigns; Prevention of Torture; and IT & Communications.

Each desk has developed unique features in carrying out the organization's mandate. This aspect of our organization is demonstrated by our working model:

AHRC Working Model



1.2 Key Partners and Beneficiaries

Given the mandate of the protection and promotion of human rights as exercised through the functions mentioned above and carried out through its specific desks, the organization has developed a number of key partners and beneficiaries of support over the years.

The key partners are various groups in the human rights field with which the organization has developed links for the protection and promotion of human rights. As previously mentioned, the work also engages the UN and its mandate holders. With these groups, the AHRC has a close partnership based on day-to-day activities, information sharing and developing common advocacy work on various issues, which are executed throughout the year by various programmes. Thus, the AHRC engages in country-based, regional and international partnerships in fulfilling its mandate.

Our partnership network is shown in this diagram:



The organization consciously attempts to develop partnerships with national institutions wherever possible. By national institutions, we mean state institutions that have the specific function of investigating into human rights abuses; the policing, prosecution and judicial institutions, as well as other state organs designed for this purpose.

In the area of human rights protection and promotion, these basic institutions are the most important partners of the organization. We engage and interact with them through appeals to support legal actions undertaken for victims of human rights violations, and by making reports and critiques of their policies and practices, which are submitted both in the local and international sphere, with a view to maintaining a constant dialogue with these institutions.

The next most important partnership is with the victims of rights violations. The organization provides avenues assisting them to make complaints, including linking them with groups that provide various kinds of assistance to them, as well as enhance their education and awareness.

The AHRC constantly engages in generating public opinion both locally and internationally. Communicating and working with the media forms an integral part of this exercise.

Other beneficiaries of the organization's work are the human rights community in general and local rights groups in particular. The organization supports these groups by helping them establish a constant chain of communication and education, providing opportunities to expand their work, creating opportunities

for capacity-building, and in particular to develop a system of protection for human rights defenders. This is done with the perspective that in times of danger the necessary assistance can be provided for people's security.

**AHRC's approach to deal with assistance
to victims is described in the following
model:**



Besides this, the internship programme provides the opportunity for local human rights defenders to visit the organization and work together with the staff enabling them to acquire various skills and understand global human rights norms and principles.

The AHRC tries to provide local human rights victims and defenders with opportunities for advocacy at the UN by participating in the activities of the Human Rights Council and other UN and international agencies through its Asia-Europe Dialogue Desk. This is done with the view to build an international solidarity base for its protection and advocacy work.

Above all, the primary beneficiaries and support groups of the AHRC are the poor in the countries where we work. Whatever the form, the ultimate target of all human rights violations is the poor. Extrajudicial executions, torture and severe restrictions on civil liberties are overwhelmingly directed towards denying the poor their right to participate in democratic life. In fact, this denies them a life with dignity. In order to achieve its mandate of providing protection to the rights of the poor, the organization constantly tries to develop linkages that will help the poor have quick access to a complaint making process, thereby ensuring their security while seeking possible redress.

In order to reach these beneficiaries and support groups, the organization works on a three-tier model of advocacy. This involves advocacy at the grass root levels where those who are the most needy can be reached, advocacy at a regional level--reaching as many organizations as possible who would support victims--and advocacy at an international level with UN and other agencies.

This three-tier model is facilitated by a deliberate and conscious use of modern technology and constant contact with both the local and international audiences. The model is shown below:

Networking

