

## 10.0 Discussion paper on security issues

The following are some basic guidelines regarding protection based on past experience.

### Security of partners

The obligation to undertake every possible action to protect local partners is ours. This principle arises out of the protection function of the AHRC as stated in Protection and Participation, one of our basic texts explaining how our development of the human rights movement in Asia lies in our capacity to improve the protection function. The basic assumption is that improving the protection of individuals, groups and organizations dealing with human rights will automatically increase people's participation in matters relating to their lives.

The basic functions carried out from the head office of the AHRC are geared towards protection: urgent appeals and documentation; direct interventions with authorities; interventions with UN agencies and various forms of lobbying on individual cases are all geared towards protecting people's rights, lives and dignity. On several occasions we have taken up the protection issue of our partners through these means; we made interventions on behalf of Kirity Roy, West Bengal, India; Dr Lenin in Varanasi, India, W R Sanjeewa in Sri Lanka, Fr Nandana, Sri Lanka, U L Joseph also in Sri Lanka (in the case of U L Joseph, after our interventions the police provided physical protection to the victim at his house for two months until he himself declared that it was no longer necessary). All these proved effective and no harm has come to these partners. We also know that when we took up such issues many human rights organizations and UN agencies intervened on behalf of our partners.

When one of the AHRC's partners feels that there is a security threat, the practice so far has been to take the following actions:

- An AHRC staff member, preferably the person dealing with that particular country will talk to the partner and get a detailed account of the threat.
- There will be discussions with the Executive Director and other colleagues regarding appropriate actions to be taken, in consultation with the local partners.
- After these actions are taken, the outcomes should be closely monitored together with other local partners.
- Individuals under threat are also assured that if they need to move away from their present location, the AHRC will assist them in the process. During the coup in Nepal for instance, Mandira Sharma was invited to stay in Hong Kong for several months. Others were helped with financial donations to stay in India.
- Besides this, we advise our partners to take whatever appropriate action they deem necessary, including ceasing their work, and that whatever contributions we are making to their subsistence will not be affected by this.

It is necessary to note here that it is primarily up to the person suffering threats to assess the situation and indicate how we can help.

The protection issue raises the need for the staff at the AHRC to have closer knowledge of our partners—how they work and how to participate in the mutual development of our partners and ourselves. It might also be a good thing to develop country interest groups within the AHRC staff. Not all persons can be interested in all countries all the time. For very natural reasons some persons may have a special interest in a country even though he or she may not be the person dealing with that country. If such country interest groups can be developed, it will help not only on the protection issue but also in developing greater expertise and local knowledge about each individual country and also about the partners with whom we work. Our partners deserve closer friendships from the staff at the centre. Such friendships contribute not only to good personal relationships but also to better insights into country situations.