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Cover photograph :

Women protesting violence against women in Guwahati, India.

Source: *Anjuman Ara Begum, July 2012*

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Asia: Civil society needs to converge to protect rights

Edited text of a statement issued by the Asian Human Rights Commission: AHRC-STM-236-2013, 10 December 2013

Commemorating the 64th anniversary of Human Rights Day, the Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) has released a comprehensive report, *State of Human Rights in Asia 2013*, covering Sri Lanka, India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Hunger in Asia. [The report can be accessed at: <http://www.humanrights.asia/resources/hrreport/2013>.]

The global theme for this year is '20 Years: Working for your rights'. The theme marks the 20th year of the establishment of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

The AHRC report has analyzed the functioning of justice institutions in Asia. While in some states the functioning of these institutions contribute to the negation of rights, in others, it is the non-functioning of the justice apparatus that hampers the rule of law.

Of particular emphasis in the report is the widespread use of torture, a phenomenon that the AHRC has documented sans jurisdictions. The report asks why, in countries like Sri Lanka, Nepal, and the Philippines, where torture is criminalized, it is in practice. The report concludes that it is not just adequate legislation that prevents torture; proper enforcement of the rule of law is needed to end torture and impunity. Central to the establishment of the rule of law in Asia is police reform.

Democracy is only possible where justice institutions are conceived, created, and nurtured to prevent arbitrary abuse of power. In Asia, what exist today, are authoritarian states in the garb of democracy, which promote impunity and nepotism. In countries like Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Philippines, and Sri Lanka, owing to entrenched corruption and impunity in governance, realizing normative rights guarantees has remained elusive. This makes democracy a façade.

The global convergence against extremism has worked as a catalyst in Pakistan and Bangladesh to further state impunity. The ensuing repercussions have increased disrespect for the rule of law.

In Sri Lanka, the government has set up a military state. This has further pushed the country into a financial crisis, from which it will be difficult for the people of Sri Lanka to recover. Any inquiry into war crimes and other human rights abuses reported from Sri Lanka, past and present, is prevented by the state, since it would expose the empty shell of governance based on nepotistic interests.

Guarantees of protection, promotion, and fulfillment of human rights in India suffer formidably due to the state's incapacity to encourage, investigate, and adjudicate complaints of human rights abuse.

In Bangladesh, impunity and corruption has resulted in the country exporting bloodstained garments. Collective bargaining for better working conditions attracts murder. Politicians of all shades are deeply entrenched in promoting private interests, for which they have intentionally wilted justice institutions.

Nepal continues to keep the democratic dreams of its people in abeyance and prevents justice and closure for the victims of war crimes.

Pakistan meanwhile, poses mortal danger for professional communities like judges and lawyers for standing firm against fundamentalist religious forces that collaborate with the military.

The façade behind democratic state-building is exposed in Indonesia with the curtailment of freedom of speech and expression and the widespread practice of torture. The country's judiciary is unable to shake off its compromised independence.

In the Philippines, human rights guarantees remain a challenge due to the omnipresent use of torture and violence by state agencies with impunity. Professional freedom of the media to report against human rights abuse is under exceptional control; those who dare challenge it face serious repercussions, including death.

In none of the Asian states assessed are institutional reforms a state priority. On the contrary, governments keep reform policies suppressed, and prioritize what is projected as 'development'. However, these development models are mere enforcement of state writ that deepen income disparities and keep millions in poverty, malnutrition, and hunger. Asia's development model is at best the convergence of its privileged, and justice, equality and dignity are the immediate casualties.

To counter an unjust development model, and protect the rights of the Asian people, the AHRC calls for Asian civil society to collectively challenge the region's governments and demand that development should not be at the expense of justice institutions.

The AHRC also wishes to reiterate—on a day that globally rekindles hope for human rights—that the best national investment states can offer their people is a life of dignity and equality. This, however, is impossible if Asian states do not prioritize institutional reforms to guarantee justice to every human within their jurisdiction.

UN honours Nelson Mandela as champion of peace, reconciliation

UN News Centre

6 December 2013—The United Nations family today mourned the loss—and celebrated the enduring legacy—of Nelson Mandela, the former South African leader and peace advocate who passed away yesterday at the age of 95.

As the UN flag was lowered to half-staff over the world body's Headquarters in New York, the 193-member General Assembly held a moment of silence to honour the memory of the man affectionately known as "Madiba," who emerged from 27 years of imprisonment to become South Africa's first black President and is known worldwide for his compassionate yet determined efforts to dismantle the country's legacy of apartheid.

"Today, in this Assembly of Nations, we mourn the loss of Mr. Nelson Mandela, one of our world's greatest leaders," said Assembly President John Ashe, who added that the example of Mr. Mandela's life and actions, "demonstrates the difference one person can make in the face of adversity, oppression and prejudice, while maintaining a disposition of humility, humour and modesty that is so rare amongst people of his stature."

In his remarks, UN Deputy Secretary-General Jan Eliasson hailed Mr. Mandela's courage, farsightedness, political skills, and kindness, adding that: "In a world too often riven and divided by vicious cycles of violence and revenge, perhaps the most impressive of President Mandela's gifts was his power of forgiveness, his ability to overcome bitterness and hatred."

"We remember Nelson Mandela today. But we should carry his spirit with us every day," continued Mr. Eliasson. "It means, speaking out against prejudice and discrimination wherever we see their dark manifestations. It means, standing up against the indignity and deprivation that millions of our fellow human beings still suffer around the world."

Mr. Mandela's ground-breaking legacy and inspirational spirit was also hailed by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon who spoke to the press soon after the South African leader's passing was announced. Calling him a "giant for justice," the UN chief said Mr. Mandela "showed what is possible for our world and within each one of us—if we believe, dream and work together for justice and humanity."

Recalling his memories of meeting Mr. Mandela, the Secretary-General said he had been deeply touched and inspired. “When I praised him for his lifelong contribution to end apartheid he said ‘It is not only me, but hundreds and hundreds of known and unknown people that contributed.’ That has stuck with me ever since.”

Among the many tributes pouring in from across the UN system to honour Mr. Mandela, the Security Council, which stopped a public meeting yesterday afternoon to hold a moment of silence, issued a statement last night expressing deep admiration for the “moral and political leadership” he displayed and his decisive role in shaping the peaceful transition to a united and democratic South Africa.

In her remarks, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay said she remembers well how, when Mr. Mandela was finally released from prison, feelings in South Africa were boiling: feelings of hatred, “a thirst for revenge, a burning desire to discriminate against those who had so ruthlessly discriminated against us. I shared some of those feelings—it was hard not to, after living so many long years under apartheid.”

But, she said, Mr. Mandela refused to go down that path, just as earlier he had refused to make a deal to win his own freedom in return for selling out on the principles of the liberation movement. “He turned it all around with words. He told us to throw our spears and guns into the sea. He told us to set aside our desire for vengeance and work for a South Africa not just free of racism, but free of all types of discrimination.”

As a young lawyer, Ms. Pillay acted as a defence attorney for anti-apartheid activists, exposing torture, and helping establish key rights for prisoners on Robben Island. In 1995, after the end of apartheid, Mr. Mandela appointed her to be the first black woman judge on the South African High Court. Later, he launched her international career when he asked her to serve as a judge on the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR), where she served a total of eight years, including four as President.

Michel Sidibé, Executive Director of the Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) said the agency and the entire AIDS community are heartbroken by the passing of the global statesman, whom he hailed as a “passionate advocate for people living with HIV.” He said that Mr. Mandela’s actions helped save millions of lives and transformed health in Africa.

“He broke the conspiracy of silence and gave hope that all people should live with dignity,” said Mr. Sidibé, explaining that Mr. Mandela devoted much of his time advocating for access to HIV treatment, ending stigma and ensuring all babies are born free of the virus. “He was my personal hero and showed me that even in the face of adversity it is possible to realize your dreams and move mountains,” the agency chief added.

Hailing Mr. Mandela as “a giant among men,” Irina Bokova, Director-General of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) said the South African leader had taught the world an enduring lesson about the power of peace and reconciliation, the importance of forgiveness and respect for the dignity of all people. “The greatest tribute we can pay him is to carry on his message of hope and to continue the fierce defence of the values he stood for,” she said.

Mr. Mandela’s life and legacy were honoured by a host of other United Nations officials, including António Guterres, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Anthony Lake, Executive Director of the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF), Jose Graziano Da Silva, Director General of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), Guy Ryder, Director-General of the UN International Labour Organization (ILO), Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka Executive Director of UN Women, and Hamadoun Toure , Secretary-General of the International Telecommunications Union (ITU). The staff of the UN World Food Programme also honoured the South African leader.

Full text taken from UN website: <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=46675&Cr=mandela&Cr1=#.UqW2o-ITVSx>

The Daw Suu of Burma: Between the reaffirmed honours of today and the challenges of tomorrow

Liliana Corrieri

Aung San Suu Kyi, the world-renowned former political prisoner, was in Strasbourg in October 2013 to collect, after 23 years, the Sakharov Prize she won in 1990. For a total of 15 years, Suu Kyi had been placed under house arrest by the Burmese military regime on multiple occasions, until she was finally released in November 2010. The Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought, named in honour of the Russian dissident and activist for civil rights Andrei Dmitrievich Sakharov, is the most prestigious human rights prize annually awarded by the European Union to people and organizations in recognition of their struggle for freedom and justice. During the award ceremony at the European Parliament on October 22, Aung San Suu Kyi said in her speech,

This is for me a joyful and deeply meaningful occasion. A joyous one because I have been given the opportunity to thank all of you for the support that you have given me, my party and all those who believe in democracy in Burma, for over two decades... To achieve the position of a society which would have had approval of Professor Sakharov, we would have to work a lot harder. Our people will have to do the greater part of the work, but I do believe that all of you can help us in our endeavours... Freedom of thought is essential to human progress. If we stop freedom of thought we stop progress in our world, because of this it is so important that we teach our children, our young people the importance of freedom of thought. Freedom of thought begins with the right to ask questions, and our people in Burma have not had this right for so long that some of our young people do not quite know how to ask questions.

A worldwide source of inspiration and a symbol of democracy, she was warmly greeted by the entire European Parliament, which welcomed her speech with a standing ovation. However, Mr. Sajjad Haider Karim, the Conservative Member of the European Parliament (MEP) for North West England and the first British-Pakistani European Parliamentarian, noted his disappointment:

I found certain aspects of her engagement with us quite disappointing because the speech that she made really was that of an activist. But she has moved on from that role now, she wants to be the leader of a nation. She had nothing to say about the role of Burma in the region, how by investing in Burma, by creating the sort of society we want to see come about in Burma we can actually bring about change not just in Burma but throughout the

region, and I believe Burma can act as a catalyst. Along with that, she made no reference at all to the human rights abuses that are being suffered by minorities such as the Rohingya and indeed the Christian communities as well.

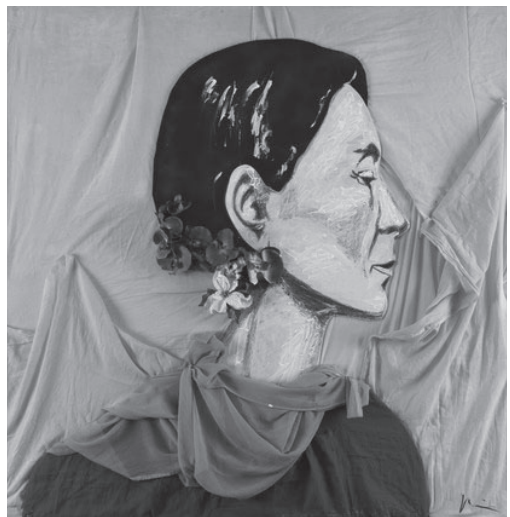
It is certainly true that the advocacy of democracy in a country like Burma necessarily involves a discussion of the various political, civil, social and cultural rights violated. These violations affect the establishment of a fair democracy, where freedom of thought, religion, association and so on are respected as birth rights of every citizen. Although Aung San Suu Kyi is now a free woman, it would be politically very difficult for her, both abroad and in her own country, to make strong statements regarding the Rohingya situation or other issues, given the level of freedom of speech accepted in Burma.

Since 2012, she has been attending parliament as leader of the National League for Democracy (NLD), the opposition party which she helped to found in 1988 and whose winning electoral result in 1990 was nullified by the military. It is clear that she is attempting to build an effective parliamentary base for her party, and understandably, she does not want to be placed back under house arrest or be again excluded from the political arena. Burma's current circumstances are complex, and the entire country is going through a transition stage. Daw Suu (Mother Suu, as she is also known in Burma) has a personal and political challenge ahead of her as a key player in the democratization of her country as well as its progressive opening towards diplomatic relations with the international community. She has also announced her intention to run for presidency in the 2015 elections. In addition, she started advocating for the reform of the 2008 army-dictated constitution, which includes a provision that reserves a quarter of the seats in the Burmese parliament for the military, resulting in a parliament composed of many unelected members and therefore undemocratic and only nominally civilian. Furthermore, the 2008 constitution seems to enumerate a number of restrictive clauses compromising transparency and even excluding her from the possibility of becoming president, since she is both the widow and the mother of non-Burmese citizens (her two sons were born in the United Kingdom and are of British nationality). Such provisions appear to have been tailored to act against Daw Suu.

After being in Europe twice in 2012, on 18 October 2013 Aung San Suu Kyi undertook her third tour of the old continent, stopping in France, the United Kingdom, Belgium, Luxembourg and Italy. The main purpose of her visits was to seek stronger support by the state members of the European Union in order to push through pro-democracy measures and changes to the Burmese constitution. From France she travelled to the United Kingdom, where she visited the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst (RMAS) in order to learn more about how British armed forces are trained in accordance with international standards and democratic accountability. In Belfast, her visit was aimed at exploring the reconciliation process between Northern Ireland and Britain as a lesson that could be learnt and applied to the ethnic conflicts troubling several communities in Burma.

On October 27, Suu Kyi landed in Rome. She recalled visiting the eternal city for the first time many years ago while still a student at Oxford and how impressed she was by the city's monuments and architecture. This however, was her first time in Italy as the renowned Aung San Suu Kyi. The city of Rome awarded her its honorary citizenship in 1994 and the prize 'Rome for Peace' (premio Roma per la Pace) in 2007. For this second award, as she was still under house arrest, she nominated the Italian football player Roberto Baggio, whom she confessed to like a lot, to collect the award in her place. On the Capitoline Hill, one of the original seven hills upon which ancient Rome was built and which is today the site of the main city municipality, she picked up the honorary parchment and a reproduction of the famous bronze she-wolf (lupa capitolina), the symbol of Rome. After meeting the most prominent politicians of the country, *The Lady of Rangoon* also had an encounter with Pope Francis I. Her visit to Italy included three other cities, where she was further awarded. In Bologna, in particular, together with the honorary citizenship, she received a Honorary Degree in Philosophy (Lauream ad Honorem). This award was also 'decided' a long time ago: in 2000, the University of Bologna recognized the policy of reconciliation carried out by Aung San Suu Kyi as based on the principles of rationality, morality and philosophy in the pursuit of freedom and democracy.

In 1991, Aung San Suu Kyi became the first Asian woman to be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for her non-violent struggle for democracy and human rights. Since then, she has grown into an internationally established model of courage and endurance, and a source of inspiration for many individuals across the world, including activists, women, young people, policy makers, artists and so on. In 2011, the French director Luc Besson filmed *'The Lady'*, which portrays the life of Aung San Suu Kyi from the assassination of her father in 1947 up until the death of her husband Michael Vaillancourt Aris in 1999. Recently, the Italian artist Marcello Reboani included her portrait in his latest exhibition consisting of 'alternative' portraits of 18 courageous women (such as Anne Frank, Mother Teresa of Calcutta and Malala Yousafzai) who have become internationally prominent because of their engagement and struggle for human rights.



Aung San Suu Kyi, 'Ladies for human rights' exhibition.

Source: <http://www.marcelloreboani.it/ladies-for-human-rights>

Some people have defined Aung San Suu Kyi as the 'female Mandela', due to her inspiring political leadership, peaceful struggle and personal strength. She is the symbol of the Burmese people's struggle against military rule, in the same way Nelson Mandela is the symbol of the anti-apartheid stance in South Africa.

It is hard to predict what the 2015 elections will bring about in Burma, and whether in the meantime, *The Lady* will succeed in her attempts to have the 2008 constitution adequately reformed. In her first official political speech on state media in 2012, she strongly advocated for several amendments, including the revocation of repressive laws and the strengthening of the judiciary, which requires independence from political interference.

What is certain today, is that people all over the world will continue to be inspired by Aung San Suu Kyi and will continue to support her and talk about her for a long time. She is indeed a living icon who has already made history.

India: Mothers' quest for justice

Anjuman Ara Begum

In commemoration of the International day for Women Human Rights Defenders, 29 November 2013

Women's movements often find their roots in motherhood as a symbol or weapon to create space. Motherhood has in fact proved instrumental for women struggling for justice worldwide. One of the rare positive impacts of armed conflict can be said to be the increase in women's leadership in society through a change in their gender roles. This occurred in Argentina for instance, when mothers of disappeared persons mobilized themselves to seek justice collectively for the atrocities committed by the military government between 1976 to 1983, a time often noted as a period of 'dirty war'. An estimated 30 to 45 thousand people went missing during this period. In 1977, mothers of these missing persons formed the Association Madres de Plaza de Mayo (Association of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo) and peacefully demanded information about their missing ones. Mothers were able to overcome their gendered roles in society and took leadership in the struggle for justice. Similar movements are also visible in Brazil, Chile and also in Sri Lanka.¹

Meira Paibis, ('torch bearers') is a popular women's group in the Indian state of Manipur, active for over a century to address issues affecting women. The changing socio-political landscape in Manipur with the advent of British administration in the late 19th century and its end in 1947 had a profound influence on the subsequent course of women's networks like the Meira Paibis, which is based on solidarity. The historic *Nupi Lal* (women's agitations) of 1904 and 1939, the running of the *Ima Keithal* (mothers'/women's market), the organization of *Nupi Marup* (women's revolving credit group) are but a few examples. It was this solidarity among women that led to the withdrawal of the use of forced labour in 1904. The *Nupi Lal* that started in 1939 was against the Manipur Maharaja's oppressive economic and administrative policies under the supervision of the political agent Mr. Gimson (1933-45), which evolved later into a movement for constitutional and administrative reform in the Kingdom.

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1. Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo: First Responders for Human Rights, <http://www.du.edu/korbel/cricc/humanitarianbriefs/rachelkoeysel.pdf> last accessed on December 10, 2013

The Meira Paibis movement is rooted in the Ima Keithal of Imphal city, Manipur. Ima Keithal is the world's largest all women's market, where sellers are women, selling daily essential items. Presently there are 34 women's solidarity groups in the Ima Keithal.

In the late 1980s, the Meira Paibis became a household name for curbing alcoholism and for being in the forefront of protests against the excessive use of force by armed forces and non-state armed groups. They came forward in public grouping themselves as 'mothers', since the maternal platform provided the space required to raise their voices. The mobilization for this movement started between March 1975 and June 1976. The group was initially called the Nishabandi due to their activities against alcoholism. Changes in the socio-political and economic spheres were also reflected in the women's movement. In the last two decades therefore, the Meira Paibis are mostly seen as active against atrocities by the armed forces and the armed opposition groups. They received worldwide attention for their bold protest against the sexual violence and custodial death of a woman named Manorama in 2004. 'We are all mothers of Manorama', declared one of the protesters.

One deviation from this trend, a mammoth hunger protest staged by a single woman, is worth mentioning. The killing of ten persons by paramilitary forces at Malom, Manipur on 2 November 2000, followed by a brutal combat operation, left Irom Sharmila shocked at the anarchical act of the state agencies. She decided to begin a fast unto death demanding the repeal of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958, which was responsible for such brutality on the part of the state. Sharmila, also known as Manipur's 'Iron Lady', completed 13 years of her fast recently. Despite Sharmila's protest, 13 years later, the investigation into the Malom massacre has still not been completed. Only on 7 January 2010, did a team of judicial officials led by Ms. T. Surbala, the District and Session's Judge, Manipur East, conduct a spot inquiry as part of an initial investigation at Malom. The victims are yet to get justice however. Since 2 November 2000, Sharmila continues to be arrested under section 309 of the Indian Penal Code for her 'attempted suicide' each year.

Another glorious example of a women's movement in North East India that used motherhood as a platform, is the Naga Mothers Association (NMA). Formed on 14 February 1984 as a voluntary organization, the mothers committed to fight social evil, which they do even today. In the 1970s and 1980s, they initiated resistance against alcoholism and drug addiction. However, challenges emerged as counter insurgency operations intensified in the state, resulting in enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings and violence against women.

NMA adopted various strategies as mothers. They offered themselves as negotiators and engaged in dialogue with soldiers deployed by the state or those enrolled as the 'nationalist' non-state armed groups, appealing to both parties for the total cessation of bloodshed.

NMA also supported mothers and family members of the disappeared and started a campaign to honour the dead. They would arrange for the funeral of the unidentified deceased by covering them with traditional shawls, preparing coffins and burial grounds.

NMA joined hands with other Naga organizations like Naga Hoho, Naga Peoples Movement for Human Rights (NPMHR) and Naga Students Federation (NSF). A peace movement under the banner, 'Shed No More Blood' was launched in the 1990s to engage in dialogue with all parties to the conflict to cease bloodshed. Mothers took journeys to the hill terrains in Burma and other difficult places to reach the rebel leaders as well as army officials for support. This trust-building process continues even in the midst of occasionally resurgent violence and constant suspicion. The NMA has provided a common platform for different parties and factions to meet and conduct dialogue with one another.

Similarly, in Assam, Matri Manch and Mahila Samities played a seminal role in political mobilization in both the pre and post Indian independence period. They addressed violence against women, killings and sexual violence by armed forces. Journalist Teresa Rehman writes that, "the first Mahila Samiti was established in Dibrugarh in 1915. These groups were formed as local associations in Assam's urban centres and particularly picked up momentum during the 1920s." To ease the life of women



Members of Assam Mahila Samiti protesting violence against women, 14 July 2012. Source: Dasarath Deka

and to secure leisure time for them, the Samities passed a resolution back in 1948 to set family mealtimes: lunch was decided to be at 12 noon and dinner at 10pm. These groups continue to address women's rights issues even today.

In recent times, widowhood is another emerging platform creating social space for women to raise their voices for justice. In 2008, the state of Manipur witnessed a spree of extrajudicial executions allegedly committed by the armed police commandos and central armed forces taking advantage of draconian laws like the Armed Forces Special Powers Act 1958, which grants virtual immunity for arbitrary killings. Most of the victims of such killings were men of the age group of 25-40 years, leaving their spouses widowed. The victims' young widows as well as mothers mobilized themselves while searching for solace. By creating loose networks and sharing their grief in informal meetings and gatherings, they also expressed solidarity with others. These gatherings helped them

to overcome their victim mode, become human rights defenders and pledge to a long struggle for justice. Their determination found a formal shape as they formed the Extrajudicial Execution Victims Families Association, Manipur (EEVFAM) on 11 July 2009 at Imphal. The group received unconditional support by civil society members and media. With this empowerment, in 2012, EEVFAM in collaboration with Human Rights Alert, a human rights organization in Manipur, filed a joint petition in the Supreme Court of India requesting investigation by a special investigation team in 1528 cases of extrajudicial killings committed in the state over the past two decades. The outcome of the petition was unprecedented; the Supreme Court constituted a committee of retired judges to investigate into six cases taken as a sample. The Committee found all six cases to be murder in cold blood, staged as the casualty of an armed encounter. The final verdict of the apex court is still pending.

Despite the shield of motherhood, women human rights defenders face particular challenges due to existing gender discrimination in society. Women activists in the region often cite domestic violence, restricted mobility and sexual harassment at workplace as reasons for their limited participation in human rights activities.

The social notion of women as a symbol of family 'honour' and dignity has created silence over the issue of violence against women. Women in general and women activists in particular, constantly feel challenged to overcome stereotypes. The need of the hour is that each member of society fosters a culture of respect and cooperation with women human rights defenders. This is in the interest of the whole society. Hands should be raised in help and dignity, not violence.

‘Bring down the beast of caste discrimination’

Navi Pillay, Human Rights Commissioner

I thank the Anti-Caste Discrimination Alliance (ACDA) for organizing this important meeting [at the House of Lords, London on 6 November 2013] and for inviting me to address you on caste-based discrimination. I shall consider recent international measures to come to grips with the scale and depth of the phenomenon, and also address the bold advances in the United Kingdom.

Backdrop

It is estimated that caste-based and other, related forms of discrimination spell a life of humiliation, exclusion and poverty for about one-quarter of a billion women, men and children worldwide. Caste-based discrimination is of immediate concern to my Office, because it is destructive of all we stand for.

It denies women, men and children their most fundamental entitlements. It strips them of their very dignity. It tramples economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights, and still does so with impunity in too many parts of the world.

The problem is not restricted to one region or one religious community. Caste prejudice is prevalent in South Asia, but taints society across East and South-East Asia, as well, and in Africa and the Middle East. Caste-based ignorance, hatred, fear and suffering, a fact of life for hundreds of thousands of people, also affects the lives of people in the United Kingdom, in other countries and in diaspora and migrant communities around the world today.

Advances at international level

None of these sobering facts are new to most of you here today. I simply raise them as a backdrop against which to measure our joint progress, and the work that remains to be done. And I must say that our progress has been substantial. You will have heard the recent calls for growing attention to caste-based discrimination at the international level, ranging from the UN Secretary-General’s Guidance Note on Racial Discrimination and Minorities, adopted in March of this year, to the resolution on caste-based discrimination adopted by the European Parliament just last month. You will have been heartened, as I have been, that the global consultation on the post-2015 development agenda has acknowledged caste-based discrimination as a source of inequality.

Legal standards TBs

You will also know that international human rights treaties already provide broad legal standards in the existing framework of international law. These standards do not refer explicitly to caste as such, but jurisprudence, for many years now, has held that existing treaty norms cover caste-based discrimination, as well. That signifies that States have a legal obligation under international law to address it.

The interpretation, application and refinement of these legal standards have led steadily to the promising signs we are now witness to. And though slow and painstaking, the methodical workings of the international human rights mechanism have helped propel caste-based discrimination into UK legislation this year.

CERD

A major player in this process has been the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, the Treaty Body known as ‘CERD’ that tends to the International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination. This Committee, the CERD, is responsible for interpretation, observance and guidance on the Convention, now ratified by 176 States.

In 2002, CERD’s General Recommendation No. 29 concluded that discrimination based on descent pertained to caste-based discrimination, and was thereby also prohibited by the Convention. And a year later, in 2003, CERD, while welcoming the strides taken in the United Kingdom to combat discrimination, called for the inclusion of a specific prohibition of discrimination on the basis of caste in UK legislation.

Growing calls for combating caste discrimination have surfaced in other country reviews, and also through other Treaty Bodies, the Universal Periodic Review and the Special Rapporteurs—all of them vital moving parts of the international human rights system. One of the latest examples was the public call in May this year by seven UN mandate-holders for endorsement by world Governments of the UN Draft Principles and Guidelines for the Effective Elimination of Discrimination based on Work and Descent.

In September 2011, at CERD’s 79th formal session in Geneva, advocates of the Anti-Caste Discrimination Alliance were on hand to witness the Committee’s recommendation to the UK Government to invoke Section 9 (5)(a) of the 2010 Equality Act, so as to make caste an aspect of race, prohibit it and provide remedies to victims.

And this year, following very strong views expressed on this matter here in the House of Lords, a new legislative provision contained in the Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Act now provides that the Government must bring caste-based discrimination within the scope of the Equality Act.

This was a victory for campaigners and their many years of tireless work for justice, and it was historic, making the United Kingdom the first country in Europe—and the first outside South Asia—that will stipulate *explicitly* in law that caste-based discrimination is banned.

Like so many others, I warmly welcomed this news. It sends a strong message, both domestically and to the world, that caste-based discrimination must be banished from our societies. And I have been heartened by how, throughout this ten-year task, State authorities, civil society and international human rights mechanisms have drawn growing strength from each other. Empowered civil advocacy and receptive government—this is how human rights should work, addressing deeply-rooted social ills through consensual, decisive action in legislation, policy-making and enforcement.

Here in the UK, caste-based rioting and manual scavenging are distant to you. But more subtle manifestations of the caste system still lurk. A Government-commissioned study here found evidence of caste discrimination and harassment in Britain at the work-place and in the provision of services. The study also found evidence of caste discrimination and harassment in schools, voluntary organizations, places of worship and in public behaviour, all with potentially severe psychological and material consequences for the victims.

This and other reports show that caste prejudice has survived migration and continues to affect work, education and social life in diaspora communities, often suddenly confronting many who for years felt caste was no longer an issue in their lives.

This has also happened in my family. As you might know, I grew up in South Africa. Though proudly South African, my parents, born in South Africa and of Indian origin, so disapproved of my sister's choice in marriage, believing him to be too low-caste, that they refused to attend their own daughter's wedding.

Some would argue that caste is largely a problem for the first-generation immigrants. They point, not without reason, to increasing inter-marriage and other helpful factors that gradually erode attachment to it. But others see the impact of caste on diaspora communities as much more insidious and persistent, frequently carrying over several generations.

Like all of you, my Office is looking forward to strong, swift implementation by the Government here of its new legal obligation to extend the reach of the United Kingdom's legislation on inequality to cover caste-based discrimination.

The challenge now is protection and enforcement, and here is the measure of that challenge: Caste-based discrimination leaves an insidious stain. It is a base act of whispering and hidden denigration. Once inside heads, it sticks there, stubborn and vindictive. It is hard to wipe out and, in this country, it is sometimes hard to see. Its victims, meanwhile, are claiming and exercising their rights to protection, to redress, and to a strong say in the search for long-term solutions, and this will continue.

This is a long-term challenge for the Government and people of the United Kingdom, but also an opportunity to make good on your joint quest for a more cohesive society. And I am sure that further afield, this legislation and its implementation will inspire similar work in other countries: the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms Racial Discrimination and the entire human rights normative framework are already in place to help guide us as we move forward.

My Office is also glad to see the Government's commitment to pursuing this work in methodical and comprehensive fashion, including through public consultations.

Public consultation and information have been central to our own successful advocacy at OHCHR. In the case of specific legislation to combat caste-based discrimination, I would point to our former office in Katmandu, which worked in close partnership with Dalit organizations, civil society representatives and authorities to facilitate Nepal's adoption of the Caste-based Discrimination and Untouchability Act in 2011. That landmark law not only provided new remedies for victims and improved their access to justice; it unleashed a wave of educational initiatives in schools, marketplaces and public squares to fight people's ignorance of caste-based discrimination.

A few years ago, Dalit activists told me of their campaign to end manual scavenging, the caste-determined cleaning of latrines by hand. They went around, smashing down the latrines. They handed me a brick from the latrine, as a symbol of release.

Their activism paid off. India has started seriously to address the matter at its root. I applaud the adoption by the Indian Parliament in September this year of a new law to eradicate manual scavenging, a dreadful practice that strips dignity from hundreds of thousands of Dalits, mostly women. The new law further strengthens the legislative framework already in place in India that prohibits untouchability and bonded labour.

And I am confident that India's advances will continue, reducing caste discrimination and harassment, facilitating its prosecution when it does occur, and providing an independent means of redress for victims, including access to tribunals and courts. This progress, too, will inspire similar efforts in other parts of the world.

Permit me a few words about law. The experience of my Office has been that even when non-discrimination legislation might cover, *de jure*, certain acts of caste-based discrimination, an explicit reference to such discrimination in legislation is needed. It not only clarifies the legal situation and ensures comprehensive coverage of the offense; it also heightens the attention paid to it by law enforcement, other authorities and by the public at large.

Few things can match law's deterrent effect. Nothing in modern British history has been more powerful against racial discrimination than your laws against it. In the same vein, as a lawyer and judge myself, I would predict that the work still facing this country to tackle caste-based discrimination will be greatly facilitated by your new basis in law, to ban it.

But a new law alone cannot be the silver bullet. We need more to bring down the beast of caste-based discrimination. Prohibition of untouchability in the Indian Constitution in 1950 did not eradicate it, and India's first attempts to outlaw manual scavenging had little impact on the practice. An indispensable complement to the law must be consequential practice.

Covering caste-based discrimination in your equality legislation by itself will not end the harassment, bullying, humiliation and exploitation. We must couple existing law with renewed political and social commitment to legal principles, and also methodically and efficiently engage the international and national working mechanisms to advance its implementation.

The judiciary has a key role to play in this respect, but so do other institutions, and so does the public at large. Limited awareness of caste-related dynamics blunts our sensitivity to discrimination and harassment when they occur. Let us push hard to raise more awareness, amongst the authorities and the people, of the catastrophic human impact of caste-based discrimination, especially on women and the young, and of the relief and benefits for all people of its prohibition.

Awareness-raising efforts must draw supporters from private and public sectors, too: our experience—and Britain's experience—show best results lie in formal, wide-ranging partnerships between governmental and civil society actors. In Britain's case, civil society, activists, trade unions and progressive employers have indeed played exemplary roles. I pay tribute, in particular, to the Dalit activists and human rights advocates who in international and national forums, with commitment and courage, have exposed the hideousness and prevalence of caste-based discrimination, and demanded a stop to it.

It is thanks to you that caste-based discrimination is gaining the attention and triggering the action it demands. Whether private or public, whether non-governmental,

governmental or intergovernmental partners, we share the same struggle. Let us continue together to call for further progress and denounce caste-based discrimination, both at home and in multilateral and bilateral contexts on the international stage.

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights remains committed to working with all of you.

Thank you.

Full text of speech taken from OHCHR website: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=13973&LangID=E>

‘The Neglected Genocide’: Abuses in Papua from 1977-1978

Meryam Dabhoiwala

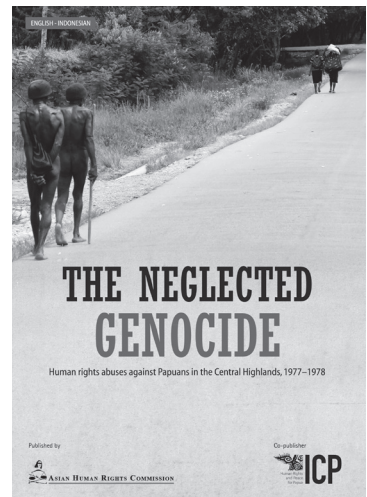
Between 1977-1978, the Indonesian military conducted operations in the central highlands of Papua, during which many human rights violations took place. A report detailing these violations has been published by the Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) and Human Rights and Peace for Papua (ICP), intimating that they in fact amount to genocide.

Produced after three years of research by the AHRC, the report reveals the death of over 4,000 indigenous Papuans, including minors, as a result of operations conducted by the Indonesian military in the area. Amongst those killed were infants and children, 10 years-old and younger, as well as elderly persons aged over 60. The methods of killing commonly used by the military at that time include aerial bombings and strafing by American-supplied OV-10 Bronco planes.

In addition to revealing the details of the murdered victims, the report narrates the stories of survivors who witnessed the brutality and inhuman treatment perpetrated by the Indonesian military at that time. An interviewed survivor, Reverend Matius Wenda (alias) shared his experience in witnessing the Indonesian military officers forcing elderly Papuans to consume their excrement. Another victim narrated how arrested Papuans were forced to stand in line in a field before being shot indiscriminately by the Indonesian military. The victim himself managed to survive by pretending to be dead.

Sexual violence against Papuan women is also reported to have been common during the military operation of the time, as described by one of the interviewed female survivors: “Breasts of some women were cut and they died. We were raped, abused and killed... Some women were only raped but others were raped and murdered.”

The horrendous human rights violations are attributed to high ranking officials of the Indonesian military at that time, including the former Indonesian President, General Soeharto. Moreover, they amount to genocide as defined by the Convention for the



Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948. According to the AHRC, the abuses were directed at the Papuans with the intention to destroy them in part—under international jurisprudence, such acts are considered genocide. The choice of methods of attack—mass shootings, strafing, village bombings—which would inevitably cause detrimental casualties to the Papuans, underlines this intention to destroy.

The claim of genocide however, is questioned by Jakarta-based human rights groups and activists. Haris Azhar of the Commission of the Disappeared and Victims of Violence (KontraS), for instance, stated that ‘there has never been genocide, there have been crimes against humanity’. He reasoned that abuses must constitute government policy to qualify as genocide.

The Indonesian government has not properly responded to the claims raised by the report. Presidential spokesman Teuku Faizasyah expressed that the term genocide is ‘very tendentious’, although admitting that he himself has not read the report. A local military officer in Papua, Lismer Lumban Siantar, called the report a ‘hoax’ and persuaded the public not to be influenced by ‘outsiders’ opinion’.

International human rights lawyer Jennifer Robinson meanwhile, expressed her appreciation for the report, calling it ‘invaluable’. Positive responses were also expressed by Papuan groups, including the La Pago office of the Papuan Cultural Council. A member of the Council, Lemokh Mabel, asserted that there are many other victims yet to be identified in the AHRC’s report. A prominent human rights lawyer in Papua, Gustaf Kawan, told the media that the report gives some hope to the victims and should be used as a reference for the National Human Rights Commission (Komnas HAM) to conduct an investigation.

In 2010, Komnas HAM concluded a report on gross human rights violations that took place in Papua during the military operation period which covers the abuses in the Central Highlands in 1977–1978. The report, however, is marked confidential and thus inaccessible to the public.

In fact, one of the central aims of the AHRC’s report was to raise awareness on the history of violence in Papua. Not only is there a lack of discussion within Indonesian society regarding Papua’s dark history and the role played by the Indonesian government and military, but even resources examining the abuses in the Central Highlands during 1977–1978 are very limited. According to the AHRC’s Director for Policy and Programme Development, Basil Fernando, “The long period of authoritarianism under Soeharto has profoundly silenced the Indonesians from discussing its dark history related to Papua.”

“Without any recognition from the government and the public at large in Indonesia on the state-sponsored wrongdoings in Papua, the ongoing conflicts in the area will only continue,” Fernando added. “There should be genuine efforts from the government to provide justice for the Papuans, for instance by fulfilling their right to the truth.”

One of the recommendations proposed by the report is the establishment of a local truth and reconciliation commission in Papua as provided for by the Special Autonomy Law enacted in 2001. It also calls for the government to comply with its international human rights obligations by lifting unreasonable and disproportionate restrictions on freedom of expression in the country to encourage an open discourse on the history of violence in Papua and by ensuring the safety of any individual speaking up on the issue.

Serving humanity during the tumultuous 20th century: 'Trailblazers in Habits'

Liliana Corrieri

A review of the documentary film 'Trailblazers in Habits'

European religious orders of the Christian faith were initially and essentially orders of monks and friars, historically known for having started foreign missions around the 16th century. For a long time, the primary aim of such missions had been to 'evangelize' and convert to Christianity those remote populations, in Eastern Europe as well as beyond the Mediterranean Sea and Gibraltar, who were not yet aware of the existence of the 'only and true God', and who were therefore considered in need of religious indoctrination.

The order of the Maryknoll Sisters was founded by Mother Mary Joseph Rogers in 1912 in Boston. It was the first order of Catholic Sisters founded in the United States specifically for service overseas. China, Taiwan, the Philippines, Vietnam and Hong Kong were among the first countries which benefitted from the Sisters' services.

The documentary film *Trailblazers in Habits* retraces the beginnings and the evolution of the great work accomplished by this new congregation of innovative nuns over the past century. The documentary is the result of five years of work, with old film clips selected from the Maryknoll archives professionally re-edited in accordance with modern movie-making standards. These clips were integrated in the documentary in order to provide historical evidence to the testimony offered by the several sisters who took part in the project. While sharing memories of their duties, the interviewed sisters also mentioned other sisters, including those who lost their lives on a mission; through their words, they contributed to the authenticity of the documentary.

The first few minutes of the film focus on the innovative approach adopted by the order of the Maryknoll Sisters since its early days and underlines its revolutionary spirit, not only from a religious point of view, but also in terms of the emancipation and self-determination of its members. For the Maryknoll Sisters, working abroad in missions was a way to prove that they could serve God and people in equal capacity as their 'male counterparts'. Being part of such a modern and forward-thinking order for those times, meant empowerment for all of them. They felt they were not women to be protected

and who were to 'follow the path'. Rather, they could choose to do something different and unconventional with their lives. Their vocation was not about praying to God in seclusion or reclusiveness, but concretized into being 'on the field', close to the real world in support of people in need of help. They saw themselves as women in action who could play an active role in relieving contemporary needs. They were indeed emancipated women and innovative Sisters. Their life was one of contemplation in action.

In one of the several interviews included in the documentary, sister Maria Rieckelman, who entered the order in 1945 and served for 15 years as a medical doctor in Korea and Hong Kong, explains how the Maryknoll missions did not aim at converting people, but purely addressed local needs. She remembers a man dying of liver disease. He said to her: *"If you want to baptize me, if you think that would help me, it's fine"*. She replied, *"What I need is not to baptize you. What I need to do is help you to get better."* She continues her explanation, *"I didn't try to convert him. I was never big at conversions. I was good at healing."* Being a specialized psychiatrist as well, Sister M. Rieckelman's contribution included mental health services, which became very important tools of support and rehabilitation as this kind of care was hardly known in those days and almost unavailable in Asia.

The documentary reveals that many of the Maryknoll Sisters on mission in Asia were highly educated and proactive women, with a profound sense of social justice and solidarity and motivated to work towards the enhancement of human dignity. They were called to engage in social, paramedical and educational services. While they were required to possess a variety of skills beforehand, they still had to learn and develop new skills, such as budgeting, administration and a great capacity for adaptation.

Before arriving in China and other eastern countries, the Sisters received no 'orientation' about the cultural and social backgrounds in which they would operate. As many of them point out during their testimony, part of the challenge also included the development of intercultural mediation skills and the understanding of local habits. In order to be more helpful and conquer the reticence of the most remote communities, they also had to learn the local dialects.

Different nuns remember with irony how long it took to simply learn ordinary Chinese characters, and the years it took to start 'getting' jokes. At times, hearing the sisters speaking Chinese, villagers would instead think that they were speaking English!

When the Maryknoll Sisters first arrived in China, their main goal was to provide a series of services to poor communities in remote areas, rather than to establish an institutional church. Their services and skills were offered to sick people, the elderly, neglected children, orphans, women, the poor and homeless people. Providing food, medical

assistance, shelter and protection to the needy ones had always been their priority. It was never like, “*read the Bible and then you’ll get some food*”.

In 1922, a group of six Sisters entered Victoria Harbor aboard a small steamboat, in complete amazement at the amount of bustling activity before their eyes. Ten years after the foundation of their order, the Maryknoll Sisters began their work in Hong Kong, which over the next two decades, brought about the establishment of six schools and a hospital for the poor.

The film notes that in the early 20th century, neither the Colonial Government of Hong Kong nor the authorities in London assumed their social responsibility for the poor, sick or homeless. Therefore, it soon became clear to the Sisters how much needed to be done in the city. Old clips of the early 1920s give testimony of the exceptional assistance provided to the hundreds of poor Chinese migrants and refugees who were increasingly crossing the border and arriving in Hong Kong. The Maryknoll Sisters established the very first primary school for refugees, where children were not only provided with basic education, but were also given milk and food, as a further way to sustain the children in their physical growth and mental development, and also as a way to help their families.

Those Sisters who had previously worked in mainland China could also provide extensive help in terms of counseling and guidance, as they could communicate in some of the local Chinese dialects. As the Hong Kong Government began to slowly invest in the welfare of its people, the sisters were able to use its support to deliver a great deal of social services, mainly education, shelter and health assistance, among the most disadvantaged groups in the city. The Sisters adopted a motivational approach, aimed at encouraging people not to lose hope and to be willing to reconstruct their life. With Chinese women in particular, brought up within patriarchal mindsets and expected to be obedient to their menfolk and devoted to their family, the Sisters tried to stress their potential and to make them realize their value as women equally capable as men.

In schools also, the educational approach was very proactive and children were taught to believe in themselves, to be self-confident and articulate, and to realize and develop their potential. The Sisters always tried to give their students the tools to develop their talents. Miss Nancy Tong, the director and producer of ‘*Trailblazers in Habits*’, is a former student of the Maryknoll Convent School, in Kowloon Tong, Hong Kong, and she remembers the motivation and encouragement received in the pursuit of her aspirations. Nowadays, she is a successful documentary film maker in New York and she is glad she did not become a physiotherapist, which is what her mother wanted for her, in order to earn a regular salary.

The Sisters also used to invite their students to share their gifts in a way beneficial to others. Volunteerism was a great part of their school values, with the idea that students could give back to society what they had received. It is important to point out that not all the pupils enrolled in the Maryknoll schools were or became Catholics. School was not about learning to be religious or being introduced to the Sacred Scriptures; it was about becoming good persons. The Sisters never provided their services to help, support or educate Christians only. They were flexible, taking care of people regardless of their beliefs, origin or ethnicity. They were respectful of other faiths and even willing to learn from other forms of spirituality.

The Maryknoll Sisters, despite being a religious congregation for missions overseas, were very engaged within the United States, too. After the attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941, Japanese Americans living in the west part of the States were ordered to move into internment camps for 'security reasons'. Film clips of the time offer testimony of the commitment of two Maryknoll Sisters in particular, who were themselves American citizens of Japanese origin, and who decided to voluntarily accompany these families to one of the biggest camps in California, in order to assist them during the internment. In particular, the two Sisters took care of the education of those American-Japanese children who were discriminated against in state schools during those years. The church in the camp was not primarily a religious place of worship, but a referral point for the entire community, a place where they could feel like a family.

In documenting the great work undertaken by the Sisters 'at home', the foundation in 1955 of the 'Queen of the World Hospital' in Kansas City, Missouri is also included. It was the first integrated hospital in the United States where African-American doctors and nurses were trained and also worked with 'white' medical personnel to cure patients regardless of the colour of their skin, with no segregation or discriminatory policies in place. This was quite ahead of the times, considering that the Civil Rights Act was passed nine years later. During the 1960s, in fact, the Maryknoll Sisters showed their solidarity with those American citizens marching in the streets making claims for social and civil rights. Photos and clips document how, particularly in the streets of Selma in Alabama, they marched in the forefront to prevent the police from opening fire on the human rights leaders and helped those who were injured during the clashes. They were known both within and outside their home country for their belief in justice and freedom. They are renowned for being women engaged with the world, who act and speak up.

During their service as nuns, they had to fight against the initial distrust of people, and at times the aversion of local authorities. As women, they had to deal with moments of discouragement, in which they questioned themselves about motherhood and other aspects of a woman's life that they had chosen to give up. There were times when even their faith was strained, but their strength and determination 'gained the upper hand'.

They have been women ahead of their time, even in the taking of photographs of their missions and writing journals from the early 1920s, which today makes their archives extremely rich. The portrait that emerges after watching the documentary film *'Trailblazers in Habits'*, is one of courageous women, with strong personalities and a marked individuality, which was by no means reduced or hidden by the habit they used to wear, as many people may tend to believe when thinking about nuns.

During the 20th century the 'face' of the Maryknoll Sisters has changed. Today they count approximately 500 members from 18 different countries. Yet, the challenges and the missions are still the same. It's a circle and a continuous struggle for social justice. The Maryknoll Sisters now serve in Albania, American Samoa, Bangladesh, Bolivia, Brazil, Cambodia, Chile, China, East Timor, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Japan, Kenya, Myanmar, Namibia, Panama, Peru, the Philippines, South Korea, Taiwan, Tanzania, Thailand, the United States and Zimbabwe.

New reality being formed

Shahed Kayes

My thoughts are birds of time

My heart is overwhelmed exploring the flow of time
It no more runs after fen-fire birds
Life is a living poem, I realize

My moments are now extreme Kavery
Tiny bits of life flourish therein
Moments which brighten the dark;
Birds of light pass flashing their wings

A strange dream begins to enliven life, at such times
It feels good to be alive;
Mysteries fill my cup

My proud, golden sail—she treads alone—away into her own wild
And my thoughts; the birds of time
Fly, from life, to life.

Mayadip School

A play of light and shadow, this is
The play of death and life

It keeps pulling me towards itself
At dawn—the childhood of day—
Darkness packs up, its serene wings
Bay-hostesses awaken
Their eyes—sleepless, red, fire stricken
Therein the magic of transformation
On the flowing Meghna shore;
Life is, yet, partially truthful
It flows central, between two deep sighs

Between the narrow paths of dreams and nightmares
Water sets its affairs, in and around
Homes of the golden clouds
And, our morning children awaken, one by one.

Shahbag Movement

And this is how
Our dreams become subject of constitutional rape

Waters are rising somewhere, in secret
In symbols of victory they carve faces of evils
These preposterous acts
And despicability, in the name of justice,
Should stop today

The Deeper we go into the night
The New Generation Square is more awake
Facebook literally walks to the street;
Today, the whole country is Shahbag

The whole country is singing songs of freedom
The light of liberation
—of nineteen seventy one—spreading like music aloud
Today, our country is awake

Illuminated with youthfulness; rays of realizations
New reality is being formed
—Wake up people, our back is stuck

Shahed Kayes was born in Dhaka, Bangladesh on 16 September 1971. He was brought up and educated in Sonargaon, Dhaka and Chennai. He completed his M.S in Computer Science.

He started writing poetry in the early nineties. He has published two volumes of poetry in Bengali: *Experience of the turning point* (1999) and *The lost voice in the pick* (2003).

Kayes's poetry is both the instrument and the outcome of his attempt to come to terms with himself. One finds in the poems the imprint of a keen mind trying to explore and communicate on a personal level feelings of loss and deprivation. Kayes is conscious in his poetry about the contradictions in society and the human struggle.

Kayes is also involved with social work and human rights activities. Kayes and his team are fighting to save the life, livelihood and environment of some 12,000 persons in the Mayadip and Nunertek islands for the past four years. Several times his life was under threat, for working for the human rights of his countrymen.

Practicing Ethics in Action

Ethics in Action begins with the realization that both law and morality have failed the people of many countries, who are today facing incredible forms of cruelty that they have little power to eradicate. Despite all the rhetoric of empowerment, the reality witnessed in most Asian countries is desperation and powerlessness. The two ingredients necessary for any real empowerment of ordinary people are law and morality. If living conditions are to improve, defective legal systems and the failures of upholding ethics and morality cannot be ignored. *article 2*, a publication of the Asian Legal Resource Centre, sister organization of the Asian Human Rights Commission, is devoted to discussing matters relating to defective legal systems obstructing the implementation of human rights. *Ethics in Action* will be devoted to discussing how movements and leaderships claiming to uphold ethics and morality have failed to promote and protect human rights.

The AHRC invites submissions to *Ethics in Action* by individuals and organizations interested in issues of human rights, ethics and morality in Asia. Submissions can include articles, poetry, fiction and artwork. For more information, please write to eia@ahrc.asia.

Other regular publications by the Asian Human Rights Commission:

Article 2 – This quarterly publication covers issues relating to the implementation of human rights standards as proposed by article 2 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

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