

WELCOME

21st July 2012

WONG KAI SHING,

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF ASIAN LEGAL RESOURCE CENTRE, HONG KONG

Dear esteemed guests and friends,

On behalf of the Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC), Hong Kong, and the Rehabilitation and Research Centre for Torture Victims (RCT), Denmark, I would like to extend a very warm welcome to the 2012 Asian Alliance against Torture and Ill-Treatment Parliamentary Meeting.

The Meeting of Parliamentarians is a recent initiative by two non-governmental organisations under the aegis of the Asian Alliance Against Torture and Ill-Treatment (AAATI) aimed at establishing a core group of Asian leaders and parliamentarians who will take responsibility for and actively work towards the prohibition of torture and other forms of cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment and punishment within the legal framework of their respective countries. This year, we are pleased to present the second instalment of the Parliamentary Meeting. It will be held from 21-24 July 2012 at Royal Park Hotel in Sha Tin, Hong Kong.

It is our great hope that this meeting, jointly organised by the AHRC and the RCT, will pave the way for increased and enhanced engagement of parliamentarians in the promotion of universal norms and ideals explicitly expressed by prominent international declarations, resolutions and treaties. The UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT) is one such key legal document that places a legal and moral obligation on state actors not only to desist from violent, barbarous and injurious acts that demean a human being's inherent dignity and endanger that individual's health and life, but to practically combat such practices by outlawing it.

You are all painfully aware, as we are, that the practice of torture and ill-treatment is pervasive and prevalent in many state institutions within Asian countries, particularly among law enforcement (police), paramilitary and military institutions. The practice of torture is not only barbaric, but it is scientifically crude and backward, particularly where better methods for obtaining evidence have already been proposed, implemented and are readily available to those in a position to investigate crime. The practice of torture is therefore also a troubling manifestation of grave defects in the investigative process, failures that would in turn compromise prosecution, conviction and rule of law in these countries. By fighting such monstrous and primitive practices, we express not only abhorrence of these reprehensible acts and attitudes but a genuine desire to endorse and advocate the supremacy of law in our countries.

(a)

The objectives and expected outcomes of this meeting are as follows.

Objectives

1. To promote the role of parliamentarians in their state's accession to the CAT as well as in the implementation, operation and maintenance of a sound legal framework that criminalises and systematically eliminates the practice of torture and ill-treatment;
2. To facilitate and develop cooperation between parliamentarians and civil society groups working against torture and ill-treatment in Asia;
3. To host permanent fora composed of potential, current and ex-Asian parliamentarians against torture and ill-treatment and generate opportunities for genuine, critical and constructive feedback and analyses concerning the adoption of the CAT within local-national laws as well as regarding countries' adherence to its provisions.

Expected Outcomes

1. Increased understanding of parliamentarians concerning the importance of the CAT and the crucial role they play in the accession by their countries to the CAT;
2. Enhanced ability on the part of parliamentarians to design initiatives that will influence legislature through the active advocacy for legal or institutional reformation geared toward the eventual elimination of practices of torture or ill-treatment in their respective countries;
3. Strengthened formal and informal cooperation between civil society groups and actors of the AAATI, evidenced in particular by the formulation of common strategies and the joint organisation of effective programmes, that aspires to the eradication of torture and ill-treatment in Asian countries

Today, even as we celebrate your presence amongst us, we call upon your convictions of the supremacy of law, the sovereignty of the people and the love you have for your country and your people. We call upon your belief in the dignity of every man, woman and child, and your appreciation of our common humanity in the advancement of this cause. We take the liberty, and revel in the privilege, of appealing to you, in your capacity as leaders and change-makers, to join us in this exciting venture to change for the better the lives of millions in Asia. We thank you for aspiring with us to a better, brighter, fairer and safer world for all.