



**ASIA PACIFIC FORUM**  
ADVANCING HUMAN RIGHTS IN OUR REGION



# ANNUAL REPORT 2015–2016

The APF is the leading human rights organisation in the Asia Pacific.

Established in 1996, we are a coalition of 22 national human rights institutions (NHRIs) from all corners of the region.

**Our vision is for an Asia Pacific where everyone enjoys human rights.**

We do this by providing the support our members need so they can be powerful agents for change in their respective countries. We also work with governments and civil society in the region to promote the establishment of new NHRIs.

The APF is grateful for the support of donors who share our commitment to promoting and protecting human rights in the Asia Pacific.

## Contents

About the APF	1
How we drive positive change	4
Key achievements for 2015-16	6
Providing advice and expertise	8
Building stronger national human rights institutions	10
Collaborating and sharing knowledge	14
Promoting gender equality	17
Contributing at the national, regional and international level	20
Strengthening organisational leadership and governance	23
Our goals for the year ahead	25

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# ABOUT THE APF

The APF was established in 1996 with five members. In 2015–2016, our membership included 22 national human rights institutions (NHRIs), drawn from all corners of the Asia Pacific.

The APF provides practical support and advice to our members to help them be as effective as possible.

We also bring our members together to develop a shared vision and shared strategies to tackle many of the most serious and complex human rights challenges in our region.

Our approach is based on collaboration and partnership.

We also provide advice and expertise to governments and civil society in the region to support the establishment of independent NHRIs that meet the international standards set out in the Paris Principles.

In addition, we develop partnerships at the international and regional levels to promote and protect human rights and to ensure that the collective voice of our members is heard.



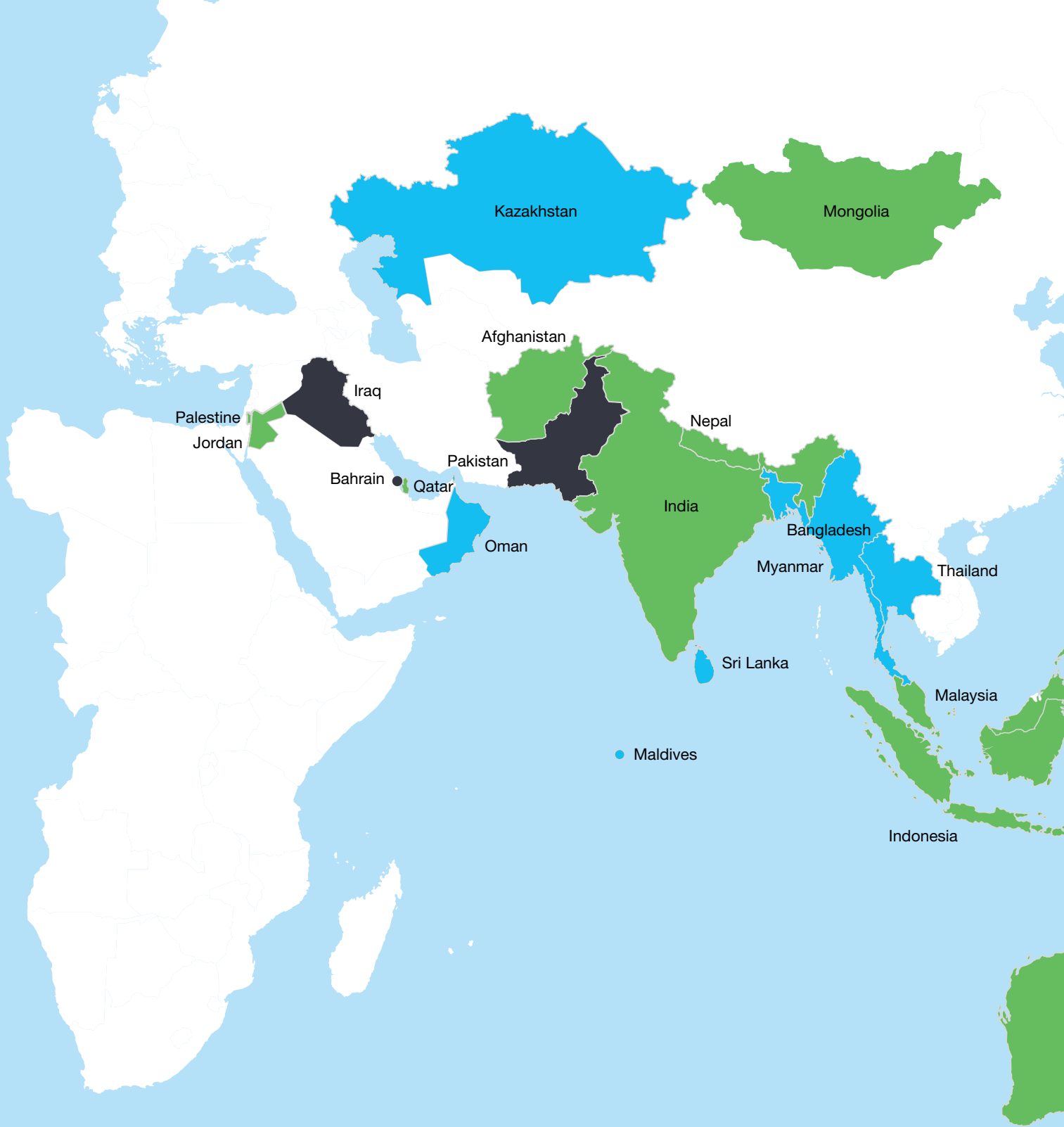
## What are national human rights institutions?

NHRIs are established, by law or in the constitution, to promote and protect human rights in their respective countries.

Importantly, NHRIs **operate and function independently from government**.

Strong and effective NHRIs make a genuine difference in the lives of individuals and communities by:

- > **Monitoring** the human rights situation in the country and the actions of the State
- > **Providing advice** to the State so that it can meet its international and domestic human rights commitments
- > Receiving, investigating and **resolving complaints** of human rights violations
- > Undertaking **human rights education** programs for all sections of the community
- > **Engaging with the international human rights community** to share information, raise pressing issues and advocate for recommendations that can be made to their State.



- Full Members of the APF
- Associate Members of the APF
- New NHRIs (not currently accredited with the ICC)

The depiction and use of boundaries, geographic names and related data shown on this map are not warranted to be error free nor do they necessarily imply official endorsement or acceptance by the APF





## Our members

The APF currently has 14 full members<sup>1</sup> and eight associate members<sup>2</sup>, drawn from across the region.

- > **Afghanistan** Independent Human Rights Commission
- > **Australian** Human Rights Commission
- > National Human Rights Commission of **Bangladesh**
- > National Human Rights Commission of **India**
- > **Indonesian** National Commission on Human Rights
- > **Jordan** National Centre for Human Rights
- > National Centre for Human Rights of **Kazakhstan**
- > Human Rights Commission of **Malaysia**
- > Human Rights Commission of the **Maldives**
- > **Myanmar** National Human Rights Commission
- > National Human Rights Commission of **Mongolia**
- > National Human Rights Commission of **Nepal**
- > **New Zealand** Human Rights Commission
- > **Oman** Human Rights Commission
- > **Palestine** Independent Commission for Human Rights
- > Commission on Human Rights of the **Philippines**
- > National Human Rights Committee of **Qatar**
- > the National Human Rights Commission of **Korea**
- > Ombudsman of **Samoa**
- > Human Rights Commission of **Sri Lanka**
- > National Human Rights Commission of **Thailand**
- > Provedor for Human Rights and Justice of **Timor-Leste**.

1 Full membership of the APF is equivalent 'A status' accreditation at the international level.

2 Associate membership of the APF is equivalent to 'B status' accreditation at the international level.

# HOW WE DRIVE POSITIVE CHANGE

Bringing about positive change on complex issues is difficult, long-term work. It requires many committed groups and individuals to work together for shared goals.

We are committed to work with and alongside others – governments, civil society and international partners – to build communities across the Asia Pacific where the human rights of all people are respected, protected and fulfilled.

Between 2015 and 2020, our goal is to deliver better human rights outcomes for:

- > Children
- > Women
- > People with disabilities
- > Asylum seekers, refugees, migrants and internally displaced persons
- > Older persons.

We are also working with governments and business groups to build understanding and respect for human rights.

Other critical human rights issues – such as preventing torture and protecting the rights of marginalised groups – continue to be an important focus of our training and capacity building work.

## Our theory of change

As independent bodies with powers to investigate and report on human rights violations, NHRIs have a unique role to stand up for those in need of protection and to hold their governments to account for human rights obligations.

Across the region, their courageous work has helped generate genuine change in many different ways: removing discrimination in laws and policies, improving the practices of law enforcement and government officials, giving vulnerable groups a say in decisions that affect them, supporting business to develop better ways of operating, and challenging negative stereotypes about marginalised groups.

Unlike the other regions in the world, there is no regional court or protection system covering the Asia Pacific that people can turn to when their human rights are violated. This makes the work of NHRIs in our region even more critical.

The role of the APF is to support NHRIs in the Asia Pacific to deliver on their mandate and generate positive change that makes a difference for people, especially those on the edges of society.



## How we contribute to change

A number of NHRIs in our region are newly established. Others operate in very challenging social, cultural or political environments.

The APF works to support our members and to promote the establishment of new NHRIs in the region by:

- > Providing advice and expertise
- > Building stronger NHRIs
- > Collaborating and sharing knowledge
- > Promoting gender equality
- > Contributing at the national, regional and international level
- > Strengthening organisational leadership and governance.

This annual report charts our work in 2015–16 to deliver positive results across each of these areas.

### Our activities are designed to deliver four high-level outcomes:

- > **Outcome 1: Increased number of NHRIs complying with UN and international standards.**
- > **Outcome 2: NHRIs are better able to perform their functions in the areas of complaints, education, monitoring, advocacy and reporting.**
- > **Outcome 3: A more conducive environment for the recognition and effectiveness of NHRIs at the national, regional and international level.**
- > **Outcome 4: The APF is a well-governed, sustainably resourced, strategically directed and member-owned organisation.**

6<sup>TH</sup> WORLD CONGRESS  
AGAINST THE DEATH PENALTY  
OSLO 21-23 JUNE 2016



### APF MEMBERS COLLABORATE TO END THE DEATH PENALTY

Over the past year, a number of APF members have advocated strongly for the abolition of the death penalty in their countries. At our Annual Meeting in August 2015, APF members agreed to work together to persuade their governments to move towards a de facto moratorium or the abolition of the death penalty across the region.

In the first of a series of activities to promote regional collaboration towards this, senior representatives from 13 APF members joined with NHRIs from other regions at the 6th World Congress Against the Death Penalty, held in Oslo, Norway from 21-23 June 2016.

In a statement to the World Congress, NHRIs made a commitment “to promote the abolition of the death penalty, and to monitor, bear witness to, and report on the manner in which such sentences are determined and carried out”.

At the start of 2016, we began a project to update the landmark 1999 report on the death penalty by the APF Advisory Council of Jurists. This will be a valuable resource to support our members in their advocacy with national governments and to foster collaboration between APF members at the bilateral, regional and international levels.

# KEY ACHIEVEMENTS FOR 2015–16

## General Assembly calls for NHRIs to have expanded role

While NHRIs have had independent participation rights at the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council in Geneva for many years, a ground-breaking resolution on NHRIs by the General Assembly in December 2015 has significantly strengthened the case for NHRI participation in major New York-based UN bodies. The General Assembly resolution was led by Germany and co-sponsored by 90 governments, including 14 from the Asia Pacific region. The APF played a key role in the campaign for this resolution, including coordinating advocacy with governments, NHRIs and civil society.

## UN body for women and girls opens space for NHRIs

Building on the momentum from the General Assembly resolution, the APF continued its long-standing campaign for the independent participation of NHRIs in the work of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). In an historic decision, the Agreed Conclusions issued at the end of the CSW's 60th Session in March 2016 included a standalone paragraph to encourage the CSW Secretariat to consider how it could enhance the participation of NHRIs, including at the next CSW session in 2017. Our hope is that NHRIs will soon be able to contribute their insight and expertise to global policy-making on the rights of women and girls.

## Building collegiality through good communication

Good communication is vital to build understanding and foster collegiality between APF members. During the year, members of the newly-established APF Communications Network helped prepare stories and 'good practice' case studies for the APF website and across various social media channels. Our vibrant network of communications professionals met in Kathmandu in April 2016 to deepen their collaboration and develop new skills in areas such as digital storytelling. In 2016, we also began work on building an Arabic language version of the APF website to improve access to information for our members, governments and civil society groups in West Asia.

## Innovative project documents progress to prevent torture

Over the past 18 months, nine senior representatives from seven APF members have implemented strategic projects to counter the risk of torture and ill-treatment in their countries. Supported by mentors from the APF and the Association for the Prevention, each project has made a tangible difference to benefit people deprived of their liberty. The outcomes of these projects were recorded in the *Torture Prevention Ambassadors Good Practice Report*, launched in Geneva in June 2016. The group also delivered an oral statement to the 32nd Session of the UN Human Rights Council, highlighting the vital contribution of NHRIs in the fight against torture and ill-treatment. Funding for the Torture Prevention Ambassadors project was provided by the European Union.

## Equipping our members to protect those at risk of violence and discrimination

A number of tragic events this past year have graphically demonstrated that violence against members of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) communities continues to be a daily reality across all parts of the world. In June 2016, the APF published a world-first manual for NHRIs on their role to promote and protect human rights in relation to sexual orientation, gender identity and sex characteristics. Part of an ongoing program of activities with UNDP, our manual sets out many practical ways that NHRIs can work to build community understanding and counter the discrimination and violence that LGBTI people commonly experience.



## Advice and support for international accreditation

We provided timely and high-quality advice to support eight APF members - more than a third of our membership - seeking accreditation or reaccreditation with the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions in 2015–16. Our members said the advice they received was clear, detailed and allowed them to participate confidently in the accreditation process. Of the eight, five APF members were reaccredited with 'A status',<sup>3</sup> one was accredited with 'A status',<sup>4</sup> one was accredited with 'B status' and one was downgraded to 'B status'. 'A status' accreditation means that an NHRI meets international standards and this recognition opens the door for it to participate in the work of the UN.

**The APF is one of four regional coordinating committees of NHRIs. Regional coordinating committees have also been established to support the NHRIs of Africa, the Americas and Europe. At the international level, the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions promotes the establishment and operation of NHRIs in compliance with the Paris Principles.**

**What sets the APF apart is the breadth and depth of the services we offer to our members, including thematic training programs, professional development resources and an innovative capacity assessment program. We are the only equivalent body that provides specialist advice on NHRI legislation and international accreditation for our members, governments and other stakeholders. We are also a leader among NHRI bodies in promoting and monitoring gender equality.**

3 The reaccreditation decisions in relation to two members will take effect from August 2016.

4 The decision will take effect from August 2016.

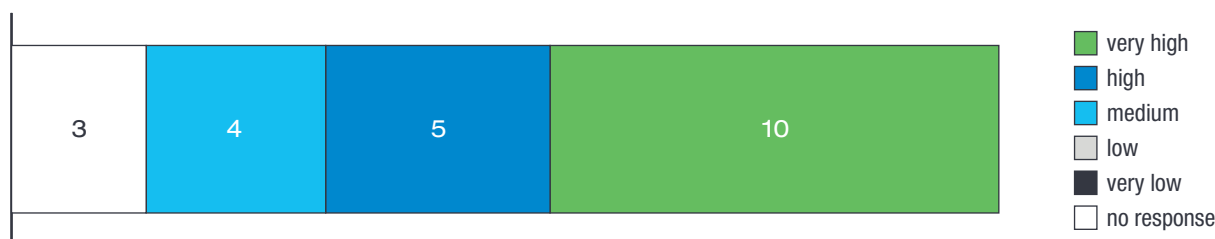


Members of the successful Torture Prevention Ambassadors project gather in Geneva, June 2016



# PROVIDING ADVICE AND EXPERTISE

## Value to members of providing advice and expertise



Source: APF Member Survey 2016

## What we achieved

- > Supported eight APF members – more than a third of our total membership – to seek international accreditation during the year, which supports their participation in the work of the UN.
- > Provided high-quality legal and policy advice to help strengthen our members and assist governments, UN agencies and civil society groups in the region.

A fundamental goal of the APF is to assist our members by providing timely advice and expertise on the legal and policy matters they raise with us.

We also promote the establishment of independent NHRIs in the region and provide advice to governments and civil society on the unique status of NHRIs; their roles and functions; their relationship with government, parliament and civil society; and the international accreditation process.

## Membership and accreditation

Membership of the APF remained constant at 22 NHRIs in 2015–16, with 14 full members and eight associate members.

More than a third (eight) of APF members sought accreditation or reaccreditation with the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI)<sup>5</sup> during the year. The following decisions were taken by the GANHRI's Sub-Committee on Accreditation in respect to our members:

- > Malaysia, Palestine, Qatar, New Zealand and Korea were re-accredited with 'A status'<sup>6</sup>
- > Myanmar was accredited with 'B status'
- > Thailand was downgraded to 'B status'<sup>7</sup>
- > Samoa was accredited with 'A status'.<sup>8</sup>

5 This body was previously known as the International Coordinating Committee of National Institutions for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights. The new name was adopted in March 2016.

6 The decisions in relation to the New Zealand and Korea will take effect from August 2016.

7 The National Human Rights Commission of Thailand was downgraded in 2015 based on concerns about the selection process for Commissioners and a failure to engage on urgent human rights issues in a timely manner.

8 The decision will take effect in August 2016, at which time the Office of the Ombudsman of Samoa will be upgraded to a full APF member.

The APF provided timely and high-quality advice to support each of our members seeking international accreditation. Our members reported that the advice they received was clear, detailed and allowed them to participate confidently in the accreditation process.

## Advisory services

In 2015–2016, the APF responded to 31 requests for legal and policy advice from a broad range of groups, including our members, GANHRI, governments, UN agencies, civil society organisations and universities.

The majority of requests for advice came from APF members, including in relation to:

- > An NHRI's legislative or practical compliance with existing international standards
- > Addressing issues that were likely to impact on the effectiveness and efficient operation of NHRIs
- > Accreditation or reaccreditation.

We also provided advice to other stakeholders, which included representations to a national parliamentary inquiry on the death penalty; to GANHRI on amendments to its statute and accreditation procedure; and to civil society organisations on the structure, functions and founding law of an NHRI.

One way that we assess the quality and relevance of our advice is by comparing the issues we raise with our members against the issues raised in the recommendations of GANHRI's Sub-Committee on Accreditation. Last year, the advice we provided to our members undertaking the accreditation process was reflected in 18 of the 24 issues noted by the Sub-Committee.

We also seek to support our members in very tangible ways, such as strengthening their founding legislation. Last year we provided advice and good practice examples to the National Human Rights Commission of Korea in relation to two issues: having an open and transparent selection process for Commissioners and enhancing the independence of the NHRI. The Commission used this advice to successfully lobby the government for changes to its founding legislation. The changes also assisted the Commission in being reaccredited with 'A status'.



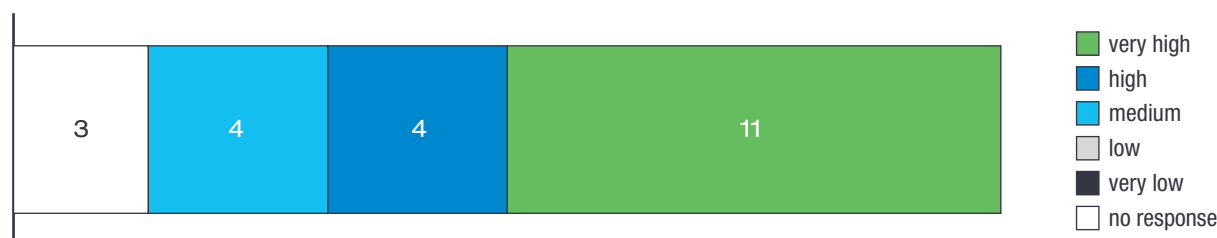
## GIVING NHRIs A STRONG VOICE ON THE INTERNATIONAL STAGE

'A status' NHRIs are able to participate independently at meetings of the UN Human Rights Council, the human rights treaty bodies and in the Universal Periodic Review. Advances are also being made to open up UN processes in New York to the participation of NHRIs. In other words, 'A status' accreditation gives NHRIs a voice to raise pressing issues, share information and recommend solutions to advance the rights of vulnerable groups in their respective countries.

To ensure consistency and to minimise duplication, the APF considers the accreditation decisions of GANHRI to determine APF membership status. Full membership of the APF is equivalent 'A status' accreditation and associate membership is equivalent to 'B status' accreditation.

# BUILDING STRONGER NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS INSTITUTIONS

Value to members of building stronger national human rights institutions



Source: APF Member Survey 2016

## What we achieved

- > Developed an innovative model – the Torture Prevention Ambassadors program – to drive human rights progress at the national level and promote collaboration across the region.
- > Supported new leadership teams appointed to APF members and other NHRIs to identify priority areas for action and advocacy.
- > Published a world-first resource on LGBTI rights, as well as video materials to support our members in their work with other vulnerable groups.

Independent and effective NHRIs can be powerful agents for change.

They can use their complaint handling, investigation, advisory and education functions to promote and protect the rights of all people, especially vulnerable groups, as well as engage with the international human rights system to draw attention to pressing issues.

Most of the APF's activities are designed to help our members do their work as effectively as possible, including:

- > Capacity assessments that enable our members to identify achievable steps to strengthen their institutions
- > High Level Dialogues that support new leadership teams to develop their collective goals and chart an agenda for human rights progress
- > Professional development training programs and resources to support staff in their efforts to drive meaningful change for those vulnerable to human rights violations.

## Measuring the capacity of APF members

The APF has developed a new monitoring program to chart the growing capacity of our members to be effective agents for change.

Factors that help build the capacity of NHRIs to promote and protect human rights in their countries include, among other things, strong legislation; deep engagement with civil society; focused strategic planning; a smart organisational structure and operating procedures; opportunities for staff training and development; and up-to-date information technology.



The APF offers practical support to assist our members to develop their capacity and early indicators demonstrate they are making solid progress:

- > From 19 survey responses this year, eight members said their capacity was 'a lot higher', eight said it was 'a little higher', two rated it as 'about the same' and one reported it to be 'a lot lower' (as a result of a 50 per cent funding cut to the NHRI).
- > APF members continued to make strong progress in implementing recommendations from the APF's capacity assessment program, run in partnership with UNDP and OHCHR. To date, 17 of the 22 APF members have undertaken a capacity assessment program.<sup>9</sup>
- > The applications of the eight APF members who sought international accreditation in 2015–16 revealed a track record of effective human rights advocacy, including for amendments to domestic laws to protect human rights and ratification of international human rights treaties.

## Supporting new Commissioners

Depending on its founding legislation, a new leadership team will be appointed to an NHRI every three to five years. The APF offers newly-appointed Commissioners the opportunity to take part in a facilitated dialogue about their responsibilities and their collective goals to promote and protect human rights.

These High Level Dialogues provide an opportunity for thinking, planning and renewing the NHRI's relationship with the APF. During 2015–16, the APF hosted High Level Dialogues with the leadership teams of the:

- > Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines
- > Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka
- > Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (not currently an APF member)
- > Fiji Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (not currently an APF member).

<sup>9</sup> Timor Leste (2015), Samoa (2014), Indonesia (2014), Oman (2014), Bangladesh (2013), Nepal (2013), Philippines (2012), New Zealand (2012), Australia (2012), Sri Lanka (2012), Mongolia (2011), Afghanistan (2011), Palestine (2011), Jordan (2010), Thailand (2010), Maldives (2009) and Malaysia (2008).



## SUPPORTING HUMAN RIGHTS PROGRESS IN SRI LANKA

In June 2016, Sri Lanka's President Maithripala Sirisena joined a public march organised by the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka to launch its campaign to stamp out torture in places of detention, signalling the new government's focus on human rights.

A fresh leadership team was appointed to the Commission in 2015. Following the APF High Level Dialogue in January 2016, the Commission has requested the APF's assistance with its strategic planning, a review of its complaint handling procedures, training for its complaint handling staff and training on conducting national inquiries.





## Professional development training and resources

The APF offers a broad range of training programs to build the professional knowledge, skills and capacity of Commissioners and staff working in our member institutions.

We use a blended learning approach to deliver our training, combining online learning with a face-to-face workshop that brings together participants for group discussions and practical activities. Gender considerations are built into our training content and methodology.

In 2015–16, we ran blended courses that benefitted all but one of our members, including on monitoring immigration detention and on investigating allegations of torture.

We delivered a workshop for the Myanmar National Human Rights Commission, in partnership with the Raoul Wallenberg Institute, on the steps involved in conducting a national inquiry on the rights of people with disabilities.

And, as part of the opening of the APF sub-regional office in Qatar, we held a two-day seminar for governments, NGOs and other stakeholders in West Asia on the establishment and role of independent NHRIs.

APF professional resources provide clear information and examples of good practice to support staff and Commissioners in their human rights work. In the past year, we published:

- > A world-first manual for NHRIs on promoting and protecting human rights in relation to sexual orientation, gender identity and sex characteristics, in partnership with UNDP
- > The *Torture Prevention Ambassadors Good Practice Report*, following the completion of our 18-month project with the Association for the Prevention of Torture
- > A video series for NHRIs on promoting and protecting the human rights of women and girls
- > A video series on the unique role and functions of NHRIs.



## Making concrete gains to prevent torture and ill-treatment

In 2013, the APF and the Association for the Prevention of Torture began a three-year project to strengthen the capacity of NHRIs in the Asia Pacific to prevent torture and other ill-treatment. Funded by the EU, the project included a series of tailored training programs for APF members and the establishment of a regional network of Torture Prevention Ambassadors.

The Torture Prevention Ambassadors project sought to harness the unique mandate of NHRIs and the expertise and commitment of senior NHRI staff to identify what approaches work best in preventing torture and ill treatment in different country situations.

A merit-based selection process was used to appoint nine Torture Prevention Ambassadors, representing NHRIs from seven countries across the region: Australia (two), Maldives, Mongolia (two), New Zealand, Philippines, South Korea and Timor Leste.

Each Torture Prevention Ambassador was tasked with planning and implementing a project to counter the root causes of torture and ill treatment in their respective countries.

They were assigned an expert mentor to provide support and advice, they received training on project management and communication and they developed additional skills on the technical dimensions of torture prevention during project meetings in Sydney (November 2014) and Ulaanbaatar (August 2015). Importantly, the Torture Prevention Ambassadors received a small amount of seed funding to implement their projects.

At the conclusion of their individual projects, each could point to tangible outcomes that would ultimately benefit persons deprived of their liberty.

These results were recorded in the *Torture Prevention Ambassadors Good Practice Report*, launched in Geneva in June 2016. The group also delivered an oral statement to the 32nd Session of the UN Human Rights Council, highlighting the vital contribution of NHRIs in preventing torture and ill-treatment.

Based on the success of the Torture Prevention Ambassadors project, we believe a similar methodology can be used to address other pressing human rights issues in the Asia Pacific region.

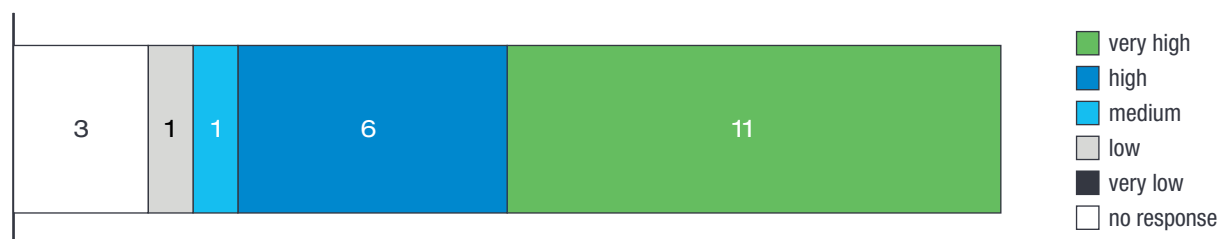


In the Philippines, Torture Prevention Ambassador Jacqueline De Guia worked with members of the Philippine National Police to identify the challenges they faced in day-to-day policing and develop a series of practical recommendations to drive genuine, grassroots reform.



# COLLABORATING AND SHARING KNOWLEDGE

## Value to members of collaborating and sharing knowledge



Source: APF Member Survey 2016

## What we achieved

- > Encouraged and supported APF members to identify and pursue opportunities for joint advocacy, including abolition of the death penalty in our region.
- > Established a vibrant network of communications professionals to share examples of good practice to encourage and inspire other APF members in their work.

One of the great strengths of the APF is the deep connections and collegiality that exists between our members.

Despite the diverse social, cultural and political environments in which they operate, APF members are committed to sharing experiences, exchanging information and working collaboratively to address common human rights challenges.

Each year, the APF hosts a range of meetings that provide opportunities for discussion and networking among our members.

## APF Annual Meeting and Biennial Conference

The role of NHRIs to prevent torture in places of detention and to support the work of human rights defenders were key themes of our 20th Annual Meeting and Biennial Conference held in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia from 26-28 August 2015.

Over 150 people attended the event, including APF members, other NHRIs, governments, UN agencies and civil society organisations. This year's gathering featured presentations from a broad range of speakers, including the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders and APF Torture Prevention Ambassadors.

At the Annual Meeting, APF members discussed how they could work together to lobby governments in the region to move towards a de facto moratorium or abolition of the death penalty. These conversations resulted in a delegation of APF members attending the 6th World Congress Against the Death Penalty, held in Oslo in June 2016 (see page 5 for more details).

APF members reported that they valued highly the opportunity to meet together at APF 20 and deepen their relationships with each other. Sixteen women and 33 men representing 21 of 22 APF members attended the 2015 Annual meeting, which was a less equal balance than last year (24 women and 36 men) but still a step forward from previously male-dominated meetings.

## Sharing good practice

Good communication is critical for building understanding and collegiality between APF members. During the past year, members of the APF Communications Network prepared a number of stories and good practice case studies for publication on the APF website, as well as promoting APF resources within their respective NHRIs and across their social media channels.

The group, established in April 2015, includes senior staff with wide-ranging professional expertise in human rights education, communications and promotion. All 22 APF members have nominated representatives, as have the NHRIs of Iraq and Bahrain.

In April 2016, the APF Communications Network met for a three-day workshop in Kathmandu, Nepal. Twenty participants from 17 APF members attended; all were actively involved in the design and delivery of the workshop. The importance of storytelling in human rights advocacy was a key theme, with participants also sharing their experiences in using social media and engaging with journalists. All participants rated the workshop extremely highly.

The APF Communications Network currently comprises 10 women and 14 men. We especially encourage Network members to share stories and case studies on their NHRI's efforts to promote and protect the rights of women and girls.

Language continues to be the greatest barrier to effective communication across the APF membership. In 2016, we began work to develop an Arabic-language version of the APF website in order to provide better access to APF information and resources for our members, other NHRIs, governments and civil society in West Asia.



### TELLING STORIES THAT MATTER

APF Communications Network members worked together to develop skills in digital storytelling when they met together at the workshop in Nepal in April 2016.







## FOSTERING COLLABORATION THAT LEADS TO ACTION

During the year, APF members reported they had formed partnerships with each other to pursue practical outcomes in relation to business and human rights, abolition of the death penalty, improved ASEAN regional cooperation, countering slavery and human trafficking, and promoting the rights of migrant workers, refugees and asylum seekers.

## Senior Executive Officers Network

Established in 2002, annual meetings of the APF Senior Executive Officers (SEO) Network are an opportunity for the senior staff from our members to discuss emerging human rights themes and share expertise on organisational policies, management practices and staff development strategies.

In November 2015, the APF held the SEO Roundtable in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Discussion focused on the role of NHRIs to address human rights concerns around access to safe water and sanitation. Participants also shared different approaches to monitoring the implementation and impact of programs delivered by their NHRIs and exchanged policies in relation to codes of conduct for Commissioners and staff.

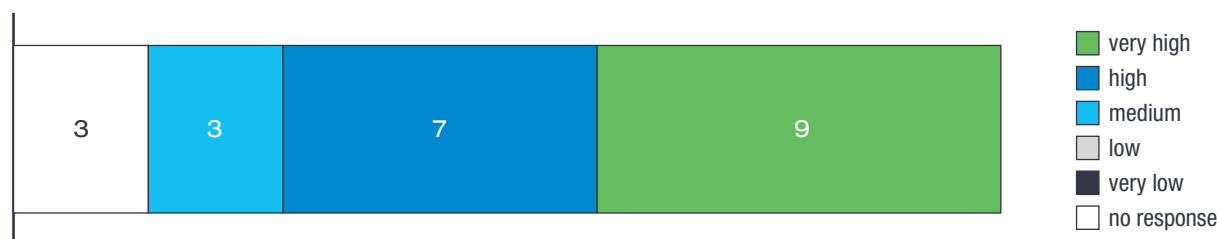
The SEO Roundtable was attended by 12 men and 10 women, representing all APF members. All participants who completed the workshop survey (17 of 22) said the meeting was very useful for building and maintaining relationships.





# PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY

Value to members of promoting gender equality



Source: APF Member Survey 2016

## What we achieved

- > **Provided practical support to our members in their efforts to promote and protect the rights of women, including a ground-breaking workshop on reproductive rights in Afghanistan.**
- > **Ensured gender considerations were integrated and measured across all areas of our work – including budgets, activities and staffing – providing a model for others to adopt.**

APF members have made promoting and protecting the human rights of women and girls a priority in their respective countries. It is also a focus for collective action through the APF.

We have developed a specialised and integrated approach to our work in this area, which our members value highly.

A highlight of 2015–2016 was the success of our long-standing campaign for NHRIs to have an independent voice at future sessions of the UN Commission on the Status of Women. More information on this historic outcome is available on page 21.

## Supporting our members work on women's rights

Many APF members have been extremely courageous in confronting a range of taboo issues concerning women and girls, such as rape, 'honour' killings and domestic violence. This powerful work continued over the past year with our members:

- > Urging an end to the practice of so-called 'virginity tests' by government doctors (Afghanistan)
- > Conducting a national inquiry to address inequality and discrimination in accessing reproductive health services (Philippines)
- > Reporting on the trafficking of women and girls into situations of abuse and sexual exploitation (Nepal)
- > Enhancing systems to support coronial investigations into deaths resulting from family violence deaths (Australia).



## DISCUSSING REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS IN AFGHANISTAN

Seed funding provided by the APF was used by the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission to run a ground-breaking workshop on reproductive rights. Held in Bamyan province in June 2016, the workshop may be the first of its kind in the country.

Twenty female teachers from girls' schools and ten civil society activists took part in the workshop. They considered a wide range of topics – including reproductive rights from an Islamic perspective and the medical consequences of underage productivity – and produced concrete proposals for further action.



During the year, the APF provided practical support to help our members in their work to promote and protect women's rights, including through strategic advice, training and "seed funding".

Following our inaugural training program on the human rights of women and girls in 2015, the APF provided grants of AUD5000 to assist two of our members to undertake activities to address systemic violations of women's and girls' rights.

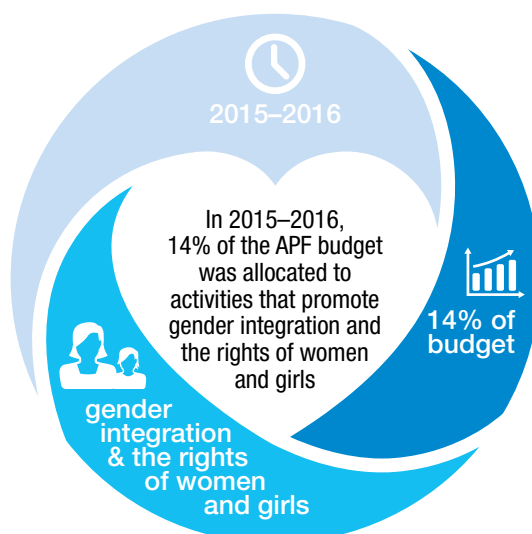
The Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission used this funding to hold a ground-breaking workshop on reproductive rights for female teachers from girls' schools (see more in the feature box), while the National Human Rights Commission of Nepal, with training support from the APF, will shortly begin a public inquiry on gender-based violence in one province where women are most at risk.

In June 2016, we published a video series on the human rights of women and girls – available on our website – to support our training program for APF members.

## Gender equity within the APF secretariat

During the year, we continued to implement recommendations from an independent 2014 report that set out concrete steps to mainstream gender considerations across the internal operations of the APF secretariat. Seven of the 12 recommendations have been implemented, while work on five recommendations is ongoing.

The six core staff of the APF secretariat includes three males and three females, with one male and one female at senior management. There are two male and two female expert consultants.

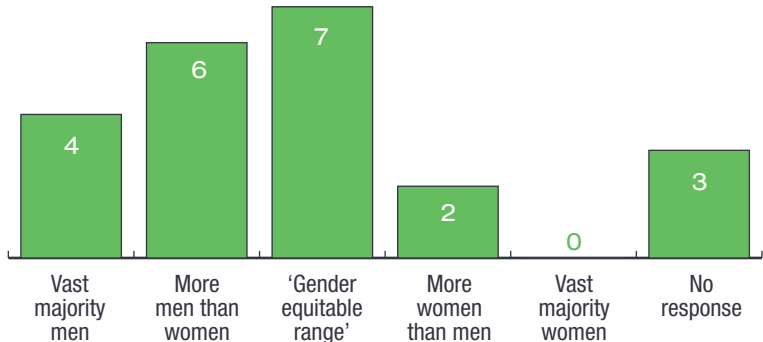


## Gender equity within APF members

The Paris Principles require pluralism in NHRIs, reflecting the society in which they work. Too often, however, there is an under-representation of women in the leadership of NHRIs.

In 2015–2016, as with last year, seven APF members fall within a ‘gender equitable range’ of 40-60% women among their government-appointed Commissioners. However, in ten APF members, men outnumbered women by a significant or very significant degree.

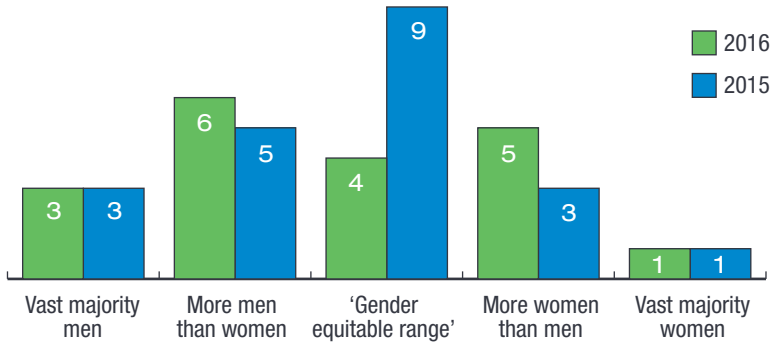
Given that terms of appointment for Commissioners are usually several years, and in some cases the legislation governing the NHRI hinders or prevents gender equity, this situation will take time to improve. Nonetheless, the APF continues to promote the importance of pluralism and that gender equity is reflected in practice.



Source: Annual Member Survey 2016

Unlike the appointment of Commission members, staff employment is within the control of APF members. This year's survey saw a decline in the number of APF members with senior staff in the gender equitable range (also noting two fewer responses were received).

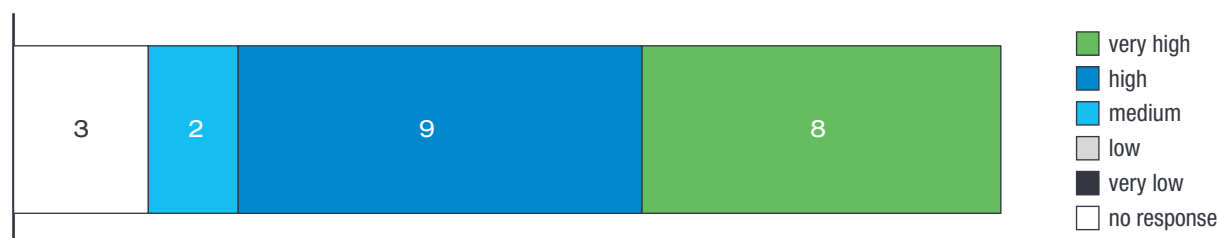
We continue to support and encourage our members to strengthen internal measures so that women and men are equitably represented at all levels of employment. This is critically important for NHRIs, especially to ensure accessibility and appropriate support for women who have experienced human rights violations.



Source: Annual Member Survey 2015 (21 respondents) and Annual Member Survey 2016 (19 respondents)

# CONTRIBUTING AT THE NATIONAL, REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL LEVEL

Value to members of contributing at the national, regional and international level



Source: APF Member Survey 2016

## What we achieved

- > Helped secure the adoption of a landmark General Assembly resolution calling for greater participation of NHRIs.
- > Achieved success in our campaign for NHRIs to have an independent voice at future sessions of the Commission on the Status of Women.
- > Provided advice and support to NHRIs who faced domestic challenges to their independence.

As part of their role to promote positive change at the national level, NHRIs are increasingly engaging with the international human rights system to share information, highlight their concerns and advocate for recommendations that can be made to their States.

Many of our members made submissions to UN human rights treaty bodies, the Universal Periodic Review and other Geneva-based mechanisms during the year.

In 2015–16, we continued our long-standing efforts to increase opportunities for NHRIs to participate across the UN system, with a number of ground-breaking developments taking place.

## UN General Assembly

While NHRIs have had independent participation rights at Human Rights Council in Geneva for many years, participation in the mechanisms of the General Assembly in New York has been extremely limited.

However, a landmark resolution on NHRIs was adopted by consensus by the UN General Assembly in December 2015, which significantly strengthens the case for the participation of NHRIs in major New York-based UN mechanisms.

The resolution was led by Germany and co-sponsored by 90 governments, including 14 from the Asia Pacific region.

The APF played a key role in the campaign for this resolution, including coordinating advocacy with governments, NHRIs and civil society. We were also represented by two APF members – Jordan and Malaysia – at a side event on the role of NHRIs in the UN system. The discussions at the side event directly shaped the resolution adopted by the General Assembly.

## UN Commission on the Status of Women

A second breakthrough occurred at the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in March 2016. Led by the APF, seven NHRIs – Australia, Canada, Denmark, Korea, Morocco, New Zealand and the Philippines – attended CSW 60 to continue the campaign for the independent participation of NHRIs in the work of CSW.

This year's campaign gained further momentum from the General Assembly resolution, with the APF and individual NHRIs increasing their lobbying efforts with governments, UN agencies and others.

In an historic decision, the Agreed Conclusions issued at the end of CSW 60 included a standalone paragraph to encourage the CSW Secretariat to consider how it could enhance the participation of NHRIs, including at the next CSW session in 2017.

Our hope is that NHRIs will soon be able to engage directly with CSW and contribute to global policy-making on the rights of women and girls.

## Engaging with other UN bodies

During 2015–16, we supported the participation of APF members at the:

- > United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (May 2016)
- > Conference of State Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (June 2016)

During these sessions, APF members highlighted their human rights work and promoted the value of independent NHRI participation in the work of the respective UN bodies, which was favourably received in both cases.

We also met with key representatives of the Open Ended Working Group on Ageing to promote the value of formally incorporating the independent participation of NHRIs in its proceedings.

## Contributing to regional human rights forums

APF members seek to raise human rights concerns with different regional bodies that exist, including the ASEAN Intergovernmental Committee on Human Rights and the Arab Human Rights Committee. A challenge, however, is that these two bodies have limited mandates, limited geographic jurisdictions and provide limited opportunities for the participation of NHRIs.

In the past year, a number of our South Asian members, especially Afghanistan and Bangladesh, have worked together to develop momentum for the establishment of a regional human rights mechanism for South Asia.



### NHRIs SHOWCASE THEIR WORK ON WOMEN'S RIGHTS

NHRIs from different parts of the globe – including the Philippines from the Asia Pacific – described their efforts to advance the rights of women and girls at a well attended side-event at CSW 60. Co-sponsored by the Permanent Missions of Germany, Australia, Morocco, New Zealand and Chile, the side event was part of our successful advocacy campaign to promote the value of NHRI participation of in future sessions of the CSW.







The APF was proud to co-sponsor the launch of the Pacific Free & Equal campaign, which is a joint initiative of UN agencies in the Pacific. Human rights activists, the NHRIs of Samoa and New Zealand, and UN officials from across the Pacific attended the launch in August 2015, along with government representatives from Samoa, Tonga, Tuvalu and Fiji.



## Promoting independence at the national level

A vital role of the APF is to provide support to NHRIs so they can operate independently from government.

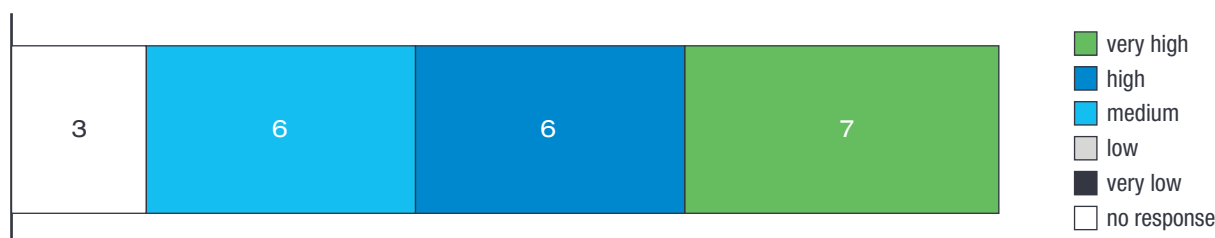
In 2014–15, the APF provided advice and support for members – most notably in the Maldives, Australia and Thailand – who faced reprisals and threats to their independence for conducting work in accordance with their legal mandate.

During the past year, a number of APF members reported having a challenging relationship with their government or experiencing budget cuts that have significantly limited the scope of their work.

Other APF members reported that their relationships with their respective parliaments, executives and judiciary were mixed but generally good.

# STRENGTHENING ORGANISATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

Value to members of strengthening organisational leadership and governance



Source: APF Member Survey 2016

## What we achieved

- > Adopted a new five-year Strategic Plan, which was developed with the input of all APF members.
- > Made progress to reform our governance arrangements to better meet the needs of our growing membership.
- > Opened a sub-regional office in Doha, Qatar, to support our members in West Asia and bolster our engagement with governments, civil society and other NHRIs.

The APF is an independent, non-profit legal entity, with a board of directors – the Forum Council – that reflects our regional diversity.

As an organisation, we seek to operate according to the highest levels of accountability, efficiency, transparency and member participation.

The APF secretariat manages the day-to-day operations of the APF and implements the decisions of the Forum Council.

## Shared decision-making

At the APF's 20th Annual Meeting, held in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, in August 2016, the Forum Council:

- > Formally adopted the 2015–2020 Strategic Plan, which focuses on promoting and protecting the rights of especially vulnerable groups of people in the Asia Pacific
- > Elected the National Human Rights Commission of Mongolia as APF Chairperson, with the National Human Rights Committee of Qatar and the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission elected as Deputy Chairpersons
- > Elected APF members to represent the Asia Pacific region in various capacities in the work of the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions.

A proposal to reinvigorate the APF's governance structure to better meet the needs our growing membership was also discussed at the meeting. The proposal was largely adopted with the exception of two issues: the voting rights of 'A status' and 'B status' NHRIs and the size of the new board.

This reform process will be discussed further at the APF Annual Meeting in October 2016. One of our key priorities will be to ensure the composition of the new board reflects our commitment to gender equity.

### Value of membership perceived by members

Feedback provided by our members demonstrates the significant value they attach to their membership of the APF. Our members say that they especially value:

- > APF services and resources, particularly in capacity building, training and advice
- > The role the APF to support networking and exchange among the members, international coordination and advocacy
- > The sense of solidarity and collective voice that results from their membership of the APF.

Our members' sense of ownership of the APF remains high, with 17 out of 19 respondents indicating a high or very high degree of ownership. Seventeen of our members also reported high or very high levels of collegiality with other APF members.

All respondents but one said they were highly satisfied with the performance of the APF secretariat, reflecting the dedication and professionalism of its six staff members.

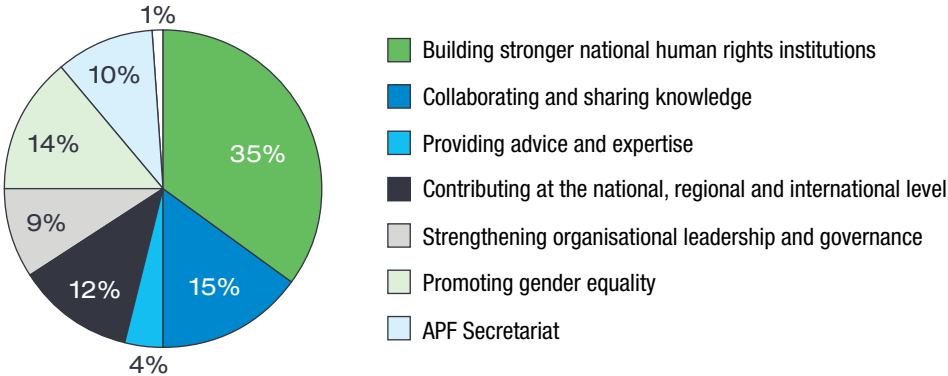
### A steady financial position

The APF receives funding from governments, institutional donors and member contributions.

Total income and expenditure for the 2015–16 of approximately AUD 2.5 million was consistent with the previous two financial years.

The steadiness of our financial position is very pleasing given the ongoing effects of the global financial crisis and the difficult operating environment this has created for many agencies working in the area of aid and human rights.

Our expenditure in the past year reflects the priorities and approaches set out in the APF Strategic Plan.



# OUR GOALS FOR THE YEAR AHEAD

Collaboration lies at the heart of our approach to promoting genuine and sustained change.

In the coming year, we will work closely with a broad range of partners – civil society organisations, governments and international organisations – to help build communities where the human rights of all people are respected, protected and fulfilled.

During 2016–17, we will:

- > Support our members with practical training to promote and protect the rights of vulnerable groups, with a special focus on LGBTI people, women and people with disabilities
- > Build on our successful efforts to promote the independent participation of NHRIs in the work of UN bodies in New York, including the Commission on the Status of Women
- > Assist our members in their efforts to advocate for the abolition of the death penalty in countries across the Asia Pacific
- > Strengthen our networks of skilled human rights educators, communicators and torture prevention experts
- > Partner with UNDP to host a regional conference to mark the 10th anniversary of the adoption of the Yogyakarta Principles on sexual orientation and gender identity
- > Launch an Arabic-language version of the APF website to increase access to our resources for NHRIs, governments and civil society in West Asia
- > Confirm a new, streamlined governance model that will support the APF's growing membership.

**We are grateful for the support of partners and donors who share our commitment to promoting and protecting human rights in the Asia Pacific.**



In the coming year, the APF will partner with UNDP to run a series of activities to build the capacity of NHRIs to promote and protect the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people.

We will also be supporting our members to share their experiences and develop new approaches in running human rights education initiatives for a wide range of groups.



# ASIA PACIFIC FORUM OF NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS INSTITUTIONS

## Afghanistan

Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission

W: [www.aihrc.org.af](http://www.aihrc.org.af)

E: [aihrc@aihrc.org.af](mailto:aihrc@aihrc.org.af)

## Australia

Australian Human Rights Commission

W: [www.humanrights.gov.au](http://www.humanrights.gov.au)

E: [communications@humanrights.gov.au](mailto:communications@humanrights.gov.au)

## Bangladesh

National Human Rights Commission of Bangladesh

W: [www.nhrc.org.bd](http://www.nhrc.org.bd)

E: [nhrc.bd@gmail.com](mailto:nhrc.bd@gmail.com)

## India

National Human Rights Commission of India

W: [www.nhrc.nic.in](http://www.nhrc.nic.in)

E: [covdnhrc@nic.in](mailto:covdnhrc@nic.in)

## Indonesia

Indonesian National Commission on Human Rights

W: [www.komnasham.go.id](http://www.komnasham.go.id)

E: [info@komnasham.go.id](mailto:info@komnasham.go.id)

## Jordan

Jordan National Centre for Human Rights

W: [www.nchr.org.jo](http://www.nchr.org.jo)

E: [mail@nchr.org.jo](mailto:mail@nchr.org.jo)

## Kazakhstan

National Centre for Human Rights of Kazakhstan

W: [www.ombudsman.kz](http://www.ombudsman.kz)

E: [info@ombudsman.kz](mailto:info@ombudsman.kz)

## Malaysia

Human Rights Commission of Malaysia

W: [www.suhakam.org.my](http://www.suhakam.org.my)

E: [humanrights@suhakam.org.my](mailto:humanrights@suhakam.org.my)

## Maldives

Human Rights Commission of the Maldives

W: [www.hrcm.org.mv](http://www.hrcm.org.mv)

E: [info@hrcm.org.mv](mailto:info@hrcm.org.mv)

## Myanmar

Myanmar National Human Rights Commission

W: [maungkhin2011@gmail.com](mailto:maungkhin2011@gmail.com)

E: [www.mnhrc.org.mm](http://www.mnhrc.org.mm)

## Mongolia

National Human Rights Commission of Mongolia

W: [www.mn-nhrc.org](http://www.mn-nhrc.org)

E: [info@mn-nhrc.org](mailto:info@mn-nhrc.org)

## Nepal

National Human Rights Commission of Nepal

W: [www.nhrcnepal.org](http://www.nhrcnepal.org)

E: [nhrc@nhrcnepal.org](mailto:nhrc@nhrcnepal.org)

## New Zealand

New Zealand Human Rights Commission

W: [www.hrc.co.nz](http://www.hrc.co.nz)

E: [info@hrc.co.nz](mailto:info@hrc.co.nz)

## Oman

Oman Human Rights Commission

W: [www.nhrc.om](http://www.nhrc.om)

E: [enquiry@nhrc.om](mailto:enquiry@nhrc.om)

## Palestinian Territories

The Palestinian Independent Commission for Human Rights

W: [www.ichr.ps](http://www.ichr.ps)

E: [ichr@ichr.ps](mailto:ichr@ichr.ps)

## Philippines

Philippines Commission on Human Rights

W: [www.chr.gov.ph](http://www.chr.gov.ph)

E: [comsec@chr.gov.ph](mailto:comsec@chr.gov.ph)

## Qatar

National Human Rights Committee of Qatar

W: [www.nhrc.org.qa](http://www.nhrc.org.qa)

E: [nhrc@qatar.org.qa](mailto:nhrc@qatar.org.qa)

## Republic of Korea

National Human Rights Commission of Korea

W: [www.humanrights.go.kr](http://www.humanrights.go.kr)

E: [nhrc@humanrights.go.kr](mailto:nhrc@humanrights.go.kr)

## Samoa

Ombudsman of Samoa

W: [www.ombudsman.gov.ws](http://www.ombudsman.gov.ws)

E: [info@ombudsman.gov.ws](mailto:info@ombudsman.gov.ws)

## Sri Lanka

Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka

W: [www.hrcsl.lk](http://www.hrcsl.lk)

E: [sec@hrcsl.lk](mailto:sec@hrcsl.lk)

## Thailand

National Human Rights Commission of Thailand

W: [www.nhrc.or.th](http://www.nhrc.or.th)

E: [info@nhrc.or.th](mailto:info@nhrc.or.th)

## Timor-Leste

Timor Leste Office of the Provedor for Human Rights and Justice

W: <http://pdhj.tl>

E: [provedoriatl@gmail.com](mailto:provedoriatl@gmail.com)







**ASIA PACIFIC FORUM**  
ADVANCING HUMAN RIGHTS IN OUR REGION

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