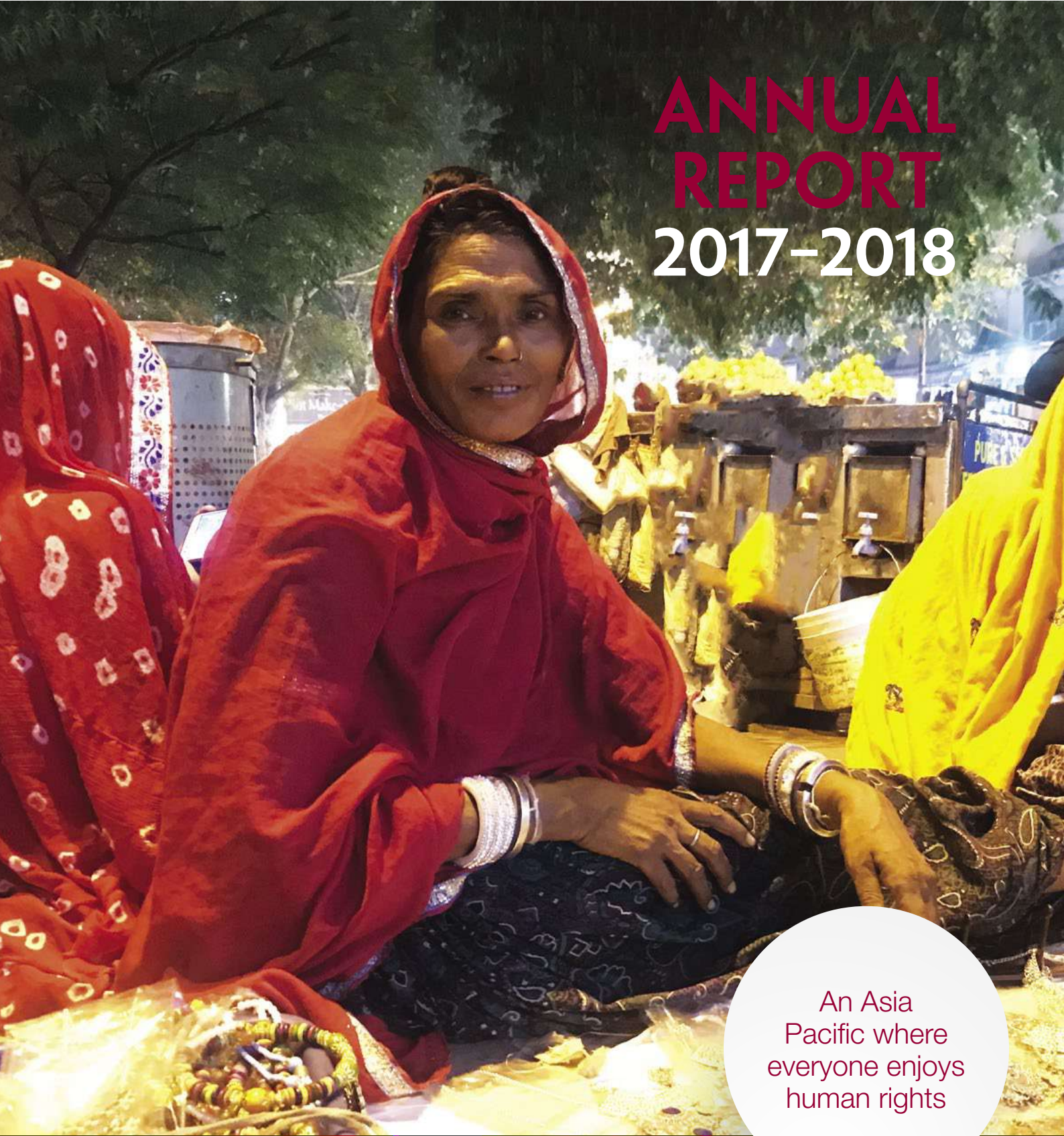




**ASIA PACIFIC FORUM**  
ADVANCING HUMAN RIGHTS IN OUR REGION

# ANNUAL REPORT 2017-2018



An Asia  
Pacific where  
everyone enjoys  
human rights





## OUR VISION IS FOR AN ASIA PACIFIC WHERE EVERYONE ENJOYS HUMAN RIGHTS

### CONTENTS

About the APF   What we do	1
Our members	2
Defending universal human rights	4
Making change happen	6
Providing advice and expertise	8
Building stronger national human rights institutions	10
Promoting gender equality	12
Collaborating for change	14
Contributing at the national, regional and international level	16
Strong organisational leadership and governance	18



***The APF has been widely engaged with NHRIs in the region. It is building networks and collaboration among the NHRIs. We value our membership of the APF.***

ANONYMOUS  
2018 APF MEMBER SURVEY

## ABOUT THE APF

For more than 20 years, the APF has helped build an Asia Pacific where human rights are promoted and protected.

Over that time, our members – national human rights institutions (NHRIs) – have used their unique mandates to lead genuine and lasting change in their countries.

Established in 1996 with five members, our membership now includes 24 NHRIs from all corners of the Asia Pacific.

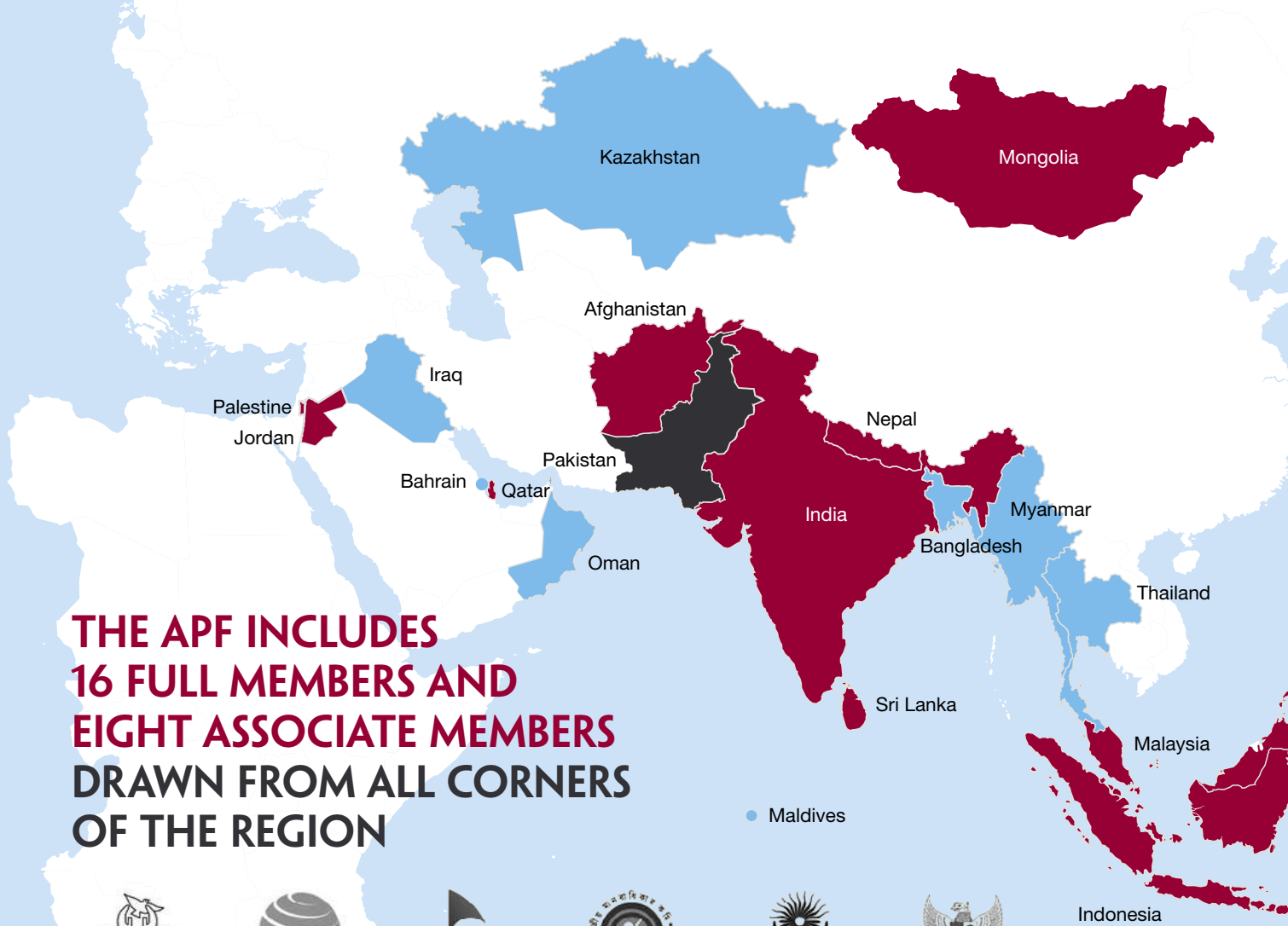
## WHAT WE DO

We provide practical support so our members are as effective as possible to promote and protect human rights.

We bring our members together and develop and implement strategies to address some of the most serious human rights challenges in our region.

We provide advice to governments and civil society groups and encourage their efforts to establish independent NHRIs.

We develop partnerships at the international and regional levels to advance human rights and amplify the voice of our members.



**THE APF INCLUDES  
16 FULL MEMBERS AND  
EIGHT ASSOCIATE MEMBERS  
DRAWN FROM ALL CORNERS  
OF THE REGION**

● Maldives



Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission



Australian Human Rights Commission



National Institution for Human Rights in the Kingdom of Bahrain



National Human Rights Commission of Bangladesh



National Human Rights Commission of India



Indonesian National Commission on Human Rights



High Commission for Human Rights of Iraq



Jordan National Centre for Human Rights



National Centre for Human Rights of Kazakhstan



National Human Rights Commission of Korea



Human Rights Commission of Malaysia



Human Rights Commission of the Maldives



National Human Rights Commission of Mongolia



Myanmar National Human Rights Commission



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



Ombudsman of Samoa



Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka



National Human Rights Commission of Thailand



Provedor for Human Rights and Justice of Timor-Leste



## INDEPENDENT NHRIs DRIVE CHANGE

NHRIs are independent bodies established to stand up for those in need of protection and to hold governments to account for their human rights obligations.

They are established by law, or in the constitution, with powers to promote and protect human rights. Importantly, they operate independently from government.

They are uniquely positioned to make change happen by:

- **Monitoring the human rights situation** in the country and making their findings available to the public
- **Providing advice to government** so that laws and policies reflect national and international human rights standards
- **Receiving, investigating and resolving complaints** so that victims of human rights violations can seek redress
- **Delivering human rights education programs** that help change attitudes and behaviour
- **Engaging with the international human rights community** to raise pressing issues and advocate for recommendations that make a difference back home.



***NHRIs which operate in full compliance with international standards play a fundamental role in upholding the rights of all people in their countries. And for the international human rights system – including OHCHR – NHRIs are among our most reliable and precious partners.***

UN HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS  
ZEID RA'AD AL HUSSEIN, ADDRESSING THE  
2018 GANHRI ANNUAL MEETING

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

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

# DEFENDING UNIVERSAL HUMAN RIGHTS



We are at a pivotal moment in the global story on human rights.

The promise of human rights – articulated 70 years ago in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) – is under grave threat as forces of intolerance, grievance and division grow in power, in our region and around the world.

As calls to embrace nationalism become louder and as communities become more fearful of difference, we have seen human rights violations become more commonplace, more extreme and, disturbingly, more accepted.

In June 2018, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights issued a powerful rebuke against this growing “contempt for human rights”, arguing that it threatens the very structures that have been designed to ensure our common safety and prosperity.

The UDHR – drafted in the wake of two devastating world wars, overwhelming genocide and a crippling economic depression – sought to affirm our common humanity and set a pathway to peace and development for all people, founded on the principles of equality and non-discrimination.

Since its adoption in 1948, the global community has worked together to articulate a body of human rights standards that provide the basis for fair, just and inclusive communities.

Instead of retreating from these standards, as some have chosen to do, it is more important than ever to stand firm in defence of universal human rights, to build solidarity, to promote inclusion and to secure justice for those whose rights have been violated.

NHRIs in the Asia Pacific are committed to upholding international human rights standards. Many do so in the face of serious threats and reprisals.

Our members conduct investigations, monitor places of detention, appear before courts, advocate to parliaments and stand resolutely against the prejudice that can lead to discrimination, harassment and violence.

Their sustained work makes a tangible difference for women, children, racial and ethnic minorities, indigenous peoples, LGBTI communities, people with disabilities and others who are vulnerable to abuse and violations.

*If we are unable to ensure the respect, protection, and fulfilment of human rights and fundamental freedoms of all – especially the poorest and the most marginalised – then the universal human rights project will indeed mean nothing.*

JOSE LUIS MARTIN ‘CHITO’ GASCON  
CHAIRPERSON  
COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS  
OF THE PHILIPPINES

## THIS IS HOW WE RESPONDED

During the year, when human rights have faced serious and sustained challenges, the APF has:

- **Defended NHRIs under threat**, especially the Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines, which has come under sustained attacks for its advocacy against extrajudicial killings that have occurred as part of the government’s “war on drugs”
- **Strengthened NHRIs to promote and protect human rights**, by providing professional training to 162 staff and Commissioners and leading capacity assessments and capacity reviews for five NHRIs
- **Fostered collaboration across the region**, by hosting meetings of Commissioners, senior executive officers and communication experts from our members in order to share their knowledge and build new skills
- **Promoted the establishment of new NHRIs**, especially in the Pacific, where the Parliament of Tuvalu passed legislation to expand the role of the Ombudsman and other countries have expressed strong interest in establishing an NHRI
- **Encouraged NHRI advocacy on international forums**, with APF members appearing before human rights treaty bodies in Geneva, as well as contributing to UN forums on the rights of older people, the rights of indigenous peoples and the rights of women in New York
- **Assisted our members seeking international reaccreditation**, with the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka being upgraded to ‘A status’.





*Despite growing threats and challenges, the APF is steadfast in its commitment to making human rights a reality for all people in our region.*



#### **A POWERFUL VOICE FOR JUSTICE**

Since August 2017, around 700,000 Rohingya refugees have fled Myanmar in search of safety and protection in Bangladesh. The National Human Rights Commission of Bangladesh has made regular visits to the refugee camps of Cox's Bazaar to record the testimonies of refugees and to monitor conditions in the camps. The Commission has been a powerful voice calling for justice for Rohingya refugees, especially those women and girls who have experienced sexual violence.

# MAKING CHANGE HAPPEN

Upholding the dignity of those who are marginalised or forgotten. This is the role of an effective national human rights institution.

Every NHRI strives to improve people's lives. They work to build fair, just and inclusive communities where each person – especially the poor and the marginalised – can live with dignity, free from violence and discrimination.

Unlike the other regions, there is no 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. For some people, NHRIs are the first and only avenue where they can seek justice.

## OUR THEORY OF CHANGE

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

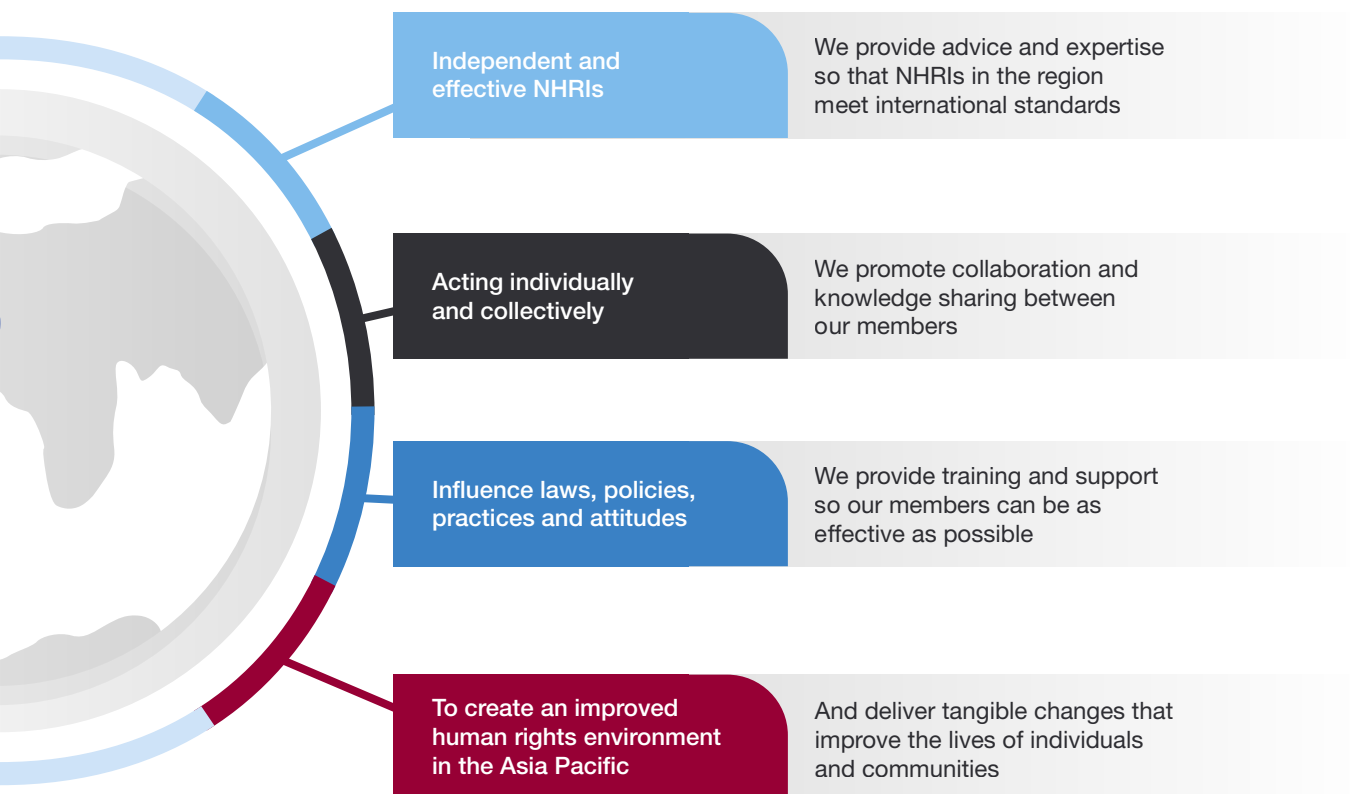


***We are always with the poor, with the victims. And they see that we are with them, not with the perpetrators, not with the powerful people.***

DR SIMA SAMAR  
CHAIRPERSON  
AFGHANISTAN INDEPENDENT  
HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

We support our members so they can be as effective as possible to generate lasting change in the communities they serve. We also assist governments and civil society to establish new NHRIs.

We collaborate with a broad range of partners – including leading UN agencies and NGOs – that share our commitment to advancing human rights in the Asia Pacific region.







### OUR SERVICES HELP BUILD STRONG NHRIS

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. Based in Geneva, 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 our members, including skills-based training, an innovative capacity assessment program and specialist advice on NHRI legislation and international accreditation. We also continue to be a leader among NHRI bodies in promoting and monitoring gender equality.

### GUARDING THE MOST VULNERABLE

In June 2018, the New Zealand Government announced that privately-run dementia facilities across the country would be subject to unannounced and independent inspections by human rights teams. The decision means the treatment of vulnerable older people in these facilities will come under close and regular scrutiny to ensure they enjoy appropriate care and can live with dignity.

This is a positive and far-reaching development, given the number of older people in New Zealand is set to nearly triple within the next thirty years.

It is also the result of strong advocacy by the New Zealand Human Rights Commission, which they developed through their participation in the APF Torture Prevention Ambassadors program (2015–2016).

# PROVIDING ADVICE AND EXPERTISE

We know the profound difference that strong NHRIs have made, especially for vulnerable people, in those countries where they operate.

That is why one of our priorities is to assist governments and civil society organisations in the region to establish independent and effective NHRIs.

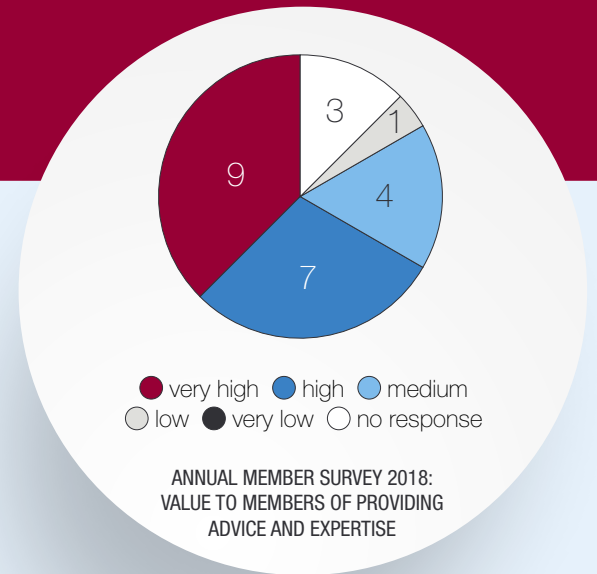
In 2016–17, the APF and the Pacific Community’s Regional Rights Resource Team (RRRT) conducted scoping visits to Tuvalu, Nauru, the Marshall Islands and the Cook Islands. In each country, there was strong support to establish an NHRI that could protect the rights of individuals and address community-wide challenges. Progress to establish an NHRI in Tuvalu was especially swift, with the APF helping prepare legislation that was presented to the Parliament in early 2017. The Bill was passed in October 2017, making Tuvalu the smallest country by population to establish an NHRI.

In the past 12 months, we held discussions with officials from the Government of Nauru on drafting legislation to establish an NHRI that would meet the international minimum standards set out in the Paris Principles.

We also conducted scoping visits in July 2017 to meet with elected officials, government agencies, civil society representatives and other stakeholders in:

- The Federated States of Micronesia (in partnership with RRRT).
- Taiwan (in partnership with FORUM-ASIA).

In addition, the APF provided substantial legal advice to the NHRIs of Pakistan and Fiji about the steps they



## WHAT WE ACHIEVED IN 2017–18

- Welcomed the establishment of an NHRI in Tuvalu, following support and advice from the APF
- Provided support to two APF members seeking international reaccreditation, with the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka upgraded to ‘A status’
- Responded to more than 40 requests for legal advice from APF members, governments, international organisations and civil society groups

could take, as well as the legislative changes their governments should enact, to bring their NHRIs into compliance with the Paris Principles.

## SRI LANKA’S NHRI RECEIVES ACCREDITATION BOOST

Two APF members – the NHRIs of India and Sri Lanka – sought reaccreditation with the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI) during the year, with the APF providing detailed advice and support to both NHRIs.

Reaccreditation assesses the extent to which an NHRI complies with the Paris Principles, both in its legislation and in its practice.

The National Human Rights Commission of India was reaccredited with ‘A status’ following the November 2017 session of GANHRI’s Subcommittee on Accreditation, while the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka was upgraded to ‘A status’ following the March 2018 review.

‘A status’ accreditation allows NHRIs to independently participate in meetings of the UN Human Rights Council, its treaty bodies and other forums.

The decision also means that the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka is now a full member of the APF.



***“We are very fortunate to have the opportunity to come over to Samoa and to get all these ideas that will support the operation of our new mandate”\****

### **PACIFIC NEIGHBOURS SHARE HUMAN RIGHTS INSIGHTS**

In April 2018, the Ombudsman of Tuvalu met with his counterpart in Samoa to learn more about the practical, day-to-day work of an NHRI.

The three-day study visit to Apia was an opportunity to see how the Office of the Ombudsman of Samoa undertakes different parts of its mandate, such as handling complaints, conducting special investigations and running human rights education and outreach programs.

The delegation from Tuvalu also met with local stakeholders to discuss the importance of NHRI partnerships with government agencies, law enforcement officials and civil society partners.

In 2017, the Parliament of Tuvalu passed legislation to establish an NHRI as part of an expanded Ombuds Office. This is the same model adopted by Samoa, when it established an NHRI in 2013.

The study visit was supported by the APF and RRRT.

\*SA'AGA TALU TEAFA, OMBUDSMAN OF TUVALU



***The upgrading of the Commission is not only an institutional achievement but it ... is equally of the APF who never hesitated to assist us in so many ways, particularly with ready advice that stood us in good stead.***

**DR DEEPIKA UDAGAMA  
CHAIRPERSON  
HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION  
OF SRI LANKA**



# BUILDING STRONGER NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS INSTITUTIONS

From conducting inquiries and investigating complaints through to running education programs and advising government on laws and policies, NHRIs work at the frontline to promote and protect human rights.

The APF provides a range of services to support our members to be as effective as possible, often in challenging political and social contexts.

Depending on its legislation, a new leadership team will be appointed to an NHRI every three to five years. In March 2018, the APF hosted a High Level Dialogue for the incoming Commissioners of the Indonesian National Commission on Human Rights, to discuss their shared priorities and how they can use the NHRI's mandate to drive change. The need to focus on the rights of women and girls across all areas of the NHRI's work was a major theme in these conversations.

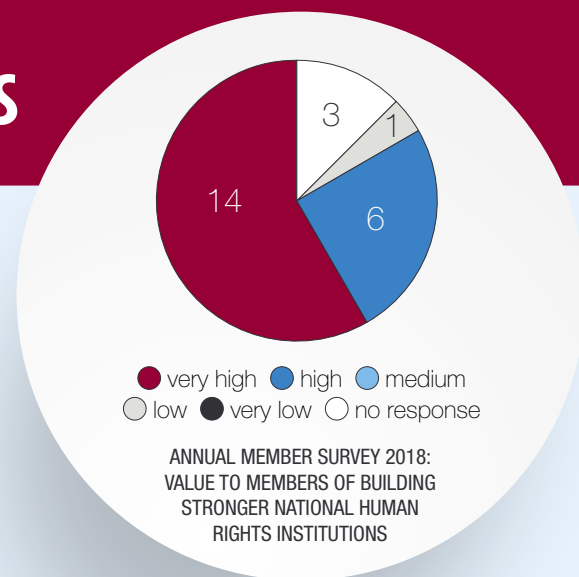
We also hosted a retreat for the leadership team of the Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines in March 2018. In the face of ongoing threats and criticism from the highest levels of government, the retreat was an opportunity for Commissioners and senior managers to reflect on their work to monitor and investigate serious human rights violations taking place in the country.

During the year, the APF assisted the NHRIs of Malaysia (September 2017) and Pakistan (January 2018) to conduct a capacity assessment of their institutions. Capacity assessments enable an NHRI to identify practical steps they can take to strengthen their institutions so they can deliver tangible change on human rights. The APF facilitates these programs in partnership with UNDP and OHCHR.

We also worked with the NHRIs of Indonesia (April 2018), Samoa (April 2018) and the Maldives (June 2018) to review their progress in implementing recommendations from previous capacity assessments.

## BUILDING SKILLS THAT DRIVE CHANGE

In 2017–18, the APF delivered professional training programs that responded to needs our members raised with us. We hosted national training programs – on the rights of women and girls (India), on the Sustainable Development Goals (Bahrain) and on media and communications (Philippines) – for NHRI staff and Commissioners in those countries.



## WHAT WE ACHIEVED IN 2017–18

- Supported six NHRIs to assess and strengthen their capacity to promote and protect human rights
- Provided 162 NHRI staff and Commissioners from across the region with knowledge and skills that will bolster their efforts in monitoring and advocating for human rights

We also organised regional training programs for APF members on monitoring and reporting and on human rights facilitation, as well as a professional development program for members of the APF Communications Network.

A total of 162 NHRI representatives (55% male, 45% female) took part in these six training programs. Over five programs where data was gathered, an overwhelming majority of participants (95%) said the training helped them in their day-to-day work.

Many APF members reported making changes to internal policies or the way they approached their work. Some used small grants provided by the APF to apply their learning to research and advocacy projects that they developed.

APF trainers and facilitators ensure that issues related to gender are considered at every stage of the design and delivery of these programs.



[WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/USER/ASIAPACIFICFORUM](http://WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/USER/ASIAPACIFICFORUM)



## COLLECTING DATA TO FOSTER INCLUSION

In May 2018, we supported six NHRIs – Bangladesh, Fiji, Philippines, Samoa, Sri Lanka and Timor Leste – to attend a ground-breaking international conference on using data collected with LGBTI people to advocate for safer and more inclusive communities.

The two-day conference, hosted by UNDP and the Chinese University of Hong Kong, was held in Hong Kong.

Following the conference, NHRIs participants met together to discuss innovative research and education projects they will conduct in their respective countries.

The APF and UNDP have provided the NHRIs with small grants to help them run their projects.



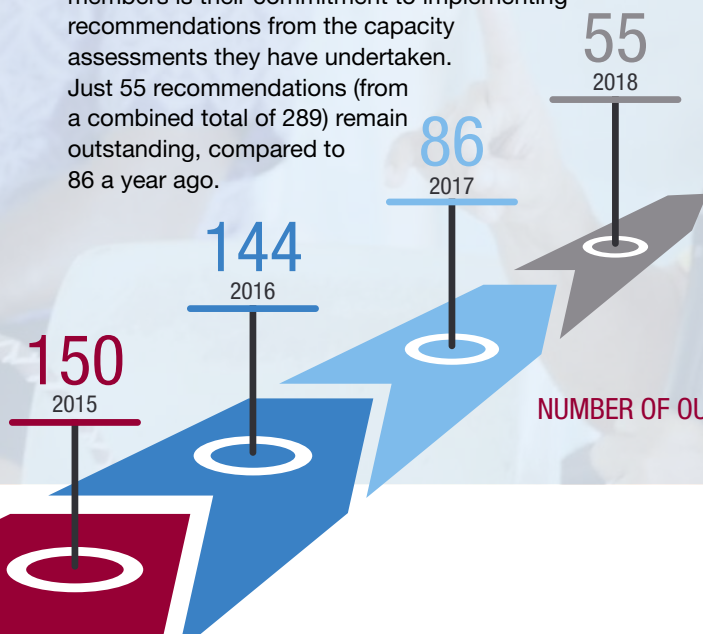
## MORE NHRIs FEEL CONFIDENT TO DEFEND RIGHTS

The APF is tracking the capacity of our member NHRIs to deliver on their mandate to promote and protect human rights. We undertake a comprehensive analysis of multiple data sources every two years.

This year we asked our members to provide a self-assessment of their capacity to do their work effectively. Eighteen of the 21 NHRIs (86%) that responded indicated their capacity was either ‘a little higher’ or ‘a lot higher’ than last year.

Another important measure of the growing capacity of APF members is their commitment to implementing recommendations from the capacity assessments they have undertaken.

Just 55 recommendations (from a combined total of 289) remain outstanding, compared to 86 a year ago.



NUMBER OF OUTSTANDING CAPACITY ASSESSMENT RECOMMENDATIONS



***We feel that we have made great progress compared to three years ago. This progress would not have been possible without the continual guidance and support of the APF.***

OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN OF SAMOA,  
2018 ANNUAL MEMBER SURVEY

# PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY

Across the region and around the globe, women and girls continue to face entrenched discrimination and grievous violations of their fundamental rights.

That's why it is critical that the APF equips our members to champion the rights of women and girls in all aspects of their work.

We also encourage our members to advance gender equality within their NHRIs, through the decisions they take in relation to staffing and their employment policies and practices.

A commitment to gender equality makes NHRIs more accessible by ensuring that women and girls who have experienced human rights violations can get the support they need, in a safe environment.

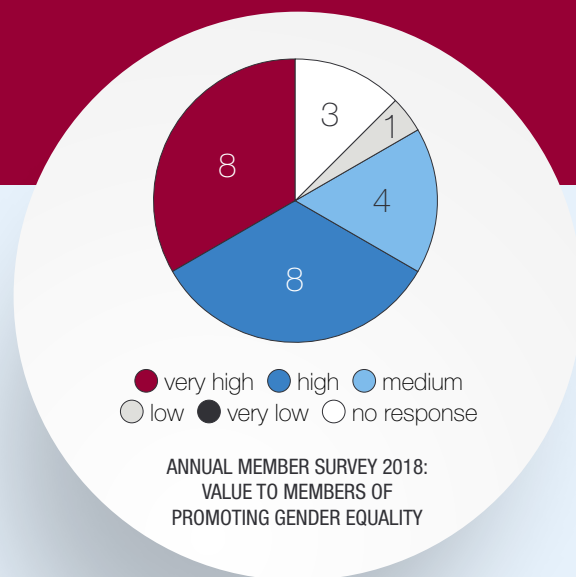
The APF Gender Strategy, adopted this year, supports our members to achieve these goals. We also work directly with members to help them identify practical measures they can take to advance gender equality. We have also begun updating our training resources to include a specific focus on gender.

Following an APF workshop with junior and senior staff in November 2017, the National Human Rights Commission of India established a separate space for female staff and now extends maternity benefits to its contractual staff. The Commission has also provided female staff members with training on conducting investigations, as a follow-up to the APF course on facilitation and adult learning.

Representatives from the NHRIs of Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, Oman, Palestine and Qatar met in February 2018 to discuss the pressing issues facing women and girls in West Asia.

Taking part in a two-day APF roundtable discussion, they also identified practical projects that their NHRIs could implement to assist those groups of women and girls most vulnerable to abuse, discrimination and exploitation.

**IN 2017-18, 12% OF THE APF BUDGET WENT TOWARDS ACTIVITIES THAT PROMOTE GENDER EQUALITY.**



## WHAT WE ACHIEVED IN 2017-18

- Supported APF members in their efforts to promote and protect the rights of women and girls
- Began updating all APF training resources to ensure there is a clear and practical focus on gender





## TACKLING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

In a year when the #metoo campaign has started a global conversation on sexual harassment and assault, APF members have continued their courageous work to address the many different manifestations of violence against women.

In the past year, they have:

- Made recommendations to reduce the prevalence of sexual assault and sexual harassment within university settings (Australia)
- Conducted public hearings and finalised a landmark national inquiry into family violence (Samoa)
- Prepared a comprehensive annual report on violence against women, with recommendations to address its causes (Afghanistan)
- Recorded allegations of violence among female Rohingya refugees (Bangladesh)
- Identified causes and trends in the trafficking of vulnerable women and girls (Nepal)
- Advocated for legal reform requiring employers to adopt policies on family violence (New Zealand)
- Recognised the courage and contribution of women human rights defenders (Thailand).



## PROTECTING RIGHTS IN RURAL AREAS

NHRIs from around the globe continued their advocacy efforts at UN Commission on the Status of Women in March 2018.

CSW 62 focused on the challenges and opportunities for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls living in rural areas.

Speaking at a side event organised by the APF and GANHRI, the NHRIs of Afghanistan, Australia and the Philippines highlighted issues such as poor access to public services, limited decision making power, unequal access to land and resources and the widespread incidence of harmful practices.

They also described the powerful ways that NHRIs can work to remedy these issues, especially through their regional offices, by regularly meeting with communities of women, taking up their complaints, supporting them with information and resources and advocating for their rights.



# COLLABORATING FOR CHANGE



Despite the diverse social, cultural and political environments in which they operate, APF members face a raft of common human rights challenges.

Further, a growing number of human rights violations – like human trafficking, exploitation of migrant workers and the impact of corporate activities – can cross multiple borders.

It means that collaboration is increasingly important to monitor and counter human rights abuses.

One of the great strengths of the APF is the collegiality that exists between our members and their desire to collaborate and share their knowledge and expertise.

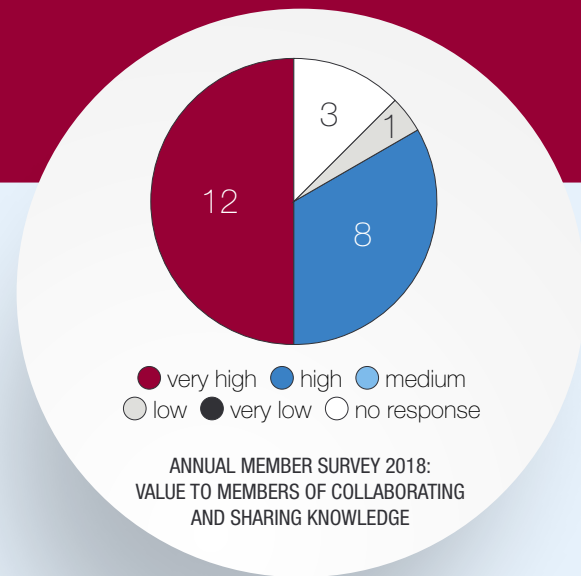
This year the APF convened meetings and professional networks that provided opportunities for collaboration among our members, including the:

- **APF Annual Meeting and Biennial Conference**, which focused on the role of NHRIs to protect human rights in times of conflict (November 2018, hosted by the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission)
- **Senior Executive Officers Network**, which agreed to develop operation guides that showcase good practice in areas of NHRI management (August 2017, hosted by the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia)
- **Communications Network**, which discussed social media campaigns, education and advocacy strategies, and the practice of digital storytelling (November 2017, hosted by the National Human Rights Commission of Bangladesh).

## CONNECTING WITH COMMUNITIES THROUGH DIGITAL STORIES

With social media an essential platform for human rights advocacy, representatives from 20 APF members have developed practical skills in producing digital stories to connect with online communities.

They learned the basic elements of video production – including how to edit interviews filmed on a smart phone, add overlay footage and mix in music – during a three-day meeting of the APF Communications Network, hosted by the National Human Rights Commission of Bangladesh.



## WHAT WE ACHIEVED IN 2017-18

- Brought Commissioners and staff of APF members together to share expertise and identify areas for joint projects and advocacy
- Finalised the translation of an Arabic-language APF website to make human rights information accessible to NHRIs and partners in West Asia



The meeting was also an opportunity to share their experiences on advocacy and community education, discuss common challenges and work together on exercises where they responded to real life media crisis scenarios.

A number of APF members – including Bangladesh, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Palestine and Samoa – have now begun producing digital stories to raise human rights issues and start online conversations.





***Ninety per cent of our members reported that the APF Annual Meeting was a valuable opportunity to connect with other members.***

### **COLLABORATING TO COUNTER IMPUNITY**

In April 2018, NHRIs in South Asia joined forces to call for all States in the region to review national security and counter-terrorism laws to ensure that they meet international standards.

The Kathmandu Declaration, issued at the end of a three-day international conference hosted by the National Human Rights Commission of Nepal, also reaffirmed that all citizens must be protected by the justice system equally and without discrimination.

The conference included the participation of all NHRIs in South Asia – Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, the Maldives, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and host nation, Nepal – along with representatives from the NHRIs of Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar, Philippines and Jordan.

Around 120 participants from more than 20 countries attended the conference on realising rights and countering impunity, which was supported by the APF.





# CONTRIBUTING AT THE NATIONAL, REGIONAL & INTERNATIONAL LEVEL

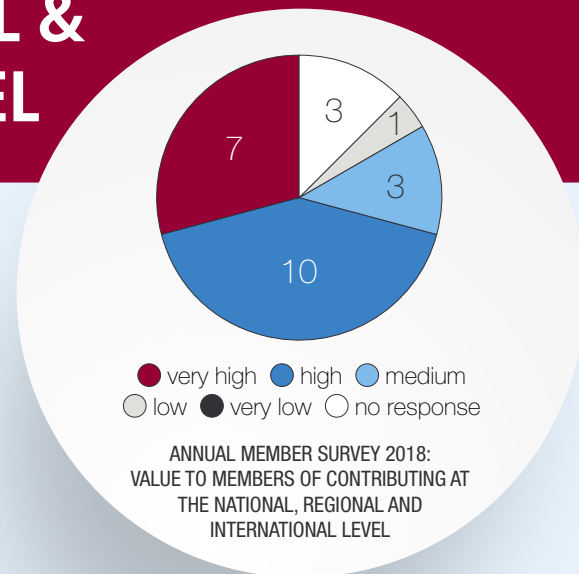
NHRIs make a unique and respected contribution to the international human rights system. The independent information and analysis they provide ensures that pressing human rights issues can be rigorously debated by UN panels and targeted recommendations can be made to States.

While 'A status' NHRIs have been able to contribute to the work of the Human Rights Council in Geneva for many years, the APF has been at the forefront of a global campaign to secure equivalent participation rights for NHRIs in UN General Assembly bodies and mechanisms.

In December 2016, the **UN Open Ended Working Group on Ageing** became the first General Assembly mechanism to formally include NHRIs in its work. Four APF members – the NHRIs of Australia, India, Korea and the Philippines – took part in a landmark session of the Working Group in July 2017 where they were among the inaugural independent NHRI participants.

In addition, the **United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues** has given separate standing to 'A status' NHRIs in its registration processes. It also now invites NHRIs to contribute to questionnaires and publishes their responses. The NHRIs of Malaysia, Nepal and the Philippines attended the April 2018 meeting of the UNPFII.

In March 2018, the APF and GANHRI continued their joint advocacy efforts on behalf of NHRIs at the **UN Commission on the Status of Women**, with the NHRIs of Afghanistan, Australia and the Philippines also attending the session.



## WHAT WE ACHIEVED IN 2017-18

- Continued our successful advocacy to broaden opportunities for NHRIs to participate in UN bodies in New York
- Established connections with ASEAN's human rights body, with APF members sharing their expertise on human rights and business
- Supported APF members facing threats and reprisals for being staunch human rights defenders

## FORGING CONNECTIONS IN REGIONAL MECHANISMS

The NHRIs of Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Thailand and India shared their insights on promoting respect for human rights in the business sector as part of an inter-regional dialogue organised by the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) in June 2018. Following the Dialogue, the Australian Human Rights Commission held a side event on business and human rights for NHRIs, which included focussed discussions on improving outcomes for women.

The APF is heartened by these developments. We believe that NHRI participation in regional mechanisms – in South East Asia, as well as in South Asia, the Pacific and among Arab nations – has the potential to strengthen understanding among States and inform policy making that upholds human rights.

During the year, we also joined with OHCHR, UNDP and GANHRI to provide a regional platform of support to five NHRIs in Central Asia: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.



***The importance of independent NHRIs can no longer be ignored, particularly by human rights defenders.***

ASIAN NGO NETWORK ON NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS INSTITUTIONS

## SUPPORTING MEMBERS FACING ATTACKS AND REPRISALS

Independence and integrity are central to NHRIs being effective and trusted human rights defenders.

The APF has been gravely concerned by the political attacks, reprisals and budget cuts that some of our members have faced for undertaking human rights work in accordance with their legal mandate.

The APF mobilises support for our members when they face attacks, where they request it. We also provide organisational support they might require.

This year, the Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines has come under sustained attacks for its work to investigate killings linked to the government's crackdown on illegal drugs. In September 2017, the House of Representatives voted overwhelmingly to defund the Commission, before overturning that decision following the public response.

In February 2018, the APF hosted a retreat for the Commission's leadership team to provide them with the opportunity to reflect and strategise.

## COLLABORATING WITH CIVIL SOCIETY

The APF values its cooperation with civil society partners, at the national level, in regional forums and on the international stage. This year we deepened our connections with the Asian NGO Network on National Human Rights Institutions (ANNI) and its secretariat, FORUM-ASIA, and continued our annual APF-ANNI dialogue at our annual meeting.

At the national level, APF members have forged close partnerships with civil society that help broaden the reach, impact and scope of their work. For example, the National Human Rights Commission of Mongolia has established an ex-officio board – comprising 19 civil society representatives from NGOs, academia, trade unions and the media – that helped develop a joint work program for 2018 with the Commission.





# STRONG ORGANISATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

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

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.

## IMPLEMENTING NEW GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS

At our 2017 Annual Meeting, APF members endorsed a new governance structure that will better meet the needs of our growing membership and ensure that we can respond quickly and strategically as issues arise.

Under the new arrangements, the APF will establish a:

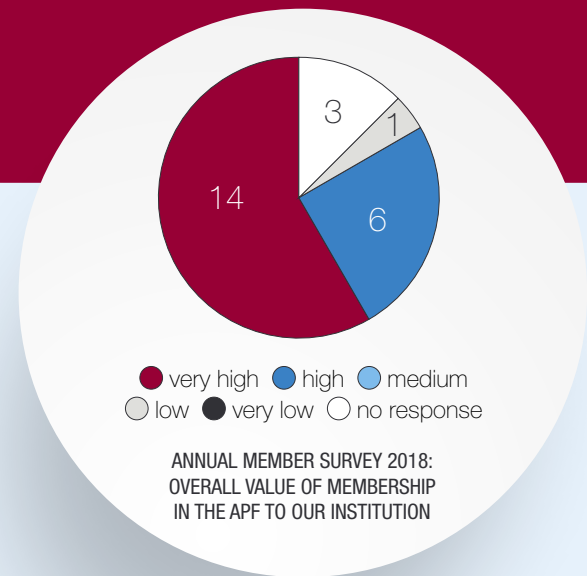
- General Assembly that will be responsible for setting strategy and making high-level decisions ('A status' members having voting and participatory rights and 'B status' members have participatory rights)
- Five-member Governance Committee, elected from 'A status' members, who will make recommendations to the General Assembly on a range of issues.

These governance reforms were developed by our members through a consultation process that extended over a number of years. At each stage, the proposals were presented to APF members for debate and decision.

Voting for membership of the APF Governance Committee, which will reflect our regional diversity and promote gender equality, will take place at the APF Annual Meeting in September 2018.



[WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/USER/ASIAPACIFICFORUM](http://WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/USER/ASIAPACIFICFORUM)



## WHAT WE ACHIEVED IN 2017-18

- Adopted new governance arrangements that will equip us to meet the needs of our growing membership and respond to emerging human rights challenges
- Provided a stable funding base to strengthen our members in their work to address human rights violations and build fair, just and inclusive communities

## BUILDING OWNERSHIP AND BELONGING

Our members place significant value on their membership of the APF and rate their satisfaction with the APF's governance and organisational structure as high or very high.

Our members also said they were highly satisfied with the performance of the APF secretariat, reflecting the efficiency and professionalism of its small staff of seven.

As a member-based organisation, it is vital that our members feel a shared ownership of the APF and our vision to make human rights a reality for everyone in the Asia Pacific.

In the transition to our new governance structure, we will endeavour to ensure that all members – both 'A' and 'B' status NHRIs – feel able to contribute to the direction and growth of the APF.



## SUPPORTING OUR MEMBERS IN WEST ASIA

The APF's sub-regional office plays an important role to strengthen links with APF members and other stakeholders in West Asia.

A new Director was appointed this year to lead the sub-regional office, coordinate training programs and other activities and support the APF's monitoring, evaluation and reporting requirements.

During the past year, the sub-regional office has:

- Hosted a workshop on engaging with UN human rights treaty bodies (Qatar, October 2017)
- Organised a roundtable discussion on the rights of women and girls (Jordan, February 2018)
- Finalised the translation of APF website content into Arabic.

The APF is grateful for the support provide by the National Human Rights Committee of Qatar in hosting the sub-regional office.

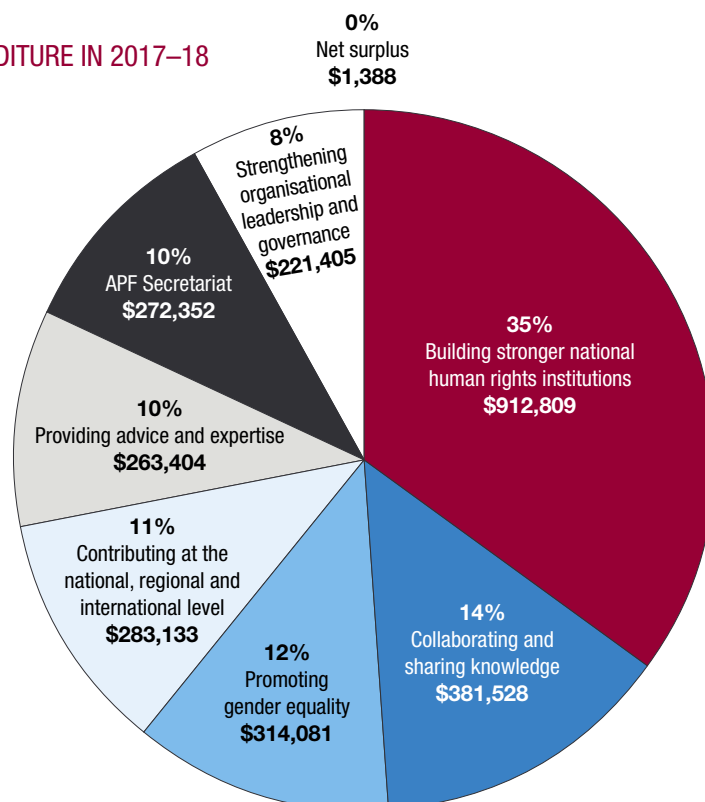
## OUR FUNDING FOR 2017–18

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

Total income and expenditure for 2017–18 was approximately AUD 2.9 million, which is equivalent to last year's budget.

A significant challenge for the APF is to increase the size and diversity of its financial support in order to keep pace with the rapidly increasing demand for our advisory, training and other services.

### APF INCOME AND EXPENDITURE IN 2017–18





**WE ARE GRATEFUL FOR THE SUPPORT OF  
PARTNERS WHO SHARE OUR COMMITMENT  
TO AN ASIA PACIFIC WHERE EVERYONE  
ENJOYS HUMAN RIGHTS**



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

© Copyright Asia Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions 2018

The APF permits free reproduction of extracts from this publication provided that due acknowledgement is given and a copy of the publication carrying the extract is sent to the following address:

Asia Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions  
GPO Box 5218  
Sydney NSW 1042  
Australia  
E: [apf@asiapacificforum.net](mailto:apf@asiapacificforum.net)  
W: [www.asiapacificforum.net](http://www.asiapacificforum.net)

Image credits: Fasoha Aishath, European Union 2018 (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0 license), Michael Power, UNDP, UN Women/Allison Joyce (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0 license), National Human Rights Commission of Nepal, Office of the Ombudsman of Samoa, Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka and Provedor for Human Rights and Justice of Timor Leste.

Design | Lisa Thompson, JAG Designs