



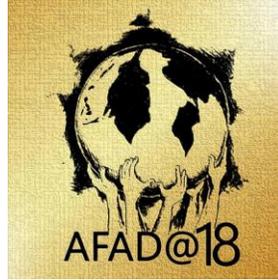
Asian Federation Against Involuntary Disappearances (AFAD)

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18 Years of Commitment For a World Without *Desaparecidos* AFAD Anniversary Statement



4 June 2016 – The Asian Federation Against Involuntary Disappearances (AFAD) commemorates its 18th anniversary. Against the backdrop of enforced disappearances in a region wallowing in dire poverty and bereft of regional human rights mechanisms for protection, the AFAD was conceived and born in Manila, Philippines. Initiated by the Families of Victims of Involuntary Disappearances (FIND, Philippines), the Association of Parents and Family Members of the Disappeared (APDP, in the disputed state of Jammu and Kashmir) and the then Organization of Parents and Family Members of the Disappeared (OPFMD, Sri Lanka), AFAD has grown and is now a Federation of 14 member-organizations from 10 countries, namely Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Timor-Leste and with an individual member in Laos and two in Switzerland.

AFAD has come a long way during these last 18 years. In the late 90s, AFAD, in cooperation with the Latin American Federation of Associations of Relatives of Disappeared-Detainees, knocked on doors of the United Nations to call the latter's attention to the alarming cases in Asia. During these years till mid 2000, AFAD joined voices with international actors in demanding for an international treaty against enforced disappearances, which is now the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance. In Room X11 of *Palais des Nations* in Geneva, Switzerland, AFAD actively participated in all sessions of the then UN Inter-Sessional Working Group to Draft a Legally-Binding Normative Instrument for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearances. Its presence helped convince the UN member-states that enforced disappearance is neither a problem of the past nor solely a Latin American phenomenon and therefore, a strong treaty with an independent body, which is the UN Committee on Enforced Disappearances must be adopted.

What was only a dream of AFAD's Latin American sisters and brothers is now a treaty that has been signed by 96 states and ratified by 52. AFAD, having been appointed as the focal point of the International Coalition Against Enforced Disappearances (ICAED), links arms with other actors and continuously strives to attain universal ratification and implementation of the Convention. Sri Lanka's most recent ratification can be attributed, among other factors, to AFAD's persistent efforts to convince the government to accede to this relevant treaty that provides for the right not to be subjected to enforced disappearances.

What was once considered a Latin American phenomenon, enforced disappearance in Asia and the rest of the world is now internationally recognized. Through its visible presence in international venues, AFAD contributed to debunk the myth that enforced disappearance is solely a Latin American problem. For the first time in 2011, the United Nations officially recognized 30 August as the International Day of the Disappeared. What was first an initiative of FEDEFAM and later adopted by AFAD and other organizations, this special day continues to be a significant traditional event, during which the international community pays tribute to all the world's *desaparecidos*.

The enactment of the Republic Act 10353 or the Philippine Anti-Enforced Disappearance Act of 2012 is a product of the perseverance of the Families of Victims of Involuntary Disappearance (FIND) with the consistent accompaniment of AFAD and the rest of the international community. This first and only anti-disappearance law in Asia, with strong pro-victims provisions, serves as impetus for other governments to codify the offense of enforced disappearance.

In Timor-Leste, AFAD's member-organization, HAK, hand in hand with Timorese and Indonesian civil society organizations, facilitated the return of Timorese children brought to Indonesia by soldiers during the Indonesian occupation. In these last two years, 28 Timorese children in Indonesia, now adults, have been reunified with their biological parents in Timor-Leste. AFAD played the role of using best practices in Guatemala and El Salvador in ensuring that the process of reunification would be meaningful and beneficial to the concerned victims and their families and thus, prevent re-traumatization.

During all these years, AFAD has withstood the test of time. In a region where 34 Asian countries, out 88 countries worldwide, submitted the highest number of cases to the UN WGEID, persecution of human rights defenders is the order of the day. In 2004, AFAD suffered irreparable loss with the assassination of its former Chairperson Munir, a staunch human rights defender in Indonesia, who, at 38, was assassinated using arsenic poisoning while traveling in a Garuda flight from Indonesia to The Netherlands via Singapore. In the

same year, 24-year old Aasia Jeelani was killed by a landmine blast in the north of Kashmir while on an election monitoring exercise, her driver was likewise killed and her two colleagues severely wounded. APDP patron and AFAD founding member representative, Advocate Parvez Imroz has been denied travel documents by the Indian government during the last 15 years. In Bangladesh, human rights defenders in Odhikar are not spared from endless persecution ranging from illegal arrest and detention, series of office raids, prohibition from receiving foreign funds and black propaganda. In Pakistan, Amina Masood continues to receive threats for her indefatigable effort to search for truth and justice for her disappeared husband and countless other victims of human rights defenders in a country where enforced disappearances occur with each passing day. And the litany of victims continues to lengthen... Amidst persecution, AFAD stands strong.

Aware of the devastating effects of enforced disappearance among families of the disappeared and recognizing the principal role of the families of victims in the struggle for truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-repetition, AFAD facilitates psychosocial rehabilitation efforts towards empowerment. Healing Wounds, Mending Scars; from Victims to Healers; Cycle of Healing were among the efforts of AFAD to pick up the broken pieces of the lives of the victims and facilitate that these broken lives be made whole again. With its successful organizing of the Third World Conference on Psychosocial Support for Victims of Enforced Disappearances, Torture and Extrajudicial Execution in 2014, AFAD exerts its efforts to popularize the Minimum Standards in the Search for Truth and Justice for Victims of Human Rights Violations.

In all these 18 years, organizational storms in forms of threats, risks, resource constraints have not weakened, but instead strengthened further the Federation. Its common basis of unity and the imperative of solidarity have transcended geographical boundaries and differences in many respects among AFAD's member-organizations. Linking arms with like-minded organizations in the region and in the rest of the world will ensure that AFAD's voice be made loud and clear enough to be heard.

On its 18th anniversary, the Federation shall steadfastly pursue this uphill struggle until its very end. Every step of the way will bring the Federation a little closer to its much-cherished dream for a world without *desaparecidos*. The spiritual presence and inspiration of the *desaparecidos* continue to serve as a beacon of hope that one day, all tears will be wiped away and all these struggles will be laid to rest.

Signed:



KHURRAM PARVEZ

Co-Chairperson



MARY AILEEN D. BACALSO

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