



Taipei Declaration on Democracy in Asia

Adopted on 17 September 2005 at the close of the first biennial conference of the World Forum for Democratization in Asia (WFDA) in Taipei, Taiwan (15-17 September 2005)

Introduction

- We, more than 300 participants from over 20 countries in Asia, as well as partners from around the world, met in Taipei from 15-17 September 2005 at the first biennial conference of the World Forum for Democratization in Asia (WFDA). It was convened by the 5 initiating organizations and hosted by the Taiwan Foundation for Democracy.¹
- During the three-day meeting, we as democracy advocates and human rights activists identified and assessed issues and challenges we faced in our work for democratization in Asia, taking into account the outcome of the three Strategy Development Workshops held since December 2004.
- We were deeply alarmed by deteriorating political situations in Asia such as Nepal, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Sri Lanka, Tibet, and East Turkestan (Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region). At the same time, Burma, North Korea, and Vietnam remain among the most repressive regimes in the world.
- We noted with serious concern the growing impact of Chinese foreign policies, particularly its political, military and economic support for non-democratic regimes. Improvements in human rights in China and its democratization are essential for the future development of the entire region.
- However, we were encouraged by democratic developments in some Asian countries such as Indonesia, Taiwan, and South Korea. We were pleased to note significant progress in conflict transformation such as the peace accord on Aceh, the India-Pakistan dialogue on peace, and the six-party talks on nuclear issues in North Korea.
- We honor and remember the many unknown and known victims of human rights abuses along with the champions of human rights and democracy including Munir (Indonesia), Somchai Neelapaijit (Thailand), Thich Quang Do (Vietnam), and Aung San Suu Kyi (Burma). Through sharing and witnessing, we reaffirmed our commitment to fundamental principles of democracy and human rights and to renew solidarity with people who are struggling against anti-democratic governments of Asia.

Values and Principles

We believe that:

1. Democracy is a universal value and a fundamental right to which all citizens and people in Asia are entitled, and it is indispensable for sustainable peace and development.
2. Democracy, human rights, human development, and peace are inter-dependent, inter-related, and mutually reinforcing.
3. The rule of law and independence of the judiciary, transparency, and accountability are essential for democratic governance.
4. Democratic development is enhanced by the political, cultural, and religious diversity of Asian societies.

¹ Alliance for Reform and Democracy in Asia, Alternative Asean Network on Burma, Forum Asia Democracy, Initiatives for International Dialogue, and Taiwan Foundation for Democracy.

5. The rights of minorities and vulnerable groups in Asia should be respected and protected before, during, and after democratization.
6. All peoples have the right to self-determination as a foundation for democracy, and all peaceful struggles for self-determination deserve our support.
7. Gender equality and women's political participation and empowerment are essential for strengthening participatory democracy in Asia.
8. Asian governments have primary responsibility to promote and protect all human rights, by establishing public institutions and strengthening inter-governmental cooperation in accordance with universal democratic norms and standards.
9. Democracy requires international solidarity and cooperation among peoples in Asia, in particular among democracy advocates and human rights defenders, working in partnership with the global community.
10. Democratic societies in Asia have a political and moral responsibility to promote democracy in other societies, particularly those struggling under authoritarian and repressive regimes, by supporting and assisting their endeavors.
11. Political parties have a responsibility to foster a democratic political culture through developing effective mechanisms for representing the public interest.
12. Civil society – both domestic and international – has a critical role to play in advancing democratization and defense of human rights, as well as transformation of conflicts.
13. Free media, as the fourth pillar of democracy, has a vital role to promote political culture conducive to transparent and accountable governance.

Call to Action

1. We commit ourselves to strengthening a solidarity network by disseminating and sharing information on best practices among democracy advocates and human rights defenders.
2. We shall strengthen response systems to immediate and emerging threats and challenges to democracy in Asia by creating more effective protection mechanisms for democracy advocates and human rights defenders.
3. We will promote political accountability – both domestic and international – by combating impunity and corruption at all levels of society.
4. We commit ourselves to elimination of all forms of discrimination against women, in particular those that impede their political participation and representation.
5. We will work to mainstream independent and effective election monitoring throughout the region in order to achieve free and fair elections.
6. We urge all Asian governments to fulfill their international obligations by ratifying and implementing all international human rights and humanitarian instruments.
7. We call on all actors to fulfill their obligations to respect and uphold human rights principles when countering terrorism.
8. We will work for the creation of inter-governmental cooperation mechanisms which effectively address issues of conflicts and human rights violations and democracy crises.
9. We urge Asian governments and international financial and trade institutions to adopt and fully implement the rights-based approach to development towards the full realization of democratic and sustainable development.
10. We will support and assist various international networks and coalitions for the promotion of democracy and human rights such as the
 - International Civil Society Forum for Democracy
 - Non-Governmental Process for the Community of Democracies

- World Movement for Democracy