

**2021 International Day for Democracy
“A Call for Solidarity and Unity to Defend Democracy”**

Press Release

15 September 2021

The year 2021 has thus proven to be not only a difficult year socially and economically with the continuation of the pandemic, but also very challenging for democracy and human rights in Asia.

The health crisis has claimed millions of lives all over the world as well as negatively impacted our fundamental freedoms, exacerbating the degradation of our civic space. This vulnerable environment in Asia has enabled the rise of authoritarian leaders as they embrace tighter populist approaches in the guise of handling the pandemic.

Political persecution in Hong Kong continues with activists, journalists, media business owners, critics and opposition figures being targeted and charged with sedition. The coup in Myanmar by the junta military has killed more than a thousand civilians. In Thailand, countless youth activists are arrested for demanding democracy. Asian human rights defenders and democracy advocates continue to endure intimidation and persecution for their work on a daily basis. Unfortunately, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and other intergovernmental institutions have failed to protect civilians from this crisis and ensure their security and safety.

Governments in South Asia still continue to victimize their citizens through an oppressive caste culture and ethnic politicization has become systemically entrenched for decades. We are seeing a regress in democratic governance and severe crackdowns on media freedom. With the recent recapture of Afghanistan by the Taliban, we are bracing for increased oppression of human rights and democracy defenders, especially for women and children. Again, the international community has failed to prevent this catastrophe and protect lives.

During these trying times, it is of paramount importance that the Asian region come together in solidarity and in unity to push back against the waning of our fundamental freedoms. We call upon the people of Asia to embrace **people to people** solidarity, and to extend support to each other in responding to these crises. We call on all actors such as civil society, youth, women, minority groups, the business sector, media,

governments on the regional, national and sub-national level to work towards unity for democracy. Through this strengthening of multilateralism, we will enable an environment that empowers people to stand-up against threats to democracy, human rights, humanity, authoritarianism and populism, providing us a chance at pushing back against democratic relapse.

We at the Asia Democracy Network (ADN) will continue to stand and support fellow pro-democracy actors and human rights defenders across all causes. We believe that, only through strong solidarity among the people, will we be able to overcome the current crisis and push back against oppression, and prevent further the shrinking democratic space in our midst.

On this day, we remember the sacrifices of those who have given their lives and liberties to fight for democracy. In the spirit of the International Day of Democracy, we affirm our resolve to protect human rights and the rule of law amid the challenges brought forth by the pandemic. We will continue to advocate, promote and uphold democratic governance and fundamental freedoms for all.

The fight goes on for democracy and human rights!