

Asia Democracy
Network

ANNUAL REPORT 2025

Asia Democracy Network

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2025

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Asia Democracy Network

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Contents

1. About ADN	1
2. Message from the Secretariat	2
3. Pursuing Democratic Unity through CSO Consolidation	4
a. Consolidating Civil Society on the National Level.....	4
b. Subregional Consultations: Grounding ADA 2025 in Regional Realities.....	4
4. Responding to Regional Democracy Crisis	6
a. Webinars.....	6
b. Statements	13
5. Sustaining the Democracy Movement	16
a. Asia Democracy Assembly (ADA) 2025.....	16
b. International Civil Society Week (ICSW): Advancing Democracy and Civic Freedoms.....	21
c. Next Generation Democracy Leaders	22
d. Asia Pacific Social Forum	25
e. Security Intersections and Alternatives (SIA).....	26
f. Discussion ACSC/APF 2025.....	27
6. Uplifting Asia's Democratic Narrative	28
a. Asia Democracy Chronicles	28
b. The 2024 Democracy Overview - Flagship Publication.....	32
7. Exploring New Frontiers in Democracy	34
a. AI and Democracy: Battling Disinformation in Asia's 2024 Elections	34
8. Financial Report	36
9. ADN Governance and Membership	38

1

About ADN

The Asia Democracy Network (ADN) is a regional coalition of civil society organizations and democracy advocates working to strengthen democracy, protect civic space, and promote inclusive governance across Asia. Since its founding in 2013 in Seoul, Korea, ADN has fostered cross-movement collaboration, supported grassroots activism, and built regional solidarity to address the region's evolving democratic challenges. With a network spanning 11 regional members and over 300 national organisations.

ADN remains at the forefront of mobilizing democratic actors across Northeast, Southeast, and South Asia.

To achieve these goals, ADN focuses on four strategic programs:

Democratic Consolidation – ADN mobilizes democracy advocates at national and regional levels to counter democratic backsliding, protect civic space, and build resilient democratic movements through convenings, solidarity actions, and advocacy.

Inclusive Democracy through Youth Leadership – Recognizing the vital role of youth in sustaining democracy, ADN nurtures young leaders through education, capacity-building, and intergenerational collaboration to strengthen youth participation in governance and activism.

Enabling Local-Global Ecosystems for Democracy – ADN bridges grassroots movements with global initiatives, ensuring local voices shape international democracy and human rights frameworks while advocating for more inclusive global governance.

Exploring New Frontiers in Democracy – ADN addresses emerging challenges such as digital authoritarianism, disinformation, business and human rights, gender equality, and climate democracy by fostering partnerships and expanding regional discourse.

ADN's mission is to mobilize progressive civil society and democracy advocates while engaging with governments and international institutions to promote a resilient, civil society-led democratic network in Asia. Through solidarity, advocacy, and innovation, ADN works to safeguard civic spaces, empower new generations of democracy defenders, and advance a democratic future rooted in justice, dignity, and human rights.

The ADN is headquartered in Seoul, Korea with a Secretariat of 5 staff members located in the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, and Thailand. ADN also has a media arm called the [Asia Democracy Chronicles](#) where we elevate Asia's democracy and human rights stories from the ground up.

2

Message from the Secretariat

The year 2025 has been one of renewal, collective strength, and rising democratic energy across Asia. While civic space continues to shrink and authoritarian tendencies remain entrenched, the region has also witnessed powerful waves of youth-led mobilization demanding accountability, social justice, and democratic change. These protest movements, often emerging from campuses, grassroots networks, and informal digital communities, have become a defining force in shaping political narratives and reminding us that the democratic struggle is carried by a new generation unafraid to speak out.

Amid this shifting landscape, ADN worked to create meaningful spaces for dialogue, collaboration, and solidarity. The Asia Democracy Assembly 2025—held within the International Civil Society Week (ICSW) and our largest and most diverse gathering to date—brought together civil society leaders, young activists, journalists, and policymakers from across the region. It served not only as a space for reflection but also as a platform to co-create strategies that bridge movements, strengthen cross-sector collaboration, and respond to the deepening challenges facing democracy today. Throughout the year, ADN also convened sub-regional dialogues, youth trainings, and cross-movement exchanges, helping transform individual activism into shared agendas and sustained networks.

In moments where democratic defenders faced repression, threats, or forced displacement, ADN continued its solidarity work by extending support, protection, and international visibility. These efforts remain central to our mission of ensuring that those on the frontlines of democratic advocacy are not left to face risks alone.

We are grateful for the unwavering support of our members, partners, and donors, whose commitment allows us to continue building a resilient democratic community. As we move forward under the guidance of ADN's five-year strategy, we remain dedicated to strengthening regional cooperation, amplifying youth voices, and advancing a shared vision of inclusive and durable democracy in Asia.

On behalf of the Secretariat,

Ichal Supriadi
Secretary General



3

Pursuing Democratic Unity through CSO Consolidation

A. CONSOLIDATING CIVIL SOCIETY ON THE NATIONAL LEVEL

Bangladesh

Building on the momentum of last year's urgent interventions on Bangladesh's democratic transition, ADN continued its partnership with the Sydney Policy and Analysis Centre (SPAC) throughout 2025. With the political landscape still in flux and key questions around election timing, institutional reform, and youth engagement shaping national debates, ADN and SPAC sustained their role in convening timely, evidence-based discussions that elevate voices from within Bangladesh and its diaspora. In March and July, the two organisations co-hosted two major webinars—*Election Timing and Institutional Reforms: A Constitutional Debate and*

Future of Democratic Transition and Reforms: Youth Perspectives in Bangladesh—bringing together constitutional experts, youth leaders, academics, and civil society actors. These conversations helped unpack the complex reform process, surface youth expectations one year after the uprising, and contribute to broader regional understanding of Bangladesh's democratic trajectory. By maintaining this partnership and platform, ADN reaffirmed its commitment to supporting inclusive dialogue, amplifying local perspectives, and strengthening regional solidarity during a formative moment in Bangladesh's democratic future.

B. SUBREGIONAL CONSULTATIONS: GROUNDING ADA 2025 IN REGIONAL REALITIES

In preparation for the Asia Democracy Assembly 2025, the Asia Democracy Network conducted a series of subregional consultations across South-east Asia, East and Central Asia, and South Asia. Held over three days, these online consultations brought together democracy advocates, civil

society leaders, journalists, youth activists, and frontline organizers from across the respective subregions to provide candid, first-hand assessments of democratic conditions on the ground.

Participants were invited to share in-depth

perspectives on political developments, civic space trends, authoritarian tactics, and emerging forms of resistance within their countries. The consultations created a trusted space for collective analysis, particularly for actors working in restrictive, high-risk, or shrinking civic environments. Across regions, discussions revealed shared patterns of democratic erosion—including militarization, institutional capture, digital repression, socio-economic inequality, and gender-based exclusion—alongside strong evidence of resilience driven by youth, women, grassroots movements, and transnational solidarity.

The insights generated through these subregional consultations formed a critical evidence base for ADA 2025. They directly informed the Assembly’s thematic priorities, plenary framing, and strategy discussions, enabling participants to move beyond diagnosis toward regional coordination and forward-looking action. By centering lived experience and frontline knowledge, the consultations ensured that ADA 2025—and its resulting Democracy Agenda—was firmly grounded in the realities, challenges, and aspirations of democratic actors across Asia.



4

Responding to Regional Democracy Crisis

A. WEBINARS

 Webinar

Register: <https://bit.ly/HK47web>



The Hong Kong 47 and the Erosion of Rule of Law under the National Security Law

Tuesday, March 25 at 22:00 Japan Standard Time



Alric Lee
Executive Director,
Lady Liberty Hong
Kong

Moderator



Joey Siu
Executive Council,
World Liberty
Congress



Maiko Ichiharha
Professor, Graduate
School of Law,
Hitotsubashi
University



Michael Caster
Head of Global China
Programme,
Article 19

The Hong Kong 47 and the Erosion of Rule of Law under the National Security Law, (March 2025)

In March 2025, ADN and Lady Liberty Hong Kong co-hosted a critical webinar examining the worsening human rights situation under Hong Kong's National Security Law (NSL) and the first anniversary of the Safeguarding National Security Ordinance (SNSO). The discussion highlighted the profound deterioration of judicial independence, civil liberties, and political freedoms, with speakers emphasizing that the expanded security framework has effectively criminalized peaceful political participation, silenced independent media, and dismantled Hong Kong's opposition. Opening remarks underscored how high-profile cases—notably the mass conviction of the Hong Kong 47 and the prosecution of Jimmy Lai—reflect the transformation of the legal system into an instrument of political repression.

Speakers detailed the far-reaching consequences of the NSL: arbitrary arrests, harsh penalties, erosion of fair-trial guarantees, and the elimination of checks on executive authority. Panelists described widespread self-censorship across media, academia, and civil society, the forced

closure of independent news outlets, and the targeting of individuals for symbolic or nonviolent acts. The discussion also examined the growing phenomenon of transnational repression, including arrest warrants and bounties issued against activists abroad, and the increasing pressure faced by Hong Kongers in exile.

The session further explored the international dimensions of Hong Kong's repression, noting inadequate global responses, limited accountability mechanisms, and the implications of China's expanding authoritarian model for regional democratic security. Speakers stressed the need for stronger protections for Hong Kong exiles, coordinated international pressure, and sustained advocacy by the global diaspora to keep the issue visible.

Based on the insights from this webinar, ADN developed a detailed [briefing paper](#) documenting the human rights implications of the NSL, the significance of the Hong Kong 47 case, and the urgent need for regional and international action.

Indonesia's Revised Military Law: Ushering in a new Era of Militarized Governance Under President Prabowo, (April 2025)

In April 2025, ADN convened a public webinar examining Indonesia's controversial revision of its military law, which was passed under President Prabowo Subianto and widely criticized as a major step toward renewed authoritarianism. Drawing on insights from leading legal experts and civil society leaders, the discussion analyzed how the amendments dramatically expand the role of the Indonesian armed forces in civilian governance, revive elements of the authoritarian-era *dwifungsi*

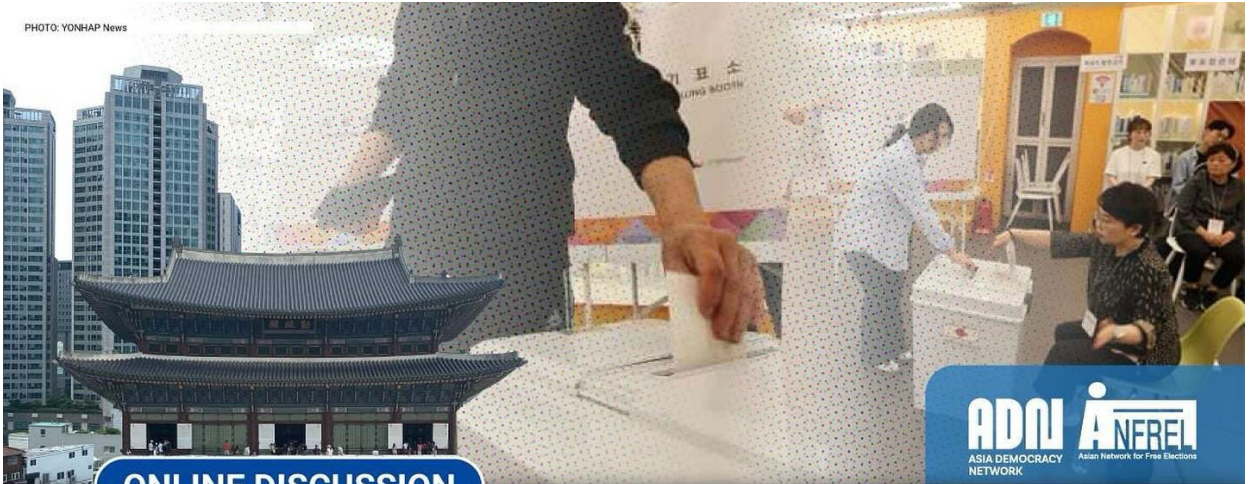
doctrine, and remove key democratic safeguards. Panelists highlighted profound concerns over the law's elimination of parliamentary oversight, the president's unchecked authority to deploy the military, expanded overseas operations mandates, and provisions allowing active-duty officers to occupy leadership roles across civilian institutions—including the judiciary, counterterrorism agencies, disaster management bodies, and state administration.

Speakers warned that these changes erode two decades of democratic reform, normalize military involvement in public life, and risk institutionalizing a governance model based on command-and-control rather than democratic accountability. The discussion also underscored the shrinking civic space in Indonesia: rising intimidation of activists, pressure on universities, growing surveillance, and the stigmatization of dissent as “anti-national.” Participants noted that the revised law threatens electoral integrity—particularly in sensitive regions like Papua—and could further entrench impunity for past human rights violations.

Public backlash has been strong, with student protests across major cities and legal aid groups preparing constitutional challenges. Regional and international organizations have likewise raised alarms, emphasizing the law’s broader implications for Southeast Asia’s democratic trajectory. Based on the webinar’s insights, ADN produced a comprehensive [policy brief](#) analyzing the legal, political, and civic consequences of Indonesia’s militarization and outlining urgent recommendations for government, civil society, and regional actors to prevent further democratic decline.



What the June 3 Presidential Election means for South Korea's Democratic Future (June 2025)



ONLINE DISCUSSION

What the June 3 Presidential Election Means for South Korea's Democratic Future

24 June 2025, Tuesday | 1 p.m. Seoul Time (GMT +9)

SPEAKERS



Brizza Rosales
ANFREL



Sohee Yang
VALID Korea



Soo Suh
ADN



Manjesh Rana
ANFREL

CO-MODERATORS

▶ WATCH LIVE via ANFREL   

 <https://anfrel.org/>    ANFREL  @_anfrel  @AsianNetworkforFreeElections

ADN, in partnership with ANFREL, hosted a timely webinar analyzing South Korea's June 3

snap presidential election—an election triggered by the impeachment of former President Yoon Suk-yeol after his unconstitutional martial-law declaration. Speakers emphasized that the election became a national referendum on authoritarian overreach and a powerful demonstration of democratic resilience, marked by nearly 80% voter turnout and the victory of opposition leader Lee Jae-min. The discussion highlighted how strong civic mobilization, especially among women and young voters, helped avert democratic collapse and reaffirmed public trust in electoral mechanisms. Panelists examined key lessons for the

region, noting South Korea's unique combination of independent institutions, active civil society, and a political culture rooted in remembering past democratic struggles. At the same time, they stressed urgent needs for institutional reform—including strengthening checks on executive power, modernizing the electoral system, and ensuring safer civic space. The conversation underscored how South Korea's experience offers both inspiration and practical insights for other Asian democracies facing polarization, disinformation, and shrinking civic space.



Bangladesh Election Timing & Institutional Reforms – A Constitutional Debate (March 2025)

Webinar 05

Election Timing & Institutional Reforms: A Constitutional Debate

March 21, 2025 | 0430 GMT or 1030 Dhaka time

Register at: <https://bit.ly/WebBangla5>

 **LIVE** Livestream on ADN Youtube



In March 2025, ADN and SPAC jointly convened a timely webinar examining one of the most contentious issues in Bangladesh’s political transition: whether elections should proceed before or after the completion of proposed institutional and constitutional reforms. Featuring members of the Constitution Reform Commission, legal experts, economists, and civil society representatives, the discussion explored the wide-ranging

reform proposals introduced by the interim government—spanning the judiciary, election management, and the balance of powers. Speakers unpacked the political dilemma that emerged following the 2024 uprising: while reforms are essential to rebuilding trust in state institutions, delaying elections risks deepening the legitimacy vacuum and weakening democratic accountability.

The conversation underscored strong public demand for timely elections and highlighted the dangers of framing reforms and elections as mutually exclusive processes. Panelists emphasized that minimal electoral reforms could be implemented quickly to support a credible vote, with broader institutional changes continuing under an elected government. Concerns about

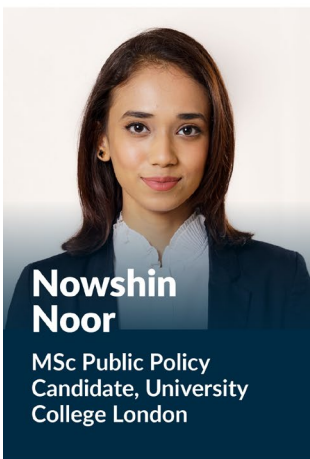
public engagement, political uncertainty, and confidence in the interim administration were also raised. Based on these discussions, ADN and SPAC produced a comprehensive briefing paper to document the insights, identify risks, and inform regional actors about the complex dynamics shaping Bangladesh's transition.

Future of Democratic Transition & Reforms – Youth Perspectives in Bangladesh (July 2025)

Webinar 06

Future of democratic transition and reforms: Youth's perspectives in Bangladesh

July 18, 2025 | 0900 GMT | Register at: <https://bit.ly/Banglaweb6>



The July 2025 webinar centered on the voices of young Bangladeshis—those who led, experienced, and were profoundly affected by the 2024 uprising. The session brought together youth leaders and researchers who reflected on the events that catalyzed the fall of the previous regime and examined how young people view the ongoing reform process one year later. Panelists recounted the violence, mobilization, and sacrifices that shaped the uprising, emphasizing the urgency of ensuring that youth perspectives remain central to the country’s democratic transition. Their reflections also illuminated the deeper mistrust in state institutions, the longstanding credibility crisis of past elections, and the pressing need for structural reforms that go beyond symbolic constitutional amendments.

Discussions highlighted concerns about whether reforms are being implemented inclusively, especially for marginalized communities whose voices remain underrepresented in national politics. Panelists warned that without transparency, public engagement, and institutional safeguards, the reform process could be derailed by reactionary forces or reduced to elite-driven outcomes. The session provided important insights into youth expectations for justice, representation, and meaningful political participation. A follow-up briefing paper was developed by ADN and SPAC to capture these perspectives and to ensure that youth-driven narratives inform future regional advocacy, solidarity efforts, and policy recommendations.

B. STATEMENTS

South Korea’s Institutions and Citizens Uphold Democracy in Historic Impeachment (April 2025)

ADN welcomed the Constitutional Court of South Korea’s unanimous decision to uphold the impeachment of President Yoon Suk-yeol, describing it as a landmark affirmation of the country’s democratic resilience. The statement highlighted that Yoon’s declaration of martial law in December 2024 constituted a serious constitutional breach, prompting swift action from the National Assembly and ultimately the courts. ADN underscored the vital role played not only by

strong democratic institutions but also by South Korea’s citizens, whose peaceful mobilization and insistence on accountability reinforced the country’s democratic norms. With a new election mandated within 60 days, ADN emphasized that this moment offers South Korea an opportunity to restore public trust and reaffirm its democratic values, while reminding the region of the importance of vigilance and collective responsibility in safeguarding democracy.

Joint Statement (ADN & FORUM-ASIA): Expanded Security Legislation Threatens Civil Liberties and Autonomy in Hong Kong (May 2025)

In May 2025, ADN and FORUM-ASIA jointly condemned the Hong Kong Government's enactment of new national security amendments that further erode civil liberties, judicial independence, and the "One Country, Two Systems" framework. Passed through a "negative vetting" process that bypassed public and legislative scrutiny, the legislation expands the powers of Beijing's Office for Safeguarding National Security, introduces harsh penalties for disclosure or obstruction, and broadens Beijing's jurisdiction over so-called "complex" cases. The statement warned that these

measures deepen a pattern of legal repression established under the 2020 National Security Law and Article 23, contributing to widespread fear, shrinking civic space, and growing risks for activists, journalists, and ordinary citizens. ADN and FORUM-ASIA urged the Hong Kong authorities to repeal the repressive provisions and called on the international community to defend human rights, support those targeted, and hold responsible actors accountable for the escalating authoritarian crackdown.

Joint Statement: Thailand – End Judicial Harassment of Human Rights Defender Pimsiri Petchnamrob (June 2025)

In June 2025, ADN joined regional and international civil society organizations in condemning the ongoing judicial harassment of Thai women human rights defender Pimsiri Petchnamrob. Despite engaging in peaceful protest and exercising legitimate freedom of expression, Pimsiri continues to face multiple criminal charges—including lèse-majesté, sedition, and violations of assembly and emergency laws—stemming from a speech she delivered during a 2020 demonstration. Her case reflects the broader misuse of Thailand's legal system to suppress

dissent, as numerous pro-democracy activists face similar politically motivated prosecutions. The statement highlighted the disproportionate and unjust application of Section 112, restrictions on Pimsiri's travel to UN human rights mechanisms, and the chilling effect of criminalizing peaceful activism. ADN and co-signing organizations called on the Thai government to drop all charges against Pimsiri, end the abuse of judicial processes against peaceful protesters, and uphold its obligations under the ICCPR and the UN Human Rights Council.

ADN Condemns Deadly Crackdown on Nepal's Genz Protesters (September 2025)

In September 2025, ADN condemned the deadly and disproportionate use of force by Nepalese security forces against youth protesters

demonstrating against the government's abrupt ban on 26 social media platforms and long-standing concerns over corruption and



economic injustice. What began as peaceful demonstrations across Kathmandu and other cities escalated into one of the deadliest crackdowns in South Asia in recent years, with 19 young people killed and many more injured after authorities deployed live ammunition, rubber bullets, and tear gas. Despite the subsequent lifting of the ban, the violence represented a severe

violation of fundamental freedoms and raised urgent questions about accountability and state repression. ADN called on the Nepalese authorities to safeguard the rights to peaceful assembly and expression, conduct an independent investigation into the killings, and engage constructively with youth and civil society to restore trust and strengthen democratic governance.

5

Sustaining the Democracy Movement

A. ASIA DEMOCRACY ASSEMBLY (ADA) 2025



The Asia Democracy Assembly (ADA) 2025 was held from 1–3 November 2025 in Bangkok, Thailand, bringing together democratic actors from across Asia at a critical moment for the region. Convened by the Asia Democracy Network (ADN), the Assembly took place alongside the CIVICUS International Civil Society Week (ICSW) and the Asia Pacific Social Forum (APSF), forming part of a broader week-long civil society gathering of over 1000+ participants across the three events enabling meaningful cross-movement exchange and global solidarity.

In a context marked by democratic backsliding, shrinking civic space, and growing transnational repression, ADA 2025 provided a vital platform for collective reflection, learning, and action. The Assembly convened over 300 participants from more than 28 countries, including activists, youth leaders, journalists, academics, civil society organizations, and diaspora communities. Participants represented all subregions of Asia, with strong participation from frontline and at-risk communities working under conditions of repression, conflict, and exile.

Building a Shared Understanding of Democracy in Asia



ADA 2025 was grounded in a robust preparatory process. In the months leading up to the Assembly, ADN organized online subregional consultations across Southeast Asia, South Asia, and East/Central Asia. Through these consultations, country experts and frontline activists contributed detailed analyses of political developments, civic space trends, and emerging authoritarian tactics.

These insights shaped the Assembly's agenda and ensured discussions reflected real-time conditions across the region. Common challenges identified included institutional capture, militarization of civic space, digital repression and disinformation, widening socio-economic inequalities, and the growing role of youth-led and intersectional movements in resisting democratic erosion.

Dialogue, Exchange, and Collective Strategy

The Assembly opened with a joint ceremony across all three congruent events at Thammasat University, symbolizing regional and global solidarity and situating Asia's democratic struggles within a wider international context. Over the following days, participants engaged in thematic breakout sessions, plenary discussions, and strategy dialogues held at the Royal River Hotel.

Thematic sessions addressed critical issues such as technology and democracy, disinformation, youth leadership, inclusion of marginalized communities,

militarization, institutional safeguards, and the role of diaspora and migrant communities in democratic struggles. Plenary sessions combined regional analysis with powerful testimony from activists working under military rule, occupation, or in exile, highlighting both the scale of democratic challenges and the resilience of resistance movements.

Creative interventions and storytelling throughout the Assembly emphasized the importance of narrative-building, cultural expression, and collective care within democracy movements.





Outcomes and Looking Ahead

ADA 2025 strengthened regional connections and fostered new alliances across movements, generations, and borders. The discussions culminated in shared priorities that will inform a regional democracy agenda for 2026, guiding future advocacy, collaboration, and movement-building efforts.

By convening diverse voices and experiences in one space, ADA 2025 reaffirmed the power of solidarity and collective action. The Assembly underscored that while democratic challenges in Asia are increasingly interconnected and transnational, so too are the strategies, relationships, and movements working to defend and advance democratic values across the region.



B. INTERNATIONAL CIVIL SOCIETY WEEK (ICSW): ADVANCING DEMOCRACY AND CIVIC FREEDOMS

In November, ADN collaborated in International Civil Society Week (ICSW), a global convening that brought together more than 1,000 civil society leaders from across regions and movements to collectively respond to the accelerating erosion of democracy and civic space worldwide. Held in Bangkok, ICSW served as a critical platform for dialogue, coordination, and collective action at a time of heightened authoritarianism and shrinking civic freedoms.

ICSW was co-hosted by CIVICUS, a global alliance of over 17,000 civil society members, and the Asia Democracy Network. The gathering culminated in a global declaration endorsed by over 600 signatories, including international organizations and alongside hundreds of grassroots activists and changemakers.

The declaration called on governments, multilateral institutions, and global actors to defend democracy and civic freedoms, emphasizing that democratic governance is inseparable from people's ability to organize, speak freely, and hold power to account. It underscored growing concerns over the weaponization of laws to suppress dissent, restrictions on peaceful protest, and attacks on freedom of expression across regions.

Four priority areas for action were identified:

- Protecting and advancing democracy and good governance
- Unconditionally upholding human rights
- Ensuring environmental protection and climate justice

- Defending the rights of minorities and historically excluded groups

The declaration also challenged civil society itself to reimagine its role, adapt strategies, and strengthen solidarity in response to unprecedented political, social, and technological challenges—reaffirming civil society's essential role in defending democratic values and human rights.

Through our engagement in ICSW, we contributed to a shared global effort to reinforce democratic resilience, strengthen civic space, and amplify collective demands for justice, participation, and accountability. The convening reaffirmed that confronting authoritarianism and systemic injustice requires coordinated, people-centered action across movements, regions, and generations.

In addition, as a part of International Civil Society Week, we convened over 250 Asia-based democracy advocates through the Asia Democracy Assembly, held in parallel to the global gathering. The Assembly created a focused space to elevate Asia's democratic realities and priorities, ensuring regional perspectives meaningfully informed global discussions on civic freedoms, democratic backsliding, digital repression, and cross-movement solidarity. This work directly advanced our long-term regional strategy to strengthen democratic resilience in Asia by investing in sustained convening, cross-border collaboration, and shared political narratives.

The impact of this engagement was amplified during the week of 1 November, when ICSW coincided with the Asia Pacific Social Forum at Thammasat University. Over six months of coordination among Asia Democracy Network,

CIVICUS, the Asia Pacific Social Forum, and Thammasat University created rare synergy across three major convenings—distinct yet united in purpose—sending a powerful message of collective resolve to advance democracy, human rights, and peace.

By convening regional actors and aligning parallel global gatherings, we strengthened Asia-wide solidarity and amplified a unified call for democracy, civic freedoms, and justice in the face of growing repression.

C. NEXT GENERATION DEMOCRACY LEADERS



South Asian Youth Network (SAYN)

ADN continued to nurture and support the growth of the South Asian Youth Network (SAYN), a youth-led regional collective established in 2023 to amplify young voices in South Asia’s democratic landscape. Throughout 2024–2025, ADN helped facilitate coordination spaces, enabling members from across the region to exchange updates, respond to unfolding events, and build cross-border solidarity.

A major milestone in 2025 was SAYN’s active participation in the Asia Democracy Assembly, where ADN ensured meaningful youth representation by integrating the network into the thematic track on Next Generation Democracy Leadership. SAYN co-organized a youth session alongside the Milk Tea Alliance and ASEAN Youth Network, bringing South Asian experiences from protest movements to discrimination

into broader Asia-wide discussions. ADN also supported SAYN members in contributing to youth-led agenda-setting processes at International Civil Society Week in Bangkok, helping embed South Asian priorities within global civil society spaces.

Through ongoing facilitation, partnerships, and capacity-building, ADN continues to strengthen SAYN as an emerging hub for future democracy leaders, fostering deeper connections across Asia and enhancing their ability to engage collectively on regional democratic challenges.

Next Generation Democracy Leaders Program (15–19 May 2025)





From 15–19 May 2025, we convened 25 young democracy leaders from across Asia in South Korea for our Next Generation Democracy Leaders Program, an immersive regional exchange designed to strengthen democratic resilience, solidarity, and cross-border collaboration among emerging leaders.

The program connected participants with Korean civil society organizations, historians, and youth activists, offering a grounded understanding of Korea’s democratic journey and the ongoing relevance of people-powered resistance. Participants engaged directly with the Korea Democracy Foundation through a visit to the newly opened National Museum for Korean Democracy, where they examined the historical struggles against authoritarian rule and the institutional foundations that sustain democracy today.

The delegation then traveled to Gwangju to participate in the May 18 Democratic Uprising memorial commemorations, in collaboration with the May 18th Memorial Foundation. Through memorial events, site visits, and dialogue with movement veterans and local activists, participants reflected on the legacy of the Gwangju Uprising as a cornerstone of Korea’s democratic transition and a powerful symbol of collective courage in the face of dictatorship.

The program also created space to examine contemporary democratic challenges, including reflections on Korea’s recent political tensions in 2025, reinforcing the lesson that democracy is not static but must be continually defended and renewed. These discussions highlighted the resilience of the Korean people—from resisting military dictatorship in the 1980s to confronting

democratic backsliding in the present—and offered comparative insights relevant across Asian contexts.

By grounding learning in lived history and active civic engagement, the program strengthened regional networks among young democracy

leaders, fostered trust and collaboration across borders, and laid a durable foundation for ongoing collective action. Participants left with deeper historical perspective, renewed commitment to democratic values, and strengthened relationships that will support future cooperation in advancing democracy across Asia.

D. ASIA PACIFIC SOCIAL FORUM

Discussion Series on Democracy and Human Rights Episode 2. Key Challenges and Common Struggles for Democracy and Human Rights in Asia. 24 June Zoom convo

Asia Pacific Update on Current Situation and Crisis, June 2025

Rebuilding from the Fractures: Regional Solidarity and Civic Action in South Asia



ADN co-hosted the session “*Rebuilding from the Fractures: Regional Solidarity and Civic Action in South Asia*” together with South Asians for Human Rights (SAHR) and FORUM-ASIA during the Asia-Pacific Social Forum (APSF). The discussion examined how deepening authoritarianism, securitization, and shrinking civic space are reshaping civil society across South Asia and constraining cross-border collaboration. Speakers highlighted the erosion of institutional safeguards, the pressures created by surveillance and criminalisation, and the growing disconnect between civic actors and the communities they serve. The

conversation also explored youth-led democratic renewal, the challenges of sustaining movements under repression, and the need for protection-conscious, trust-based forms of regional solidarity—including support for marginalized communities and for Afghans facing extreme rights violations.

Following the session, an outcome statement was issued, outlining shared commitments to practical, inclusive, and risk-aware regional cooperation to defend democracy and human rights in South Asia.

E. SECURITY INTERSECTIONS AND ALTERNATIVES (SIA)

In 2024, ADN joined an informal network of civil society organizations working on analyzing the impact of securitization and militarization in Southeast Asia. The loose network, called Security Intersections and Alternatives (SIA), focuses its gaze on how securitized narratives, draconian policies, and militarized governance catalyze shrinking civic spaces and the rights of citizens.

On November 1, during the recently conducted Asia Democracy Assembly 2025 (ADA) in Bangkok, SIA, in collaboration with the Asia Muslim Action Network (AMAN), conducted a thematic discussion on the role of Securitization and Militarization on the rise of autocratic governance in Southeast Asia. The session featured Indonesia as a case study of how securitized

narratives impact political processes. The session then proceeded with a presentation on the Security Playbook, and how various democracy sectors experience securitization first hand. The session concluded with a set of recommendations which were recorded and will be incorporated into the ADA 2025 Outcome Document.

At the sidelines of the ADA 2025, SIA and its members also launched a report on the “*UN and Multilateral Efforts and Civil Society Engagement on Counterterrorism and Preventing and/or Countering Violent Extremism in Southeast Asia*” on November 4. Following the events, the group was also able to conduct its first organizational Strategy Meeting and Planning session in Bangkok on November 6-7, 2025.

F. DISCUSSION ACSC/APF 2025

Reimagining Safe and Healthy Civic Space Toward the Realization of the ASEAN Vision 2045 - Putting Civil Society's Voice at the Centre - Oct 2025

On October 2, 2025, ADN, in partnership with Forum Asia and ALTSEAN - Burma, conducted an online breakout discussion regarding the ASEAN 2045 Vision and how it relates to the health of civic space in Southeast Asia. Titled *“Reimagining Safe and Healthy Civic Space Toward the Realization of the ASEAN Vision 2045 – Putting Civil Society’s Voice at the Centre”*, the discussion puts under the lens the two important human rights declarations are expected to be adopted during the ASEAN Summit 2025:

1. The ASEAN Declaration on the Right to a Safe, Healthy, Clean, and Sustainable Environment, along with its Regional Plan of Action; and
2. The ASEAN Declaration on the Right to Development.

Against this backdrop, the Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA), the Asia Democracy Network and

ALTSEAN Burma propose to convene a multi-stakeholder dialogue to reflect critically on current contexts and re-strategize civil society engagement with ASEAN for 2026 and beyond. During this discussion, ADN presented its preliminary analysis of the state of democracy in Southeast Asia, while a reading of the two declarations were presented by Forum Asia and ALTSEAN Burma.

Both declarations, spearheaded by AICHR, hold potential to guide ASEAN’s implementation of Vision 2045 in ways that strengthen inclusive and sustainable development while reinforcing civic space and environmental rights. Additionally, the adoption of the AICHR Five-Year Workplan (2026–2030) — which addresses democracy, civic space, and environmental concerns — opens avenues for engagement. Notably, the Workplan includes commitments to develop a complaints mechanism and a common regional position on human rights issues, which could empower AICHR to influence ASEAN’s stance more effectively.

6

Uplifting Asia's Democratic Narrative

A. ASIA DEMOCRACY CHRONICLES

ASIA DEMOCRACY CHRONICLES

▲ CIVIL LIBERTIES AND HUMAN RIGHTS: THE VIEW ACROSS THE REGION ▼



ANALYSIS

Building solidarity and forging the future of democracy in Asia

This year's Asia Democracy Assembly comes at a critical juncture in the region's democratic struggle. Human rights are steadily on the decline while civil society actors are determined to push back against repressive governments, driven by a collective aspiration: to reclaim democracy.

BY SABRA ZAHID

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"Every assembly reminds us that authoritarianism thrives in isolation. When we come together – activists, youth leaders, movements, journalists, and defenders – we disrupt that isolation."

Ichal Supriadi
Secretary General
Asian Democracy Network

ABOUT US

Asia Democracy Chronicles, an online publication of the Asia Democracy Network, seeks to shine a spotlight on important but still untold stories from the ground tackling the state of human rights and democracy on the world's largest, most diverse, and most populous continent.



In 2025, ADC's coverage captured a region at a democratic crossroads. Through reporting, analysis, and field-based stories, ADC documented the lived realities of democratic

struggle across Asia—where authoritarian consolidation, democratic backsliding, and civic repression increasingly coexist with resilience, resistance, and innovation by civil society actors.

Shrinking Civic Space and Rising Repression

Key themes emerging across ADC's stories included shrinking civic space, the criminalization of dissent, and the weaponization of law, technology, and disinformation against pro-democracy movements. Elections—once assumed to be democratic safeguards—were frequently portrayed as contested arenas marked by uneven

playing fields, repression of opposition voices, and declining public trust. At the same time, ADC highlighted the persistence of grassroots organizing, particularly among youth, women, labor, and marginalized communities who continue to mobilize despite mounting risks.

Emerging Trends in Democratic Struggles

Across these themes, several trends became evident. First, repression has grown more adaptive and transnational, with states learning from one

another in the use of digital surveillance, legal harassment, and narrative control. Second, civic resistance is increasingly decentralized,

issue-based, and networked across borders, reflecting both necessity and strategic evolution. Third, democratic struggles are no longer framed solely in political terms but are deeply intertwined with economic justice, gender equality, climate governance, and digital rights.

Taken together, the issues covered by ADC in 2025 signal a sobering yet instructive moment for democracy in Asia. Democratic decline is no longer episodic but structural, rooted in entrenched power, inequality, and the normalization of emergency governance. The erosion of independent media, judicial institutions, and electoral integrity poses profound challenges for accountability and citizen participation.

Yet ADC's reporting also points to critical opportunities for action. The persistence of civic engagement—even under extreme repression—demonstrates that democratic aspiration remains

deeply embedded in societies across the region. Stories documenting community-led resistance, cross-movement solidarity, and innovative forms of organizing reveal pathways for renewal rather than retreat.

Excerpts from ADC's coverage underscore these dynamics: accounts of young activists navigating digital repression, communities resisting land dispossession, and women leaders sustaining movements amid patriarchal backlash illustrate both the costs of authoritarianism and the creativity of democratic resistance. Complementing these narratives, regional and international reports increasingly echo ADC's findings—warning of accelerating democratic decline while emphasizing the importance of transnational solidarity, protection of civic actors, and sustained investment in independent media and civil society ecosystems.

Sharpening Editorial Vision for 2026

In light of these challenges, 2026 presents a pivotal opportunity for ADC to sharpen and expand its editorial vision. Building on ADN's strategic directions for the year, ADC can deepen its role as a regional platform that not only reports on democratic crises but also traces connections across movements, borders, and thematic struggles.

There is space for expanded coverage at the intersections of democracy with economic inequality, climate justice, digital governance, and peace and security—areas where democratic deficits are most acutely felt. Strengthening cross-border storytelling, elevating underrepresented sub-regions, and amplifying voices from the frontlines of resistance will further position ADC as both a watchdog and a convening force for democratic discourse in Asia.

A renewed editorial thrust can also emphasize solutions-oriented journalism: documenting not only what is failing, but what is working, where solidarity is emerging, and how collective action is reshaping democratic futures.

Looking ahead, ADC's work sits within a broader ecosystem of regional media and civil society striving to keep democratic issues visible, urgent, and human. As authoritarian narratives grow louder and civic space narrows, independent regional media play an indispensable role in countering silence, fragmentation, and disinformation.

ADC's coverage demonstrates that storytelling is not merely descriptive—it is political, connective, and mobilizing. By drawing sustained attention

to democratic struggles and amplifying voices often pushed to the margins, ADC complements and strengthens the work of organizations like ADN that seek to build solidarity, strategy, and collective resilience across Asia.

In the year ahead, the challenge is not only to document what lies ahead, but to help shape it—by ensuring that democratic struggles are seen, understood, and connected across borders, movements, and generations.

ASIA DEMOCRACY CHRONICLES

▲ CIVIL LIBERTIES AND HUMAN RIGHTS: THE VIEW ACROSS THE REGION ▼



SPECIAL FEATURE

Whose fight is it anyway?

As fighting rages between Pakistan's security forces and the Tehrik-i-Taliban in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province bordering Afghanistan, civilians have their lives upended, in constant threat of being injured or killed.

BY JAMAIMA AFRIDI

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the full article.



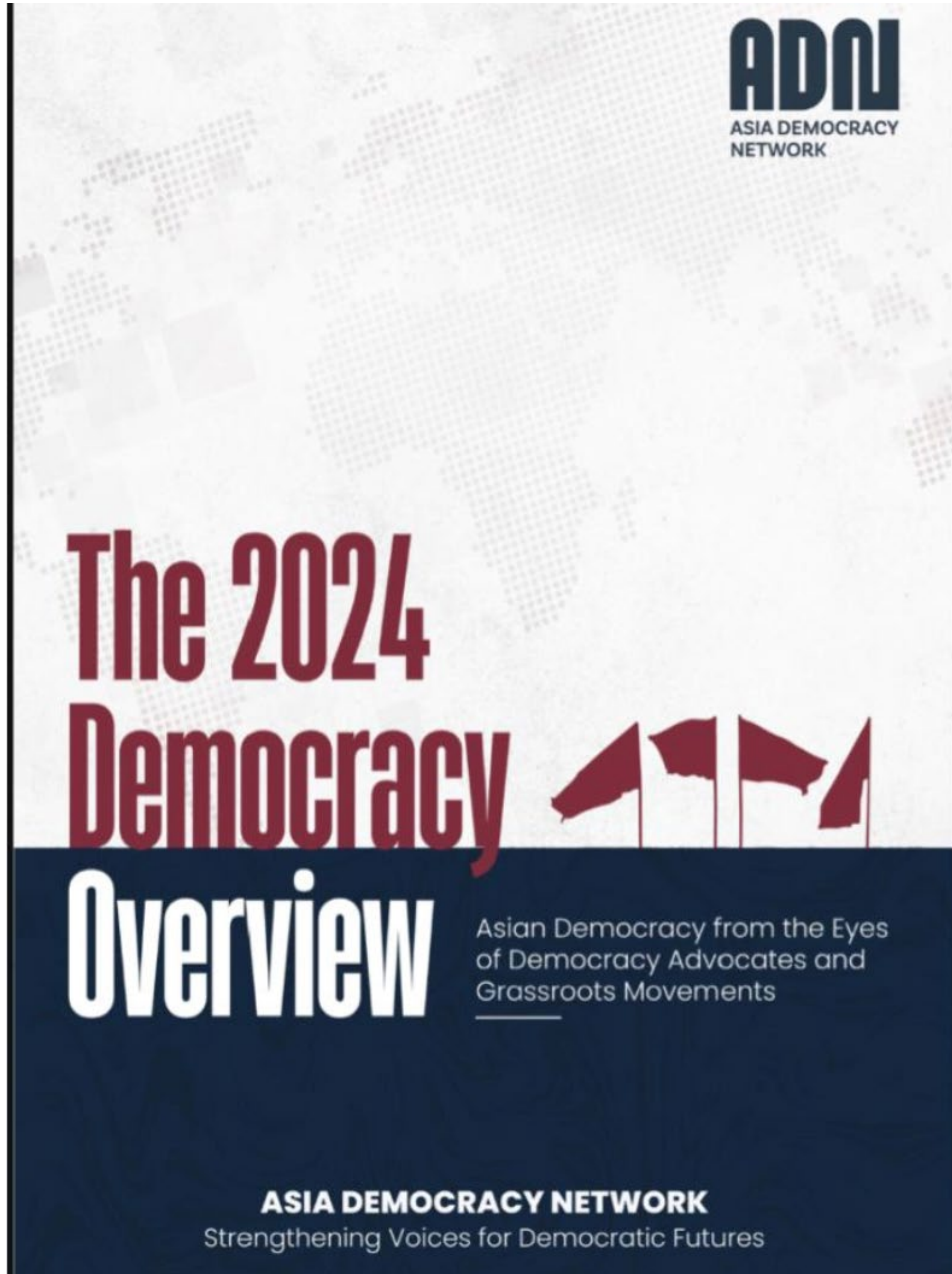
"My children are traumatized, and even the slightest noise sends them into a panic as if it is firing or the situation has become even worse."

Dunya Khela
Tirah Valley resident
Pakistan

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B. THE 2024 DEMOCRACY OVERVIEW - FLAGSHIP PUBLICATION



The year 2024 marked a turbulent period for democracy across Asia. Pro-democracy advocates witnessed the continued co-optation of democratic institutions and political processes, accelerating the region's slide toward entrenched autocracy. Major elections were held in several countries, yet political uncertainty and the lack

of commitment to democratic reforms deepened concerns about the future of rights, freedoms, and civic participation.

Political developments in countries such as Thailand and Bangladesh reflected the rapidly shifting democratic landscape, while long-standing

crises — including the conflict in Myanmar and the situations in Cambodia and Afghanistan — remained profoundly affected by these regional and global pressures. These dynamics were compounded by cross-cutting challenges such as mis- and disinformation, polarization, securitization, climate stressors, weakening institutions, and growing illiberal influence.

Against this backdrop, the Asia Democracy Network, together with its members, published [The 2024 Democracy Overview: Asian Democracy from the Eyes of Democracy Advocates and Grassroots Movements](#), offering a comprehensive assessment of the political and civic space developments across Asia. Drawing on contributions from national and regional partners, the report mapped key trends shaping democracy in the region—including heightened authoritarian consolidation, weaponization of legal systems, shrinking civic space, digital repression, and the intensification of conflicts and military rule.

Despite the widening democratic recession, the Overview identified areas of resilience driven by people-powered movements, youth mobilization,

independent media, and cross-border solidarity networks. The report emphasized how communities continue to resist repression through grassroots organizing, digital activism, and transnational collaboration, even under increasingly hostile conditions.

The report also highlighted the uneven but significant openings for democratic renewal, including electoral shifts, legal victories, and emerging regional alliances working to push back against autocratic influence. The report concluded with strategic recommendations for civil society, international actors, and pro-democracy networks—calling for stronger cross-movement cooperation, support for frontline defenders, investment in independent information ecosystems, and sustained advocacy to protect civic space.

Insights from the Democracy overview 2024 directly informed the agenda of the Asia Democracy Assembly 2025, shaping discussions on collective strategy, shared democratic priorities, and coordinated action across the region.

7

Exploring New Frontiers in Democracy

A. AI AND DEMOCRACY: BATTLING DISINFORMATION IN ASIA'S 2024 ELECTIONS



At RightsCon 2025 in Taipei, ADN co-organized an in-person dialogue with Hashtag Generation Sri Lanka titled *“AI and Democracy: Battling Disinformation in Asia’s 2024 Elections.”* The session brought together leading digital rights

experts, technologists, and democracy advocates from India, Taiwan, and Indonesia to examine how artificial intelligence shaped electoral environments across Asia’s major 2024 polls. The discussion highlighted the growing convergence

of AI-driven disinformation, algorithmic bias, and online gendered harms, and their cumulative impact on electoral integrity, public trust, and democratic participation.

Designed as an interactive session, participants engaged from the outset through live polling, helping surface perceptions of the most pressing AI-related threats to elections. Panelists provided country-specific insights from India's general elections, Taiwan's presidential race, and Indonesia's national and local elections, pointing to the rapid rise of deepfakes, bot networks, and micro-targeted political content. They emphasized how gendered disinformation and online abuse disproportionately targeted women politicians, activists, and journalists, further shrinking civic space.

Two rounds of moderated questions explored regulatory gaps and emerging governance models for AI in elections. Panelists reflected on current efforts in their respective countries—from Taiwan's legal amendments enabling investigations into election-related deepfakes, to Indonesia's Constitutional Court ruling restricting the use of AI in political campaigns. Speakers stressed that regulation must be multi-stakeholder, combining

state oversight with independent watchdogs, civil society, researchers, and technology companies to ensure transparency and safeguard fundamental freedoms.

The session also considered the positive potential of AI, such as improving civic literacy, monitoring online manipulation, and strengthening election administration. However, panelists underscored that without strong safeguards, the risks continue to outweigh the opportunities in fragile democracies. During the Q&A segment, participants shared on-the-ground experiences with digital manipulation in their own countries, reinforcing the need for regional cooperation, rapid response mechanisms, and sustained public education.

The session concluded by outlining key priorities for civil society and policymakers: strengthening cross-border collaboration, investing in digital literacy initiatives, advancing gender-sensitive approaches to tackling online harms, and advocating for rights-respecting AI governance frameworks. The discussion positioned ADN as a leading regional actor in addressing emerging digital threats to democracy and underscored the urgent need for collective action as AI technologies rapidly evolve.

8

Financial Report

2025 Grant Funds		1,235,573
Operational Expenditures (Salaries, Benefits, Office Space, Office Supplies, Communications)	355,154	
Program Expenditures	446,470	
Balance of December 31, 2025		433,949



9

ADN Governance and Membership

In November 2025, ADN held its 5th General Assembly in Bangkok, Thailand, bringing together members and Governing Council representatives to review governance matters, provide organizational updates, and strengthen strategic alignment across the network. This Assembly marked an important moment of consolidation as ADN moves into the second year of implementing its 2024–2028 Strategic Plan.

The General Assembly formally enacted the 5th Amendment to the ADN Constitution, reflecting updates discussed over the past year, including clarifications on the roles of the Governing Council, Secretariat, and membership bodies. Members reviewed the amended constitutional clauses and agreed to finalize a consolidated version for internal use.

Membership Engagement and Collaboration

Following the addition of new members in 2024, this year's Assembly focused on deepening engagement across the expanded network rather than adding new organizations. Representatives from across Asia shared updates on their key areas of work, creating a shared map of thematic strengths aligned with ADN's Strategic Plan. Members highlighted active work in:

- Civic freedoms and human rights documentation
- Peacebuilding and security sector monitoring
- Climate and environmental democracy
- Business and human rights

- Youth leadership and digital democracy
- Gender equality, LGBTQ+ rights, and democratic inclusion
- Protection of democracy champions and HRDs

Members also emphasized the value of rebuilding national-level cooperation under the Strategic Plan's Democratic Consolidation pillar. To support this, the Secretariat will create a shared framework for members to map priorities, identify intersectional areas of work, and explore opportunities for joint programming and advocacy.

Looking Ahead

The 2025 General Assembly reaffirmed members' commitment to ADN's collective mission and strengthened its governance and operational structures. As ADN navigates shrinking civic space, funding challenges, and rising authoritarianism across the region, the Assembly underscored the need for closer coordination,

strategic communication, and shared action. The Secretariat and Governing Council will continue guiding the implementation of the 2024–2028 Strategic Plan, deepening collaboration with members, advancing youth leadership, and supporting democratic movements across Asia.



