

2013 ANNUAL REPORT



Letter from the co-founders

Dear friends,

During the past year AJAR has deepened its relationships with national and local human rights organizations in the region, working together to develop innovative strategies to defending the rights of victims in difficult contexts. We have continued to provide a space for human rights defenders from different Asian transitions to meet, share and discuss the challenges they face, look at their work in a fresh way, and develop new strategies for change. In addition AJAR chose to work more deeply in four countries experiencing different stages of a transition from mass human rights violations: Indonesia, Timor Leste, Myanmar and Sri Lanka.

Interwoven through the deep learning process that we continue to experience with our partners were a number of lessons that will continue to inform our plans and programs. These include the following key approaches.

Involve victims in a real way

Many human rights approaches claim that victims are at the center of their work. However many victims say have provided their stories to others and then been forgotten. Others have suffered in silence for many years, unable to share or express what has happened to them. AJAR's multi-country gender justice program brings together women survivors of serious violations from a range of contexts to share their experiences, contribute to personal healing and develop strategies for change. Participants are then supported to extend this work to involve other survivors in their national networks. This participatory methodology in which victims from several countries come together to learn, are then supported to work in their own contexts and come together again to strategize with their regional partners is also a key strategy in AJAR's transitional justice approach and its new EU funded four nation anti-torture program.

Build on regional links and lessons

There is significant resistance to didactic approaches to human rights and accountability from the developed north to Asian contexts. Unlike other regions there is no unifying or common language for Asian countries. There is no dominant colonial history, the time difference and geographical distance from centres such as New York, Geneva and Brussels is extreme and it is often forgotten that Asia contains more than half the world's population. The deep cultural similarities and values provide potential for significant learning when human rights defenders and victims from different Asian contexts find the space to explore lessons learned and develop new strategies. AJAR's Learning Centre held regional trainings on subjects including transitional justice in Asia, the right to religious freedom in transitional contexts, gender based violations in different conflicts, and social and economic rights. AJAR also brought key actors from different transitions on study tours, to learn from other contexts, such as the exchange of 26 Members of Parliament from Myanmar to Indonesia, following up on previous civil society exchanges between these countries.

Use new and appropriate technologies

AJAR's participatory research methodologies utilize a range of different tools for different purposes. Survivors of gender based violations developed a way to use 'rock and flower' objects to explore their deep personal experiences. Victims were taught to use cameras and record stories of survivors, working together with their networks to produce personal histories that were loaded to YouTube. Indonesian youth human rights defenders discussed new tools for change with national activist rock stars and media personalities. In Myanmar AJAR provided technical assistance to the production of an eight hour television 'soap opera,' with human rights and rule of law underlying themes.

Create a space for meaningful interactions

AJAR's trainings and workshops brought experts from transitional contexts in Africa and Latin America to Asia to share their experiences and conducted many activities with Asian experts. However in addition to the need to provide exposure to new knowledge we are increasingly aware of the value in providing a safe and appropriate place for interactions between actors involved in similar struggles. A workshop on religious freedom brought together leaders from a broad range of religious groups in Indonesia who found common ground and strategies despite the rising tide of intolerance in the country. A workshop and training for women human rights defenders explored issues experienced by participants that are rarely possible in more mixed groups. Providing a

safe and confidential space at the private residential AJAR Training Centre allowed victims from several countries to open their hearts, share with those who had similar experiences and explore approaches to combat similar violations being committed in the future.

Making real progress in human rights protection and accountability in contexts that have been poisoned by dictators, gross corruption and entrenched impunity requires an acknowledgement that the structural changes needed will not take place quickly. They require carefully considered strategies, an ocean of commitment, and years of dedicated work. We feel incredibly fortunate to work with local partners in our regional context who have the courage, drive and commitment to take on these goals. We would like to thank all of those collaborators for the lessons they have provided to us during the past year, and especially to the survivors of human rights violations who have so generously shared their experience and wisdom with us.

Featured Projects

Strengthening women survivors in post-conflict transitions

AJAR is conducting a two-year action research project, with support from IDRC, to understand how women victims in conflict/ post-conflict settings experience impunity, develop strategies for survival, and find ways to empower themselves. The project uses a radically different set of tools than most traditional research approaches. Seven methodologies drawing on women's health and psychosocial experience with victims in developing contexts have been adapted. They include the use of body mapping to encourage women to be able to speak more freely about both their pain and sources of joy; use of 'flowers and rocks' to explore the views of victims from traditional societies in relation to truth, justice and reparations; focus on the impact of mass violations on communities as well as individuals; and resource mapping to identify the social economic impact of the violations and strategize on ways to assist the well being of victims.

The program is designed to ensure that the victims participate in the process in an active way, allowing them to develop links to other survivors in their communities and in this way build broader ongoing networks of support and change. A key goal of the program is to explore the link between the experience of gender based



violations during periods of conflict to violence against women and impunity in post transition settings. The methodologies employed assist to identify those survivors who have the capacity and commitment to take ongoing roles as leaders of change. In this way exploration of the lessons of the past are used as a base for combating gender based violations in the future.

AJAR will host a regional seminar on gender justice in November 2014 with the report of the multi-year research program launched in early 2015.

The "Year of Truth" campaign in Indonesia

During the period of transition to the 30 year Soeharto dictatorship in Indonesia in 1965 an estimated 500,000 to 2 million individuals were killed, with many thousands more subjected to serious human rights violations including years of internment. In the following 30 years of dictatorship mass violations involving hundreds of thousands of victims were committed in a range of contexts across the country. In the face of continuing official denial and impunity the "Year of Truth" is a civil society campaign involving 47 non government organizations whose goal is to uncover the truth around the mass violations of 1965-2005, beginning with the purges of perceived communist sympathizers in 1965, and culminating in 2005 with the case of the assassinated human rights' activist, Munir Said Thalib and the Aceh Peace Agreement. AJAR played a significant role in the collaborative organization of the Year of Truth civil society coalition and its activities.



The campaign included ten public hearings of victims' personal testimonies that were facilitated by a "Citizens' Council," a committee of 22 prominent national figures who strongly believe in the recognition of Indonesia's violent history as the keystone for the nation's transition to democracy. It also included an exhibition at the national library and a week of public hearings in the capital Jakarta. Evidence relating to the background and causes of the mass violations remains unclear but indicates that many of the contributing factors,

such as impunity, mass corruption, nepotism and officially sanctioned discrimination persist, and many of the key actors in past violations maintain positions of power and authority. The civil society coalition has committed to continue in the struggle to bring the truth relating to the human rights violations to light, and will publish a final report on the 40 years of violence in Indonesia, which will include a compilation of its findings, as well as recommendations for the State for use as a roadmap in addressing its past human rights violations.

Myanmar ethnic minority Parliamentarians visit Indonesia

At the end of 2012 AJAR hosted 26 Myanmar Members of Parliament representing ethnic minorities in conflict areas, on a week-long exchange to study the lessons learned from the 15 years of transition from military dictatorship to democracy in Indonesia.

The MP's met with a wide range of government officials, representatives of the Indonesian parliament and civil society actors involved in a broad range of issues relevant to the transition in Indonesia and its relevance for the Myanmar context. At several points during the program a facilitator helped participants to analyze the information and experiences they had encountered and draw out practical lessons, positive and negative for the context in Myanmar.

At the end of the exchange a review was conducted in which participants expressed their appreciation to being exposed to a national setting in which there are so many similarities. Some of the particular lessons identified included the gradual removal of the military from parliament, the dismantling of military operated businesses, the cyclical

'fight-back,' of powerful forces from the authoritarian regime, continuing large scale theft and corruption of natural resources following the transition, the distance between Constitutional and law reform initiatives and the ability to implement new laws effectively, the key role of an open and vibrant media, linking corruption to the fight for accountability in general, and the need to focus on gender equality and anti discrimination during the transition. The peace agreement in Aceh and special autonomy status for Aceh and Papua also



provide valuable lessons for the sustainable resolution of long-term conflicts, as well as revealing the challenges and benefits of special autonomy arrangements.

Myanmar Rule of Law TV Edutainment Drama Series

AJAR has provided technical assistance to the Pyoe Pin project in Myanmar on a project aimed to produce a first series of eight hours of high quality popular TV drama, with underlying rule of law and human rights themes. The goals of the series are to reach a broad range of the population who are unlikely to access written materials or other sources of information but are regular watchers of television, particular 'soap opera,' and drama series. Through creating a highly entertaining story base, character relationships, love stories, drama etc the interest of the viewers is maintained whilst the subject matter of the episodes introduces issues that are highly relevant to the democratic transition in Myanmar.

The series uses a setting that includes a legal aid office, village community, family homes, police station, court and a local tea-shop. Themes include the progress of a local election, corruption and land confiscation, the rise of a local street kid as a football star and particular episodes focus on trafficking of a young village girl, poisoning of the local river by a factory, unfair trial of an innocent person, workers rights in a factory, domestic violence, corruption in a local school, the tension between rights and responsibilities in a democracy etc. It is expected that the series will be broadcast widely in Myanmar in late 2014. Discussion groups, follow up programs and related materials such as booklets based on the series are also being planned.

Anti torture project in four Asian transitional contexts

AJAR has been awarded a multi-year grant by the European Union focused on assisting victims of torture and developing effective anti torture mechanisms that are appropriate to four transitional contexts: Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Indonesia and Timor Leste. The program is in its early stages of implementation, focusing on bringing together survivors and leading activists from the four national contexts to explore common experiences and lessons and to begin developing the strategies that will assist victims to heal and promote their role in the ongoing prevention of torture. The initial activities will include a training and meeting of victims and key anti-torture activists from the four countries in Jakarta in early 2014.

Activities at AJAR's Learning Centre

AJAR operates a full time residential Learning Centre in Bali, Indonesia, a location which serves well as a well-serviced hub for regional activities and a central point for Indonesian participants from Papua in the east to Aceh in the west.

During the past year a broad range of human rights and transitional justice trainings and workshops were conducted at the Centre. In addition it served as a base where researchers and writers gathered to work in a concentrated manner on a number of projects. Some human rights activists also used the center as a tranquil setting to rejuvenate and work on particular projects. The majority of workshops conducted during the year were AJAR dedicated activities. However the Training Centre was also used by a range of other Indonesian human rights organizations, with AJAR providing specialist facilitators and technical experts. Below are some examples of the trainings conducted at the Centre included the following:

Youth as Human Rights Defenders

Historically university students and young people in general have been powerful agents of change, driving many of the most dramatic social and political transformations. However human rights trainings are often not tailored specifically to the role of youth and the tools that young people use to promote social change. The training included expert inputs and discussions on core human rights issues, as well as youth social change leaders including film, media and music personalities. One section of the training focused on the use of "New Tactics," to increase respect and fulfillment of rights. These included blogging and journalism, Photo Story and artwork, campaign and documentation using a variety of methods including written, photo, film and social media, and networking.



Participants at the training were assisted to produce strategies for human rights change during the next year. This resulted in group strategies including: mapping human rights violations and conflict through the use of ‘geo-tagging,’ an anti-corruption campaign focused on the slogan ‘Corruption Not Cool,’ using social media to share the stories of drug users who are victimized including rape, extortion and other violations; production of a documentary film focused on the link between corruption and abuses within the prison system, and training and capacity

building for members of the religious minority group Ahmadiyah who continue to be seriously persecuted.

Transitional Justice in the Asia region

Participants in the training included civil society actors a range of Asian transitional contexts, and selected government officials and actors involved in peace processes. These included human rights defenders from the conflict areas in Myanmar, from the northern post conflict areas of Sri Lanka, post conflict Aceh and representatives from both the Office of the President of the Philippines and the MILF, who have recently reached a historic peace accord that includes promises to establish transitional justice mechanisms.

International experts that provided inputs to the training included their direct experiences working in truth commissions, prosecutions and reparations programs in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Participants presented the challenges of their own contexts and were asked to identify potential lessons from the experiences of others in the region. In the final portion of the training participants developed a year-long strategy on transitional justice in their national context, presented the strategy to the group and answered questions and comments.

Training and technical assistance to the parliament of Aceh on issues related to Truth and Reconciliation Commissions

The Parliamentary Drafting Committee responsible for drafting a law establishing a TRC in Aceh requested AJAR to organize a three day training and workshop at the

AJAR Learning Centre. During the workshop international experts provided details of their experience working directly in TRC's in Africa, Latin America and Asia, with case studies focused on Timor Leste, South Africa, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Kenya, Peru, Chile, Guatemala, Thailand, the Solomon Islands and Morocco.

The entire drafting committee responsible for drafting the bill attended the workshop. They discussed core issues relating to their context with the international experts and worked in groups on key challenges. Three months after this workshop the Aceh People's House of Representatives passed the bylaw for the establishment of the truth and reconciliation commission in Aceh. A by-law has since been submitted to the Indonesian Ministry of Home Affairs. At the time of writing, this is still pending approval.

Economic, social and cultural rights- human rights and business

In each of the contexts in which AJAR works human rights defenders and organizations, and community groups are involved in a broad range of disputes arising from the actions of corporations and businesses. In many situations this involves the taking over of traditional or community land by businesses often following payments made to government officials. In others the actions of companies have poisoned rivers, land or air in the surrounding areas. Local communities in many places are forcefully removed, often illegally, due to the influence of businesses. Workers rights are also a major issue in countries where there are few effective legal protections. In all of these contexts victims include the poor and marginalized, women and children.

This training examined the national and international frameworks that can be utilized to try to control the actions of businesses in urging them to respect human rights. Using national Constitutions and other legal bases for legal action was explored, with particular examples of successful cases from countries such as South Africa and India. A strong outcome of this training was the exchange of positive lessons from strategies used by different groups in a range of settings and a commitment to maintain a network so that advice and exchange of information can be ongoing.

Women as Human Rights Defenders

The vulnerability of women human rights defenders is rarely recognized, nor the particular challenges of working in contexts of human rights violations where the state, community and family are dominated by patriarchal structures. In contexts where gender-based violations are widespread cultural sensitivities require that a central role in

dealing with cases falls to women human rights defenders. Some of the topics included in the training included Womens Rights as Human Rights, Understanding gender justice, the experience of women human rights defenders in various countries, mapping risks and challenges for women human rights defenders, the use of innovative strategies and media to defend rights.

Some of the strategies that groups in the training produced included: regeneration of university student discussion groups focused on gender violation issues; increasing the effectiveness of peer-to-peer education for sex workers; recording of cases of gender based violations from the period of massive killing and violations in Indonesia in 1965; monitoring and campaigning against Regional Government Regulations that discriminate against women.



AJAR wishes to thank the following organisations for their support and collaboration in the past year:

