

# ASIA JUSTICE AND RIGHTS ANNUAL REPORT

2024



People trapped in cycles of war and political violence experience mass human rights violations that can break their countries, communities, and themselves.

**Annual Report © Asia Justice and Rights 2024**

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**Cover image:** A protester stands peacefully in front of the police officers near Hledan junction in Yangon, Myanmar. A massive crowd took to the streets of Yangon to protest against the coup and demanded the release of Aung San Suu Kyi as the government cut off the internet. © Thuya Zaw

# Letter from the President

The year 2024 saw a wave of populism sweep the globe, with newly elected governments looking increasingly inward, towards immediate domestic concerns and away from international crises, like climate change, declining democracy and mass human rights violations. Across the world, newly elected populist leaders are returning to past negative patterns – using their mandates to protect their power base and enrich themselves and their cronies.

The tools that dictators use to maintain this grip on power and resources are familiar to us. They include attacking the independence of the judiciary, so that judges decisions are based not on the law but ideology, under the direction of their political masters; nepotism that places unqualified individuals into key positions they then utilise for self-enrichment; control of state resources including the police, military and government agencies to target political opponents and critics; adoption of 'divide and rule' strategies that create and deepen social divisions for personal gain at a massive cost to national unity and harmony.

In the Asia region, where AJAR works, these are clearly retrograde steps towards the values and methodologies of past authoritarian regimes. In addition to ongoing authoritarian contexts, such as China, North Korea and Afghanistan, recent elections have resulted in the return of military leaders and family members of former dictators to national leadership roles in Indonesia, Thailand, Cambodia and Philippines, with communist governments still in place in Vietnam and Laos. Since the Burmese military seized power in Myanmar in 2021, more than 55,000 have been killed and 3.5 million driven from their homes. The genocidal attacks of the junta have forced more than 1.7 million Rohingya to flee, to live under plastic sheeting in the world's largest refugee camp over the border in Bangladesh. AJAR teams on the Thai/Burma border, in the Rohingya camps and working on advocacy for

ASEAN in Jakarta, are playing a key role in supporting the Burmese people's movement for peace and democracy. Against all odds, the revolution against the brutality of the Burmese military junta is succeeding, with the resistance now controlling more than half the country.

For autocrats to succeed in expanding their abuse of power they must also destroy the potential for effective monitoring and oversight by government. When this happens, the role revealing the truth and building social movements that demand justice and accountability falls to non-government organisations.

For this reason, AJAR's work of supporting human rights and democratic civil society organisations in the Asia Pacific region is now more important than ever. Over half the world's population live in the Asia Pacific region, including some 60% of the world's youth, who are the guardians of the future. Strengthening the knowledge and solidarity of young human rights and climate justice champions is a key element of AJAR's strategies and programs. Under the threat of authoritarianism, the role and voice of women is also under attack, and AJAR will continue its major focus on the empowerment of women and marginalized groups. This includes, fighting against persecution of minorities, promoting inclusion and tolerance for all identities and helping indigenous communities to understand and negotiate increasingly complex climate justice challenges that relate to the forests and lands that are their homes.

The information contained in this report can only briefly summarise the amazing work that AJAR teams have done in the past year, to contribute to peace and justice across the region. From its headquarters in Jakarta and four other Asian offices, around 60 staff have been responsible for implementing more than three activities every single week of 2024. These include training Burmese judges who must go back to conflict areas and conduct war crimes trials with only bombed out buildings for courts; empowering hundreds of Rohingya women victims of serious violations by the Burmese military so that they can understand their rights and raise their voice to speak about what happened to them; working in important close collaborations with international mechanisms such as the International Criminal Court, which last year included an invitation for AJAR to spend five days at

the ICC in the Hague; providing healing and small business support to more than 500 East Timorese women victims of serious sexual violations during the Indonesian military occupation; initiating and supporting Asian youth networks for human rights using film, social media, art and music to encourage young people to find their own voice in demanding democracy, justice and accountable societies.

It is true that we are facing many global challenges, but we must remind ourselves that this is not the first dark period within living memory when massive obstacles have been collaboratively faced and overcome. For example, in the First World War more than 40 million people were killed, followed by the Second World War which cost more than 50 million lives and left the world with the legacy of the nuclear bomb. In the midst of those multi-year periods the world looked dark with no light in sight. Collective global collaboration on developing the concept of human rights institutions, such as the United Nations, international law and the strengthening of national movements that demand justice, human rights and democracy have helped to break what seemed at the time to be the inevitable cycle of repeated global conflicts.

Amidst a growing global domination by 'fake news', we need to maintain a close focus on the truth and important lessons of the past, particularly in relation to collaboration and co-operation. We are also living at a time when electronic tools are dividing us more deeply and more frequently than ever before. The challenges are great, but the spirit of resistance to domination and commitment to the protection of our planet is also rising. This is not a time to be manipulated by the 'divide and rule' strategies of those seeking power and domination. This is a time for increased cooperation, solidarity and appreciation for all of those working on the side of peace, justice and human rights. The light at the end of the tunnel is there. The coming year is an opportunity to appreciate all of those working in their way for a better world and to support each other as we move towards that light together.

**Patrick Burgess**  
*President*  
**Asia Justice and Rights**



# AJAR's Way of Working

## *Our methods*

AJAR envisages a world where governments and civil society recognise that combating impunity and building strong mechanisms to achieve accountability and respect for victims are essential elements to achieve peace and prosperity, and that the foundations of society are based on universal principles of human rights and gender justice. To achieve such a world, AJAR works to increase the capacity of both local and national actors, especially survivors, to enable them to fight against entrenched impunity, to contribute to building cultures based on accountability and justice, and to learn from the root causes of human rights atrocities, in order to ensure that those atrocities remain a thing of the past.

This is particularly important in a world where civic space is shrinking, intolerance is growing and the environment is degrading, spurred on by a resurgence of authoritarianism, strong-arm politics and insatiable greed. That is why AJAR chooses to work in countries like Indonesia, Myanmar, Philippines, Sri Lanka and Timor-Leste, where impunity remains entrenched and structural violence is a major barrier to protecting human rights and achieving sustainable peace.

It is in this context that for the past five years AJAR has focused on three strategic goals:

- Supporting innovations for accountability in difficult transitions;
  - Promoting peaceful and tolerant societies resilient to hate; and
  - Recognising the right to a sustainable environment and climate justice.
- It is only with these goals in mind, that we can hope to live in a world that is free from impunity, a world that celebrates difference and a world that respects the environment.

AJAR is well positioned to advance these goals, as it is rooted in the south, with a deep understanding of context. This means that people interact with their counterparts as equals. People

relate to AJAR, without feeling that they are being lectured to by 'fly in fly out' experts from the global north. Great emphasis is placed on linking with south-based organisations in order to learn from local and regional experience.

This 'south-south linking and learning' cannot be underestimated, as lessons are relatable and transferable, and more likely to make sense and resonate with people's everyday experiences. This is complimented by participatory approaches and innovative methodologies, like AJAR's well-received 'stone and flower' exercise, designed to encourage survivors to share their experiences in a safe and trusting environment.

## *Using multi-media tools for change*

In Indonesia, Timor-Leste, Thailand and Bangladesh, AJAR uses film, music and art to raise awareness and spread knowledge about human rights challenges, and to build hope and inspiration among those working for change. These efforts have included a 'music for human rights' event at a global conference on Myanmar in Chiang Mai. This followed human rights songwriting competitions in the Rohingya refugee camps of Bangladesh and in Timor-Leste. Our Myanmar program hosted a social justice film festival, and supported Burmese filmmakers to tell stories of conflict and resilience. In Bangladesh, AJAR organised international documentary filmmakers to mentor and teach young Rohingya media and film workers. Two short documentaries were produced as a result: "Who are the Rohingya?" and "More than a Refugee". The latter won an award for Best Female Director at the International South-South Film Festival.

## *Our priority groups*

AJAR focuses on groups whose voices are seldom heard, but who make up critical constituencies in any society. These groups include women in general and, importantly, survivors of human rights violations in particular. Young people are also singled out, as it is their voices and their actions that will shape the future. But other minority and marginalised groups are also prioritised and given space to voice their concerns. These include indigenous peoples, members of the LGBTQ+ community and people living with disabilities.

# Theory of Change





A theory of change is the process or steps required that result in making a positive difference to people's lives. AJAR's vision is to build just and accountable societies, free from impunity. To achieve this, a broad-based and holistic approach is implemented, illustrated by the diagram below.

Put simply, AJAR's theory of change follows four steps, or building blocks:

1. By focusing on a specific issue, like stopping violence against women and girls, for example, AJAR will support activities that promote awareness and understanding, by engaging the general public on the subject, and garnering their support to stop violence against women and girls;
2. With the public's support secure, AJAR will develop the capacity of selected individuals and organisations to equip them to effectively advocate for an end to violence against women and girls;
3. This is followed by activities that build social capital, meaning embedding this knowledge and understanding in the community, and building a constituency of likeminded individuals and organisations who will demand a change to the status quo; and
4. Finally, engaging policy-makers and legislators, or those who hold the levers of power, to use their influence to pass laws and regulations that will put a permanent end to violence against women and girls.



# Initiatives & Networks



## Asia Justice Coalition

The Asia Justice Coalition (AJC) was founded by AJAR, Burma Human Rights Network, Centre for Peace and Justice (BRAC University), Burmese Rohingya Organisation UK, The Centre for Policy Alternatives, Fortify Rights, The Global Justice Centre, and The Global Centre for Responsibility to Protect, with the secretariat hosted by Amnesty International. A focus of the AJC is seeking justice for the horrific crimes committed against the Rohingya by the Myanmar military.



## Global Initiative for Justice, Truth & Reconciliation (GIJTR)

The Global Initiative for Justice, Truth and Reconciliation brings together advocates, activists and practitioners from global organisations with expertise in a range of fields from psycho-social support and documentation to forensics and law. Together they assist communities in or emerging from conflict in creating just and peaceful futures.



## Transitional Justice Asia Network (TJAN)

AJAR continued hosting the Transitional Justice Asia Network — a regional network established four years ago, with the goal of increasing the capacity of Asian experts to fight for truth, justice, and human rights. This year, TJAN members from nine countries (Indonesia, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Philippines, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Bangladesh, Nepal, and South Korea) participated in a series of online training and discussions.



## Global Action Against Mass Atrocity Crimes (GAAMAC)

GAAMAC is an inclusive network created in 2013 by states, civil society organisations, and academic institutions with the support of the United Nations. It works collaboratively to provide a platform for the prevention of mass atrocities (genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and ethnic cleansing). GAAMAC assists interested states in operationalising the prevention of mass atrocities at the national level through information-sharing, enhancing links among and between states, civil society and academia, and peer-to-peer support.



## Global Learning Hub for Transitional Justice and Reconciliation

## The Global Learning Hub for Transitional Justice and Reconciliation

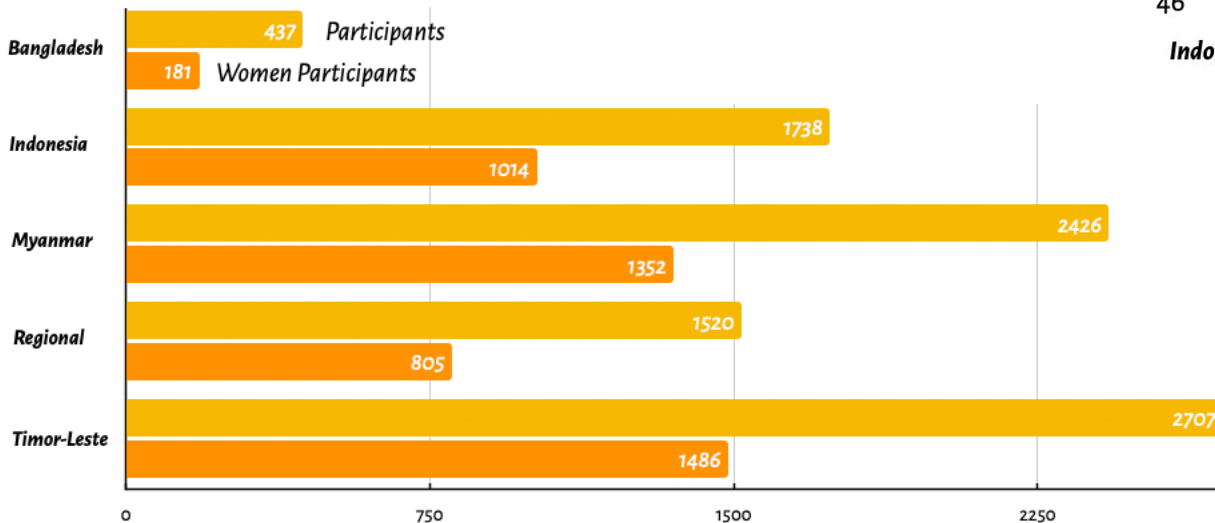
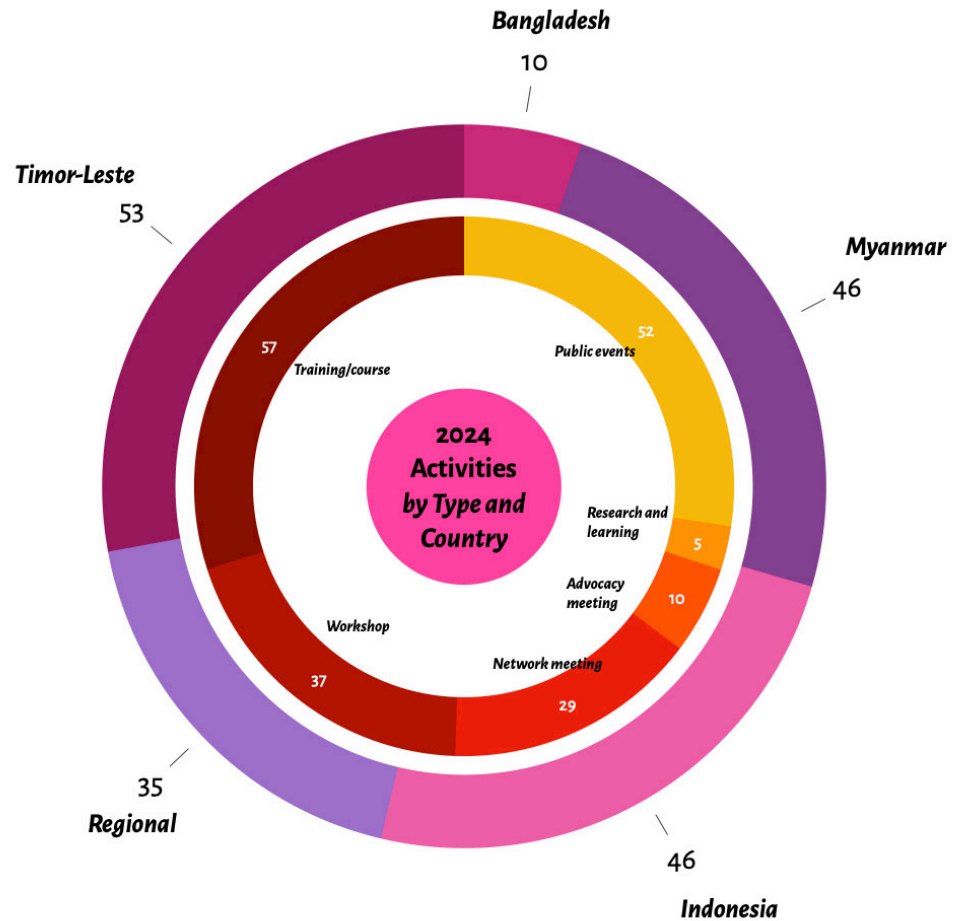
AJAR joined the initiative of the Berghof Foundation and the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, in collaboration with partners from Germany and across the world. The Hub seeks to strengthen partnerships and to advance the policy and practice of transitional justice through dialogue and mutual learning, practice-oriented knowledge generation, capacity development, and advice.



# The Year in Numbers

**190**  
Activities

**63**  
Products



2024 Outreach by Gender-ratio and Country

# Program Impact and Achievements







## Accountability

**A**ccountability is important, as it helps ensure that people and organisations act in the best interests of society. It builds trust, strengthens democratic values and promotes fairness and equality.

Accountability is a vital element for good government, as it holds those in power responsible for their decisions and actions. It promotes transparency and integrity in public service, strengthens democratic values and upholds the principles of justice. But accountability also holds individuals and organisations to account for their impact on the environment, indigenous communities and other marginalised groups, like gender, religious or ethnic minorities. This helps create a more sustainable and equitable world.

AJAR puts great emphasis on accountability and works towards a vision of a world free from impunity. Some examples of our work that emphasise the importance of accountability in building a fairer and more equitable world are described here.

### From Stolpersteine to Semarang, and Berlin to Biak — sparking a youth-led culture of remembrance in Indonesia

In May, as part of a collaborative effort between AJAR and Watch Indonesia, eight young Indonesian human rights activists embarked on a transformative journey to Berlin. The purpose was to bring Germany's culture of remembrance to their own advocacy efforts for accountability and pluralism. The visit to Berlin exposed the participants to powerful examples of memorialisation, such as the Stolpersteine project, the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe and the Topography of Terror. These memorial sites demonstrated how grassroots efforts and institutional support can work together to preserve memory, promote accountability and ensure these atrocities are never repeated.



Following the visit to Germany, Orideq Jousubana and Pujo Nugroho showed how youth can promote diversity and understanding through impactful initiatives. Orideq and Pujo applied the lessons they learned to their own work at home, championing inclusive stories and fostering inter-generational dialogue. Their work underscores the potential for youth-led initiatives to reshape societal understanding of historical injustices, ensuring they are neither forgotten nor repeated. Through their actions, Orideq and Pujo exemplify the role of young leaders in promoting plurality. By engaging their communities in meaningful conversations about the past, they have contributed to a culture of remembrance and respect for diversity in Indonesia.



### *MEET Orideq Jousubana: a young activist from Papua*

Orideq works with the church in Papua. He used his experience from his trip to Berlin to look at ways of addressing historical injustices by drawing lessons from the ways that Germans have confronted their Nazi past. He initiated a grassroots project to create a film, entitled “Refuse to Forget”, featuring the Biak Massacre that has deeply

affected and scarred the people of Papua. The film focuses on stories from survivors, with the objective of providing a platform for other survivors to tell their stories and engage with their communities to promote healing and reconciliation.

### *MEET Pujo Nugroho: an activist from Semarang in Central Java*

Pujo used a grassroots approach to disseminate his knowledge. Through his community organisation, Semai, he applied the principle of “history from below,” which he learned during the Berlin exchange. This approach prioritises personal stories and community engagement over grand narratives, making history accessible and relatable to communities. Pujo has initiated discussions and workshops with members of Semai that address local histories of marginalisation, and promote pluralism and tolerance in the community. By involving community members in creating shared memories, he has fostered understanding among diverse groups in and around Semarang.



## **Advancing justice and peace in Thailand**

In 2024, Thailand saw important progress in advancing transitional justice and peacebuilding in the country, with significant contributions from human rights organisations and grassroots activists. The Cross-Cultural Foundation or CrCF, one of AJAR’s key partners, has been at the forefront of efforts to address political violence, advocate for justice and press for legislative change.

A major milestone was the National Seminar and Exhibition on Peacebuilding and Transitional Justice held





in May. This event brought together some 150 participants, and marked the launch of two important publications: 'I Just Want to Live in Peace', based on action research conducted in both English and Thai, and an in-depth study on transitional justice. These resources provide a framework for understanding the country's ongoing struggles with political violence in the pursuit of justice. Between 2013 and 2024, CrCF played an instrumental role in articulating a transitional justice approach to Thailand's political unrest, offering policy recommendations that will help pave the way for reconciliation and sustainable peace.

A key outcome of these efforts was the drafting of the People's Amnesty Bill, currently under parliamentary review. This proposed legislation aims to provide amnesty for individuals – many of them young activists detained or imprisoned since 2016 for their involvement in political protests. If passed, the bill will mark a turning point in Thailand's approach to political dissent, offering a path towards reconciliation between protestors and the state. The initiative builds on previous successes, such as the Anti-torture and Enforced Disappearance Act of 2023, that reinforced legal protections against state violence.

In the 'deep south', where conflict has persisted for more than two decades, survivors and families of victims continue to seek justice. In April, ahead of the 20-year statute of limitations, legal

action was taken against former government officials responsible for the Tak Bai crackdown. As a result, in August, despite procedural obstacles, a local court ruled that seven military and police personnel bore responsibility for the deaths resulting from the crackdown. This ruling represents a rare step towards accountability in a region where impunity has long prevailed.



Survivors also used art to express their experiences and calls for justice. With AJAR's support, CrCF organised 'The Diary of the People: past, present and future', exhibiting survivor-led artwork, including pieces from the 'Let Art Heal' workshop. The exhibition paid tribute to a participant protesting the violation of her rights, who tragically passed away following a hunger strike in prison.

Another peacebuilding breakthrough came with the appointment of two Muslim women human rights defenders as advisors to a national committee on peace in the 'deep south'. One, Anchana Heemina from Duay Jai, gained prominence as a representative of the south, empowered through her engagement with AJAR's participatory research tools and survivor-centered advocacy. This signaled a shift in the Thai government's previous unwillingness to engage civil society in addressing the ongoing conflict. These advances demonstrate that, while challenges remain, Thailand is making meaningful

strides in confronting past injustices, addressing political grievances and fostering inclusive peace processes.

CrCF's work is part of AJAR's three-year program on transitional justice and peacebuilding, supported by the European Union.

### *MEET: Anchana Heemmina, also known as Mumtaz, of the Duay Jai Group in the 'deep south' of Thailand*



"My friend was killed," said Mumtaz, referring to Roning Dolah who was shot on 25 June, one day before the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture. Roning had been repeatedly tortured, while supporting victims of torture himself. His murder reflects the constant danger faced by human rights defenders like Kak Mumtaz, a founder and leader of the Duay Jai in southern Thailand.

As a member of the Transitional Justice Asia Network, Mumtaz represents civil society on the Southern Border Commission. The Commission has recommended public consultations in the peace

process, given that lack of participation is a main factor obstructing the work of the government's Peace Panel. However, civilians involved in the peace process are often targeted by the military, under wide ranging 'strategic' lawsuits against public participation. Many activists have fled to Malaysia, several have been 'disappeared', while still others have been found dead, like Mumtaz's friend, Roning Dolah.

Mumtaz established Duay Jai in the aftermath of the arrest and detention of her brother-in-law, who was falsely accused of killing a security officer. In the family's search for justice, she became aware that ethnic Malay Muslims faced language barriers and difficulties accessing legal aid.

Since 2004, the escalation of the conflict has exposed civilians to constant danger, with over 7,500 killed. Mumtaz, herself, was charged with defamation following her criticism of the military's approach to the insurgency. Duay Jai works with those imprisoned for crimes related to the insurgency, as well as on policy development for legal reform.

Mumtaz often cites the use of participatory methodologies introduced by AJAR, stating that, "Safety is the priority of our work with victims, so we use AJAR's methods with communities to help protect unarmed civilians in order that they are able to identify signs of violence, and investigate suspected human rights abuses". Participants expressed their fears and concerns using methods such as the 'Tree of Conflict' and the 'River of Life'.

## **Weaving resilience — AJAR's healing retreats for women human rights defenders**

AJAR facilitated two retreats for women and non-binary human rights defenders from across Asia and the Pacific. Held at Kampung Damai, AJAR's learning centre in Bali, the first retreat brought together 17 participants from Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Myanmar, Papua New Guinea, Philippines and from the Rohingya community in Australia. While the second retreat focused on ten Indonesian women and non-binary human rights defenders from Aceh, Yogyakarta, Kupang, Papua, Palu and Jakarta. With support from Urgent Action Fund, the retreats aimed to create safe and nurturing spaces for defenders to heal, connect and rebuild their resilience amidst the challenges of their work.

"What brought you to your activism? Why do you do what you do?", were two opening questions that set the tone for deep and reflective conversations. Participants spoke of a shared purpose, and personal experiences of violence and discrimination. "We are all drawn to our work because of our personal experiences. Some of us experienced violence as children or young girls, and this made us choose to become human rights defenders."





The retreats integrated participatory trauma-healing methods with self-care practices. Sessions included body mapping, the 'River of Life' exercise and 'Stone and Flower', a tool developed by AJAR to explore the right to truth, justice, remedy and guarantees of non-recurrence. "I believe that my work and my identity as a transwoman is a struggle for truth", one participant commented. Skills-based sessions were included, such as digital security, that revealed varying levels of knowledge and vulnerabilities amongst participants. The program balanced group discussions with creative activities like pottery, yoga, collage-making and an exposure visit to

Taman 65, a survivor-led memorial of the 1965/66 massacres in Bali. In both sessions, a counsellor was present to provide one-on-one support, with some participants seeking guidance on work-related stress and personal challenges.

The retreats closed with participants creating a mandala to symbolise unity and resilience. "I have received good energy and gained an understanding of the value of slowing down as an activist," said one, while another commented, "Here, the balance between brainwork and hands-on activities makes healing possible. My ceramic work is proof that I can heal myself and others."

These retreats reaffirmed the importance of fostering safe spaces for well-being and solidarity. As AJAR continues to adapt its participatory methods, it remains committed to supporting those who defend human rights with courage and compassion.

## *MEET: Fabiao – a journey of hope and reunion*

Born in 1978 in Bobonaro in Timor-Leste, Fabiao's childhood was shaped by nature, school and selling tais (traditional woven fabric). But, at just 13, conflict changed his life forever, after he was recruited by Indonesia's military as an auxiliary – known locally as TBOs, young boys were tasked with carrying out menial chores for the soldiers. Following his time as a TBO, Fabiao was taken to Indonesia with the promise of education but, instead, he was abandoned in North Sulawesi and had to fend for himself.



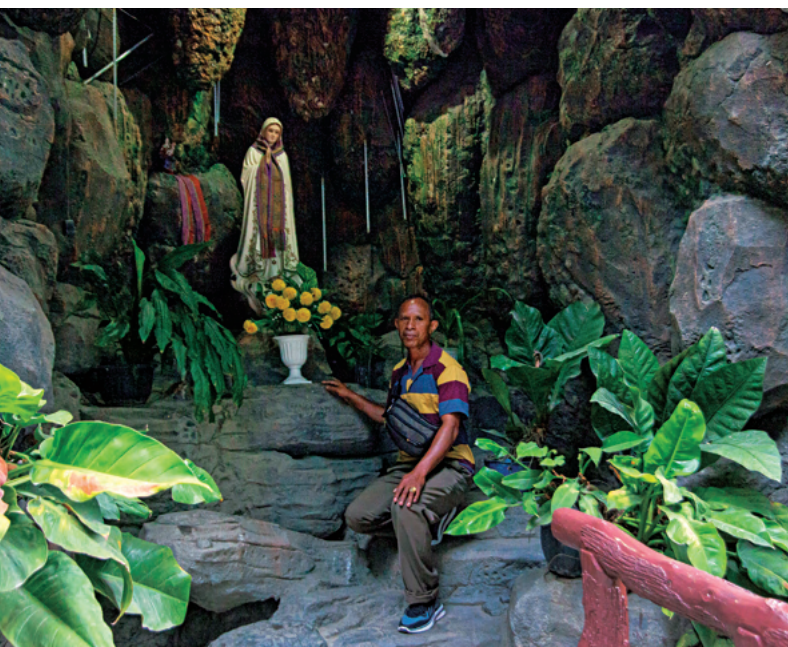


Determined to survive, Fabiao worked doing heavy labor, while struggling to educate himself. Later he became a labor union leader, advocating for workers' rights, only to be fired by his bosses for standing up to injustices. All this time he was carrying the burden of a life he never chose.

In 2024, AJAR and the Working Group for Stolen Children helped to fundamentally change his life story. Fabiao and other survivors were brought to Timor-Leste and, for the first time in many years, were reunited with their families in highly emotional ceremonies. After years in the wilderness, Fabiao finally got to embrace his mother once again.

"Now we understand how we got to be in Indonesia, what's next? Can we be given special citizenship status to enable us to return home with dignity?", Fabiao asked.

While bureaucratic answers to mend these long family separations remain unclear, civil society in both countries, together with survivors, are continuing to lobby the two governments to support regular annual reunions. For Fabiao, the past may never be fully reconciled but, at least now, home feels within reach.











## Tolerance

**T**olerance is the belief that people have equal rights, and should be treated with dignity. It is the idea that people should be able to accept, and live with, the differences. It is a sign of healthy and diverse societies, and that people should be able to live as they choose, even if they have different opinions, beliefs or practices. It is the idea that people should be able to co-exist peacefully, even if they come from different cultures and ethnicities, and that they should respect others' rights, even if they have different opinions.

AJAR stresses 'tolerance' as a key component for diverse, healthy, happy and peaceful societies. People should not only accept, but should celebrate difference. The notion of tolerance is nicely captured in Indonesia's national motto: *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, or 'unity in diversity'. It is this idea that underpins much of AJAR's work.,

## Building tolerance for a new Myanmar

In April, AJAR facilitated a gender and transitional justice training, engaging participants to examine the intersection between justice and gender. The training emphasised the inclusion of marginalised gender groups in transitional justice processes, fostering awareness of gender sensitivity, and the need for equity in accessing justice. Participants shared personal stories, building connections across diverse backgrounds and fostering mutual understanding. Emphasis on collaboration highlighted the critical role of tolerance in addressing systemic injustices and ensuring inclusivity in peacebuilding efforts.





swathes of Burmese society. The initiative emphasised that embracing diversity would only strengthen the collective struggle for a new and inclusive Myanmar, that respects justice and equality.

In July, AJAR provided seed funds to three organisations – Tri Star, Lift Spirit and Bridge of Being – to address violence and historical grievances. Initiatives combined psychosocial support and human rights training, using creative participatory tools, like ‘body mapping’. They created safe spaces for survivors to share experiences and begin healing, and fostering emotional resilience and mutual understanding. Survivors documented their stories through photos and memory boxes, promoting collective healing by strengthening community networks and encouraging dialogue. These initiatives cultivated tolerance and solidarity among both survivors and the wider community.

In June, AJAR organised a series of trainings on freedom of religion and belief. 40 Rohingya participated, along with people from other religious backgrounds including Islam, Christian, Hindu and those with no religious affiliations. The training provided a platform for interfaith dialogue and understanding. Through group discussions and case studies, participants explored religious freedom within legal frameworks, fostering mutual respect for difference. The trainings not only empowered people to campaign for religious tolerance, but also helped bridge divides, especially with the Rohingya, who have long faced fierce discrimination by broad



In August, 650 people attended the Fourth International Conference on Burma in Chiang Mai. A quilt exhibition entitled, “Threads of Hope and Resilience”, provided a striking symbol of tolerance. The quilts, handcrafted by Rohingya refugees in the camps of Bangladesh, captured experiences of persecution and resilience – they told stories of survival, solidarity and dreams for a better future. The exhibition fostered empathy, even among policymakers and academics who stated their renewed commitment to campaign for better protections for displaced populations. The event brought together people from diverse backgrounds, showcasing how a shared appreciation for creativity can bridge cultural and political divides, and reinforce the role of tolerance in global advocacy efforts.

## Martial arts for peace in Timor-Leste

Young people aged between 15 and 29 make up some 30% of Timor-Leste’s population, with 46% being under the age of 18. Following the restoration of independence, Timor-Leste’s newfound peace was violently overturned in 2006 by an “explosion” of political turmoil, with young people turning on one another. This outbreak prompted the government to restrict the activities of martial arts, and other youth groups, widely believed to have been responsible for instigating the violence.

AJAR saw this as an opportunity to harness the energy of young people to become peacekeepers and agents of change, rather than disruptors of the peace. It contacted four martial arts groups – PSHT, IKS, KORKA and 77 – and persuaded them to turn their backs on violence, and use their pent-up energies for peacebuilding and other constructive community activities. These groups were encouraged to be the champions of minorities and other vulnerable groups, and to work through education, and other established mechanisms, to promote messages of peace and tolerance. Using focus group discussions and other participatory methodologies, young people were persuaded to fight for positive change, rather than with one another. A national dialogue between young people and government officials resulted in the publication of a research paper entitled: “Our young people can also lead in contributing to peace”.



A national workshop involving youth groups and other stakeholders, including the Ministry of Youth, the Martial Arts Regulations Committee, Centro Nacional Chega!, the National Youth Council, FONGTIL and young Timorese parliamentary alumni, provided space for young people to discuss the roots of conflict and other burning issues. The results of the workshop were presented to the government for a response. A member of 77 commented: “We are very pleased to have had the opportunity to participate in the activities that AJAR organised, especially this National Dialogue, because this was the first time that our martial arts organisation had participated in an activity that gave us the space to freely express our ideas and opinions, and to increase our knowledge on ways to strengthen peace in Timor-Leste”.

These activities made it clear that banning youth groups was not the way to end violence. Violence stems from deep-rooted structural tensions regarding unequal access to public goods and services, like education and the unequal distribution of employment opportunities. To break the cycle of violence, it is important to ensure that the voices of young people are heard, and that youth stereotypes are quashed. As a member of IKS said: “Young people are eager to learn and explore our talents and skills, but the state gives more space and opportunities to foreigners than to us. Activities organized by AJAR are a good example that solutions to the problems of young people must come from the aspirations of young people themselves, that’s all we really need”.





## *MEET: Joanita Antonita Pinto, a young human rights defender*

Joanita is a dedicated Timorese human rights defender, passionate about defending the rights of marginalised and oppressed groups. She has been involved in several humanitarian activities, including community action with vulnerable people in rural areas, and as a member of AJAR's social justice program. As a human rights defender, she organises initiatives

that advocate for gender justice, emphasising women's rights. She had the opportunity to document stories by survivors of conflict-related sexual violations that taught her much about survivors and children born of war.

"AJAR not only taught me about humanity, but also offered wonderful opportunities to explore other things. I was privileged to be a part of a workshop with the victims of past conflicts, and have shared joy with women survivors and their children. Although I fought for gender justice to promote women's rights, I never really knew about the survivors' situations, or those of their children born of war. The workshop brought me closer to them, and I learned about the war from them". After documenting survivor stories, Joanita wrote an article, entitled 'Silent Voices', where she outlined the difficulties of survivors and children born of war. She has since joined a group in Ermera that raises awareness of discrimination against children born of war. "The struggle for human rights requires great effort, and I believe that the best resource to promote human rights are young people".

## **Seeing first-hand the Rohingya refugee camps of Cox's Bazar**

In March, AJAR hosted an exchange to the Rohingya refugee camps of Cox's Bazar, involving both Indonesian and Bangladeshi organisations. Four Indonesians, from three NGOs and one media agency, participated in the exchange. The exchange was arranged in response to a violent public outcry in Aceh, against Rohingya refugees arriving by boat. Several Acehese organisations, campaigning on behalf of the Rohingya, were subjected to hate speech and were threatened in the social media. Anti-Rohingya sentiments were further fueled by the spread of hoaxes and fake news, including claims that the Rohingya were rich and owned big houses, and that they were only in Aceh to steal Indonesian land.

The exchange provided an opportunity for Indonesians to meet directly with the Rohingya, and to hold talks with Bangladeshi organisations working with them. The Indonesians did not only have an opportunity to visit refugee camps in Cox's Bazar, and meet and chat with Rohingya



families, but they also got to visit the Rohingya Cultural and Memorial Center to learn about Rohingya history and culture. This gave them a much deeper understanding of the challenges facing the Rohingya, and ways in which organisations might work together to support them. The visitors also discussed ways of building solidarity with the stateless Rohingya, and advocating on their behalf for improved conditions.

On their return to Indonesia, the group reflected on what they had seen and heard, and produced blogs, wrote articles and organised public discussions to counter the disinformation and hate campaign, providing the public in Aceh, and in Indonesia as a whole, with a more accurate and empathetic picture of the Rohingya's situation, building empathy and solidarity, rather than spreading hatred and lies.

### *MEET: Rino Abonita, a journalist based in Aceh and working for the BBC*



"From a journalist's point of view, the visit to Cox's Bazar played a crucial role, ensuring that information shared with the public was based on fact, and countering the spread of hate speech directed at Rohingya refugees. All the stories I covered during the visit are factually accurate and important, and could never have been written without visiting the world's largest refugee camp and talking directly with the Rohingya. Stories from the camps countered the hate speech and the

misinformation circulating on social media, and fuelling anti-Rohingya sentiments in Aceh.

On a personal level, the journey to Cox's Bazar was an emotional experience. Each moment spent in the camps stirred up profound feelings. The camps were a tapestry of many facial expressions – loss, despair and the shadows of fear – mingling amongst the stifling tents made of woven bamboo and plastic sheeting, and perched on steep slopes of unstable ground. Yet, even there I found smiles, and it is from these smiles that hope is born".



## Justice

Every individual has an equal right to basic liberties, and they should have the same equal opportunities available to others. Sometimes justice is divided into four categories: 'distributive' (who gets what), 'procedural' (how fairly people are treated), 'retributive' (punishment for wrongdoing) and 'restorative' (restore or repair wrongs). AJAR, through its transitional justice program, addresses all four categories. But this section focuses on three specific areas, 'international justice', 'gender justice' and 'climate justice'.

International justice is the pursuit of accountability for serious crimes, such as genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity. AJAR has worked tirelessly in this field, particularly in Myanmar where genocide, war crimes and crimes against





humanity have been especially rife following the military coup in February 2021.

Broadly speaking, gender justice envisions a world where gender doesn't determine anyone's value or worth, and isn't a barrier to opportunities or the ability to thrive. Women's rights are human rights, and gender justice is equality and equity between women, men and non-binary people in all spheres of life. Millions of women around the world have the potential to bring about positive and sustainable change, shaping policies, structures and decisions that affect all our lives. That's why women are at the heart of AJAR's work.

Climate justice is the notion that decision-making around climate change, or the climate crisis, should be based on equity and respect for human rights. It recognises that the effects of climate change are not felt equally, and that some countries and communities are more responsible for the

climate crisis, while others are more severely impacted by it. Climate justice is underpinned by a number of principles:

- Human rights: respect for human rights, including the right to food, clean air, clean water and other resources;
- Equity: the benefits and burdens of climate change are shared fairly;
- Transparency: decisions on climate change are transparent, accountable and participatory;
- Gender sensitive: gender equality and equity perspectives are highlighted;
- Development: adequate assistance is provided to countries to adapt to climate change; and
- Education: education is provided to help people understand and manage climate change.

### *MEET: Rene Clemente from the Alternative Law Groups in Philippines, and a key member of the Transitional Justice Asia Network*

Rene has witnessed the evolving landscape of transitional justice in the region. Over the past few years, he has seen the Transitional Justice Asia Network or TJAN grow in visibility, strengthen its regional partnerships and contribute to building solidarity among civil society groups advocating for accountability.





“One of the biggest challenges has been making transitional justice relevant to broader audiences. We’ve seen greater public awareness of transitional justice issues, especially among younger generations”. TJAN has made great strides in this area, by improving its communication strategies, increasing engagement on social media and fostering relationships with journalists.

Rene highlights the importance of TJAN’s participation in regional and global platforms. “Our representation as TJAN in key conferences has been instrumental in ensuring our issues are heard. We have built stronger collaborations with regional and international organisations, allowing us to amplify our collective efforts”. Over the years, these engagements have helped connect TJAN’s work with global movements for justice, strengthening the network’s role in regional discussions. Partnerships have been another key area of progress. Alliances have facilitated knowledge-sharing and

joint advocacy efforts, reinforcing the importance of transitional justice in addressing past human rights violations.

Reflecting on the impact of these efforts, Rene acknowledges that progress is often piecemeal and incremental. “Despite the political challenges, we’ve seen strengthened civil society coalitions and increased documentation of human rights violations”. The work of TJAN and its members has contributed to a growing regional commitment to justice and accountability.

For Rene, one of the most significant lessons from the past few years has been the need for continuous learning and adaptation. “Equipping our networks with the right tools and knowledge remains essential. TJAN has laid the groundwork, and now we must continue strengthening our collective voice in the fight for justice.”



## Contributing to international justice

In July, AJAR was invited to the Hague, as one of a select group of leading human rights organisations, to participate in the annual five-day meeting of NGOs hosted by the International Criminal Court or ICC. ICC staff and prosecutors presented on the progress of investigations in different country contexts, and invited relevant NGOs to comment. The ICC expressed appreciation for AJAR's assistance in the case of Myanmar and the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh. On the final day's plenary session, AJAR's President was one of only six invited to address representatives of 60 member states. AJAR's role was to represent millions of Burmese victims, displaced and traumatised and unable to be present or speak for themselves, given that the junta has refused to extend the passports of all those opposing its authority. AJAR also provided additional support to submissions on two other cases – Afghanistan and Philippines.

The ICC case relates to the forced deportation of almost a million Rohingya from Myanmar to Bangladesh. In November, AJAR's team assisted the Chief Prosecutor, Karim Khan, during his visit to the camps in Cox's Bazar. After meeting with AJAR and discussing our work, the Chief Prosecutor formally requested for an ICC warrant to be issued for the arrest of the Commander-in-Chief of the Burmese Armed Forces, Minh Aung Hlaing. In appreciation for our contribution, and to deepen the ICC's understanding of the situation in Myanmar, the ICC has invited AJAR, at the Court's expense, to bring ten Burmese to the Hague, including AJAR staff and members of select civil society organisations, for a one-week study tour of the court.

In addition, AJAR staff, including the Myanmar Program Coordinator, travelled to Geneva to attend private meetings with staff from the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights working on Myanmar, and the UN Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar. This visit was combined with public presentations in Berlin and Brussels updating on the Myanmar situation.

## Training Burmese judges, lawyers and doctors

Since 2021, following the coup, thousands of innocent civilians, including many women and children, have been killed in acts of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity. As the junta controls all government offices and courts within the areas it administers, there is no hope for justice for the victims. However, resistance forces have taken control of more than half the country, and are establishing local governments, hospitals, schools, courts and prisons in safe areas. The Minister for Justice in the National Unity Government requested AJAR's assistance to train judges and senior staff of six ministries. The trainings focused on ways to deal with mass crimes, with an emphasis on war crimes, of which they had no previous experience. Following the trainings, the judges and their staff returned to the safe areas and to conduct trials for alleged war crimes committed by junta soldiers and others.



Doctors were also invited to the trainings, as they had requested help on ways to objectively document cases of burns and other injuries to children, allegedly caused by chemical weapons. By increasing their skills and capacity, the doctors are now able to compile bodies of evidence that clearly indicate the use of chemical weapons, which is a war crime. Providing evidence and establishing the truth, is a first step on the journey to justice and the non-recurrence.





## Unlearning impunity through AJAR's 'Bukae program'

It has been 23 years since Timor-Leste regained its independence. But women survivors still face challenges, like discrimination and social stigma, and the circle of injustice continues to widen. At the same time, the state has neglected their rights to reparations. In the meantime, perpetrators are free to live happy, comfortable and content lives. This situation not only affects survivors, but also their children born of war, who also experience discrimination and social stigma.

Women survivors are getting older and some have already passed away, while their struggles for justice and recognition by the state remain unmet.

To support greater accountability for survivors, and to break the entrenched cycle of impunity, AJAR, along with its partner ACbit, brought 455 survivors and 86 children born of war together through Bukae ba Sobrevivente, or the interim reparative measures program. The program is designed to strengthen transformative and co-creative approaches to reparations with survivors of sexual violence and their children, and to raise awareness and lobby government

officials to fulfil their responsibilities to establish survivor-centred reparation programs. AJAR and ACbit, along with community organisers from Piriampu (a survivor movement established in 2022) and seven partner NGOs, are working countrywide to persuade government to recognise survivors, and to provide them with the means to repair their lives.

This year the Bukae program implemented interim reparative measures for a number of survivors, and provided door-to-door medical assistance, including psychological support, to 250 of 455 women from 13 municipalities. 25 survivors, who previously suffered serious illnesses, are now in good health. At the same time, a draft law on reparations was developed by AJAR and the Timor-Leste Truth Commission, and is due to be presented to the Council of Ministers. A woman survivor from Covalima commented: “This Bukae program means a lot to me and my family. I am very grateful for the support I received, as for many years I felt unrecognised and ignored in this country. But with the presence of AJAR and ACbit, I feel alive and valued”.

### *MEET: Leticia Gomes – a community organizer with the Bukae program*

Leticia, from Piriampu, is a community organiser for the Bukae program. Her mother is a survivor of the 1975-99 struggle to regain independence. Leticia witnessed her mother’s suffering

as she faced social stigma and discrimination. This provided her with the motivation to fight for survivor rights to reparations, and for their recognition by the state.

After being involved with the Bukae program, Leticia gained new knowledge and expanded her connections with other survivors. “I am very happy to be involved in this program because it can be a bridge for me to reach other survivors, besides my mother”.

Leticia supports women survivors in her municipality to fight for their rights. This year, she spent every day walking long distances to help vulnerable survivors, and to better understand their experiences and the impact of the conflict on their lives. This is illustrated by how she helped a survivor who had suffered burns over most of her body after being splashed with hot oil. Leticia accompanied the woman to a medical facility, and continued treating her burns until she was fully healed. “It is not easy to gain the trust of survivors after their bitter experiences of conflict. Survivors did not trust me, but with the experience of my mother, and with training from AJAR and ACbit, I keep looking for better ways to approach survivors. Finally, I can participate in their lives and this is a wonderful experience that I will remember for the rest of my life”.

### *MEET: Melania Kiriho – fighting for climate justice*

Melania was born 45 years ago in Jayapura in Papua. Since 2004, following the completion of her degree in law, she has been working with a local non-governmental organisation, LP3A, assisting women and child victims of violence. In 2009, Melania began documenting the situation of women victims of human rights violations from Papua and West Papua.

Together with AJAR and several civil society groups, the Papuan Women’s Working Group, or PWG, was founded. Between 2012 and 2024, PWG focused on documenting, compiling reports, developing modules and pocket books, and training local facilitators to become the voice of the voiceless. In 2024, Melania was selected as the coordinator of the group. “As a member of PWG, I see that forest conversion has had a huge impact on climate change, with the reduction of forests that should be a source of livelihoods for the Papuan people.





In responding to these conditions, PWC is involved in community activities that strengthen the community, with regular discussions on the impact of climate change, and what can be done to deal with its consequences.”

“As the coordinator of PWC, I see our network as a guide, a bridge and a driving force to amplify the voices of Papuan women—loud, clear and strong. Our mission is to strengthen these voices across generations, to advocate for the recognition of Papuan women’s rights in national and community policies and to foster learning spaces grounded in human rights. We expand our network by engaging younger generations, ensuring that the fight for justice and equality continues into the future.”

### ***MEET: Rudi Kogoya, Program Assistant, Asia Justice and Rights—empowering indigenous communities to address the climate crisis***

Rudi first heard of AJAR in 2018, when he was a university student. After graduating, he worked as an assistant public lawyer at the Jakarta Legal Aid Institute, an NGO AJAR often collaborates with. He quickly became acquainted with some of AJAR’s staff, as well as its publications, such as *All the Birds are Gone*.

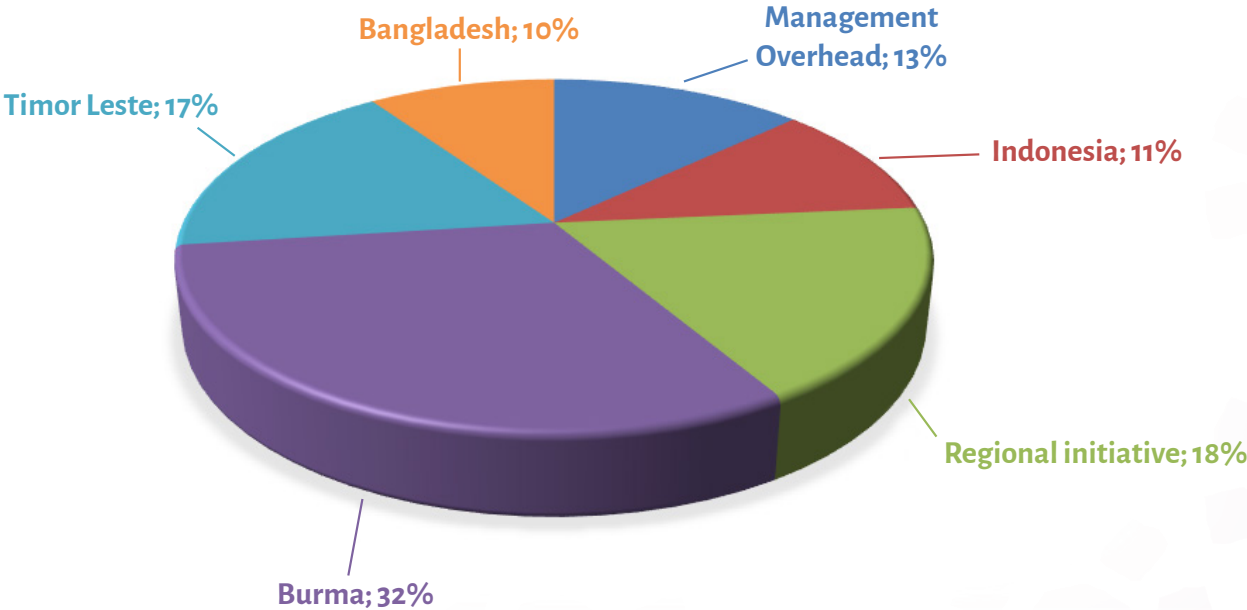
“I had a firmly patriarchal upbringing,” Rudi said, “so reading *All the Birds are Gone* opened my eyes to the issues women face in my own land.” In contrast to his legal work, that focused on urban issues in Jakarta, Rudi appreciates the opportunity to work on issues in Papua, which motivated him to join AJAR in 2023. Since that time, Rudi has worked on various projects documenting environmental destruction, the negative impacts of large-scale development projects and the ongoing low-level conflict, and how these factors disproportionately affect indigenous peoples, women and other marginalised communities in Papua.



Moving forward, Rudi hopes AJAR will continue to tackle the issue of climate justice. “Traditional ‘environmental’ NGOs aren’t doing what AJAR is doing,” he said, referring to AJAR’s focus on empowering communities and individuals affected by climate change. “Exploitation and deforestation don’t just harm the environment, but also people’s ways of life, livelihoods and social relations,” said Rudi. “There is an immense amount of indigenous knowledge on caring for the environment and climate justice that can benefit Papua.” Rudi firmly believes organisations, like AJAR, play important roles in empowering indigenous communities to respond to issues caused by climate change.

# Financial Overview

Project	Funded	Percentage
Management Overhead	484.499,06	13%
Indonesia	392.915,00	11%
Regional Initiatives	666.908,94	18%
Burma	1.174.790,25	32%
Timor Leste	649.130,00	17%
Bangladesh	357.714,00	10%
<b>Total</b>	<b>3.725.957,25</b>	<b>100%</b>





# Looking Ahead

## Seeding hope in uncertain times

**A**s we enter 2025, AJAR remains committed to justice, accountability and dignity. The road ahead is undeniably complex. The global landscape is marked by increasing polarisation, entrenched conflicts and the rise of authoritarian regimes, emboldened by opportunistic transnational technology corporations. This, coupled with dwindling resources for human rights work, and the threat of the climate crisis, present unprecedented challenges.

Our new five-year strategic plan charts a path, grounded in participatory approaches – approaches that hero lived experiences, foster local leadership and build strong networks of solidarity. Over the coming years, AJAR’s work will address four pressing forces impacting Asia and the Pacific – rising authoritarianism, digital suppression, the climate crisis and pervasive gender-based violence. The resurgence of authoritarian governments threatens civic freedoms, particularly in Indonesia, Myanmar and Thailand, restricting the efforts of human rights defenders and youth activists. Disinformation campaigns, combined with surveillance and repressive laws that target and further marginalise vulnerable youth. Climate change and resource exploitation disproportionately harm indigenous and rural communities, compounding risks of conflict. At the same time, survivors of gender-based violence face enduring barriers to justice, particularly in conflict zones.

AJAR’s strategy focuses on amplifying survivor voices, strengthening local resilience and fostering inclusive systems of justice. Key initiatives include supporting truth-seeking, trauma healing and accountability efforts, as well as integrating climate and gender justice approaches. AJAR will empower survivors, particularly women and youth, while promoting south-south learning, to develop innovative solutions to impunity. By fostering collaboration between civil society and

government, AJAR aims to build peaceful, inclusive societies, resilient to hate, violence and environmental degradation

Importantly, AJAR focuses on integrating climate and conflict analysis into its justice work. We need to better understand how climate change exacerbates conflict, and how conflict, in turn, worsens environmental degradation, while natural resource extraction remains at the root of conflict. Innovative, gender-aware approaches and localised strategies are essential for mitigating the dual impacts of conflict and climate change.

Central to this strategy is our ongoing work with survivors of torture and sexual violence, ‘stolen children’, young human rights defenders and, increasingly, refugees displaced by conflict. In the face of marginalisation and injustice, AJAR continues to plant seeds of hope. This work requires dedication and endurance. Burnout and disappointment are real challenges for human rights defenders, activists and organisations alike. But we are guided by a core belief: participatory approaches that amplify the voices of those most affected by injustice offer the best path forward when the journey is long and uncertain.

As we look to 2025, we carry with us the lessons learned from years of working alongside survivors and advocates of change who refuse to give up. Their hope fuels ours.

## *MEET: Galuh Wandita, AJAR’s Executive Director*

Galuh has been working on justice and reconciliation across Asia for over three decades, navigating the complex landscapes of conflict-impacted societies. As Co-founder and Director of AJAR, she has championed efforts to empower survivors and marginalised groups, particularly women, in regions affected by violence and instability.

“We support survivors – women, youth and indigenous communities – by working together to rebuild lives and strengthen communities. I believe that by trying to understand violations and their impact head-on, and learning from them, we find real paths to lasting change. Justice isn’t just about courts – it’s about building a society where dignity is restored and protected for everyone”.



With AJAR's team members in Indonesia and Timor-Leste, Galuh has been deeply involved with tracing and reuniting Timorese children abducted during the occupation, supporting over 100 survivors to reconnect with their families. "Witnessing the reunions is like drinking-in a human rights miracle. But after the reunions there is so much more hard work to do."

Galuh is proud of how AJAR has cultivated resilience and solidarity among survivors. One of her key areas of focus has been empowering women survivors through creative and participatory research, storytelling and advocacy. She has been instrumental in developing some of AJAR's most impactful approaches, such as 'Stone and Flower', highlighting survivors' voices and strengths. This has led to bottom-up approaches to support survivors rebuild their lives.

Looking to the future, Galuh remains positive, "The challenges are immense: rising authoritarianism, dwindling resources for human rights and climate crises compounding conflict. Burnout and disappointment among activists are real. Despite these hurdles, what gives me hope is the power of local communities. When survivors are treated as agents of change rather than victims, transformative justice becomes possible – even if the road is long.

We're committed to supporting movements that challenge impunity, while centering survivors' voices. Our new strategic plan emphasises strengthening participatory approaches and building solidarity networks across the region. As we look ahead to 2025 and beyond, I see AJAR continuing to be a space where hope thrives, even amidst adversity."



# Thank You

AJAR's work would not have been possible without the generous support of our donors. Their support has enabled us to work for meaningful change for the disempowered. On behalf of all of us at AJAR, we extend our heartfelt gratitude to the following donors for their loyal and steadfast support in 2024:

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AJAR works to rebuild communities by championing justice for all and empowering victims and society to hold perpetrators to account





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