

# Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network

## July 2011 Updates

### UNHCR Consultations with NGOs in Geneva

The 2011 annual UNHCR-NGO consultations were held in Geneva from June 28-30. More than 14 APRRN members were able to attend the consultations. APRRN members were actively involved in sessions as speakers, moderators and participants.

This year marks the 60th year of the 1951 Refugee Convention and APRRN took this occasion to launch the model state pledges at the consultation. The launch took place at the informal session for Asia with about 70 participants present. The model pledges were well received and commitments were made by participants at the launch to take the pledges to their governments and use the model pledges as a tool to develop country specific pledges to advocate with their own governments. It is hoped that the advocacy on the pledges would lead to commitments to be made by states at the global ministerial meeting in December 2011. The model pledges can be downloaded here: <http://refugeerightsasiapacific.org/2011/06/21/aprrn-state-pledges/>

APRRN has also been able to highlight a range of issues of concern with UNHCR during the consultations. In addition, APRRN has also been approached by many organisations that are keen to engage with the Network more closely.



APRRN members launch the state pledges at the UNHCR Consultations in Geneva

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### World Refugee Day

#### Refugee Day Flashmob Dance in Korea

APRRN members in Korea were involved in organizing a Flashmob dance on the streets of Seoul to raise awareness of World Refugee Day. The project was jointly organized by The Asia Center for Human Rights, UNHCR Korea, Medipeace, APIL, Nancen and the Korean Public Interest Lawyer's Group Gong-Gam, P Nan and the National Human Rights Commission Korea.

#### Kathmandu, Nepal

The Magna Carta Centre and PPR Nepal organized a special function in Kathmandu to mark the World Refugee Day. The event was attended by the Country Representative of UNHCR along with the representatives from UN agencies, national and international civil society organizations, relief agencies and some media representatives. Present were also the refugee representatives from different communities living in Nepal both as camp and urban refugees.

On the occasion, the APRRN initiated model "State Pledge" was also disseminated and highlighted. Dr. Gopal Krishna Siwakoti, Deputy Chair of APRRN, had the privilege to make an opening presentation.

#### New Delhi, India

The Chin Refugee Committee (CRC) organized a rally and called on the Indian civil society and government for providing a legal protection and on the UNCHR to improve services given to Chin refugees stranded in Delhi. More than 3,000 Chin refugees took part in the rally and received support and solidarity from prominent human rights activists including Mr. Deena, General Secretary

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of The Other Media; Mr. Ravi Niar, Executive Director of South East Asia Human Rights Documentation Center; Dr. Prakash, Director of Jesuit Refugee Services, South Asia Region; and Dr. Achan Mungleng, Coordinator of Euro-Burma Office, India. (Source: Chinland Guardian).

## **Bangkok, Thailand**

The Thai Committee for Refugees Foundation (TCR) and the Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network (APRRN) organized “60th year of Refugee Convention and Thailand: Past, Present and Future” and launched three new innovations representing the beginning of a new era in the protection of refugee rights in Thailand.

The event included panelists from Thai civil society such as Dr. Niran Pitakwatchara (National Human Rights Commission of Thailand), Dr. Sriprapha Petcharamesree (Thailand’s Representative to ASEAN Inter-Governmental Commission on Human Rights), Somchai Homlaor (Human Rights and Development Foundation & National Commissioner on Law Reform) and Dr. Vitit Muntarbhorn (Professor of Law, Chulalongkorn University, Thailand). The event was also attended by representatives of UN agencies, academics, NGOs, activists as well as the media.

The Thai Committee for Refugees officially launched its Refugee Freedom Fund, which was created to bail vulnerable groups from Immigration Detention Centre (IDC) in Bangkok. Earlier this month the group achieved the release of 94 refugees and 2 asylum seekers from IDC in cooperation with the National Human Rights Commission of Thailand and the Immigration Bureau. In the long-term TCR and APRRN will also continue to advocate for alternatives of detention and that detention should not be necessary in the first place.

In order to achieve a sustainable and long-term solution to the refugee problem in Thailand, TCR and APRRN have also launched a campaign on a draft bill of domestic legislation for refugees in Thailand. 10,000 signatures need to be collected from Thai citizens in order for the bill to be tabled for consideration at parliament.

In an effort to strengthen Thai civil society and create capacity for those working with refugees, APRRN and TCR have also launched a Refugee and Statelessness Studies Programme in cooperation with the Centre of Human Rights and Social Development at Mahidol University in Bangkok.

## **Press Releases on World Refugee Day**

Thai Committee for Refugees Press Release: <http://refugeerightsasiapacific.org/2011/06/21/press-release/>

Malaysian Bar Press Release: [http://www.malaysianbar.org.my/press\\_statements/press\\_release\\_refugees\\_save\\_them\\_from\\_a\\_different\\_kind\\_of\\_hell.html](http://www.malaysianbar.org.my/press_statements/press_release_refugees_save_them_from_a_different_kind_of_hell.html)

International Detention Coalition Press Release: <http://id-coalition.org/idc-world-refugee-day-2011-press-release/>

SUARAM Malaysia: <http://suaram.net/news/1022>



Flash mob dancers in Korea



Panel discussion at World Refugee Day Event 2011 in Bangkok

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## Refugee Conference 2011

The UNSW Centre for Refugee Research, partnering with the Refugee Council of Australia and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Regional Office Canberra, hosted a Refugee Conference (14–17 June) to mark the 60th anniversary of the 1951 Refugee Convention. The conference attracted more than 550 delegates from the region. Issues discussed included:

- Reflection on the strengths and achievements of the Refugee Convention and refugee protection system.
- Consideration on what further action is needed to secure the rights of refugees both in countries of asylum and in resettlement.
- Exploring contemporary challenges in the refugee regime, including IDP protection, urban refugees, environmental displacement, statelessness and mixed migration flows
- Acknowledgement and engagement in the experiences, knowledge and expertise of refugees
- Promoting the rights of refugees in their country of asylum and resettlement
- Sharing of best practice in refugee protection, service provision and research and contribution to social harmony and inclusion by increasing awareness of the experiences and contributions of people from refugee backgrounds



Panel discussion at the Refugee Conference 2011

## Refugee Studies Programme & Short Course

From September 12-16, APRRN in collaboration with the York University (UK) and the Thai Committee for Refugees will be conducting a 5-day course on Refugee Law. The course will be the first of its kind in the South East Asian region and will enable refugee rights advocates, activists, academicians, lawyers and students to build their capacity on international refugee law, its implications for their countries, application of refugee law in different contexts, challenges and best practices. APRRN also envisages an additional 2 days for interested participants to visit refugee camps on the Thai-Burma border to enable participants to understand firsthand the conditions and challenges of refugees. For the full curriculum and application details please visit: <http://www.york.ac.uk/inst/cahr/short%20courses/Index.htm>

APRRN, TCR and the Centre of Human Rights Studies and Social Development at Mahidol University also initiated the Refugee and Statelessness Studies Programme, which is part of the regular Master in Human Rights Programme. The curriculum covers international law, the regional protection framework, durable solutions, statelessness, socioeconomic rights and advocacy related to the South-east Asian region. The course will start in August 2011.

## Release of the Pakistani Ahmadis

On June 6, 94 refugees and 2 asylum seekers were released from Immigration Detention Centre in Bangkok, Thailand. This represents a historic development being the first time ever that such a large number was released at one time. The process was spearheaded by the Thai Committee for Refugees in cooperation with the National Human Rights Commission and the Immigration Bureau. The full details can be viewed on our website.

## Annual Report

The APRRN Annual Report for 2010 can now be downloaded here:  
<http://refugeerightsasiapacific.org/2011/06/23/aprrn-annual-report-2010/>

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## Joint Statement on the Australia Malaysia Refugee Swap Deal

The APRRN Secretariat coordinated and drafted a joint statement on the Australia – Malaysia refugee swap agreement. Under this bilateral agreement Australia plans to transfer 800 individuals seeking asylum to Malaysia in return for resettling an additional 4,000 refugees from Malaysia over the next 4 years.

The deal is likely to violate Australia's obligations towards refugees and to lead to the violation of the rights of the individuals transferred to Malaysia. Furthermore APRRN showed concern about the role that UNHCR will play in this transfer.

The full statement can be downloaded here:  
<http://refugeerightsasiapacific.org/2011/05/17/aprrn-joint-statement-on-the-australia-%E2%80%93-malaysia-refugee-swap-agreement/>

## Staff development

Haemin Park has joined the APRRN Secretariat as an intern in July 2011. She can be contacted under [aprrn.intern@gmail.com](mailto:aprrn.intern@gmail.com).

## More information

Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network  
12th Floor, Suite 12-03  
246 Sukhumvit Road  
Bangkok  
Thailand

E-Mail: [refugee.fa@gmail.com](mailto:refugee.fa@gmail.com)  
Web: <http://www.aprrn.org>  
Phone: +66 2653 2940 102

## Upcoming activities

### Short course on refugee law

Bangkok, September 12-16

For more information please visit our website or contact [aprrn.officer@gmail.com](mailto:aprrn.officer@gmail.com)

### Southeast Asia Subregional Consultation

Bangkok, September 17-18

### ARLAN (Asian Refugee Legal Aid Network) Workshop

Jakarta, September 20

Please contact Martin Jones (Lecturer in International Human Rights Law, Centre for Applied Human Rights, University of York) for more information: [martindavidjones@gmail.com](mailto:martindavidjones@gmail.com)

### South Asia Detention Workshop

Bangladesh, tentative late August 2011

### East Asia Detention Workshop

TBA, tentative November 2011

### Regional Detention Conference

Malaysia, early October 2011

### East Asia Refugee Mental Health Training

Hong Kong, November 9-11, 2011

### East Asia Sub-Regional Refugee Symposium

Hong Kong, November 12, 2011

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**<http://www.aprrn.org>**