

Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network

July 2012 Updates

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UNHCR Consultations with NGOs

Every year over 400 NGO representatives from around the world attend the UNHCR Annual Consultations with NGOs in Geneva, Switzerland. The consultation is a major event for international NGOs, community-based refugee organizations, UNHCR's implementing partners, human rights groups and refugee representatives themselves. The consultation is a venue to discuss challenges and put forward recommendations and solutions. At the consultations, issues can also be raised to UNHCR with the prospective of influencing policies in the long run. The meeting is important for networking and provides the opportunity for advocacy with senior level UNHCR staff. Besides the consultations, many NGOs take the opportunity to arrange side meetings with other stakeholders such as state representatives.

The APRRN Secretariat and many of its members have been attending the consultations since 2009. Many APRRN members have been engaged with the process for more than a decade, and have been instrumental in institutionalizing the NGO-UNHCR consultations. In a relatively short period, APRRN as a network has achieved high visibility at the consultations, primarily due to the targeted and effective interventions and constructive dialogue with UNHCR at the consultations and beyond. APRRN has been referred to as a model for NGO-UNHCR collaboration. This year more than 15 APRRN members were present at the consultations being actively involved in sessions as speakers, moderators, and participants. At the same time, APRRN has also been approached by many organizations that are keen to join the network.

Besides the usual regional sessions for the various bureaux, the agenda also featured thematic sessions on the following issues: resettlement, statelessness, climate

change, information management, strategic litigation, refugee legal representation and advocacy, implementing partnerships, redefining protection for children in emergencies, marginalization and social exclusion of particular refugee populations.

Every year one civil society representative is selected to be the Rapporteur of the Consultations. Last year Linda Bartolomei from the Centre of Refugee Research at the University of New South Wales took over this role. This year Anoop Sukumaran, APRRN Coordinator, was nominated for this role. The role of the rapporteur is to report back on the various sessions highlighting key issues, best practices and recommendations. This input will be compiled into a final report, which will be presented at the Executive Committee Meeting in October. The Executive Committee guides the work of UNHCR and approves UNHCR's budget and programmes and decides on key priorities. Anoop being the Rapporteur has not only provided great leverage for APRRN but has also been very useful in making important contacts with key staff at UNHCR in Geneva.

Besides attending the consultations, APRRN members were also able to arrange meetings with UNHCR Asia Bureau and the Deputy Director of the Division for International Protection. Through these meetings APRRN was able to raise key issues and share updates from civil society perspectives. In addition, APRRN was able to meet the representatives of the permanent mission of Thailand, Japan and Nepal, and briefed them about the refugee situations in their respective countries.

In addition APRRN has also organized a separate side meeting on July 2 (along with SRLAN and IDC), and updated participants on the recent developments in the Asia Pacific region and the achievements of the Network.

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Anoop presenting the report of the Rapporteur at the end of the UNHCR Consultations with NGOs



Participants at the Legal Aid Training in Nepal

Legal aid training in Nepal & South Asia Consultation

The first legal aid training conducted by APRRN for the South Asia region was held in Dhulikhel, Nepal from July 19-21, 2012. The training was attended by 22 participants from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Tibet and Nepal. Brian Barbour from the Japan Association for Refugees (JAR) and the Chair of the APRRN East Asia Working Group had kindly accepted to be the main resource person for the training. The training was hosted by INHURED and PPR Nepal which are APRRN members. Additional speakers included two resource persons from UNHCR, Luma Singh and Nathan Williams.

The objective of the training was to map the challenges in the sub-region, discuss the gaps identified and tools to address these gaps. The training started with a critical panel discussion on the challenges to RSD/legal aid in South Asia and a mapping exercise, which identified the main gaps. The latter part focused on an introduction to refugee law, legal aid and the refugee definition. On the second day, participants were introduced to case studies, the Nairobi code and ethics in legal aid, RSD procedural standards as well as practical aspects of legal representation. The last day of the training discussed legal aid projects as well as future action plans for APRRN in terms of legal aid for the South Asia region.

The training was followed by a one-day consultation for the South Asia Working Group, which evaluated and revisited some of the actions and strategies of the Working Group. A detailed report on the training and consultation will be available soon.

Refugee Mental Health Training

The Refugee Mental Health Training was held in Bangkok from June 14-16, 2012 and attended by 45 participants coming from Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, Cambodia, the Philippines and Myanmar. The profile of the participants was diverse ranging from legal aid providers to service providers and organizations working on advocacy.

The training built on the momentum, which was created by the first Refugee Mental Health Training organized by APRRN, held in Hong Kong in November 2011. This training was very well received and APRRN members highlighted the fact that a similar training was needed for the South-east Asia region.

The Southeast Asia Refugee Mental Health Training was spread over three days and aimed to build knowledge, skills and capacity among organizations working with refugees to respond more effectively to mental health issues among refugee communities. The agenda covered the following topics/sessions:

- Introduction to refugee mental health & overview of common health conditions in this region
- Panel discussion: mental health professionals from SEA sharing their experiences
- Self-care
- Effects of trauma and the connection between trauma and memory
- Working with children
- Mental health programming, research and evaluation
- Skills training: interviewing, making referrals, listening skills, assessment of clients, basic interventions, relaxation techniques, etc.

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- Mapping exercise to identify and assess beneficiaries, capacity, challenges, stakeholders and available resources
- Action planning and sharing of best practices

Derina Johnson from Burma Border Projects was the main facilitator for this training. APRRN also relied on many other experienced mental health professionals as speakers, such as Dr. Xavier Pereira (Health Equity Initiatives, Malaysia), Ofelia C. Mendoza (Community and Family Services International, Philippines), Meredith Walsh (Burma Border Projects, Thailand), Dr. Htin Zaw (Social Action for Women, Thailand), Eh Tho & Saw Thaw Lin (Mae Tao Clinic Thailand), Judith Strasser & Sopheap Taing (Transcultural Psychosocial Organization, Cambodia).



Relaxation techniques session at the Refugee Mental Health Training in Bangkok

Feedback on the training was very positive and participants suggested that there is a need for future training and capacity building on the issue. The Secretariat is also in the process of compiling a training manual, which will also serve as a starting point for further collaboration and information sharing on the issue. APRRN also plans to organize a similar training for the South Asia region in early 2013.

Southeast Asia Consultation

The Southeast Asia Consultation was held on June 13, 2012 in Bangkok and attended by 25 participants from Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippines, Cambodia and Burma. The consultation was facilitated by Veerawit Tianchainan, Chair of the Southeast Asia Working Group of APRRN. The discussion started off with country updates of the various organizations present and was then followed by discussions on key issues.

The consultation ended with the identification of joint actions for the action plan of the working group. Some of these include: continuous engagement with UNHCR on a national/regional level, monitoring of the 6-P Programme in Malaysia, advocacy and engagement around the Regional Cooperation Framework and the Regional Support Office, advocacy on legal representation and capacity-building on legal aid, engagement with AICHR/ASEAN and the SAPA network, the establishment of the statelessness working group and capacity building on this issue, a regional workshop on alternatives to detention and increased leverage of refugee voices within the network. Overall, the meeting was productive to discuss the most pressing issues and to identify key action points.

Refugee Workshop in Malaysia

APRRN organized the first legal aid training in Bangkok in February 2012. As a result, APRRN members in Malaysia and Indonesia recognized the importance of legal aid and capacity building. Malaysian groups organized a national workshop from May 30-31 in Kuala Lumpur. The workshop discussed the definition of refugees, gave an overview of refugee law, highlighted the gaps in procedural standards, and provided the opportunity to identify action plans. It was also welcoming to see that the workshop was attended by a large number of representatives from refugee communities in KL. The national workshop in Indonesia featured similar topics and was held in spring 2012. Legal aid providers in Bangkok also started to have regular informal meetings to update each other and move forward on the national action plans. APRRN is pleased to see that national groups took recognition of the issue, since APRRN believes that it is important to build capacity first, which will lead to more local ownership and domestication of refugee protection.



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Joint statement on the Rohingya situation

In June 2012, APRRN released two separate statements on the current situation in Rakhine state in Myanmar. The first statement was titled "Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network statement on the situation in the Rakhine state of Myanmar". In the statement, APRRN condemned the sectarian violence and deplored the use of violence by all sides. The statement also addressed the root causes of the problems and the systematic discrimination suffered by the Rohingya. APRRN made recommendations to the government of Myanmar and the government of Bangladesh as well as the international community. The full statement was endorsed by over 50 organizations/individuals and can be accessed here:

<http://refugeerightsasiapacific.org/2012/06/14/asia-pacific-refugee-rights-network-statement-on-the-situation-in-the-rakhine-state-of-myanmar/>

The second statement was released on June 20 and addressed to the Government of Bangladesh. APRRN showed concern over the detainment and deportation of Rohingya refugees by the Border Guards Bangladesh (BGB). The statement highlighted that those fleeing Rakhine state should be provided with safe haven and humanitarian assistance. APRRN also urged donors, regional governments and international organizations to provide diplomatic and financial support to assist the situation. The full statement can be downloaded here:

<http://refugeerightsasiapacific.org/2012/06/20/do-not-turn-away-those-fleeing-the-sectarian-violence-in-rakhine-state/>

Upcoming APRRN activities

Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Consultation (APCRR4): August 21-24, Seoul, Korea (More information is available on the APRRN website: www.aprrn.org)

Other important dates

Tenth Annual Orientation Course on Forced Migration: October 1-15, Kolkata, India. More information: <http://www.mcrg.ac.in/>

World Social Forum on Migration: November 26-30, Manila, Philippines. More information available on the MFA Website: www.mfasia.org

Refugee Studies Centre 30th Anniversary Conference: December 6-7, Oxford, UK. More information: <http://www.rsc.ox.ac.uk/events/thirtieth-anniversary-conference>

4th International Association for the Study of Forced Migration: January 6-9, 2013, Swabhumi, Kolkata, India. More information can be obtained here: <http://www.iasfmconference.org/index.php?conference=iasfm14&schedConf=iasfm14&page=schedConf&op=cfp>

More information

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