

AI INDEX: ASA 01/02/98
15 MAY 1998

PUBLIC STATEMENT

ASIAN HUMAN RIGHTS CHARTER

The Asian Human Rights People's Charter, *Our Common Humanity*, launched by NGOs in Kwangju, South Korea on 17 May reflects the growing strength and determination of the human rights movement in the Asia-Pacific region and the contribution it can make to the international debate on human rights. This initiative is especially appropriate during the 50th anniversary year of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The People's Charter affirms the universality of all human rights -- a principle often attacked by governments in the region, both rhetorically and in law and practice. Drawing upon a broad spectrum of civil society across the region, it shows that human rights, far from being an alien or foreign concept, are the legitimate aspiration and demand of people throughout Asia and the Pacific. It shows how these universal principles can be articulated powerfully from an Asian cultural, religious and philosophical perspective.

The People's Charter is also an important expression of the indivisibility and interdependence of all human rights, a reminder that the process of development is about the realisation of all human rights and that one set of rights -- economic, social, cultural, civil or political -- cannot be enjoyed at the expense or in the absence of another. This message is particularly relevant at this time of economic crisis in the region, as some countries face the human rights and social fallout of decades of political repression and unsustainable economic development.

Amnesty International welcomes the Charter's emphasis on legal and institutional protection of human rights, starting with the ratification of international human rights instruments and their full implementation in law and practice. It recognises the critical role the judiciary, legal profession and national human rights institutions can play in the protection and promotion of human rights. Amnesty International believes, however, that some aspects of the Charter need to be strengthened -- in particular, it should include an unreserved call for abolition of the death penalty.

The People's Charter calls for the adoption by governments of a regional convention on human rights. While such a regional convention might be a positive development over the longer term, Amnesty International believes the overwhelming and immediate priority is broader ratification and implementation of existing international standards by governments in the Asia-Pacific region. Widespread adherence to international standards, such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, should serve as the foundation stone for any future regional human rights mechanism.

ENDS.../