

## Concept note

### The Rights Path to Recovery – How countries place human rights at the centre in responding and building back better

An online side event at the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development 2021.

**Location:** Virtual

**Platform:** Via Microsoft Teams.

**Date/Time:** Tuesday 23 March 2021 from 12:15 to 13:45 Bangkok time zone (GMT+7).  
Check-in time: 12:00-12:15 Bangkok time zone (GMT+7).

**Registration** Please visit the event page to sign up and stay updated. Materials and updates will be provided on the event page on an ongoing basis.

**Hosts:**

- [The UN Asia-Pacific Issue-based coalition on Human Rights, Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment \(IBC\)](#) composed of OHCHR, UNFPA, UN Women (co-chairs), and ESCAP, FAO, ILO, IOM, UNAIDS, UNDP, UNDRR, UNEP, UNESCO, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNIDO, UNODC and WFP
- [Danish Institute for Human Rights](#)
- [Asia Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions](#)
- [Komnas HAM](#).
- Government from the Asia-Pacific (TBC)

#### DESCRIPTION

This interactive side event will focus on the role of human rights in building back better in response to COVID-19 and in achieving the 2030 Agenda. It will feature a panel discussion with a range of government officials, civil society representatives and developments experts, and also include segments to proactively involve the audience. The side event will aim to inspire governments and other stakeholders in the region to take action, by showcasing concrete initiatives from different stakeholders the Asia-Pacific, illustrating how recovery with human rights at the heart is not only the right thing to do, but also the smart thing.

The SDG implementation trajectory has been seriously disrupted by the impact of the pandemic that has exacerbated existing patterns of inequality, vulnerability and discrimination. These patterns reflect long overdue obligations of states under international human rights law, as well as pending commitments under the 2030 Agenda. Depending on how states address this crisis, inequalities could become even more pronounced, undermining the promise of the 2030 Agenda “to leave no-one behind”.

While the Asia-Pacific region has seen the shrinking of civic space during the COVID-19 pandemic, increased gender-based violence, discrimination, stigma and serious threats to economic, social and cultural rights, some countries have used the crisis as opportunity to strengthen their public health

systems, move towards universal social protection, search for future-oriented solutions to protect the planet, and harness the creativity of citizens in co-designing solutions to the challenges of the pandemic. The side event will highlight some of these initiatives, present insights into the economic imperative for putting human rights at the centre of the recovery and also share examples that illustrate the recommendations provided by the UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights in the recent “Report on the “just transition” in the economic recovery: eradicating poverty within planetary boundaries”.

The lessons from the pandemic reinforces the need for building transparent, effective, inclusive and accountable institutions to advance poverty eradication, fundamental freedoms, justice and accountability, to reduce inequalities, provide space for participation and diversity and to promote sustainable development.

No one actor can deliver on the 2030 Agenda alone, and governments need to work with civil society, business, academia and independent institutions. For example, National Human rights Institutions (NHRIs) in the Asia-Pacific region have made an important contribution to national and local response to the COVID-19 pandemic including by setting up helplines and through undertaking human rights monitoring in order to identify issues of concern and advocate with the authorities. They have also been engaged in public advocacy campaigns to combat racism and xenophobia and raise critical awareness on, for example, the needs of persons deprived of their liberty. NHRIs and national human rights actors in general should have a central role to play in policy and decision-making on a sustainable and resilient COVID-19 recovery.

The side event is directly linked to the 2021 APFSD theme “Sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic in Asia and the Pacific”, as well as two out of four aims of the forum, namely: 1) the discussion on how transformations can take place in the aftermath of COVID-19, supporting a sustainable and resilient recovery while accelerating implementation of the SDGs; and 2) to conduct in-depth review of certain targets and rights under review for SDGs 1, 2, 3, 8, 10, 12, 13, 16 and 17, without prejudice to the integrated, indivisible and interlinked nature of the SDGs.

## STRATEGIC VALUE AND EXPECTED OUTCOME

As the UN Secretary General António Guterres stated in his policy brief “COVID-19 and Human Rights: We are all in this together” in April 2020: *‘This is not a time to neglect human rights; it is a time when, more than ever, human rights are needed to navigate this crisis in a way that will allow us, as soon as possible, to focus again on achieving equitable sustainable development and sustaining peace’*. Similarly, the Secretary General’s Call to Action on Human rights, also launched in 2020, proposed strategic interventions to promote and protect human rights to realize the transformative promise of the 2030 Agenda.

In response to this, **the objective of this interactive side event is to serve as a platform to share good practices guided by human rights, that are proving effective in navigating the crisis and building back truly sustainable and just societies** in the Asia-Pacific region.

Through contributions from countries with successful response and recovery strategies, leading experts and interactive segments with the audience, the expected outcome of the side event will be the identification of concrete and context-specific solutions to reach those left furthest behind.

Building back better can only be achieved where there is respect for fundamental human rights and where civic space is protected. This event would be an opportunity to encourage governments to engage with national human rights actors and other actors relevant to contributing to the realisation of the 2030 Agenda and to ensure recovery planning incorporates the principles of inclusion and participation, dignity and non-discrimination.

## **OBJECTIVE**

The side event will serve as a platform to share good practices and experiences around the following:

- Which are proving to be the most successful strategies for sustainable response and recovery in the Asia-Pacific region, and how are they related to human rights and the SDGs?
- How are effective sustainable response and recovery strategies ensuring the principle of leaving no-one behind, and realising the transformative potential of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development?
- What role has civil society, NHRIs and other stakeholders played in the COVID-19 response, and how could they further contribute to sustainable and resilient recovery?
- What can we learn from earlier global health crises in relation to human rights when responding to the COVID-19?

## **PARTICIPANTS/ SPEAKERS**

The side-event will be open to all interested APFSD participants and the organizers will also invite policy makers and civil servants in ESCAP member states, UN entities, civil society, private sector and development actors, as well as national human rights institutions from the organizers' respective networks in the region. The organizers aim to attract more than 150 participants to this virtual event.