

Concept Note

Regional Commemorative Panel Discussion on the 25th Anniversary of Durban Declaration and Programme of Action: Comprehensive Anti-Discrimination Legislation in Asia

Wednesday, 23 September 2026 / Bangkok, Thailand

Venue: Meeting Room A, United Nations ESCAP Conference Center

Time: 9:00-12:00

Background

Adopted in 2001, the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action (DDPA)¹ remains the most comprehensive international framework for combating racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. Over the past 25 years, the DDPA has guided States, United Nations entities, and civil society in addressing both structural and intersectional forms of discrimination, emphasizing the need for effective legal and institutional measures to protect individuals and groups exposed to systemic exclusion. The 25th anniversary of the DDPA offers a timely opportunity to reflect on achievements as well as persistent challenges in translating international commitments into meaningful protection at the national level.

The DDPA calls on States to prohibit discrimination in all its forms and to ensure effective remedies for victims. The *Protecting Minority Rights – A Practical Guide to Developing Comprehensive Anti-Discrimination Legislation*², jointly published by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the Equal Rights Trust (ERT), outlines the key components of comprehensive anti-discrimination law and offers practical guidance for developing and implementing legislation in line with international standards on equality and non-discrimination. In the Asia region, progress toward comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation has been witnessed to be at varying stages in different sub-regions, with many countries lacking holistic legal frameworks that provide broad coverage, effective remedies, and strong enforcement mechanisms. Discrimination based on descent continues to affect millions of people in the region, often manifesting through segregation, restrictions on access to education, employment, housing and

¹ See, https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Publications/Durban_text_en.pdf

² Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/publications/policy-and-methodological-publications/protecting-minority-rights-practical-guide>

justice, and exposure to violence and degrading treatment, as documented by the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) in its review of States parties. CERD General Recommendation No. 29 underscores the obligation of States to explicitly prohibit descent-based discrimination in law, adopt comprehensive strategies and special measures, and establish effective institutions to ensure substantive equality for affected communities. Civil society organizations, national human rights institutions, academics, and other stakeholders have played a central role in advocating equality law reform, often in complex political and social environments.

Against this backdrop, the commemoration of the DDPA's 25th anniversary provides an important platform for cross-country learning, strategic dialogue, and strengthened regional collaboration to advance comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation that effectively protects people from discrimination in diverse national contexts. It is within this context, the UN Human Rights Office (OHCHR), in collaboration with Minority Rights Group International (MRG), and in the presence of the UN Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, will hold a half day commemorative event.

Purpose

The purpose of the event is to convene civil society organizations, legal practitioners, strategic litigation advocates, academics, national human rights institution representatives, UN experts and community leaders to examine how comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation can be advanced and implemented in Asia. The event will also create a dedicated space to integrate descent- and caste-based discrimination into the wider equality law agenda, including by examining how discrimination-related cases are framed, litigated, decided and implemented in practice.

Objectives

- To commemorate the 25th anniversary of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action by reflecting on progress and persistent gaps in addressing discrimination in Asia and strengthening regional collaboration to advance comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation.
- To facilitate the exchange of knowledge and experiences on advocacy strategies across different stages of promoting comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation in diverse country contexts.

Expected Outcomes

- Enhanced visibility and awareness on the DDPA framework and the key features of comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation.
- Strengthened collaboration among civil society movements in Asia to adopt comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation.

Participants

Representatives of civil society movements advocating comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation in Asia, including but not limited to advocates, legal practitioners, civil society leaders, academics, and regional experts who have been directly involved in advancing equality and non-discrimination.

Modalities

The event will be convened in hybrid format via Zoom with AI-generated interpretation available in multiple languages.

For in-person participation, registration via Indico is required via:

<https://indico.un.org/e/regionalcadlasia2026>.

For online participation, registration via Zoom is required via:

https://zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_nFdN95XkSO6zxZrMFsllZw.

Agenda

Time	Item	Moderator/ Speakers
09:00 – 09:30	Registration	
9:30 - 9:45	Welcome Remarks	Moderator: Hanae HANZAWA, Anti-Racial Discrimination Advisor for Asia and Pacific, OHCHR Regional Office for Asia and Pacific Karin BUHREN, Human Rights Officer/Coordinator, OHCHR Regional Office for Asia and Pacific
9:45 - 10:00	Keynote Speech: DDPA at 25 and the Future of Comprehensive Anti-Discrimination Legislation in Asia	Ashwini K.P. , UN Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination,

		xenophobia and related intolerance
10:00 – 10:30	Regional State of Play in Asia on Developing and Adopting Comprehensive Anti-Discrimination Legislation	Claude CAHN, Human Rights Officer, OHCHR, Indigenous Peoples and Minority Section Megumi KOMORI, Acting Secretary-General, International Movement against All Forms of Discrimination and Racism (IMADR)
10:30 -10:45	Coffee Break	
10:45 – 11:45	Panel Discussion: From Durban to Domestic Law: Advocacy, Litigation and Overcoming Challenges towards Adoption of Comprehensive Anti-Discrimination Legislation in Asia The discussion will look at how advocacy movements across Asia have been tackling challenges faced in their advocacy efforts for adoption of comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation.	Moderator: Chet Narayan RASAILI, OHCHR Speakers (5-8 min/each): Yoko HAYASHI, Lawyer and former Chair of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (online) Ging CRISTOBAL, Co-coordinator, Stop the Discrimination Coalition Shaheen ANAM, Executive Director, Manusher Junno Foundation
11:45-11:55	Ways Forward & Closing Remarks	Yamini RAVINDRAN , Head of Asia, Minority Rights Group
11:55-12:00	Group Photo	