



RESOLUTION ON THREATS TO FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND PEACE IN SOUTH AND EAST ASIA

Proposed by Writers for Peace Committee

Seconded by French PEN, Independent Chinese PEN Center, Slovenian PEN, PEN Finland, and Wales PEN Cymru

The Assembly of Delegates of PEN International, meeting at its 85th annual Congress in Manila, Philippines, 1 to 5 October 2019,

Recalling the PEN Charter's commitment to the ideal of one humanity living in peace and equality in one world, and to championing the unhampered transmission of thought and the right to freedom of expression; and,

Recalling the principles of the Bled Manifesto, in particular the belief that all individuals and peoples have a right to peace, and the importance of free debate, discussion and dialogue as an essential condition for peace; its deep and longstanding concern over the continuing and exacerbating violations of human rights by many governments across South and East Asia, which gravely impede upon the freedoms and liberties of their citizens.

Among other things, PEN International:

- Continues to condemn the systematic human rights violations and crimes against humanity¹ committed by the Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea;
- Continues to condemn the Vietnamese government's abuse of the new Cyber Security law to persecute activists calling for democratic reforms and social justice.
- Remains concerned by the suppression of free speech by the government of China in the context of the exercise of legitimate political activities, including in Hong Kong and in Tibet, as well as the manipulation of technology and media to this end;
- Is deeply disturbed by the violent persecution of minority groups by both State and non-State actors, including the credible allegations of a genocide of the Rohingya in Myanmar² and this people's on-going plight, and of forced cultural assimilation of Uighur people in Xinjiang including their arbitrary detention in so-called "re-education camps";³ and,

¹ <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/CoIDPRK/Pages/CommissionInquiryonHRinDPRK.aspx>; <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/north-korea>.

² <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hrbodies/hrc/myanmarffm/pages/index.aspx>.

³ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/09/china-up-to-one-million-detained/>.

- Remains alarmed⁴ by the continued existence of ‘blasphemy’ laws,⁵ in light of their role in inciting and legitimising violence by religious extremists, and in enabling the violation by state authorities of the right freedom of expression and the stifling of open dialogue and public discourse;

Notes the numerous armed conflicts in the region and the bellicose behaviour, in word and action, by many of its governments as well as non-State armed groups, and expresses regret over the subsequent lack of stable and true peace and its negative impact on human rights and development;

Deplores the attacks on life and livelihood by acts of terrorism, while observing that many measures purportedly aimed at countering terrorism and preventing violent extremism are abused to suppress legitimate free speech and dissenting voices; and,

Observes with alarm an increase in authoritarian practices including censorship,⁶ and a tendency of elected and non-elected leaders alike to fuel and exploit divisive politics with a view to ostracising those with opposing and dissenting views and cementing their own power.

In light of the above, the General Assembly of PEN International:

- Calls on the governments of the region to respect their obligations under international human rights law and international humanitarian law, including:
 - Respecting the right to freedom of expression;
 - Ending the violent persecution of minorities, and ensuring its perpetrators are held accountable; and,
 - Immediately and unconditionally freeing political prisoners;
- Calls on all parties to armed conflicts in the region to commit to their resolution through non-violent means, with a view to respecting the right to self-determination and the human rights of all people living in affected areas.

We also call on the writers of the world, and on the membership of PEN in particular, to continue to seek to bring together people through literature and discussion, so that culture may serve to bridge divisions in society, and provide a defence against and refuge from polarisation and hatred.

⁴ <https://pen-international.org/app/uploads/Resolution-on-blasphemy-and-the-supression-of-freedom-of-expression.pdf>.

⁵ <https://end-blasphemy-laws.org/countries/asia-central-southern-and-south-eastern/>;
<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-46046074>.

⁶ <https://www.seapa.org/regional-the-slide-backwards-across-southeast-asia/>;
<https://www.voanews.com/extremism-watch/intolerance-india-concerns-rights-groups>