



Asian Federation Against Involuntary Disappearances



AFAD's Humble Beginnings

The Asian Federation Against Involuntary Disappearances (AFAD) is a regional federation of human rights organizations working directly on the issue of enforced disappearances. Founded on 4 June 1998 in Manila, Philippines, the federation was established through the initiative and efforts of the Families of Victims of Involuntary Disappearance or FIND (Philippines), Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons (disputed state of Jammu and Kashmir), and the then Organization of Parents and Family Members of the Disappeared or OPFMD (Sri Lanka).

The founding of AFAD was essentially motivated by the increasing problem of enforced disappearance in Asia, which necessitated a regional response from similar organizations working on a common issue. Further inspiration also sprang from the Latin American Federation of Associations of Relatives of Disappeared-Detainees (FEDEFAM), a federation that was formed in 1981 at the height of the horrific phenomenon of enforced disappearances during Latin America's dictatorships.



From three (3) organizations in three (3) countries, AFAD has grown to become a federation of 14 member-organizations from Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Nepal, Pakistan Philippines, South Korea, Thailand, and Timor-Leste, with two (2) individual members from Geneva (Switzerland), and one (1) from Laos. In 2018, the federation will be celebrating its 20th founding anniversary.



The formation of AFAD had marked a significant breakthrough in the human rights work in Asia, as it did not only foster a coalition among similar organizations in the region but also signified unity in diversity, as its members were all of diverse cultural backgrounds and political contexts. The foundation of their solidarity is rooted on their strong fervor to respond to the horrific phenomenon of enforced disappearances in their respective countries. Through the years, the federation has achieved a great many milestones in its almost two-decade search for truth, justice, reparation, redress, memory, and guarantees of non-repetition.

AFAD's conceptualization in the year 1997, which was initiated by the Families of Victims of Involuntary Disappearance (FIND) was graced by the late Father Jon de Cortina, S.J. , former director of the Association of the Search for Missing Children in El Salvador or the *Asociación Pro-Búsqueda de Niñas y Niños Desaparecidos* of El Salvador and by representatives from other organizations such as HIJOS of Argentina, *Khulumani* Support Group of South Africa, and Adhoc of Cambodia. The 1997 conceptualization of AFAD led to the establishment of its core group in 1998. Fr. de Cortina also facilitated FIND's cooperation with FEDEFAM. With the presence of former FEDEFAM President Sra. Ynette Bautista and her husband Federico Kircher, the core group, comprised of organizations from the Philippines, the disputed state of Jammu and Kashmir, and Sri Lanka, was officially formed on June 4, 1998.



THE LATE FATHER JON DE CORTINA, S. J. (RIGHT) MEETING WITH FOUNDING MEMBERS DURING AFAD'S CONCEPTUALIZATION

During AFAD's humble beginnings, the close coordination between AFAD and FEDEFAM was further strengthened by their joint lobbying efforts at the United Nations (UN) for the institution of an international treaty against enforced disappearances with an independent monitoring body to ensure implementation.



MARY AILEEN BACALSO, AFAD'S SECRETARY-GENERAL (LEFT) AND FATHER JON DE CORTINA, S. J. (CENTER) AND MABEL MAKUPE OF KHULUMANI SUPPORT GROUP (RIGHT) GET INTERVIEWED REGARDING THE FOUNDING OF AFAD

Today, this treaty is known as the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearances (herein after referred to as the Convention) with a strong monitoring body, dubbed as the UN Committee on Enforced Disappearances (UN CED).

AFAD's Relentless Struggle for a World without *Desaparecidos*



AFAD ACTIVELY PARTICIPATED IN THE DRAFTING AND NEGOTIATION PROCESS OF THE CONVENTION.

From 2002 until 2005, AFAD actively and consistently participated in the drafting and negotiation process of the Convention. The federation helped to refute the widely-held belief that enforced disappearance is solely a Latin American phenomenon. The visible presence and active engagement of AFAD had contributed in convincing the UN Member-States of the imperative of a new treaty

against disappearances, which took only three (3) years to draft.

To date, the drafting and negotiation of the Convention was the most expeditious process in the history of the United Nations in drafting a human rights treaty. However, it is significant to note that while the drafting and negotiation process for the Convention was prompt; convincing the UN Member-States to adopt new treaty was still quite difficult, as they also held the view that enforced disappearance was only a Latin American



LOBBY VISIT OF VICTIMS' FAMILY MEMBERS TO GENEVA DURING THE NEGOTIATION PROCESS

phenomenon and a problem of the past. AFAD's presence essentially helped in projecting the Asian phenomenon of enforced disappearance and the establishment of the fact that in this region, there are no strong regional human rights mechanisms for protection from human rights violations.

After the Convention was adopted historically by the UN General Assembly on 20 December 2006 as well as its historic signing in Paris on 6 February 2007, the International Coalition Against Enforced Disappearances (ICAED), mandated to campaign for universal ratification and implementation of the Convention, was established. From its inception to the present, AFAD has remained one of the most active members of the coalition. By dint of its active participation and consistent presence throughout the whole process, AFAD has, since 2010, been appointed as the focal point of the Coalition which has 56 member-organizations from different parts of the world.

DISAPPEARANCES

NO

CONVENTION

NOW!



INTERNATIONAL COALITION
AGAINST ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES

International Campaign for the
Convention for the protection
of all persons of enforced
disappearances www.icaed.org

AFAD's Advocacy at Various Levels:

International Level

Despite its limited resources, AFAD continues to coordinate with the Steering Committee of the ICAED in coming up with joint statements and in coordinating actions to achieve universal ratification of the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance. Side events at the UN are being conducted by ICAED annually through the coordinatorship of AFAD and in coordination with both the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disap-



**CONDUCT OF DESPARICIONES FORZADAS EN ASIA Y EL IMPERATIVO DE LA
CONVENCION SOBRE DESPARICIONES FORZADAS**



Federación Asiática contra las
Desapariciones Involuntarias (AFAD)



Coalición Internacional contra
las Desapariciones Forzadas (ICAED)

Desapariciones forzadas en Asia y el imperativo de la Convención sobre Desapariciones Forzadas

12:00 nn - 1:00 p.m. | 17 de Septiembre 2015
XXIV, Palais des Nations, Ginebra, Suiza

Programa

Moderador:

Mr. Ron De Vera

Coordinador de país - Filipinas

Panel de oradores:

Federación Asiática contra las Desapariciones Involuntarias (AFAD)

Su Excelencia el Sr. Alberto Pedro D'Alotto

*El embajador de Argentina a la Oficina de las Naciones Unidas
y otras organizaciones internacionales en Ginebra*

"La importancia de la Convención sobre Desapariciones Forzadas"

Sr. Kimio Yakusiji

Miembro

Comité de la ONU sobre Desapariciones Forzadas

"Desafíos de la Convención contra la Desaparición Forzada de Asia"

Desapariciones forzadas en Asia

Sra Yati Andriyani	Indonesia
Lcdo. Kartik Murukutla	Jammu y Cachemira
Lcda. Mandira Sharma	Nepal
Sra. Amina Masood	Pakistán
Sra. María Aileen D. Bacalso -	Filipinas

Sr. Yeshua-Moser Puangsuwan

Oficial de Enlace a las Naciones Unidas

Nonviolence International

Palabras de cierre:

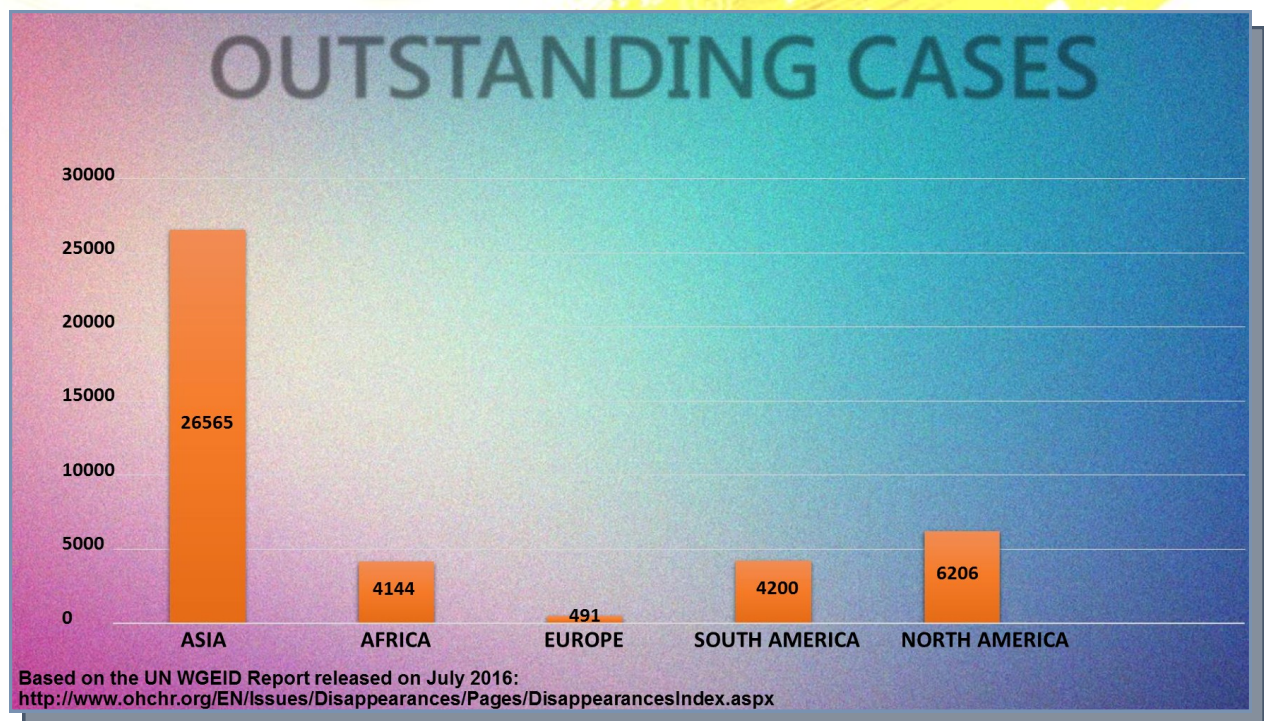
Sr. Khurram Parvez

Presidente

Federación Asiática contra las Desapariciones Involuntarias

THE OFFICIAL PROGRAMME FOR AFAD'S SIDE EVENT AT THE UNITED NATIONS HEAD-
QUARTERS IN GENEVA, SWITZERLAND IN PARTNERSHIP WITH ICAED AND NONVIOLENCE
INTERNATIONAL

Being the sole regional federation against enforced disappearances in Asia where the highest number of outstanding cases were submitted to the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances (WGEID), AFAD has, in no small measure, contributed to the projection of the issue of enforced disappearances at the local, regional, and global levels. Its public activities and lobbying work in these countries have helped made the issue of enforced disappearances in Asia visible internationally. It also facilitated the submission of the highest number of cases to the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances.



Essentially, AFAD constantly leads in organizing side events at the United Nations in cooperation with other national, regional, and international NGOs and with both the UN CED and the UN WGEID. As well, the federation regularly meets with the latter and submits cases and general allegations, thus calling the attention of Asian states where cases of enforced disappearances occur, with the ultimate end of saving lives.



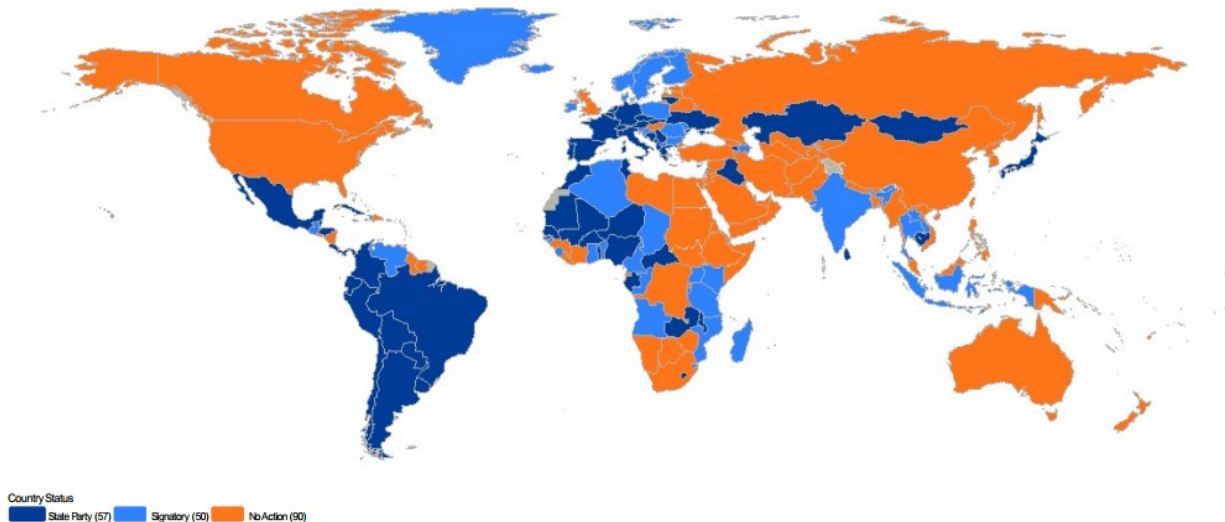
In April 2016, AFAD was invited to represent the civil society organizations and speak during the 10th anniversary of the Convention, which was organized by the Group of Friends of the Convention, e.g. Governments of France, Argentina, Japan. This was attended by around 100 representatives of the concerned States. It was an opportunity for AFAD to present its and ICAED's positions on the impact of the Convention and the challenges for more ratifications and implementation.

Regional Level

In Southeast Asia, AFAD lobbied rigorously for the signing and ratification of the Convention, which as of this writing, has been signed by Thailand and Indonesia along with 57 states that have ratified. 50 that have signed, and 90 that have not acted on it at all. Asia is one of the regions which has the least number of ratifications.



International Convention for the Protection of all Persons from Enforced Disappearance
Last Updated: 22 Sep 2017



AN INFOGRAPHIC DEPICTING THE STATUS OF THE CONVENTION AMONG ALL THE INVOLVED STATES-PARTIES. THE STATES HIGHLIGHTED IN DARK BLUE COLOR REPRESENT THOSE WHO HAVE RATIFIED AND SIGNED THE CONVENTION; THE ONES IN LIGHT BLUE COLOR SIGNIFY THOSE THAT HAVE SIGNED BUT HAVE YET TO RATIFY; AND THE ONES IN COLOR ORANGE ARE ALL STATES WHO HAVE YET TO TAKE ANY ACTION.

In South Asia, where governments are predominantly repressive, AFAD worked painstakingly toward the exclusion of Sri Lanka from membership of the UN Human Rights Council. The federation picketed in front of the embassy of Sri Lanka in Manila while it joined other organizations at the United Nations office in Geneva in exposing the sorry state of human rights in the country. With the recent change in administration, AFAD worked hard to lobby for the ratification by Sri Lanka, which deposited the 52nd instrument of ratification to the office of the UN Secretary-General on May 26, 2016.

At present, AFAD continues to knock on the doors of various Asian governments, through their Heads of States, foreign offices, and other relevant government agencies in convincing Sri Lanka to sign and ratify the Convention on Enforced Disappearances, which provides for the right to truth as well as the right not to be subjected to enforced disappearance and to recognize the competence of the UN Committee on Enforced Disappearances (UN CED).



CO-MAGSAYSAY AWARDEES OF SOMBATH SOMPHONE RAISE A SYMBOL OF THE GLOBE IN SOLIDARITY OF THE CALL TO RESURFACE SOMBATH

Capacity-Building of AFAD Constituents:

International Level

In its almost two-decade journey toward truth and justice, AFAD has been able to conduct relevant capacity-building activities that continue to advocate and lobby for a world without *desaparecidos*, such as:

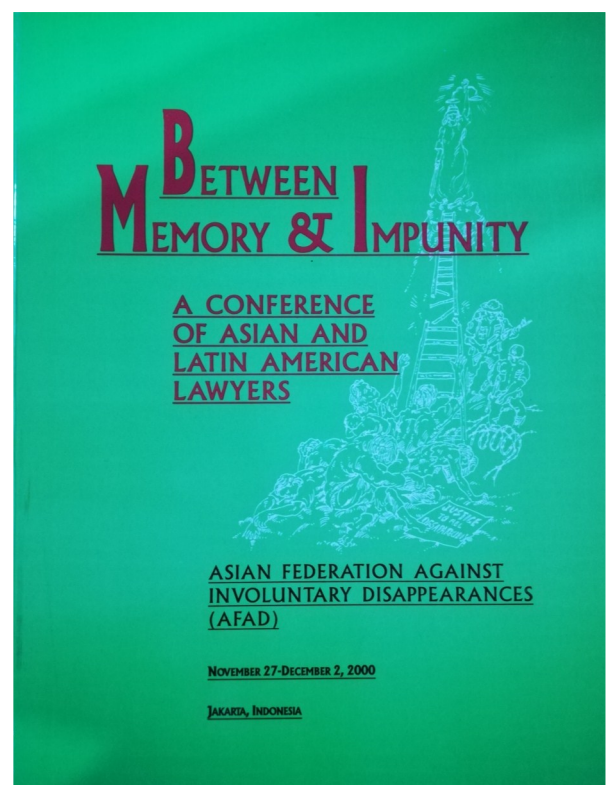
1. Between Memory and Impunity

A conference of Asian and Latin American Lawyers that was held in Jakarta, Indonesia in December 2000. A total of 40 lawyers from Asian countries participated in the event, with the participation of lawyers from Chile, El Salvador, and Argentina.

The event culminated with the adoption of important resolutions to achieve concrete victories in the search for truth and justice for victims of enforced disappearances. It was an effort to learn from the positive experiences of Latin American lawyers who have experienced concrete strides in litigation, prosecution and other forms of combatting impunity.

2. Healing Wounds, Mending Scars

Sharing of experiences of Asian family members of the disappeared with participation from Latin America, Africa, and Asia. It was held in Jakarta, Indonesia in December 2004. This was followed up by a series of national activities of families of the disappeared in the countries where the delegates were from.



The ultimate objective of the whole series was to empower the families of the victims, thus facilitating their participation in the continuing search for truth and justice for their disappeared loved ones. The succeeding processes were named from Victims to Healers and Cycle of Healing.

An online copy of this book can be found on the AFAD website: <http://afad-online.org/resources/books/healing-wounds-mending-scars>



3. International Forum on Enforced Disappearances held in Geneva, Switzerland

This training was held in November 2011 on the occasion of the first meeting of the UN Committee on Enforced Disappearances. This international forum was participated in by representatives of the 40 member-organizations of the International Coalition Against Enforced Disappearances. Several public forums are being held annually on the same topic as side events during sessions of the UN Human Rights Council in coordination with both the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances and the UN Committee on Enforced Disappearances.

4. World Conference on Psychosocial Support in the Search for Truth and Justice for Victims of Enforced Disappearances

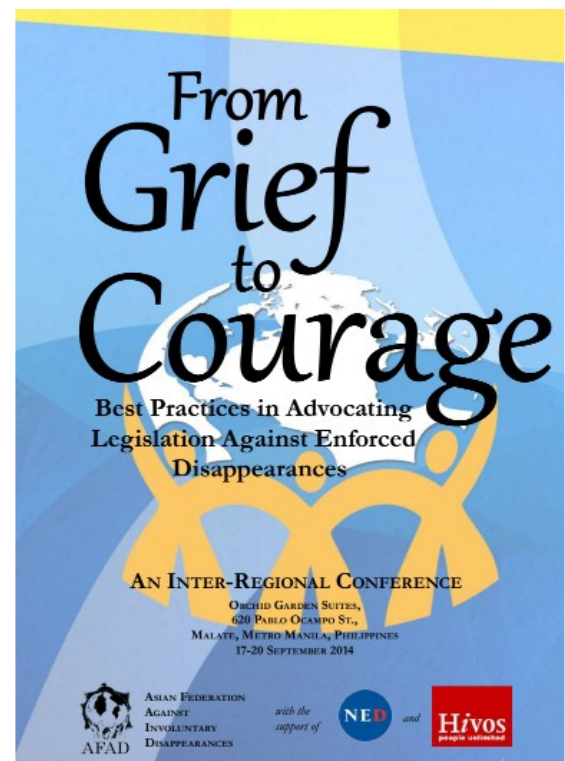
This conference was organized by AFAD and held in July 2014 in Manila, Philippines with the participation of various experts and NGO practitioners in Asia and Latin America. This led to the development of an Asian version of the Minimum Standards on Psychosocial Support in the Search for Truth and Justice for Victims of Enforced Disappearances, Torture and Extrajudicial Execution which was published by AFAD in 2016.

5. An International Conference on Best Practices in Advocating Legislation Against Enforced Disappearances

This conference was held in Manila, Philippines in September 2014. It was participated in by legal luminaries and NGOs from various parts of Asia; Latin America, particularly Guatemala, Argentina, Chile and El Salvador; Eastern Europe; and Africa.

The noteworthy practices, lessons, and inputs gathered and documented in this momentous gathering was consolidated and published in the book entitled "From Grief to Courage." A full copy of this resource can also be found on the AFAD website:

<http://afad-online.org/resources/books/251-ebook-from-grief-to-courage-best-practices-in-advocating-legislation-against-enforced-disappearances>



Regional Level

AFAD has also managed to conduct significant regional activities that have helped to capacitate both AFAD staff members and families of the *desaparecidos*. Some these activities are as follows:

1. Training on Gender Sensitivity

A training that was held in 2004 in Baguio City, Philippines, which was participated in by all member-organizations of the Federation. This was in recognition of the importance of gender issues in AFAD, taking into consideration that most of those who disappeared are men and the surviving family members are women and children. This was later followed up by another training in March 2015 with all AFAD Council members and country staff representatives were present.

2. Training Seminar on the Imperative of a Draft Convention on the Protection of All Persons from Enforced or Involuntary Disappearance (Convention)

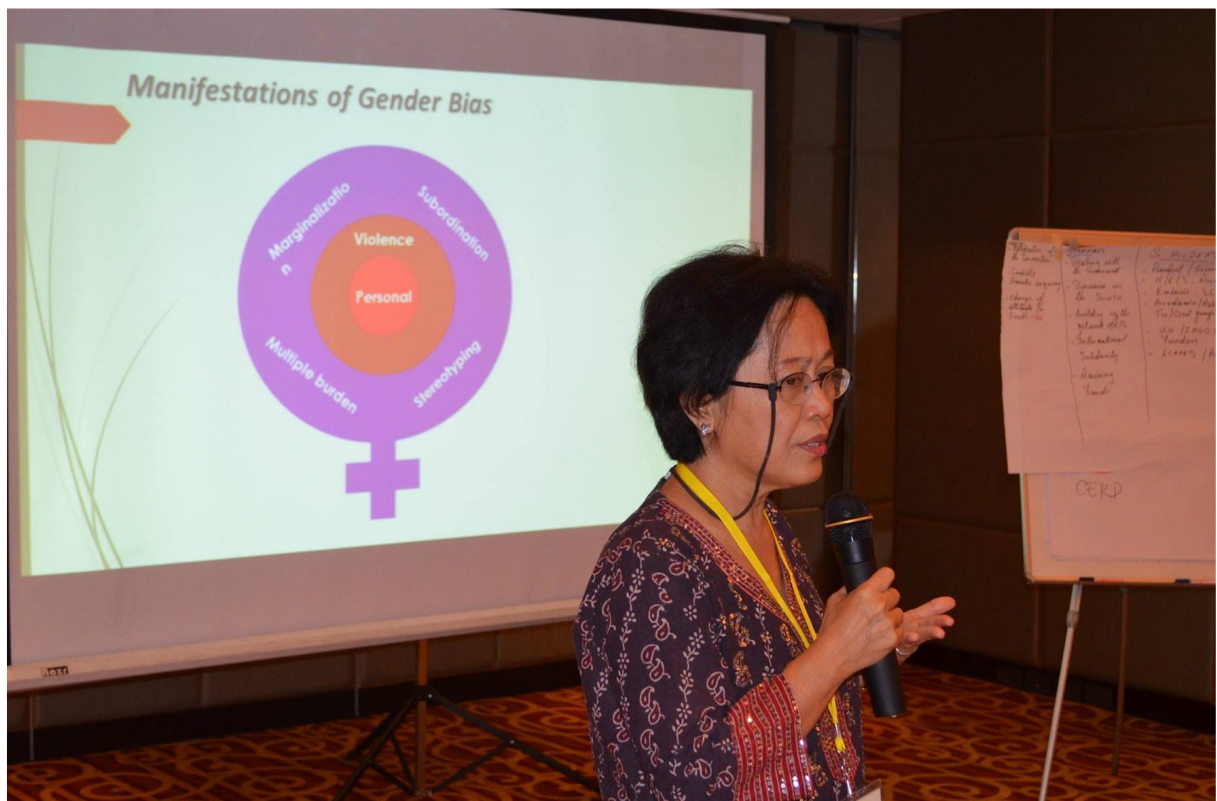
A seminar that was held in Bangkok, Thailand in May 2005 on the occasion of the first session of the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances to Asia. This was later followed up by several activities at different levels on the Convention.

3. Training Seminar on the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) held in the Quezon City, and on lobbying at the country level for domestic laws against enforced disappearances

This was a training held in Quezon City, Philippines in June 2008. This was done on the occasion of AFAD's 10th anniversary. Another training was held in 2016 prior to the Third Cycle of the UPR for the Philippines, Indonesia and India.

4. Training on Enhancing Capacities on Effective Advocacies and Gender Sensitivity

This training was participated in by all AFAD Council members, Secretariat members, and country staff members. It was held in Bangkok, Thailand in March 2015.



DR. CAROLYN SOBRICTHEA TEACHES AFAD COUNCIL, COUNTRY STAFF, AND SECRETARIAT MEMBERS ON THE PRECEPTS AND PRINCIPLES OF GENDER

5. Breakthrough in Leadership and Strategy

This was a training that was participated in by all Council members, AFAD Secretariat as well as campaign, research, and documentation country staff from all AFAD member-organizations. Conducted by Bridge Partnership, the activity was aimed to consolidate the existing organization to face more challenges. It was held in December 2015.



AFAD COUNCIL, COUNTRY STAFF, AND SECRETARIAT MEMBERS POSE FOR A PHOTO AT THE BANTAYOG NG MGA BAYANI IN QUEZON CITY, PHILIPPINES AFTER THE CONDUCT OF THE BREAKTHROUGH IN LEADERSHIP AND STRATEGY TRAINING

6. Local Training on Documentation and Gender Sensitivity

Last March 2017, a series of local trainings were conducted in Nepal, Bangladesh, and the Philippines following the Regional Training of Trainers on documentation and gender sensitivity. This is part of the project implemented by AFAD with the Women's World Day of Prayer (WWDP) organization, which aims not only to capacitate the families of desaparecidos but also empower and enable them to become champions and defenders of human rights.



FAMILIES OF THE DISAPPEARED IN BANGLADESH DISCUSS ABOUT THE DOCUMENTATION OF CASES OF ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCE

National Level

At the national level, the AFAD Secretariat, which is based in the Philippines, also worked hard in lobbying for the adoption of the first and only anti-enforced disappearance legislation in Asia, which is the Republic Act 10353 or the Anti-Enforced or Involuntary Disappearance Act of 2012.

1. Series of fora on Enforced Disappearance with focus on the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance and the Anti-Enforced Disappearance law in the Philippines

With the Philippines as the base of the AFAD Secretariat, the federation conducted a series of fora on enforced disappearances in the country with focus on the Convention and the Anti-Enforced Disappearance law through showings and presentations of films on enforced disappearances, which were either produced by AFAD or by its member-organizations or by other organizations. This was done in various universities and religious organizations in various parts of the country.

2. University Hopping

This was the most crucial aspect of a national campaign that was launched by AFAD to intensify advocacy and lobby efforts for the signature and ratification of the Philippine government to the UN ICPED and for the enactment of a domestic law criminalizing enforced disappearance as autonomous and distinct offense.



Photos from the University Hopping activities

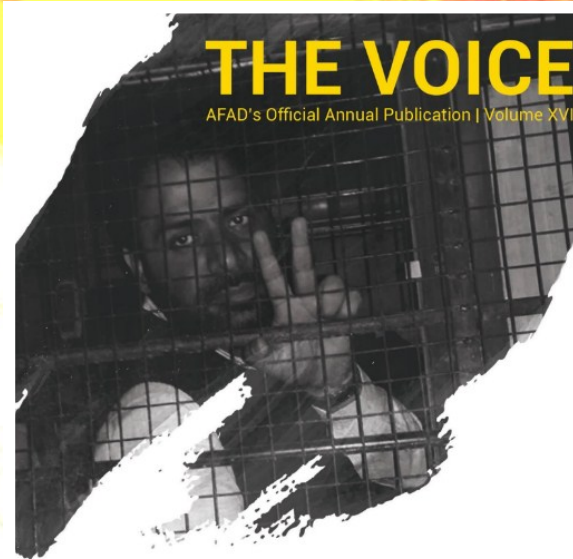


3. Poster-making Contest

This activity was held in December 2016 as part of the national campaign to make the issue of enforced disappearance visible among the youth, which is also aimed at raising their consciousness on the advocacy of upholding and defending human rights. Alongside this event, a truth-telling session was held, where families of desaparecidos shared the story of their loved ones' disappearance.



Some of AFAD's Publications:



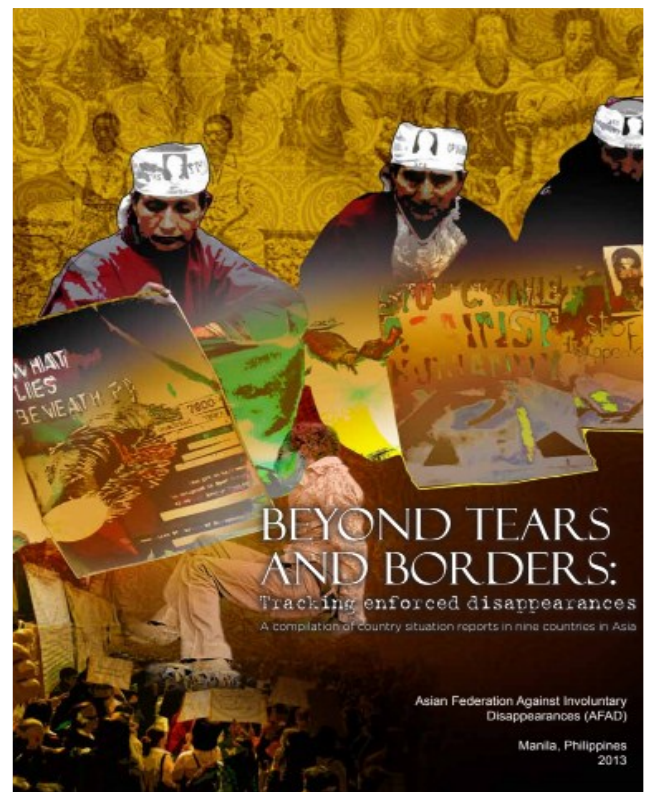
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Apart from this, the Federation also regularly publishes publications on enforced disappearances, through *The Voice*, AFAD's official publication, which comes out annually with a circulation of 1,000 copies .

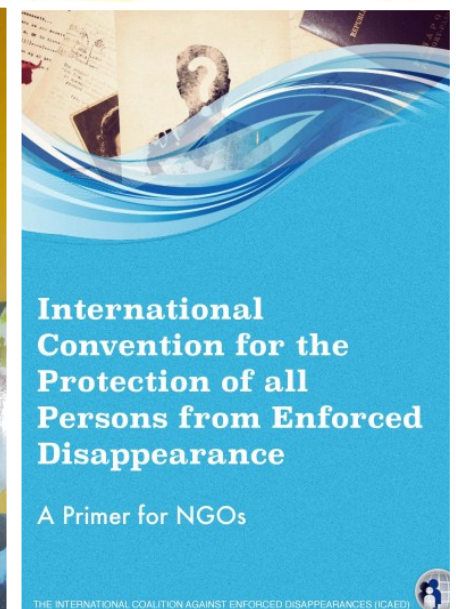
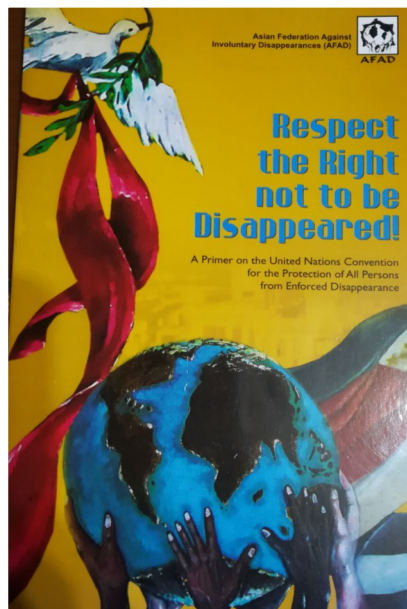
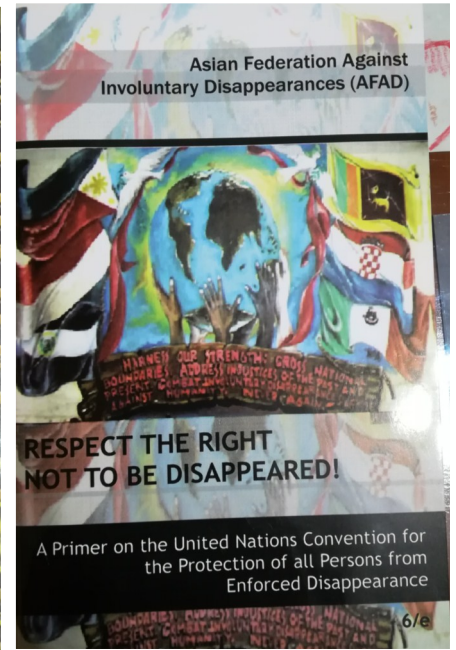
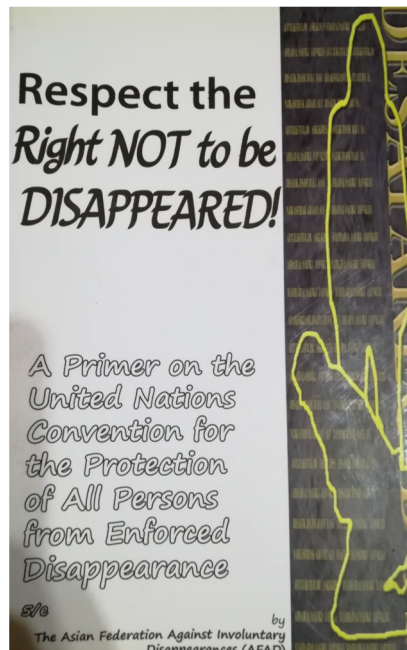
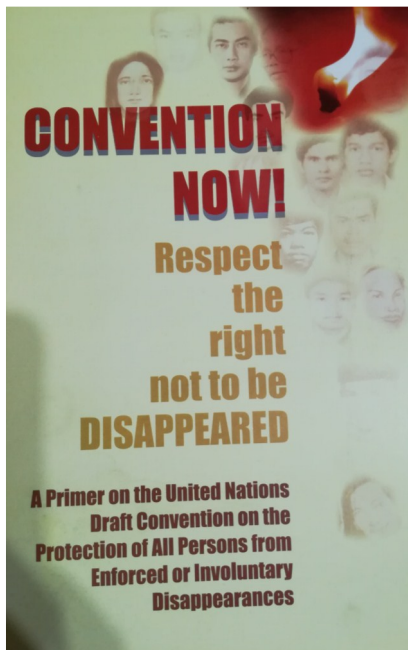
A copy of the most recent issue of *The Voice* is available on the AFAD website as well: <http://afad-online.org/resources/the-voice/363-april-2017-issue-the-voice>.

AFAD has also published the following books:

- **Between Memory and Impunity**
- **From Victims to Healers**
- **Reclaiming Stolen Lives**
- **From Grief to Courage**
- **Beyond Tears and Borders**



In keeping with its mission to achieve the full implementation and ratification of the Convention, the Federation also published seven (7) editions of the Primer on the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance. It initiated the production of an updated Primer on the Convention, with versions for NGOs and Governments, which was published by ICAED.



Some of AFAD's Video Materials:

The Federation has also produced videos on the regional as well as national phenomena of enforced disappearances, particularly in Asian countries where AFAD members are based, which are being used in various countries - both for internal conscientization among families of the disappeared and for information dissemination of the general public, religious groups, the academic community, and government agencies. One of these video productions, entitled "Unsilenced," was translated to seven (7) languages and is posted on the AFAD website and YouTube channel for wider visibility. The other is Healing Wounds, Mending Scars. A regional video was also produced, entitled Beyond Tears and Borders. *(Click on the images to get the link to these videos)*



Empowerment of the Families of the Disappeared:

Recognizing the crucial role of the families of the disappeared, who are in the best position to bring this issue to the fore, AFAD has also facilitated direct assistance programs for the families of victims of enforced disappearances. In 2004, when families of the disappeared in Sri Lanka and Indonesia were victimized by a tsunami, AFAD facilitated some donations from Philippine-based religious congregations, an act which was appreciated by the families of the victims at the time when it was badly needed.

From 2007 to 2010, it facilitated the provision of educational assistance to children of the disappeared in the disputed state of Jammu and Kashmir, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Timor-Leste along with the provision of medical assistance for families of the disappeared in the Philippines. While they were given but a modest amount, it serves as both a symbol of support and solidarity and a concrete form of assistance because the amount, meagre though it was, had actually supported the children of the families that were economically dislocated due to the enforced disappearance of their breadwinners.

Acknowledging that enforced disappearance entails devastating consequences to the surviving families of the disappeared, AFAD also led a series of psychosocial accompaniment activities through its projects entitled “Healing Wounds, Mending Scars,” “From Victims to Healers,” and “A Cycle of Healing.” As aforementioned, the Federation organized the Third World Conference on Psychosocial Support in the Search for Truth and Justice for Victims of Enforced Disappearances, Torture, and Extrajudicial Executions in 2014. As shown in the succeeding matrix, a total of 275 individuals from different Asian countries were engaged in psychosocial rehabilitation activities, while 229 children of the disappeared were given educational assistance, and 80 were given medical assistance.

Psycho-social Rehab Activities	Country/ Organization	Date of Con- duct	Number of Partici- pants		Amount in USD
			M	F	
Healing Wounds Mending Scars	Sri-Lanka (OPFMD)	May 2- 4, 2006	36		1213.46
Healing Wounds Mending Scars	Pakistan (Truth and Justice)	Oct. 28 – 31, 2006	28		none
Healing Wounds Mending Scars	Kashmir, India (APDP)	Nov 13- 15, 2006	9	14	272.50
From Victims to Heal- ers	Sri-Lanka (OPFMD)	Nov. 27-29, 2006	11		933. 54
From Victims to Heal- ers	Indonesia (IKOHI)	Dec. 3-6, 2006	30		none
Healing Wounds Mending Scars	Thailand (WGJP)	Dec 11-13, 2006	30		3597.04
Healing Wounds Mending Scars	Philippines (Claimants 1081)	Nov 16- 18, 2007	6	12	2,000
Healing Wounds Mending Scars	Nepal (Advocacy Forum)	Dec 5- 8, 2006	5	13	3063.48
Healing Wounds Mending Scars	Nepal (Advocacy Forum)	Dec 27-28, 2007	16		2,117.55
From Victims to Heal- ers	Pakistan (Truth and Justice Commission)	Sept. 2- 11, 2007	22		1,800
From Victims to Heal- ers	Thailand (WGJP)	June 10- 12, 2007	25		2,018
Healing Wounds, Mending Scars	Claimants	June 27-29 2008	18		1,756.10
From Victims to Heal- ers	Indonesia Kontras and Ikohi	June 2008	No report yet received		2,000
From Victims to Heal- ers	Thailand (WGJP)	July 2008			1, 500
From Victims to Heal- ers	Kashmir	June 2008			2,000
TOTAL NUMBER OF PERSONS FOR REHABILITATION (FROM 2006-2008): 275					



(ABOVE) A RELATIVE OF A VICTIM OF ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCE PARTAKES IN A KITE-FLYING ACTIVITY, WHICH SYMBOLIZES THE PROCESS OF UNDERSTANDING TRAUMA AND HEALING; (BELOW) PARTICIPANTS IN THE PSYCHOSOCIAL REHABILITATION SESSIONS USE CLAY TO EXPRESS HOW THEIR DISAPPEARED LOVED ONES MEAN TO THEM; (NEXT PAGE) A PARTICIPANT PRESENTS AN ILLUSTRATION SHE AND HER TEAM HAD DONE.





Educational Assistance	Country	Year	Number of Beneficiaries	Amount in USD
Scholarship	Kashmir India (APDP)	2007	60	None
	Indonesia		40	None
	Pakistan		20	600
	Sri Lanka		40	5080
	Southern Thailand		29	3,820
	Nepal		40	2,741
TOTAL NUMBER OF BENEFICIARIES: 229				

Medical Assistance	Country	Year	Number of Beneficiaries	Amount in USD
	Philippines (Claimants)	2007	40	5,169.56
		June 2008	40	
TOTAL NUMBER OF BENEFICIARIES: 80				

AFAD also facilitated a skills exchange between Timorese civil society organizations and the Liga Guatemalteca de Higiene Mental in May 2015, when Timorese and Indonesian organizations facilitated the reunification of 14 disappeared children in Timor-Leste. These children were stolen and brought by soldiers to Indonesia during the Indonesian occupation. In June 2016, AFAD, in



cooperation with its member-organizations in Indonesia and Timor-Leste, facilitated two (2) separate workshops in both countries using the best practices of the above-mentioned Guatemalan organization, which, as of this writing, had successfully reunified 433 Guatemalan

children (now adults) who disappeared during the Guatemalan conflict.

The said training was followed by another skills training for another set of reunification of another 14 stolen children from Indonesia reunified with their biological parents in Timor-Leste.



(ABOVE) STOLEN CHILDREN FROM TIMOR-LESTE REUNITE WITH THEIR FAMILIES AFTER 15 YEARS OF SEPARATION

With the aforesaid accomplishments, AFAD is making a difference in the lives of families of the disappeared not only in the countries where its member-organizations are located, but also in other parts of the world. Its strong leadership, composed of renowned individuals who are respected in their own countries for their human rights advocacy, complemented by its committed and competent Secretariat in the Philippines, manages the Federation as the member-organizations in different countries of Asia march in step towards their common direction of attaining a world without disappeared persons.

At present, the Federation is now more than 19 years in existence. It was conceptualized, conceived, and born against the backdrop of the worsening phenomenon of enforced disappearances in Asia. It is nurtured by the sufferings of those who involuntarily disappeared and their families, yet it continues to be strengthened by the *métier* and dedication of its member-organizations and their constituents.

Enforced disappearance is an anathema to life. It is likewise an anathema to democracy. The work of AFAD in promoting and protecting the right of every person not to be subjected to enforced disappearance, as explicitly provided for by the Convention, is to a large measure, contributing to the struggle for democratization in the Asian region where human rights are grossly violated and where genuine democracy is a major challenge. By dint of AFAD's significant contribution to the promotion, protection, and defense of human rights as well as its service in the promotion and enhancement of democracy in the region, AFAD truly deserves this prestigious international human rights award.

The Persecution of Human Rights Defenders of AFAD

The Asian Federation Against Involuntary Disappearances works under difficult circumstances. Many of its human rights defenders are persecuted, especially in the southern part of Asia, e.g. Bangladesh, disputed state of Jammu and Kashmir, and Pakistan. As a matter of fact, its former Chairperson from Indonesia, Munir, was poisoned by a lethal dose of arsenic on September 7, 2014 in a flight from Indonesia to The Netherlands via Singapore.



MUNIR SAID THALIB



KHURRAM PARVEZ

To date, truth and justice on the case remain elusive, despite the diligent efforts of AFAD's Indonesian member-organizations to fight for truth and justice. In 2016, AFAD's current Chairperson, Khurram Parvez from the Indian controlled-Kashmir was illegally detained for 76 days and was blocked from attending the UN Human Rights Council to be held in Geneva in September of the same year.

The head of Odhikar, AFAD member-organization in Bangladesh, Adilur Khan, was illegally detained in 2013 and is presently in jail. Odhikar's office was raided, its computers and files were stolen shortly after Mr. Khan's detention.



ADILUR KHAN

These are among some of the manifestations of persecution of human rights defenders within the AFAD network. In response to this, AFAD conducts various forms of simultaneous activities not only in Asia but with its network under the ICAED. The strength of the solidarity within the network and beyond it proved to have pressured governments to respond positively in various ways, although justice is still far from being achieved.



Recognition of AFAD's Work



On 10 December 2016, AFAD received the Asia Human Rights and Democracy Award from the Taiwan Foundation for Democracy. The award, which was handed to the AFAD Secretary-General, was handed by Her Excellency President Tsai Ing Wen. The award consisted of a plaque and a cash amounting to USD 100,000.00 in recognition of AFAD's human rights work in Asia.

Likewise, other leaders from the Federation have also received similar recognition:

- Khurram Parvez won the Reebok Human Rights Award in 2006
- As well, Mary Aileen Bacalso was given the Emilio F. Mignone International Human Rights Prize in 2013
- Adilur Rahman Kahn received the 31st Annual Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights Award, Gwangju Prize for Human Rights, and the International Bar Association Human Rights Award in 2014
- On behalf of Sombath Somphone, Shui Meng Ng received the Gwangju Prize for Human Rights in 2015

Amidst all these, AFAD remains strong and even more resilient in its journey toward truth, justice, and reparation. While AFAD receives support from international funders, resources are not adequate to fully respond to the increasing demands of the work. In spite of these constraints in resources and amid repression, AFAD remains ever more steadfast in working against enforced disappearance and the culture of impunity.

“What AFAD has now achieved springs from the courage and determination of our human rights defenders, who in the course of their work, engendered their states, which despite their democratic stance, violate human rights.”

Mary Aileen Bacalso
AFAD Secretary-General