



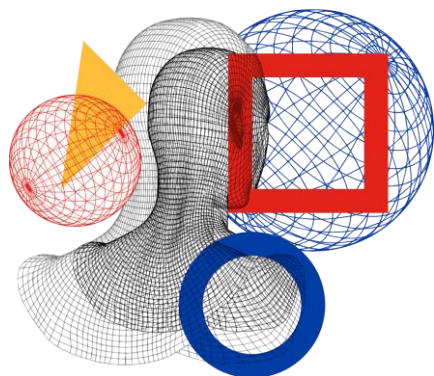
THE FUTURE OF HUMAN RIGHTS

FROM LOCAL TO GLOBAL

Key Messages and Recommendations



24th Informal ASEM Seminar on Human Rights
12–14 October 2026 | Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia



24th Informal Seminar on Human Rights **THE FUTURE OF HUMAN RIGHTS** **FROM LOCAL TO GLOBAL**

ABOUT THE SEMINAR

The 24th Informal Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) Seminar on Human Rights explored the theme **“The Future of Human Rights – From Local to Global”**. It was convened from 12 to 14 October 2026 in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, and co-hosted by the National Human Rights Commission of Mongolia and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Mongolia.

The Seminar was co-organised by the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF), the Department of Foreign Affairs of the Philippines, the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, with financial support from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, and in partnership with the Raoul Wallenberg Institute, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia and the European Union.

BACKGROUND AND CONCEPT

The Background Paper for the Seminar was prepared by Professor Vitit Muntarbhorn, Faculty of Law, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, and Dr Domenico Zipoli, Geneva Human Rights Hub, Geneva. Titled **“Asia-Europe and the Future of Human Rights: Bridge-Building for Shared Pathways”**, the paper took into account the current dilemmas facing multilateralism while identifying windows of opportunity for constructive change.

The paper adopted a three-lens perspective: global, regional and national (domestic). The global lens considered possibilities for repositioning the international human rights protection system under the current UN80 Initiative and related reforms, welcoming changes that would enable the United Nations (UN) to be more effective, coherent and accessible. This was followed by an examination of the regional systems in Europe and Asia, including lessons learned in enabling access to justice and remedies in various forms. The final section reviewed developments at the national level, including follow-up action to the 1993 Vienna World Conference on Human Rights and cross-cutting innovations under the new UN-backed initiative, the Global Alliance for Human Rights. In conclusion, the paper offered recommendations for the future, including on transformative processes, laws, policies and practices, and cooperation between the two regions.

In addition, the Concept Note set out the following expected outcomes, drawing on the participation of a broad range of stakeholders from the two regions:

- Increased awareness and shared understanding of the challenges and opportunities shaping the future of human rights protection at the local, regional and global levels.
- Identification of gaps, priorities and forward-looking recommendations for action across governments, National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs), civil society, academia and international organisations.
- Strengthened collaboration and networks among ASEM partners to support ongoing cooperation, knowledge-sharing and joint action across Asia and Europe.

PROGRAMME OVERVIEW

The Seminar opened with welcome remarks by HE Ambassador Beata Stoczyńska, Executive Director of the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF), and Dr Sunjid Dugar, Chief Commissioner of the National Human Rights Commission of Mongolia (NHRCM).

In the Keynote Session that followed, distinguished speakers from the international community and from Mongolia highlighted critical local-to-global issues for the Seminar, including the current state of world affairs and challenges and priorities for the future. The keynote speakers included, HE Munkhbaatar Lkhagva, Member of the State Great Khural (Parliament) and Head of the Legal Standing Committee; HE Mr Amartuvshin Gombosuren, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Mongolia; HE Professor Marta Cartabia, President of the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe; HE Ambassador Sidharto Reza Suryodipuro, President of the UN Human Rights Council; and HE Dr Volker Türk, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, whose statement was delivered by Ms Reem Mazzawi, UN Human Rights Office (OHCHR).

This was followed by the presentation of the Background Paper by Professor Vitit Muntarbhorn and Ms Virginia Bras Gomes, Vice-President of the Geneva Human Rights Hub. After a plenary discussion on the paper, the Opening Panel addressed **“National Human Rights Institutions in the Face of Emerging Challenges: From Artificial Intelligence (AI) to Climate Change”**.

On the second day, three Working Groups met on three sub-themes: Human Rights Protection at the Global Level; Human Rights Protection at the Regional Level; and Human Rights Protection at the Domestic Level. A side event was also held on **“From Law to Protection: Mongolia’s Lessons on Protecting Human Rights Defenders”**. The sessions were conducted under the Chatham House Rule; this summary therefore presents experiences and observations without attributing them to individual speakers.

The third and final day was devoted to reports from the three Working Groups, followed by comments and questions from participants. The recommendations of the three Working

Groups form the basis of the Summary of Recommendations below. The Working Groups were led by the following Moderators and Rapporteurs:

Working Group	Moderator	Rapporteur
Working Group 1 (Global Level)	Dr Anna Camille Talbot	Ms Virginia Bras Gomes
Working Group 2 (Regional Level)	Professor Hélène Tigroudja	Professor Vitit Muntarbhorn
Working Group 3 (Domestic Level)	Mr Adrià Duarte	Dr Narantuya Ganbat

A plenary discussion on **“Connecting the Dots – Strengthening Human Rights Protection Across Local, Regional and Global Levels”** followed. The Seminar concluded with closing remarks from MP Erdenebold Sukhbaatar, former Head of the Subcommittee on Human Rights; Dr Narantuya Ganbat, Commissioner of the National Human Rights Commission of Mongolia (NHRCM); and Mr Rolf Ring, on behalf of the Seminar’s Steering Committee. Two youth representatives also spoke: Ms Amarzaya Tumurbaatar, General Director of the Mongolian Youth Council, and Mr Nate Wilbourne of Make It 16. They underlined the urgency of meaningful youth participation.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND THE WAY FORWARD

The Seminar programme, together with its diverse range of speakers and discussants, provided the setting for a wealth of ideas, discussions and recommendations.

In that context, the Background Paper surveys the international human rights system through five concentric circles. The first circle is the State, as the primary protector of human rights, surrounded by a second circle of National Human Rights Institutions acting as a check and balance. The third circle has two halves: on the one hand, the nine core international human rights treaties and their treaty bodies (such as the Human Rights Committee); on the other, the UN Charter-based system, including the Universal Periodic Review and the UN Special Procedures (e.g. Special Rapporteurs). This is surrounded by a fourth circle comprising the rest of the UN system, such as the Security Council and UN country teams. The fifth circle represents the wider international community, especially rights-holders and civil society, as leverage for action.

Reforms are currently under way, particularly in relation to the third circle, which is hard-pressed by dwindling resources and other shortfalls. The trend is to synchronise reporting under the various human rights treaties within an eight-year cycle; to regionalise and decentralise by enabling treaty bodies to hold clustered dialogues beyond Geneva; and to digitalise the flow of information to ensure a continued stream of evidence-sharing on recommendations and implementation measures. For national coordination, the establishment of National Mechanisms for Implementation, Reporting and Follow-up (NMIRFs) in several countries is welcome.

“Universal protection does not mean uniform protection.”

“There is no need for a single blueprint (for establishing a regional human rights protection system).”

“There is a need for strong multilevel human rights pathways (to bridge protection gaps).”

“How can human rights protection work better for people’s daily lives?”

WORDS OF WISDOM FROM SEMINAR PARTICIPANTS

The regional level invites cross-sharing of developments, bearing in mind the different histories and levels of development of Asia and Europe. While Europe has a more systematic regional human rights framework, including regional courts, developments in Asia are anchored on a smaller scale, at the sub-regional level, on a step-by-step, consensual basis. Both regions face the challenge of implementation. Europe has developed regional channels for communications from individuals where there is no redress at the national level; in Asia, this issue is nascent and is beginning to be addressed at the sub-regional level, notably within the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) through the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights. At the same time, both regions share key concerns, such as climate change and digitalisation and AI.

At the national level, developments have been guided by the pillars set out after the 1993 Vienna World Conference on Human Rights: national human rights protection systems, national human rights action plans, human rights education, and economic, social and cultural rights, now closely linked with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). New avenues for action are highlighted by the UN-backed Global Alliance for Human Rights in relation to human rights cities, local and regional governments and governance (LRGs), business and human rights, and responsible digitalisation and AI. Ultimately, the aim is to bring standards, institutions, mechanisms and related measures closer to rights-holders on the ground.

The Working Group discussions elaborated on these key elements, while also raising other issues, such as the impact of corruption on human rights and the need to be strategic in addressing the range of challenges.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Realign, regroup and recommit** in response to the present difficult geopolitical environment, reaffirming the universality, indivisibility and interdependence of all human rights, and using economic, social and cultural rights as entry points to broader political engagement, while upholding the equal importance of civil and political rights.
2. **Contribute to the wider UN reform** for increased visibility, efficiency and effectiveness, including through the treaty body strengthening process, by advancing regionalisation and responsible digitalisation, and by piloting new solutions rather than waiting for the entire reform package to be adopted.
3. **Recognise that global and cross-cutting challenges**, including those concerning women's rights, manifest locally across Asia and Europe and require context-specific measures to protect the human rights of affected individuals and groups.
4. **Strengthen human rights implementation across both regions** by putting people at the heart of policies and programmes, ensuring informed and meaningful consultation, promoting the role of grassroots movements and community platforms, and enabling affected communities and smaller civil society organisations to contribute their knowledge and evidence to policy development, implementation and monitoring.
5. **Utilise the mandates and potential of regional and sub-regional organisations**, and encourage coalitions of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to advance common issues.
6. **Combine the energy and wisdom of Asia and Europe** to exchange preferred practices, such as on the development of regional and sub-regional human rights protection systems, so that rights-holders can seek protection at the regional and sub-regional levels, especially where there is a protection gap at the national level.
7. **Promote access to a variety of effective, timely and affordable remedies**, both formal and informal, for individuals and communities affected by key human rights challenges, supported by independent complaints mechanisms, appropriate enforcement powers and effective follow-through on decisions and recommendations.
8. **Use the SDGs as a possible avenue for protection**, given their universal “buy-in”, while promoting accession to human rights treaties and individual complaints procedures.
9. **Build alliances via the Global Alliance for Human Rights** to address novel concerns such as human rights cities and LRGs, business and human rights, climate change and climate justice, and digitalisation and AI, while strengthening accountability for private actors, the meaningful participation of affected communities, access to remedies and safeguards against digital exclusion, without overlooking longstanding constraints on civil and political rights.

10. **Underline the call for independent National Human Rights Institutions** with adequate resources and capacity to work effectively, encourage strategic leadership that combines principled scrutiny with constructive dialogue and cooperation with civil society and public authorities, and strengthen NHRI networks to maximise the promotion and protection of human rights, alongside the establishment of NMIRFs.
11. **Establish clear government responsibility**, adequate resourcing, monitoring and follow-up for implementing human rights obligations, without shifting that responsibility to NHRIs.
12. **Act strategically to deliver on commitments and protect civic space**, for example by adopting laws and other measures to protect environmental and human rights defenders, and by reforming laws, policies and practices that are not in conformity with international standards.
13. **Connect human rights protection with anti-corruption efforts**, community monitoring, transparent public service delivery and independent investigative journalism.
14. **Build a culture of, for and with human rights**, based on practical human rights education, clear communication and effective implementation; anchored in inclusion and participation; respectful of local inputs that help to raise international standards; and aimed at tangible improvements in people's lives and the rebuilding of public trust, while not forgetting compassion and empathy as part of the spirit of human rights.

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

The Seminar provided a timely opportunity for key stakeholders from the two regions to take stock of the current situation from a forward-looking and future-ready perspective. Participants shared important lessons, ranging from the varied histories of the two regions to the nexus between human rights, democracy, peace, sustainable development, environmental protection and responsible technologies. At the heart of these developments lies the resonant challenge of how to ensure and strengthen the protection of rights-holders, especially at the national and local levels, within a multilevel framework.

The discussions also served as a reminder that long-term commitment needs to be accompanied by practical results. As participants observed, building a culture of human rights requires patience, sustained effort and public trust, but this should not become an excuse for delayed implementation or merely procedural compliance. Even small initiatives at the community level, where people experience discrimination, exclusion or denial of services, can contribute to meaningful change and strengthen confidence in human rights institutions. The challenge is to connect shared international commitments with effective protection in people's everyday lives.

The essence of the matter is to project hope through cooperative action on the basis of shared wisdom, activity and responsibility, as captured in these illuminating words from the Seminar:

“Europe and Asia bring different perspectives, but our rights, our economies, our technologies and our environment are deeply interconnected.”

“If you want to go far, you have to go slowly.”

“The closer to the ground, the better.”

“Human rights give us a shared foundation; they are a compass that can guide policies and decisions from the local to the global.”

INFORMAL SEMINAR ON **HUMAN RIGHTS**

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