

For immediate release

**Taiwan Urged to Pass National Refugee Legislation and Provide
Genuine Protection to Refugees**

Taipei, 20 January 2017

This week the government of the Republic of China (Taiwan) hosted a review of Taiwan's commitments under the United Nations ICCPR and ICESCR – two core international human rights covenants. During the review, the independent expert panel raised several refugee protection issues including the need to adhere to the fundamental principle of non-refoulement, the pending draft refugee legislation, and Taiwan's refugee protection obligations under international law. Most asylum seekers in Taiwan come from the People's Republic of China and Tibet in addition to a handful from other nations.

The pending draft refugee legislation has been under review for some time and passed the first of the three readings in July 2016. However, many civil society groups claim that the legislation is not high on the government's agenda and as it has in fact been stalled from passing through the Legislative Yuan for more than ten years.

During the review sessions, government officials stated that Taiwan received zero asylum applications last year. However, NGOs working in Taiwan note that there were in fact ten asylum cases in 2016 that they provided assistance with. In addition, 2016 saw five asylum seekers repatriated to the People's Republic of China, the country from which they were seeking asylum.

Eeling Chiu from the Taiwan Association for Human Rights notes "Whilst the Taiwan Government obviously has positive intentions, these intentions do not amount to anything until the draft bill is passed into law. The fact that the government deported asylum seekers last year without processing their claims is a clear breach of the principle of non-refoulement under international customary law."

In addition to the review, civil society also met with officials from various government ministries including the National Immigration Agency. Evan Jones, APRRN's Senior Programme Officer said "We have been impressed with the willingness of the government to engage on the issue. It is positive to see more countries in the region exploring the development of domestic refugee frameworks. We encourage jurisdictions in East Asia, such as Taiwan, to step up and share responsibility in the current global refugee crisis."

Following the presentation of the expert panel's concluding observations, NGOs highlighted the need for the government to take a proactive approach towards refugee protection. Through engagement with civil society and other willing stakeholders, Taiwan will be able to implement and showcase a strong and robust law and be a strong example for other countries in the region.

The concluding observations of the committee included three specific references to refugees and asylum seekers. This included a reiteration from 2013 to adopt national legislation to protect refugees, the absolute need to observe the principle of non-refoulement, and a recommendation for the Taiwan Legal Aid Foundation to provide legal support to refugees and asylum seekers regardless of their status.

NGOs were pleased that the ICCPR review provided a space for refugee issues to be acknowledged and that the government was willing and open to engage with NGOs on what is seen by many a sensitive issue. Members of the Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network both within Taiwan and across the region stand ready to assist the government in the lead up to, and after the passing of this law. Training for lawmakers, government officials, NGOs and service providers will be made available to ensure that Taiwan is able to effectively implement this historic law.

Notes to the editor:

This week the government of the Republic of China successfully hosted the review of Taiwan's second national report on the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). Held in Taipei, Taiwan from 16-20 January 2017, the review focused on a range of human rights issues including refugee protection.

About APRRN:

The Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network (APRRN) is an open and growing network of over 300 civil society groups and individuals from 28 countries in the Asia Pacific region committed to advancing the rights of refugees, through joint advocacy, capacity-strengthening, resource sharing and outreach.

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