



DIPLOMACY TRAINING PROGRAM

AFFILIATED WITH THE FACULTY OF LAW AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW SOUTH WALES
A training program for peoples of the Asia-Pacific region

Human Rights Capacity and Network Building in Asia

DTP Alumni Workshop on Human Rights Capacity and DTP Network Building

26-27 June, 2023, Bangkok, Thailand



1. Executive Summary and Key Recommendations:

In June 2023, the Diplomacy Training Program (DTP) organised its first workshop with DTP alumni in Asia. The two-day workshop was held in Bangkok, Thailand, with 28 alumni from Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Nepal, the Philippines, South Korea, Sri Lanka, and Thailand. There were alumni from the first program in 1990 through to the most recent program in 2023.

1.1 Workshop objectives:

- to reflect on the impact of DTP's human rights capacity and network building programs over the last 30+ years;
- to discuss and provide input on the current needs and priorities for human rights advocacy capacity building in Asia;
- to discuss how DTP could effectively support the development of DTP alumni networks, and support DTP alumni in their work for human rights;
- to provide input into DTP's future capacity building strategies.

1.2 Summary of Workshop Recommendations:

- **Increase DTP's investment in national / regional DTP alumni networks through:**
 - Establishing national / regional focal points (selected DTP alumni volunteers)
 - Bring DTP alumni together more regularly at national and regional level
 - Explore establishment of DTP Business and Human Rights Alumni Network
 - Facilitate more knowledge and skill sharing among participants / skills bank
 - Explore connecting DTP alumni with Australia's diplomatic missions
- **Develop more advanced / refresher training, including in the following areas:**

- Use of technology for human rights
- “Peoples Diplomacy” – Advocacy, engagement and campaigning skills
- Engagement with ASEAN/UN other bodies
- **Develop DTP’s content/programs on:**
 - Climate change and human rights
 - LGBTQIA+
 - Gender
- **Develop DTP’s website as a repository for sharing of useful resources on human rights**

This report provides a brief description of the workshop and the reflections from the rich discussions of DTP alumni on the value of DTP’s work and its impact over time.

DTP acknowledges with appreciation the support and involvement of its partners, Human Rights Development Foundation (HRDF), Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact (AIPP), The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA), and Migrant Forum in Asia (MFA).

DTP also acknowledges the support from the Australian Government’s Australian NGO Cooperation Program and the National Endowment for Democracy in delivering the workshop.

2. Workshop Participants:

DTP worked with its partners to invite selected alumni from across the region, from the 3500 alumni of DTP’s different programs over the last 30 years, and representatives from different countries/regions. Gender balance and experience of working on different human rights issues and in different roles was also considered. Unfortunately, not all invited alumni were able to attend.

The participants currently work or have worked in non-governmental organisations (NGOs), social movements, trade unions, faith-based networks/organisations, national human rights institutions, government, universities and the United Nations (UN). In their different roles they work on a very wide range of human rights issues, including:

- Democracy and human rights
- The right to health
- Transitional justice and accountability
- Women’s rights and gender based violence
- Children’s rights
- Indigenous peoples’ rights
- Enforced “disappearances” and the impact on victims and their families
- Migrant worker’s rights, trafficking, modern slavery
- Human rights and business
- Human rights and social movements
- Social development and poverty
- Human rights in Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)
- Human rights and democracy in Myanmar
- Human rights education and advocacy



Also participating were DTP trainers, [Ruki Fernando](#) and [Arul Prakkash](#), and [William Gois](#) and [Guangchun Gangmei](#) from DTP partners, MFA and AIPP. FORUM-ASIA was also well represented by its Chair, [Jerald Joseph](#), and Executive Director, [Aileen Balcaso](#), both DTP alumni.

3. Program Overview:

The workshop was facilitated by the alumni working in pairs to facilitate different sessions. Some alumni knew each other, and for others the workshop was a reunion. Some have been more connected with DTP's work, organising and facilitating DTP programs, while for others this was their first re-engagement with DTP since their program. Collectively the workshop participants represented many decades of accumulated experience of working in, and building, human rights movements in Asia. Participants shared this knowledge and experience generously with each other.

There was rich sharing of experiences and discussion over the two days. The following description of different sessions aims to capture the highlights.

3.1 Reflections on DTP's impact

William Gois and [Anelyn de Luna](#) led the first session, encouraging participants to connect (and reconnect) with one another, and reflect on the impact of DTP's training; on themselves individually and their movements. Many participants were able to provide specific examples:



- the knowledge and confidence to be involved in drafting and promoting the new international treaty on “enforced disappearances”
- being involved in development of a UN General Comment on migrant women workers
- engaging with human rights treaty bodies in advocacy
- submitting individual cases to national human rights institutions for remedy
- producing advocacy videos to build support
- forging new collaborations with different human rights movements.

There was also a broader and less definable impact of knowing or reinforcing that they were part of wider human rights movements in the region.

3.2 Benefits of the DTP Alumni Network

Participants highlighted the following benefits from their participation in DTP courses beyond building knowledge and skills:

- The programs give participants a network of experts (trainers and fellow participants) to access for support, advice and further capacity building.
- Alumni made friends and connections on the courses that helps them to manage risk and feel more secure. They emerge with a new group of people who will support them and make connections to organisations that can offer support.
- DTP provides access to a unique set of resources through its training programs, website and eNews. Access to these resources would benefit from more consideration.

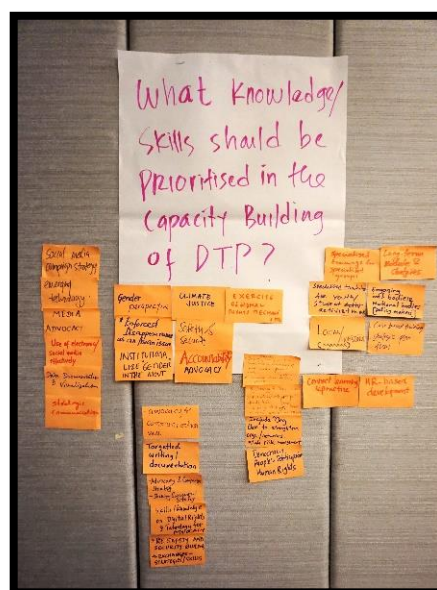


3.3 Identifying Capacity Gaps, Needs and Priorities

[Ellene Sana](#) and [Ravi Tissera](#) led this session which asked alumni to consider current gaps in knowledge and skills that DTP should prioritise.

Four key categories were identified:

- *Knowledge and Thematic Areas*
 - Gendered perspectives on human rights issues
 - Climate justice/climate
 - Advocacy for accountability
 - Safety and security of human rights defenders – including organisational development and risk management protocols
 - The connection of practice and theory by the publishing of case studies
 - Training for specialised groups – in particular youth/young people.
- *Soft Skills – “Peoples’ Diplomacy”*
 - Advocacy: tools for engaging with, and strategic use of, media and social media
 - Strategies: development of advocacy and campaign strategies, within a context of closing civil society space, and looking at long term goals.
 - Effective campaigning: how to build coalitions, knowledge sharing, and strategic relationships
 - Advocacy for human rights-based development strategies/policies
 - Tools for safety and security for human rights defenders
 - Writing skills for targeting different audiences
 - Documentation.



- *Technology Skills*
 - How to make best use of emerging technology
 - Use of information and communication technologies: in documentation, data collection and visualisations
 - Skills in and knowledge of digital rights
 - Staying safe and being secure online.

- *Collaboration/Networking/Highlighting work of alumni*
 - Sharing success stories
 - Developing training modules which incorporate the experiences of DTP alumni working on the ground
 - Systemising and sharing the tools, knowledge, skills and expertise of DTP alumni.

3.4 Looking ahead: Who should DTP prioritise for training?

For the past 33 years, DTP has prioritised training of NGO/CSO leaders and advocates across the Asia-Pacific and Indigenous Australia. Its thematic programs have focused on Indigenous Peoples, Migrant Workers, Human Rights and Business, and Child Rights. Participants were asked to look at who was present and then to consider who was not represented. While participants agreed that DTP’s current training priorities should continue, they also raised the following movements and sectors for development:



- climate activists
- LGBTQ+ activists (as opposed to lesbian, gay and bi-sexual?)
- children / young people
- trade unionists.

There was no suggestion that the focus should shift away from human rights defenders/civil society, although the value of involving government/business in programs was also raised. The focus for building capacity should be on rights holders – but consideration should also be given to the knowledge and capacity of duty bearers in

governments and business. One of DTP’s advantages as a specialised training/capacity building program is the space it provides for dialogue.

Participants also noted that the human rights landscape is currently changing and the DTP alumni can play an important role in ensuring DTP remains “fit for purpose”. They can help guide DTP regarding who it should prioritise for training needs. This would suggest the need to establish some representative or consultative process with DTP alumni.

3.5 Reflections on Networking and Networks

Picking up on the discussion in the first session, led by [Anselmo Lee](#) and [Nukila Evanty](#), [Sumitha Shaanthinni Kishna](#) and [Guangchun Gangmei](#) facilitated further discussion on the value of networks and networking, challenges in maintaining networks, and the possible role of DTP alumni networks, in existing human rights networks in Asia.

There was consensus that there was value in having a DTP Alumni Network and that this network could play an important role in the region not just for individual alumni but their movements and organisations. They saw the current alumni network as having three functions: solidarity, moral support and the sharing of resources.

3.5.1 Why Network?:

Participants identified the following areas as being of particular benefit from being in the DTP Alumni Network.

- Networking – the opportunities to connect with others, across different human rights sectors which, in turn, provides opportunities to discuss common areas of concern for defenders from different groups. Facilitating dialogue between alumni, other human rights defenders, supporters / funders, governments and the UN system.
- Solidarity – “the feeling that you are not alone” and building people-to-people solidarity.
- Impact – through the network, alumni can promote their work to larger networks and audiences leading to greater collaboration and more concerted campaigns.
- Knowledge – a hub: acting as a valuable resource for activists. The sharing of ideas, knowledge and experience. The development of new methodologies.

3.5.2 Current DTP Networks:

DTP Alumni in Asia already connect with one another in different ways. Some connections are built around a particular DTP program, some are issue-based, and some are country-based. Currently this “networking” is largely informal. Some interesting examples were shared:

- DTP Malaysia WhatsApp Group: This network was set up in 2018 following the DTP/MFA Malaysia Migrant Worker program (five modules over 14 months). Individuals share news and case studies, and seek assistance and advice. It is also a social group organising meetings in the country, celebrating birthdays, offering condolences etc.
- MFA Network: MFA know which DTP alumni are involved in MFA member organisations and involve them in general and specific MFA activities and programs – providing support to implement their training. They reach out to MFA members for news and examples to share.

In recent years, DTP has invested in the DTP networks by:

- Hosting “in-country” meetings with DTP alumni to coincide with DTP courses
- Profiling DTP in the DTP eNews and Website
- Sharing DTP alumni and partner news in the DTP fortnightly eNewsletter



3.5.3 Future DTP Networking:

Workshop participants also discussed ideas and options for future DTP alumni networking. The discussions focused on options for national, regional and thematic alumni networks.

- Regional/National DTP Networks could:
 - Share information on human rights issues
 - Share calls for action
 - Engage, as alumni, with the Australian and other diplomatic missions
 - Organise capacity building programs
 - Promote DTP courses and be involved in the selection process for DTP alumni
 - Organise briefing sessions for DTP participants.



Proposals to take this forward would include:

- Establishing national / regional steering committees of DTP alumni
- Developing resources for alumni use
- Establishing a DTP alumni focal point in each country to coordinate alumni network.



- Regional/National Networks on Business and Human Rights (BHR):

Participants noted that there is a strong pool of human rights advocates (DTP alumni) with expertise and experience in BHR. Unlike other thematic focus areas for DTP's work there was no established regional network or organisation on BHR. DTP alumni are involved in the increasing levels of BHR advocacy across Asia. It was suggested that DTP alumni explore initiating a BHR Network with a focus on:

- Identifying capacity building priorities
- Developing a BHR train-the-trainers program in Asia
- Sharing information on calls for action in relation to BHR issues
- Coordinating engagement around regional BHR / and SDG (processes)
- Strengthening the BHR capacity of Asia's different human rights movements.

- Indigenous Peoples (IP) Rights Networks:

It was acknowledged that DTP works in partnership with AIPP to assist them in building the capacity of their networks at national and regional level. Further work could be done to identify and link the alumni of DTP's Indigenous peoples' programs with AIPP networks at national and regional level, and into the AIPP's strategy of engagement with UN meetings at regional and global level.



It was further noted that there could be shared benefits of linking DTP Indigenous alumni with other DTP alumni to help build support for IP issues. Links with other thematic networks – especially business and human rights and climate change / environment – were seen as vital for the IP network.

At a regional level, the establishment of a WhatsApp or Signal group was also suggested. There was discussion about whether to expand the membership and include the Indigenous Peoples Human Rights Defenders (IPHRD) networks even if they were not DTP alumni.

Country focal points could maintain the network nationally and regionally and engage with DTP secretariat.

Migrant Workers: It was suggested DTP establish a repository of resources on Migrant Worker's Rights as well as a registry of alumni skills.



3.5.4 Opportunities and Challenges

All participants expressed a desire for a greater connection between alumni and between alumni and DTP. And that this would be beneficial. They felt a DTP alumni network would meet a currently un-met need and would be distinct from other networks.

Participants also discussed the challenges of establishing and maintaining an alumni network namely:

- Resources – human and financial
- Ideological divides
- Power dynamics and divisions among members
- Security concerns
- Representation
- Differing issues and priorities
- Duplication of efforts
- Self-interest and gate keeping



4 Workshop Conclusions:

Participants stressed the importance of DTP’s programs on human rights. Human rights advocacy by civil society is critical, especially given the failures and limitations of the UN system and UN mechanisms, the rise of authoritarian governments and increased impunity. Training programs helped to refresh and energise grassroots thinkers and advocates to generate ideas for advancing human rights. Their recommendations for DTP’s program priorities included:

- A focus on climate change and human rights
- A greater focus on gender
- Engagement with UN and Regional/ASEAN intergovernmental processes.

Participants were in favour of more formal DTP alumni networks being established and for DTP to tap into the expertise of its alumni. Recommendations included:

- Building and sharing the DTP alumni directory
- Setting up specialised thematic networking groups among alumni e.g. BHR
- Identifying alumni expertise and competencies
- Promoting DTP alumni networks across borders.

Specific requests to DTP included:

- Formalising a repository of human rights and training resources for alumni
- Creating/supporting programs for DTP alumni “at risk”
- Organising national and sub-regional alumni gatherings
- Assisting the establishment of connections with Australian Embassies / High Commissions
- Supporting funding for alumni initiatives.

The recruitment of a fundraising / resource position may be of benefit to DTP in delivering its programs and supporting alumni.

5 Next Steps:

DTP will develop an alumni network strategy to share with alumni based on this workshop and the Pacific alumni workshop, alumni survey and in-depth interviews. This strategy will be launched in 2024 with further alumni focused activities.

