

## 9<sup>th</sup> World Human Rights Cities Forum ( WHRCF) 2019 Gwangju, South Korea/ 30 Sept.-2 October 2019

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Organized by the UCLG Committee on Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy and Human Rights, the Raoul Wallenberg Institute of Human Rights and Humanitarian Law ( RWI) and the International Human Rights Cities Network ( IHRC-Net) and In partnership with the Gwangju Metropolitan City and the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) .

**Gwangju Metropolitan Honorable City Mayor Mr. Lee Yeng sup** he is chief Guest of the opening ceremony. Mr. Lee said I heartily welcome you to Gwangju, a world –renowned human rights a universal value for humanity throughout the world. I hope all of you attending the human Rights Cities Forum have a precious and personal experience with the sprit and values while you stay in Gwangju. Thank you again for visiting Gwangju and look forward to this Human Rights Cities Forum having a great achievement.

### **Plenary Session1: Discussing and Reimagining Human Rights Cities**

The Plenary session of the 9<sup>th</sup> world Human Rights Cities Forum will be an opportunity to review the principles of practices for human rights cities and discuss innovative ways of promoting human rights cities internationally. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights ( OHCHR) , the United Cities and Local Governments Committee on social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy and Human Rights cities around the world will take part. The target is for responsible bodies to reaffirm the values and norms that human rights cities should aspire to, and to redesign the future of human rights cities. To this end, the plenary session has two areas of focus.

### **Plenary Session 2: Challenges and Opportunities for Human Rights Cities**

This session aims to develop a common response and strategy for an integrated local approach to human rights in global agendas. It will address the OHCHR report on “ Local Government and Human Rights” act ( A/HRC/42/22) presented to the UN Human Rights Council in Sept,2019 specially its recommendations, and draft framework for 2030 Agenda for Human Rights City. It will call on different stockholders –from local government to international organizations, civil society and researchers to think of different ways that help

maximize local government impact over international human rights and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as well as to support local governments to integrate recommendations made by human rights mechanisms. As well as several practices for human rights protection and promotion. It will also consider the contributions from civil society and international partners.

### **Plenary Session 3: Right to the City in the Asian Context.**

This session entitled will examine the above description in the Asian context, while building on the knowledge and experience of the previous WHRCF. These meetings placed the R2C as the framework to talk about different topics currently affecting Asian cities and human settlements in which the R2C also offers solutions that are already being implemented, both in Asian and abroad, such as:

- Inclusive citizenship that does not criminalize people based on their social back-ground, gender or identity
- Inclusive economies that integrate rather than persecute the non-formal economy
- Enhanced political participation in the decision –making process, especially at the local level.
- Sustainable urban development that ensures rural-urban linkages
- Cultural diversity and youth.

The participants will talk about their own experience in relation to these topics, focusing on how to achieve just, inclusive, safe and sustainable cities, villages and human settlements, in Asian Region, and to propose solutions that can be implemented under the R2C, particularly at the level.

### **Plenary Session 4. Transforming and Empowering Dreams ( TED ) Talks**

#### **Why does a human rights city matter for me?**

It matters for two specific reasons. The human rights city matters for me because I am a



development activist and I am also a human rights defender. I have been involved in the development sector of Bangladesh for more than 20 years. My main focus in the development sector is the mobilization of grassroots people for realizing legitimate rights.

I am working with COAST Trust ([www.coastbd.net](http://www.coastbd.net)), I am leading the advocacy wing of the organization named Equity and Justice Group in Bangladesh ([www.equitybd.net](http://www.equitybd.net)), as the head of the advocacy section, I am regularly associated with organizing campaign and mobilization in grassroots and national level, conducting different studies and research on food sovereignty and climate change,

ensuring documentation of program/campaign, mobilizing media for raising voice of rural people for their rights and livelihood issues.

I organize local and national level mobilization including human chain, press conference, and seminar on various issues like rights of small-scale fisher folks of Bangladesh, land grabbing and food security, MDG achievement and beyond 2015, etc. So far, I have presented many keynotes in national and international programs. I also have some publications on food security, MDG, land grabbing issues published in different international publications.

COAST is a human rights-based organization. COAST tries to enhance the capacities of the disadvantaged people so that can raise and mediate their legitimate rights. On the other hand, COAST tries to positively influence the policymakers and policy implementers so that they can be sensitized towards the rights of the people. As I am one of the leaders to promote the RBA in COAST, the human rights city really matters to me.



In COAST, we believe in sustainable cities. Bangladesh is one of the most vulnerable countries due to climate change. Different research estimates that about 30 million people will be displaced from coastal areas. Our cities must be ready to accommodate them sustainably. And we know that cities can be only sustainable only if human rights is localized there effectively.

I always recall the quotation by Lewis Mumford, American historian, sociologist, philosopher of technology, and literary critic. He says, “The city... is the point of maximum concentration for the power and culture of a community.” This is also one reason why the human rights city is a matter for me.

### **My vision for Human Rights City**

My vision in this regard is usual and much known worldwide. I would like to see that everyone in my city is enjoying their human rights, no one will be left behind. I want to see a city with human rights where a decision on rights and rules will be taken in a participatory, democratic and inclusive way. Human rights will be based on equity and justice.

### **How I have engaged with Human Rights City**

As I mentioned earlier, my engagement with the Human rights city has been started when I started my career as a development activist. As a development activist and human rights

defender, I believe that human rights guarantee people the means necessary to satisfy their basic needs, such as food, housing, and education, so they can take full advantage of all opportunities. Human rights are needed to ensure empowerment and also to ensure sustainable development. So, my intention, my dream, my vision for sustainable development I have become engaged with the Human Rights City.

### **My Plans to Promote Human Rights City**

To promote human rights city, first I will need to promote the ideas of human rights. I will need to define the human rights according to our context. I will need to localize the global ideas of human rights. I have a plan to promote the human right city in an organized way, and for this, I will form a platform. This platform will try to ensure Cultural and Institutional Change regarding human rights. To do that activity will include a study to identify social and economic policies for the promotion of human rights, this platform will also use the media to promote the idea.

I will work also to promote economic justice. The effort to economic justice will involve activities to ensure appropriate wages for low-income people, policy priority to ensure adequate affordable housing for all residents, ensure access to affordable and nutritional food, etc.

I will be advocating for adequate public funding for education, to ensure universal access to free, quality public education, regardless of income.

Environmental Justice will be another important issue for me. As Bangladesh is one of the most vulnerable countries, I will plan to work for vulnerable communities, especially with the coastal people.

### **What are the difficulties and challenges I have faced and how to overcome them**

In Bangladesh, the main challenges of working with the issue of human rights are the present political or power structure. Presently Bangladesh is experiencing controlled democracy, where the ruling party is practicing full control over power and in politics. Democratic institutions have lost their desired characteristics.

The impact of climate change is another challenge for Bangladesh both in terms of sustainable development and human rights. As Bangladesh is a country with a Muslim majority, terrorism has become a great threat. Rohingya influx has created a great burden on both for government, host communities and also for the human rights defenders. Dhaka is one of the fast growing capital and no. 6 in grade which considered as non-livable city in the world. One of the local popular Bangla news paper did a study, and said that it is around 55 thousand people lives per square kilometer in main part of Dhaka city, at present total population of the city is 16 million. By the year 2030 the city population will reach 27 million. Climate scientist forecasted that there will be 25-30 million people will be displaced (UN Global Environment Outlook Report, May 2016) due to climate impacts in Bangladesh by the year 2030 Bangladesh is the country which is 6 / 10th overcrowded and utmost hit country out of climate impact (UN Report on World Urbanization Prospects: The 2014 Revision). That's why it is obvious that, climate change, specially internal displacement due to climate change will be a great challeng.

COAST is working to address these problems. COAST and EquityBD are campaigning for democratic ownership to the government organizations. We are also working to ensure climate justice. COAST is implementing programs and projects to aware of youth groups of violent extremism.

One of the major strategies to overcoming these problems is Positive Engagement with the policymakers and to motivate-mobilize CSOs and NGOs in this regard.

### **Lessons Learnt from my Engagement**

One major lesson is that, if there is political will most of the problems towards development and human rights be solved. For example, the Bangladesh government is taking stern actions against corruption and it is experiencing huge support from the people. Some vested quarters who used to think themselves beyond the law, are now being arrested, their bank accounts.

Another lesson for me is that, now to influence the policies in favor of human rights or favor of disadvantaged people, in favor of the country, positive involvement with the government, policymakers is a must and it is most effective.

To create enabling an environment for a human rights city, CSOs-NGOs can play a vital role. To play that effective role, CSOs-NGOs should work together, they should establish themselves as the third sector along with the government and private sectors.

The End

Mustafa Kamal Akanda  
+88 01711455591  
Deputy Director  
& Coordinator –Networking and Mobilization  
COAST Trust & Equity BD  
[kamal@coastbd.net](mailto:kamal@coastbd.net)  
[www.coastbd.net](http://www.coastbd.net) & [www.equitybd.net](http://www.equitybd.net)  
BANGLADESH