

Indonesian mayor unveils new concept for human rights cities at Asian-African Conference

By: Marzuki Darusman, chair of FIHRRST

Actions speak louder than words, and in Ridwan Kamil the citizens of Bandung, Indonesia have a mayor who believes in getting things done. In welcoming the heads of state of the Asian-African Conference Commemoration (AACC) to Bandung on 24 April, he recounted the 10-point 'declaration on world peace and cooperation' that their forebears had agreed in the initial conference held in Bandung 60 years earlier.¹

'Respect for fundamental human rights and for the purposes and principles of the charter of the United Nations' was the first point on that list and in closing his address, the mayor emphasised that human rights were still very much to the fore with the words: 'Once again, welcome to Bandung, the capital of Asia and Africa, and the first Human Rights City of Indonesia.'

An architect by profession with a Master Degree in Urban Design from the University of California, Berkley, Mayor Ridwan has a clear vision of what he wants to achieve by declaring Bandung to be a Human Rights City. Moreover, this is not some handed down edict, but a carefully planned operation carried out in conjunction with the Centre for Law and Human Rights Advisory (PAHAM) of the state Padjajaran University, and the Association For International Human Rights Reporting Standards (FIHRRST), an international not-for-profit established in Belgium (www.fihrrst.org).

In line with the United Nations Progress Report on Human Rights Cities, the Bandung Declaration of a Human Rights City, which Mayor Ridwan actually signed on 2 April, promises his citizens and other stakeholders a charter that 'will be formulated in accordance with the principles of transparency, accountability and citizens' participation'. Moreover, implementation of both the declaration and the charter is to be in accordance with drawn-up policies, monitoring and evaluation, and remediation.

A start had already been made prior to the AACC with the holding of the first of several focus group discussions (FGD) representing a wide cross-section of Bandung's stakeholders to determine the initial areas of consideration of rights that should be included in the city's charter. The aim is to ensure that the whole process is bottom-up and citizen-led, and every effort will be made to ensure each and every stakeholder has the opportunity to have their say on what is to be incorporated into their city's charter. To this end, advantage will be taken of the Indonesian love affair with social media, together with a dedicated website, FGDs and use of all other applicable media resources. Much work thus remains to be done if the citizens of Bandung are to realise the dream of having their own charter by year's end.

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dKL63lnvQ80>

Yet that is only half the story and what sets Bandung's brave new approach apart from that of others who have declared themselves to be human rights cities is its transparency and accountability. Not only is there transparency in the formulation of the Bandung Charter itself, but also in the manner that its implementation will continue to be monitored by third party assessors. Even at this initial stage, two sub-districts chosen at random have been subject to preliminary audit of their human rights city management systems. Besides the city's central administration, over the next two years there are 30 districts and 149 sub-districts that will be subject to audit by assessors accredited by FIHRRST.

While the specifics of the GHRISC standard for Bandung being formulated by FIHRRST have still to be inked in as the city's charter is developed, FIHRRST's business and human rights tool, BHRISC has proved its adaptability in the preliminary audit to check on the existence of a human rights management system and its understanding and implementation by officials.

This is vital, for the vision of the process being introduced in Bandung is to make sure that the protection of human rights begins at the local level with local government officials who understand what this entails. Similarly, remediation for any human rights transgressions should, wherever possible, also be handled at the local level, as the keys to any such mechanism are for it to be legitimate, accessible and known to the public, and with predictable procedures for providing equitable and transparent solutions.

It is to provide equitable and transparent solutions that FIHRRST was formed by a group of internationally respected human rights advocates, believing that what are required are clear standards against which organizations, both business and governmental, can measure the legitimacy of their operations. FIHRRST is thus fully supportive of the actions of Mayor Ridwan both in his efforts for the city of Bandung and desire to spread this new concept from Bandung to other cities in Indonesia, Asia-Africa, and the world.

This work is ongoing and together with the mayor, FIHRRST organised an International Workshop entitled 'Global Introduction and Socialization of a Human Rights City: From Bandung to Asia-Africa' on 23 April, which was attended by some 30 mayors from cities both in Indonesia and abroad. Mayor Ridwan took this opportunity to again proclaim Bandung as A Human Rights City, which the mayors present subsequently endorsed.

In closing, it is worthy of reflection that the initial Asia-Africa Conference held in Bandung in 1955 was to ultimately lead to the establishment of the Non Aligned Movement (NAM). Sixty years on and with the final Bandung Message making reference to Human Rights Cities, it is not too much to hope that with the Bandung Spirit rekindled a new movement will be spawned, one that adopts this bottom-up citizen-led auditable approach so that citizens across Asia, Africa and the world can have their say on human rights and social justice.