

NGO Forum network and allies demand accountability from the Asian Development Bank amid Georgia's civic space crisis

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[/EINPresswire.com/](https://EINPresswire.com/) -- In a bold stance against the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the NGO Forum network and its allies from across the globe unite to challenge the bank's policies and projects, highlighting its detrimental impact on communities, environments, and civic spaces. As the ADB convenes its 57th Annual Meeting, CSOs emphasize the urgent need for accountability and reform within the institution.

The ongoing oppression of civic space in Georgia serves as a poignant backdrop to the broader critique of the ADB's actions. Amidst oppressive laws targeting civil society in countries like Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, and the shrinking civil society space in Mongolia, Vietnam, India, and Bangladesh, the ADB's role cannot be overlooked.

CSOs demand that the ADB uphold the highest standards of Environmental and Social Safeguarding (ESF), rooted in internationally agreed-upon human rights, labor, and environmental conventions. However, the Draft ESF released in October 2023 fails to meet these standards.

The lack of transparency and accountability in the ESF consultation process raises serious



Forum IC Chair Hasan Mehedi presents to ADB President Masatsugu Asakawa a powerful watercolor painting depicting women mourning the death of environment, livelihood, and gender in the draft ADB ESF.

concerns. Despite two years of engagement, CSOs have not seen how their inputs were incorporated into the draft policy. The ESF's failure to commit to doing 'No Harm' underscores the ADB's negligence towards environmental and social safeguarding.

Furthermore, the ESF's ambiguous language and omission of critical processes like Environmental Impact Assessments and Social Impact Assessments raise alarms about its effectiveness in addressing project-related harms. CSOs reject the ESF draft and demand its immediate overhaul with binding requirements.

The ADB's support for coal and fossil gas projects contradicts its climate commitments. The Energy Transition Mechanism (ETM) fails to ensure the decommissioning of coal projects or prevent their repurposing into other harmful ventures. CSOs denounce the ADB's inaction in phasing out fossil fuel support and call for the closure of loopholes allowing coal financing.

Moreover, the ADB's disregard for human rights, labor rights, and gender considerations further undermines its credibility. CSOs demand the integration of a human rights-based approach into the ESF, aligning with global frameworks and principles.

As the ADB conducts its safeguards review process, CSOs call for robust, just, rights-based policies with mechanisms to hold borrowers and the private sector accountable. Transparency, inclusivity, and community participation must guide ADB's decision-making processes.

In a direct message to the ADB President and Director Generals, the Forum network and its allies urge them to prioritize the public interest and accountability. The ADB must heed the calls of affected communities, environmental defenders, and human rights advocates. ADB's actions have real consequences on the lives and livelihoods of people across Asia and the Pacific. It is time for the Bank to prioritize people over profit, safeguard the environment, and uphold human rights. ###

Quotes from NGO Forum on ADB network members and allies

The shrinking civil society space is a recent trend in the region where Russia tries to reassert its power. The laws in Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and now in Georgia undermine different freedoms and rights, including the right to freedom of association and expression, recognized and widely integrated into ADB policies and standards. It threatens ADB's goals for 2030 for sustainable

development, climate resilience, and prosperity. The laws have a chilling effect not only on media outlets and civil society organizations but also drastically worsen the investment climate, increase corruption, deteriorate governance indicators, significantly raise corruption risks, impact the sustainability of investments, and corrode business. Therefore, the response from ADB should be systemic to halt or reduce its impacts to ensure meaningful participation, freedom of assembly, and expression. For example, as the public sector in Georgia is a large recipient of ADB funds, the Bank should suspend all new funding to the public sector until the decision to pass the draft law is overturned, as it increases the risk of projects failing to meet performance standards by limiting opportunities for meaningful stakeholder participation.

- Manana Kochladze, CEE Bankwatch

At the 57th ADB Annual Meeting, we are still seeking environmental and social justice for the Tanahu Hydro Project Affected Indigenous Magar Communities, who have been pursuing justice since 2019 through the dispute resolution process with no avail. Civil society groups from Manipur are left vulnerable with no assurances that raising concerns about the Imphal road project will not lead to backlash and risk of harm. The ADB's failed delivery of the SPS 2009 remains a reality in 2024, and we are witnessing a rush to change the architecture of the policy instead of addressing the bank's implementation failures of the SPS. Our analysis of this ESF W paper reveals a policy that seeks to dilute binding regulations from the SPS 2009 standards through the Mitigation Hierarchy approach, allowing borrowers to bypass EIAs and SIAs prior to board approval for high and medium-risk projects. This places the environment and local communities at direct risk from all ADB project operations. The ADB's new Gender-blind ESF, in our assessment, actually does an excellent job in safeguarding, especially ADB Bank Officials and its borrowers, just not the people or the planet.

- Rayyan Hassan, NGO Forum on ADB

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