



## Asian Network for Free Elections (ANFREL Foundation)

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### **ANFREL Condemns Police Action against South Korean electoral reform group, Change 2016**

The Asian Network for Free Elections (ANFREL) expresses solidarity with South Korea's Citizen's Network for General Election of 2016 (Change 2016) and supports its appeal to the UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression and the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of Human Rights Defenders in South Korea.

ANFREL condemns the arbitrary police raids conducted last 16-June in the offices of the members of Change 2016. The raids were carried out in relation to a complaint filed by the Seoul Election Commission in April 2016 for alleged violation of Public Official Election Law. The law prohibits unlawful distribution or posting of documents and pictures and the publication of public opinion. Although Change 2016, in a statement, deems that the present form of the law limits the voters' freedom of expression, it maintains that its campaigns were conducted within the bounds of the law.

Leading to the 2016 general elections, more than 1000 South Korean civil society organizations, including ANFREL's member the People's Solidarity for Participatory Democracy (PSPD), established Change 2016 to conduct an online campaign to encourage voters to participate in the polls and a blacklist campaign where voters could identify 10 worst candidates and choose 10 most urging pledges during election. Also, Change 2016 held a series of press conferences in front of the offices of the worst candidates selected by the voters.

The arbitrary police raids raise a serious concern for the government of South Korea for violating the people right to expression. It also undermines the collective efforts of civil society organizations to contribute to a free and fair electoral process. The act of intimidating members of civil society groups goes against democratic norms and principles.

Instead of filing a complaint the Seoul Election Commission could have used the opportunity to strengthen the electoral process by engaging with CSOs advocating for a more meaningful electoral exercise. Civil society groups like the Change 2016 including the PSPD exist to monitor the electoral process in order to make it more transparent and accountable.

ANFREL calls on the South Korean authority to end the arbitrary investigation against members of Change 2016. It strongly demands for the law enforcement agencies of South Korea to respect the citizens' freedom of expression and right to information. Lastly, it calls on the South Korean government to fully respect and protect the universal human rights of all South Korean citizens and put an end to any form of legal abuse against civil society organizations.

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