



Struggles for Grassroots Democracy: A South Asian Civil Society Perspective

Proceedings of the 2nd General Assembly of SAAPE

2-3 July 2006
Kathmandu, Nepal

Organised by



South Asia Alliance for Poverty Eradication (SAAPE)

Fighting unitedly against poverty, hunger and injustice in South Asia

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Foreword

It is our pleasure to present the proceedings of the second General Assembly (GA) of the South Asia Alliance for Poverty Eradication (SAAPE), on the theme of **“Struggles for Grassroots Democracy: A South Asian Civil Society Perspective”** which was convened on 2-3 July 2006 in Kathmandu, Nepal. The GA was a successful convergence of over 135 civil society leaders, academicians, trade union leaders, farmers' groups, human rights activists, women groups, mass based organisations, NGO leaders and other civil society activists from South Asia and Europe who are engaged in the struggle for eradicating poverty and injustice, thereby, realising and advancing grassroots democracy and peace building from below.

The assembly comprised of sharing experiences and learning of people's struggle around the region, such as, the one that the world witnessed in April in Nepal; a panel discussion organised as a side event, on “Nepal's *Jana Andolan-II: Changes and Challenges*”, and workshops and plenary sessions to review and reflect on the learning and strategies of the SAAPE movement. The GA focused on building up a regional SAAPE programme for the next three years, with regard to lobbying, advocacy, campaigning and activities on the ground. The formation of the Core Committee in order to provide the much required political leadership to SAAPE was a major decision taken and a strategic change seen in the SAAPE structure.

We believe that the fruitful deliberations that have taken place have only reaffirmed the indispensable roles and responsibilities of the people themselves, in deciding and shaping their own system of governance, in order to achieve liberation from all forms of exploitation and exclusion, and freedom from poverty and hunger. Although SAAPE is a fledgling regional people's network engaged in pro-poor and pro-people issues and concerns, it has already shown visible contours on the terrain of different social movements taking place around the world. The slogan of “fighting unitedly against poverty, hunger and injustice in South Asia”, voiced at the inception, is certainly gaining momentum to undo all forms of injustice imposed upon us by the dominant neoliberal development paradigm. We are confident that the vision of SAAPE to create “just societies and esteemed individuals fully enjoying human rights for dignified living” will certainly materialise, but, only if we come together and forge alliance in building up the necessary synergy.

We thank all for their active participation and valuable contributions in making this GA productive . And, we look forward to continuing our struggles towards poverty eradication. Thank you once again!

Dr. Arjun Karki
Regional Co-ordinator
SAAPE Secretariat
Kathmandu

Acronyms

ADB	Asian Development Bank
APMDD	Asia-Pacific Movement on Debt and Development
ANPA	All Nepal Peasants' Association
ANWA	All Nepal Women's Association
ARENA	Asian Regional Exchange for New Alternatives
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BNPS	Bangladesh Nari Progati Sangh
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CPN	Communist Party of Nepal
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CWS	Centre for World Solidarity
NGO/DPI	The United Nations Department of Public Information for NGOs
EU	European Union
EURODAD	European Network on Debt and Development
Eurostep	European Solidarity towards Equal Participation of People
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
GA	General Assembly
GAA	German Agro Action
GCAP	Global Call to Action against Poverty
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GM	Genetically Modified
GNP	Gross National Product
HIV/AIDS	Human Immunodeficiency Virus / Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
HIVOS	Humanist Institute for Cooperation with Developing Countries
ICIMOD	International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IFI	International Financial Institution
IFPRI	International Food Policy Research Institute
IFRC	International Federation of Red Cross
IMF	International Monetary Fund
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MNC	Multi National Corporation
MONLAR	Movement for National Land and Agricultural Reform
NGO	Non Government Organisation
NOVIB	Netherlands Organisation for International Development Cooperation
PILER	Pakistan Institute of Labour, Education and Research

PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
RRN	Rural Reconstruction Nepal
SAAPE	South Asia Alliance for Poverty Eradication
SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
SAFTA	South Asian Free Trade Agreement
SDO	Sanayee Development Organisation
SPA	Seven-Party Alliance
STDs	Sexually Transmitted Diseases
TB	Tuberculosis
WB	World Bank
WSF	World Social Forum
WTO	World Trade Organisation

OVERVIEW

1. SAAPE's journey from Manesar (2000) to Kathmandu (2006)

South Asia is home to the world's largest number of poor people. Since ages, people of this region have remained neglected and their fundamental human rights violated frequently. Poverty, deprivation and civil strife are projected as the defining characteristics of South Asia. In this context, the civil society actors of the region and representatives of civil society organisations (CSOs) from Europe convened a consultation in 2000 in Manesar, India. During this consultation about 200 representatives comprising journalists, academics, NGOs and other civil society actors from the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) region - together with representatives from European NGOs including Eurostep - agreed upon a number of measures including the formation of an Alliance of civil society organisations to fight against poverty and injustice in the South Asian region.

As a follow up to the Manesar consultation, the South Asia Civil Society Network meeting on poverty eradication was held in December 2001 in Kathmandu with the theme "Fighting unitedly against poverty, hunger and injustice". This meeting formally endorsed the proposal to build an Alliance in the region to join hands to fight against poverty.

This is how the South Asia Alliance for Poverty Eradication (SAAPE) - a regional initiative of like-minded (in terms of understanding, advocacy, addressing the issues of poverty and deprivation, social development, and the process of "globalisation") NGOs, mass based organisations, academics, trade unions and community based organisations - was established in 2001.

SAAPE members recognised that in order to effectively fight poverty it was vital that civil society organisations and NGOs should have a good understanding of the macro-economic

and political frameworks within which policy decisions affecting the lives of the poor are made. In addition, SAAPE was ideally placed to help share experiences and understanding across the region in order to identify region-wide priorities in relation to poverty and develop strategies to address them. It was in this context that SAAPE held a conference on the theme: "Power, Politics and Poverty in South Asia", as part of its first General Assembly (GA) in Kandy, Sri Lanka in June 2003.

The purpose of the first GA was to analyse inter-relationships of poverty, power and politics of development in South Asia, to formalise the SAAPE alliance and to strategise how SAAPE could better facilitate the work of its member organisations and strengthen strategic alliances for eradicating poverty in the region.

The second General Assembly of SAAPE held in Kathmandu on 2-3 July 2006 on the theme of "Struggles for Grassroots Democracy: A South Asian Civil Society Perspective" brought together representatives of peasant organisations, women's groups, NGOs, trade unions, grassroots social movements, independent academics and human rights activists. Representatives of fraternal European NGOs and members from other organisations also participated in the deliberations held to better understand and analyse emerging challenges in the region, their implications for grassroots democracy, human rights and peace building processes and how SAAPE members could respond. The GA discussed the progress made by SAAPE since its inception and also discussed ways to move ahead meeting fresh challenges.

Vision

SAAPE envisions just societies and esteemed individuals fully enjoying all human rights for dignified living.

Mission

The mission of SAAPE is to facilitate the process for establishing suitable mechanisms thereby ensuring people's genuine participation in the decision making processes at all levels to contribute towards poverty eradication.

General Goal

The general goal of SAAPE is to converge together to strategise and take actions for effective changes in the socio-political arena to combat harmful economic policies of globalisation, privatisation and liberalisation which are considered responsible for ever-perpetuating poverty in the region and have become major causes of frequent social strife; and to provide effective alternatives to eradicate poverty and to empower marginalised people.

Development Objectives

- Monitor national governments' performance in implementing their commitments towards eradicating poverty and sustainable development.
- Work as a pressure group on governments, the SAARC, the European Union, and multilateral bodies active in the region; advocating for policies towards the elimination of poverty.
- Make the voices of the poor heard at the national, regional and international levels.
- Resist anti-poor policies, be they economic, social, political or environmental.
- Develop and promote alternative policies to the governments of the region that are conducive to the elimination of poverty.
- Encourage regional development cooperation amongst the governments of the region to eradicate poverty, as well as amongst non-state actors.
- Develop strategies, which create space for people's initiatives and support people's struggles for ensuring human rights and social justice recognising the specific and different contexts of marginalised groups.
- Facilitate alliances of civil society

organisations in the region and support existing networks in their efforts to strategise for effective change, and combat the harmful economic policies of corporate globalisation, liberalisation and privatisation which are responsible for perpetuating poverty in the region.

- Develop common strategies to make governments, states and local authorities accountable and responsive to people's needs and aspirations.
- Establish a regional dialogue with the European Union and other international bodies and networks, both state and civil society ones that can be seen as allies in the struggle to control and change strong international actors who are causing impoverishment in the region, indeed, in the world.
- Set up a "People for Peace" initiative in the region to work towards peace in the region. This will include influencing governments to reduce defence expenditures.
- Communicate and share about people's initiatives in the region including relevant literature about regional civil society and inter-governmental events important to the Alliance.

2. Poverty and its impact on grassroots democracy

23 per cent of the world's population lives in South Asia, but most of its nearly 1.4 billion people do not share Asia's considerable human, economic and organisational resources. About 540 million people, or 45 per cent of the region's population, live below the poverty line, with incomes of less than one dollar a day making South Asia the planet's poorest region lagging behind even the Sub-Saharan Africa.

Poverty in its most common definition is thought of as being poverty of income or is seen in terms of consumption. However, poverty is a very broad concept and these definitions do not capture broader dimensions of poverty - the poverty of opportunity. In the context of human development, which is concerned with enlarging people's choices, it is the poverty of opportunity that creates and sustains economic poverty. The lack of

opportunities available to an individual to lead a healthy and productive life, to be able to make informed decisions about his or her life, to enjoy a decent standard of living, freedom and security, would convey all deprivations.

In South Asia, these opportunities are denied to the majority of the population:

- Life expectancy at 63 years has registered an increase of 5 years during the past decade. Yet it is still among the lowest in the world, second only to Sub-Saharan Africa.
- The infant mortality rates have declined by 29 per cent, but 69 infants out of 1,000 still die in this region before reaching the age of five years.
- Nearly half of the children under the age of five are chronically malnourished in South Asia.
- 276 million people or 22 per cent of the entire population have no access to basic health facilities.
- The region is host to the highest proportion of underweight and stunted children in the entire world.
- Adult literacy rates have increased from 44 per cent in 1990 to 54 per cent in 1999. But an estimated 39 million children lack even primary education.
- Among the region's adults, 395 million are illiterate. The illiteracy rate in Nepal is 40 per cent, in Pakistan and Bangladesh it is 62 per cent, in India 48 per cent, in Sri Lanka 10 per cent and in Maldives 7 per cent.
- Two-thirds of the illiterate adults are women while two-thirds of the out-of-school children are girls.
- A total of 278 million people have no access to safe drinking water.
- The region's total debt accumulates to around USD 164.5 billion.

In this backdrop, economies of South Asia have

begun to participate in the globalisation process, pursuing market-oriented policies and reducing barriers to trade and investment. But despite rising shares of trade and capital flows in the national income, South Asia remains among the least integrated regions in the world. Exports are seven times lower on a per capita basis than in East Asia, and barely account for one per cent of the world's total. There is a worldwide movement of forming regional trading blocs, yet inter-regional trade within South Asia is low compared to other regional groups. This is despite the fact that cooperation mechanisms such as the SAARC and the South Asian Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA) are in place.

Economic growth and human development need to be consolidated in order to improve the lives of the vulnerable people. Globalisation is not accompanied by a reduction of poverty or improvement in human development. During the globalisation phase, about half a billion people in South Asia experienced decline in their incomes. The benefits of economic growth that took place were limited to a small urban population of educated minorities. In South Asia, income inequality has increased (IFRC, 2002). The highest income-earning layer of 20 per cent owns 40 per cent of the total income in the region while the lowest 20 per cent bracket owns only 10 per cent.

Economic development in the region has never benefited the poor, and even with increasing GDP per capita, average income of the richest 10 per cent is still six times the average of the poorest 10 per cent across the region.

At the same time whenever there have been fiscal adjustments, the axe has fallen on health and education expenditures. Real per capita expenditures on education have followed a downward trend since the early 1990s. All the countries, except Bhutan and Maldives, spend less than 2 per cent of the gross national product (GNP) on public health. Shortages of doctors and nurses contribute to the poor health conditions. Throughout South Asia, there are only 44.34 doctors per 100,000 people. In

India, the ratio is 48, in Pakistan 52, in Bangladesh 18, in Nepal 5, in Sri Lanka 23, in Bhutan 20 and in Maldives 19. Across the region there is one nurse for every 4,078 people and one doctor for every 3,684. By contrast, there is one policeman for every 939.

At the same time as expenditure is falling, problems such as the re-emergence of tuberculosis and malaria and the emergence of infections like hepatitis and HIV/AIDS represent serious challenges. There is an urgent need to respond to HIV/AIDS epidemic in the region through collaborative efforts. South Asian women face more discrimination compared to their colleagues in other parts of the world. Child prostitution and trafficking in women is widely known to exist in South Asia but rarely discussed in strategic fora. Widespread poverty and inadequate social safety nets have forced many children and women to trade flesh to survive.

According to a gender disparity profile for the region, the level of female literacy rates, the overall school enrolment ratio and real GDP per capita is considerably lower compared to the levels for men. Generally, women have lower access to health care, both preventive and curative, and limited attention is given to reproductive health care. Except for Sri Lanka, female foeticide and infanticide are widely prevalent.

Caste and ethnic discrimination is also prevalent across the region. In India, tribal people make up to 8 per cent of the population but they constitute 50 per cent of the displaced population in the country. Poverty reduction programmes have not reached the excluded caste and tribal groups, who remain the poorest and most vulnerable groups in the region. In addition, there are evidences that caste and class systems remain unaffected by development programmes, and discrimination is entrenched in almost all the societies.

Majority of the people in the region depend on agriculture for their livelihoods and their survival. 60 percent of South Asian labour force is involved in agriculture, which accounts for

about 25 per cent of South Asia's GDP. Therefore policies that affect agriculture have ramifications for a large mass of people, especially the poor (IFPRI, 2002).

In addition, there are several areas of unrest, conflicts and natural and/or man made disasters causing a drain on the economy at all levels and often resulting in large population movements. The region is prone to cyclones, tropical storms, tidal surges, earthquakes, monsoon flooding and landslides as well as droughts and a total of 25 per cent of the world's population affected by disasters inhabits this region.

SAAPE members are working to address these realities at local and national levels within their own countries. At the same time, it is clear that there are many shared problems and concerns with similar issues affecting poor people across the entire region of South Asia. During the GA, participants worked out to develop common strategies at the regional level to address shared issues of concerns and to bring a regional dimension to their national and local level work and also to forge alliances with CSOs working on similar issues outside the region, mainly European CSOs such as Eurostep, NOVIB, HIVOS and EURODAD.

In South Asia, the poor are either out of mainstream development as chronically marginalised people or face hardships on account of anti-poor policies, priorities and institutions. The region can be seen in terms of irresponsible political parties, no or poor local governments, national parliaments, ineffective civil society and civil services. Sub-nationalism is on the rise everywhere as castes and tribal, religious and linguistic minorities seek to exert their cultural identity undermining the principle of co-existence, mutual understanding and tolerance within the society. Similarly, the local governance system is highly dominated by the local lords, insurgents and religious prophets. Low levels of literacy, lack of awareness and absence of accountability or responsibility on the part of national governments has a huge impact on societies in South Asia.

However, SAAPE believes that the goal of

eradicating poverty which has social, ethical, political and economic imperative can only be achieved through genuine participatory development processes, involving people linked to grassroots struggle in South Asia. The whole idea of 'grassroots democracy' is devolution of power at the different levels of society from top to bottom. The principle being that for democratic power to be best exercised it must be vested in the local community instead of isolated, atomised individuals. As such, grassroots organisations exist in contrast to so-called participatory systems, which tend to allow individuals equal access to decision-making irrespective of their standing in a local community, and, which particular community they reside. As well, grassroots systems also differ from representative systems that allow local communities or national memberships to elect representatives who then go on to make decisions. And grassroots activists are necessary for the successful implementation of grassroots democracy and for its check and balance.

Grassroots democracy is particularly important to sustain democracy at the central level by bridging democratic deficit at the societal level, thus, consolidating democracy at the grassroots level.

The South Asia region features a rich diversity of geopolitics, societies, cultures, traditions and human potentials. However, the regional politics has not been able to build synergies out of the diversity of values and resources. Instead, it has been manipulated to produce socio-political tensions, religious violence, economic inequalities, inequalities on the grounds of caste and gender and, above all, armed insurgencies. A handful of rich elites rule the vast majority of poor and marginalised, keeping the latter deprived of access to political decision-making, natural resource use and human development. The entire region of South Asia is scarred by poverty and deprivation on the one hand, and on the other, by conflict and war. Militarisation is rampant in all states with substantial proportions of GDP spent on defence. India, which is said to be the largest democracy with

secularism as a principle of state policy, is not performing as a secular state in many respects. In Pakistan, army generals dictate the functioning of parliament. Bangladesh is marred by corruption, factional fanaticism and excessive policing. More than 100,000 Nepali speaking Southern Bhutanese are in an exile in Nepal. They were thrown out of their country just because they demanded recognition of their own culture and language. Sri Lankan democracy is crippled by a two-decade long ethnic conflict taking a high toll of human lives and causing untold human sufferings. Maldives is only now trying to emerge from isolation, both geographic and political.

Following the footsteps of Pakistan, India and Bangladesh also joined the so-called war on terror led by the Bush administration. The recent US-India signing of treaty on nuclear collaboration has further pushed South Asia into an arena of mistrust, conflict and tension.

By and large, regional politics can best be characterised as authoritarian where small elite, elected or otherwise, control the whole of the political process. Irrespective of the form of the government, military might take precedence over democratic dispensation in most countries. Political differences are not honoured and accommodated in the political process. Rather, they are suppressed and neglected. Women, *Dalits*, indigenous people and minority groups are rarely treated as political equals. To a large extent, armed insurgencies in the region have emerged from this political neglect and discrimination. Democracy is far from perfect where the form of government is plural. Where there is a closed polity, the prospect of democracy remains elusive.

But, there is no room for hopelessness. Many initiatives are already in place aimed at the transformation of the current polity: human rights movements, gender justice movements, peace campaigns, demilitarisation campaigns, environmental movements and poverty eradication initiatives. These 'alternative movements' are being led not by career

politicians but by people to whom they matter, in close collaboration with members of civil society organisations. The civil society organisations, movements from grassroots organisations and political parties played a great role in changing the system of Nepal.

In Nepal, the recent 19-day long people's movement that began on April 6, 2006 forced King Gyanendra to withdraw from his position as the absolute monarch (assuming power in February 1, 2005). Despite support from the South Asian governments to legitimise the illegitimate Gyanendra government by accommodating him in the last SAARC summit held in Dhaka, the people of Nepal backed by solidarity and support from the people of other countries in South Asia and beyond successfully established people's power with blood and sweat. The forceful reinstatement of the

dissolved Parliament and handover of executive powers ended, to some extent, the King's illegitimate and authoritarian regime. The royal address that reinstated the Parliament could not disregard the people's aspirations and demand of the Seven Party Alliance (SPA) that included declaration of an unconditional constituent assembly election to lay the foundation for an absolute democracy and sustainable peace in the country.

The implementation of the neo-liberal paradigm has in itself become a poverty creating process in the region. To challenge and overcome this, SAAPE believes in returning total democracy to the poor people who in turn would themselves develop their own agenda for development and in doing so challenge the destructive anti-poor tenets of the so-called 'Washington Consensus.'

INAUGURAL SESSION

The inaugural session of the SAAPE's Second General Assembly was chaired by Dr. Arjun Karki, Regional Coordinator while Mr. Subash Nembang, Speaker of the reinstated House of Representatives of Nepal graced as the chief guest. Ms. Bidya Bhandari, Member of Parliament, President of All Nepal Women's Association (ANWA) and SAAPE Nepal Coordinator was one of the distinguished guests together with Dr. Shova Raghuram of India, Mr. Sarath Fernando of Sri Lanka and Mr. Simon Stocker, Eurostep representative from Belgium. The Speakers had highlighted the political situation of the South Asian countries, which is not very much different between them, and outlined the need for grassroots democracy to fight against poverty and discrimination in the region.

Mr. Subash Nembang, highlighted the success of the people's movement in Nepal and the ensuing challenges ahead. He articulated the Nepali people's struggle for grassroots democracy and the consequent success of *Jana Andolan-II* (people's movement). He said, "The authoritarian rule was defeated by people's power from all walks of life despite adopting various measures to foil the movement. As a consequence, the authoritarian regime had to bow down to the people's power and will".

Speaker Nembang highlighted some major achievements made by Nepal's Parliament that was restored through people's power. He said, "First it has put an end to the basis and remnant of authoritarianism. Second, it has created a basis for inclusive democratic system. Thirdly, the House of Representatives has unanimously adopted a resolution to allocate 33 percent seats to women community in all space of life. Fourthly, it is working on the basis and criteria to conduct elections for the constituent assembly."

Dr. Arjun Karki said that the SAAPE movement was started from Manesar of India some five years ago ' with the objective of organizing the

people of South Asian region on a platform where peasant movements, women's movements, trade unions, social movements, academia, and other mass based grassroots organisations come together and develop their own agenda and strategies to successfully struggle against poverty in the region. He further said, "We have realised that until and unless democracy is realised at the grassroots level and people are empowered to exercise their fundamental rights we won't be able to eradicate poverty."

Ms. Bidya Bhandari highlighted the success of the recent popular movement in the country and the role played by women in the success of the movement. She lauded the role of SAAPE as an important alliance in the region; working as a pressure group, watchdog and campaigner for the tens of thousands of people of South Asia who are suffering from hunger and poverty.

Ms. Bhandari said though the situation in the country during the royal regime was hopeless and uncertain with no difference between state terror and the terror created by the Maoist insurgents, the Nepali people dared to revolt against the autocratic rule of the King coming in hundreds and thousands into the street demanding early restoration of democracy and even succeeding in its short but intensive struggle. She further said that though Nepali people were able to restore democracy, the main challenge is to institutionalise democracy as there were many conspiracies hatched during the post 1990 period as well quoting for instance, the royal palace massacre and the *Dashdhunga* incident. She also stressed the need for restoration of total democracy in the country including the development of democratic culture within the party; inclusive state mechanism; end of practice of untouchability and discrimination and promotion of equal participation of women, adding, "Without aiming for such objectives and results, the mission of grassroots democracy is

meaningless." She further said, "To achieve grassroots democracy, the organisations functioning at the grassroots level should be taken as the base for poverty alleviation measures empowering them in the process." She shared that ANWA is such an organisation which is working towards establishing grassroots democracy and added that every country with such organisations play an important role in institutionalising grassroots democracy.

Dr. Shova Raghuram, one of the founder members of SAAPE talked about the origin of SAAPE and shared that SAAPE emerged as a regional response of the growing resistance in the civil society. "The Manesar and the Kathmandu declarations are two historical documents of SAAPE that have underscored the steep rise of poverty plagued with gender discrimination, high rate of internal migration, militarization and conflict, declining labour standards and the overall dwindling lives of people. Almost 40 per cent of the poor living in South Asia receives minimum or no support from the government elected by its people. She further said that SAAPE in the next two year time has to build up a mass-based alliance like linking up farmers with peasant movements; engaging with trade unions; networking with the media at both the national and regional levels in order to propagate democracy at the grassroots level.

Mr. Sarath Fernando of MONLAR and Sri Lanka Co-ordinator said that poverty of the region is not declining as people who are creating poverty are setting the agenda and formulating strategies for poverty reduction. He further said that though the World Bank and the IMF have been setting the strategies for reduction of

poverty since the past sixty years, they have miserably failed in doing so; hence, the task of setting the agenda for poverty eradication should be left to the people themselves. "It is clear that as long as we allow the creators of poverty to form strategies for reducing poverty those strategies will not work," he said. He further stressed that the poverty reduction indicator of "faster growth" advocated by the IMF, WTO and WB is not appropriate. SAAPE needs to play the very important role of opposing the imperialistic tendencies imposed by the rich countries. It must coordinate with various people's movements in South Asia who are moving in that direction. He further said that grassroots democracy doesn't prevail unless people take control over deciding on their lives consequently uplifting themselves from the vicious cycle of poverty.

Presenting his observation on the South Asian experience concerning grassroots democracy, Mr. Simon Stocker said that the Manesar declaration of 2000 is based on the principles of politics and poverty and the total unacceptance of poverty for it means a denial and even violation of basic human rights, adding the relevance of grassroots democracy in this regard.. "Taking democracy to the grassroots is fundamental also in terms of gender perspective. People of other countries are taking inspiration from Nepal after the popular people's movement in April 2006 which proved to the world that "people's power" eventually succeeded in overthrowing the authoritarian monarchy in the country. SAAPE needs to work towards ensuring the accountability of the state and the accountability on the part of the donors and the international community vis-a-vis other countries around the world," he added.

SHARING OF COUNTRY SITUATIONS

The first session of the GA mainly focused on sharing of country situations involved in the SAAPE movement, namely, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bangladesh and Bhutan. As a welcome initiative, the GA also saw the participation of two representatives from Afghanistan, being introduced to SAAPE for the first time. The country representatives of Maldives could not be present on time due to delay of flights.

Mr. Simon Stocker, Eurostep, highlighted the significance of international solidarity networks of civil society organisations and added that while building such coalitions, the organisations and individuals should be drawn from among those having shared principles and defined working relations based on equality. For instance, there are some concerns about the global GCAP movement on that the policy positions were being determined too much by Europe or the North with too little attention being given to demands by the people for whom the programme is actually being targeted at. Sharing of information is vital for understanding what's going on and stated that they work with their partners to make strategic use of available information. They can share common means of targeting their objectives in a way which has greater chance of success. The session was moderated by Prof. Babu Mathew, Country Director, Action Aid India and one of the founding members of the SAAPE movement. The country representatives made presentations on their struggles around grassroots democracy and peace that have been summarised as follows:

1. Nepal

Mr. Gauri Pradhan, of the Human Rights Alliance, Nepal highlighted the recent *Jana Andolan - II* that Nepal witnessed widely in April 2006.

The popular national movement succeeded due to the participation of each and every sections of the Nepali society involving all walks of life. Nepal has a history of 104 year of oligarchic-rule by a specific group of people known as the Ranas. Similarly, the so-called partyless *Panchayat* system of bourgeoisie ruled the country for nearly 30 years and with the initial efforts of institutionalising democracy, somehow won in 1950; it was forcefully terminated by the then King Mahendra in 1960. And finally in 1990, after the popular movement (*Jana Andolan I*), multiparty parliamentary democracy was reinstated but that democracy did not sustain for long. People wanted to be free from hunger and other denial of basic rights urging for a total restructuring in the state governance system, demanding effective participation in the formation and implementation of national policies and plans. Issues like local governance have been talked about a lot in paper but disappointingly haven't been realised on the ground,

Reasons like such are used in justifying the "people's war" which was introduced in Nepal in 1996, as a result of the failure of democracy and the failure of service delivery in the remote rural areas of the country. Through the success of the recent *Jana Andolan - II* in the country, people proved that history repeats itself. Currently, the nation is heading towards the constituent assembly elections, in order to secure future course of actions but in the right direction. The constitution to be made by the people's representatives is expected to address the root causes of poverty, deprivation, marginalisation and exploitation. The process of constituent assembly elections is very difficult without doubt but people are committed to making it a success and hence the process of mobilising and sensitising every village, every Ward, every movements has already begun.

Mr Pradhan further added, "We are not only demanding absolute restructuring of the state but also urging the responsible political parties to have a democratic restructuring within them, and in the civil society movement as well. There are so many things we can learn from each other, and in South Asia, we certainly need to have more exchange, strengthened solidarity and extensive learning from each other. One day, we will certainly overcome over poverty, injustice, marginalisation, exclusion, exploitation and all other forms of anomalies that our societies are subjected to for so long now."

2. Bangladesh

Ms. Rokeya Kabir of BNPS presented the case of Bangladesh remarking that the data presented by the IMF and the like have depicted poverty reduction in Bangladesh but on the contrary, poverty is not declining in the real sense. The state bureaucracy is not accountable to the parliament while the parliament is dysfunctional, so with democracy in such a state, poverty eradication looks challenging in Bangladesh. People are facing chronic crisis of water, electricity, and others. In the last two year period, there has been an unprecedented price hike in essential things including food and agricultural products. The agriculture minister and finance minister of Bangladesh boast about farmers being happy owing to the increase in price of their products. But ironically, the poor people have to import all the basic food commodities as they do not have land in their hands and they are compelled to purchase them from the market. The human rights situation is also deteriorating and state violence has been increased. The police often open fire and shoot unarmed civilians to death. 55 per cent of the Bangladeshi members of parliament are from the business community and they have not been instrumental in establishing real separation of power among the judiciary and executive including within the national government, namely, the parliament and the local government.

The PRSP has been in implementation from this year replacing the traditional five year

development plan of Bangladesh. And, the key problem with the PRSP is that it was not even discussed in the parliament reflecting how Bangladesh democracy is functioning in the real sense. Another of the Bangladeshi government's controversial decisions is the recent indemnity law which has been passed to grant indemnity to the World Bank, IMF and ADB in the country. Consequently, these institutions cannot be tried in court on grounds of any unlawful actions or activities.

With this brief scenario, Ms. Kabir shared that the situation in Bangladesh is very volatile and the ordinary people are living in times of uncertainty and instability. Nevertheless, there is hope that the people of Bangladesh will display resistance if need be as they have proved time and again that people's power will overrule any injustice that has come upon them and as a nation as a whole. She hoped that people would come forward and join the SAAPE movement which is fighting against unjust ills like lop-sided social structures and poor governance in the region.

3. Pakistan

Presenting the case of Pakistan, Mr. Zulfikar Shah of PILER said, "When we look at our region, we see that most of the countries are being ruled by military dictators or by autocratic rulers. This is a very disappointing and depressing situation, however, there are renewed hopes as the new development in Nepal is on a fast track following the recent massive people's movement and this is surely the time to celebrate the victory of the people's struggle. In Pakistan, out of the 57 years of its origin, we have had the military regime since 27 years, and hence genuine democracy has never been realised. Without participatory democracy and inclusion of people in decision making processes, it is very unlikely to eradicate poverty. So, the struggle towards poverty eradication starts from the struggle towards establishing democracy. Unfortunately, the failure of establishing democracy in most of the countries in the region is responsible for the inadequate efforts to uproot abject poverty

from our countries.”

Mr. Shah shared that most of the countries in South Asia including Pakistan have not risen above the colonial mindset. India and Pakistan, particularly, spend significant amounts of their national budgets in defence leaving little for the socio-economic development of their societies. Therefore, it is important to bring together all civil society partners working at and for the grassroots, within the fold of SAAPE thus gaining increased strength and synergy towards improving the socio-economic lives of the excluded and marginalised.

4. India

Dr. Rukmini Rao of CWS presented the case of India, spelling out that ‘India is shining’ as being promoted as a success story of the policy of liberalisation, is actually not true for many of the people living in both rural and urban India and is a bitter fact for many of the friends and colleagues in the region working for the marginalised and poor. This is not only the case of millions of the poor living in India who continue living in poverty and deteriorating situation day by day, but, also of millions of others who are living in the region. So when talking about grassroots democracy, it is not only looking at the opportunity for the people to be active in politics merely to stand for office and to be part of the participatory process at the national level but also looking at the opportunity for the people to take control of their own resources and their livelihoods by themselves.

She said, it is actually painful to share the fact that the farmers engaged in producing food are asked to switch over to something else. According to government statistics, seven million farmers in India have been pushed out from the agriculture sector, and more than 100,000 farmers have committed suicide in the last two to three years. The special economic export processing zones have been set up and very currently, the practice has been changed. With this whole negative scenario, people are actively fighting and resisting at different levels. Dr. Rao opined that there is huge potential for

a regional alliance like SAAPE to actualise people’s struggles across the region learning from each other in the process.

5. Bhutan

Dr. D. N. S. Dhakal of Bhutan said, “Bhutan is the latest entry in the race to democracy. The King of Bhutan has declared that by 2008 there will be democratic elections and multiparty democracy will be allowed to function. The elected prime minister will run the government in the direction of people’s aspirations. The country has already drafted a Constitution, which may not be the kind of thing that we would like, nevertheless, we have said it is a welcome step.”

Commenting on the Bhutanese refugee issue, Dr. Dhakal shared that above 100,000 refugees of Bhutan are waiting for the repatriation process since the last 15 years. Several rounds of official talks have been held between the government of Nepal and Bhutan but there is no positive sign yet. He was of the opinion that Bhutan needs an urgent push to solve the refugee problems and institutionalize democracy. In this regard, the initiative of SAAPE is well respected and supportive.

6. Afghanistan

The general country situation of Afghanistan was presented by Mr. S. Ihsanullah Dileri of Sanayee Development Organisation (SDO).

Mr. Dileri shared that the situation of Afghanistan is very different and difficult because they have been at war since the last two decades or more only enjoying an emerging democracy. In Afghanistan, the definition of democracy is filled with ambiguity. The common people and the government have a confused understanding of democracy hence it needs to be redefined altogether: what does democracy mean for Afghanistan? In the name of democracy, the people in state power are doing something quite different than the expectation of the common people. The recent riots in Kabul have proven that there is a striking gap between the state’s delivery and people’s needs.

The positive changes in people's lives within the last five years are minimal compared to the aid flow in Afghanistan. People say they need food, employment and security first, and democracy would come next. Security is a major problem in Afghanistan. Out of 32 provinces, six provinces are under the effective control of the Taliban, and the formal government is present only in name. Drug production and trafficking is another big challenge in Afghanistan. During the last five years, the international community helped the government of Afghanistan to develop the policy for drug eradication but it was mainly focused on destroying the drug plants without giving viable alternatives to the farmers engaged in this livelihood. The existing recommendations say that the government design development programmes and promote education and social welfare, than use military

solution for bringing peace. Another one quotes that the government discourage drug production but also work with farmers for alternative livelihoods. The country faces another problem of food insufficiency; therefore importing food grains from other countries.

The other recommendation by the international donor community is to hire fresh blood and well educated people to run the government. Most important is the need of well capable government and the effective management of resources which may lead Afghanistan to stability and democracy. People believe that instead of hiring foreign consultants, the capacity of the local people should be developed. Currently, there are more than 6,000 foreign consultants in Afghanistan and hence they are just recycling the aid money.

ISSUES IDENTIFIED DURING THE 2nd GA

Delegates from eight South Asian countries and European civil society partners deliberated at length on the issues that they thought are pertinent to the SAAPE movement at the moment. For further discussions, they identified seven sub-themes to be addressed in respective groups with poverty as the overarching theme.

Main theme: Alliance building for grassroots democracy to eradicate poverty

Sub-themes:

- i) Conflict and democracy
- ii) Labour, trade and globalisation
- iii) Gender perspective for construction and reconstruction of democracy
- iv) Ecology, agriculture, food sovereignty and livelihood
- v) Governance
- vi) Natural disasters and democracy
- vii) Basic rights

Each group nominated one rapporteur to present the conclusions in the plenary.

Group presentations:

1. Conflict and democracy

There were 15 participants in this group. The group wanted to change the title itself. They wanted to continue with the SAAPE theme of 'peace, justice and demilitarization'. They have outlined the possible agenda for SAAPE's area of work vis-a-vis conflict and democracy:

- nuclear free South Asia
- upholding of basic human rights
- lobby for bringing perpetrators to justice
- advocacy against hegemonic psychology of

big countries within and outside the region

- peace education campaign against history distortion, religious fundamentalism and the like
- upholding values of plurality and diversity
- campaign to increase people-to-people contact
- graduating to People's SAARC out of SAAPE movement
- lobby for conflict transformation

2. Labour, trade and globalisation

Delegates from five countries took part in this sub-group discussion. They spoke of common history and similar patterns of economic development. They identified the problems South Asian countries were facing with, which include loss of social security, change of labour legislations with new provisions that restrict right to organisations job loss, change in work environment, privatisation and so on. Some common issues that were identified:

- enforcement of rights of migrant workers
- exploitation of living and working conditions of informal sector workers
- enforcement of higher level of minimum wages
- bonded labour, *Dalit* and child labour
- violation of workers' rights
- exclusivity of women workers in decision making
- disparity of wage against women workers
- privatisation and out-sourcing
- lack of social security
- exemption of labour laws to multi national corporations and foreign investors

- unemployment and underemployment

After identifying common issues, the delegates discussed about the way forward. They reached a common consensus on:

- preparing a SAARC labour charter
- strengthen research, advocacy and lobby work
- facilitate interaction among labourers in the region
- information sharing for empowering the labourers
- SAARC level consultative body of trade unions
- solidarity organisations to be built around labour
- alliance building of labourers at sectoral level and at Asian level

3. Gender perspective for construction and reconstruction of democracy

Gender issues are cross-cutting. The group discussed about research, advocacy and lobbying, capacity building and pressure-building. The discussions focused on capacity building of women, sensitising of people and pressure-building on the government:

- building alliances from grassroots to national to regional levels
- gender-sensitive education
- reform all discriminatory laws
- sensitising against violence on women
- sensitising about local mediation groups still promoting patriarchal values
- gender policy analysis
- gender budget analysis
- working for changing patriarchal power structure from family, society, state and civil society (improve democracy, gender sensitive programme, respect reservations, etc)
- increase women's participation at decision-

making level

- gender sensitive programs among youths
- pressure for intervention to ensure respect to CEDAW, Beijing declaration
- women's participation in peace-building process
- gender sensitising for house-wives

4. Ecology, agriculture, food sovereignty and livelihood

This group took up issues especially with reference to the World Food Summit activities scheduled for September 2006. There was broad consensus on the following issues:

- food sovereignty is inalienable right
- it includes rights to food and produce food
- international convention on food sovereignty should be held in order to enshrine the principles of food sovereignty in international law
- institute food sovereignty as principal framework in which national and international laws related to agriculture are framed
- implement genuine agrarian reforms like ensuring lands to tillers and landless peasants
- demand WTO out of agriculture
- pursue the spirit of the Convention on Biodiversity
- ensure no privatisation of natural resources
- ensure women's equal rights and participation
- ensure no patent rights on all life forms
- say no to genetic engineering in agriculture
- ensure farmers' sovereign rights to seeds
- initiate proper acts to protect the interest of peasants
- ensure representation of peasants in legislative and decision-making bodies
- promote local models of sustainable agricultural practices
- conduct research, prepare documents and

- share experiences about sustainable agriculture
- establish resource centres
- take up regional and national campaigns against the international financial institutions
- conduct public hearings on the atrocities by MNCs in the agricultural sector
- ensure more allocation of resources for development of agriculture
- build alliances with peasant movements and political parties

5. Governance

Members of this group included seven participants from India, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. The group felt that grassroots democracy is a form of democracy with direct and inclusive participation of local people either by themselves or through their elected representatives giving adequate representation to all marginalized groups, *Dalits*, women, indigenous people and other minorities. Issues on governance were discussed as follows:

- effective representation of marginalised groups in all levels of governance structures
- respect people's right to natural resources
- representatives must be accountable to the people
- in case of gross conduct, they ought to be recalled

The group discussed three aspects that tried to answer the questions on –how to strengthen grassroots democracy, what are the impediments against functioning of grassroots democracy and what measures are needed to overcome them. Regarding strengthening of grassroots democracy, following points were - put forth:

- capacity building
- giving autonomy
- address weaknesses in local level frameworks
- ensure participation of women in local bodies

- elected representatives of local bodies must not be allowed to be dismissed by bureaucrats
- local bodies must be allowed to participate in decision-making of use of natural resources that affect their livelihood

Regarding forces of impediment, the following point was put forth:

- local, national and global vested interests including prevailing power structures

Regarding the nature of alliance required in order to overcome the impediments, following points were put forth:

- alliance based on common minimum programme
- alliance of disadvantaged groups

6. Basic rights

The group had ten delegates from the eight countries of South Asia. They identified three basic rights – right to education, right to health and right to shelter - and also some issues, which could be considered by SAAPE to include in its future programmes:

- SAAPE must press for Compulsory Universal Education for All irrespective of caste, gender, race, religion, class, etc
- the state is responsible for providing education, which should be of uniform quality
- content of the education should be socially, culturally and historically sensitive
- primary education should be taught in the mother tongue of the children and local history should be part of the curriculum
- SAAPE should oppose the privatisation, commercialisation and communalisation of education
- SAAPE should reject all forms of child labour
- SAAPE should advocate for access to primary health care, safe drinking water, immunisation, sexual and reproductive health care, care for mental health

- disorders, care for communicable diseases, HIV/AIDs, TB and malaria
- government regulation on private medical practices including research, education, drug research, drug production, drug sale prices and so on
- SAAPE should oppose commercialisation of health education
- SAAPE should advocate the regulation of commercial exploitation of traditional knowledge of bio-medicine and ensure return to the communities where the resource and knowledge belong
- SAAPE should advocate social mobilisation with regard to health condition that carry with them social stigma including HIV/AIDS, STDs and reproductive health

REVIEW OF THE SAAPE STRUCTURE

Dr. Arjun Karki chaired the session together with a panellist from each SAAPE member country including a representative from Eurostep. The session mostly dealt with the administrative arrangements at the SAAPE Secretariat and the political structure of SAAPE.

After intensive discussions and feedback from the participants about the administrative functioning of the SAAPE secretariat and the political leadership of SAAPE, a common understanding was reached. The conclusions reached during the discussions are presented in Annex Three.

The assembly agreed to continue the SAAPE secretariat at Rural Reconstruction Nepal (RRN) until the next general assembly or until any changes in this respect are introduced. The delegates agreed that SAAPE believed in collective leadership and it should function at all levels—grassroots, national and regional – as one.

The assembly agreed that the thematic groups at the country level, which must be formed by including at least two or more country groups working on the same or similar theme, should select one representative to take part in regional-level activities on the respected theme.

Inclusion of other new thematic issues like cultural and youth issues could be decided by the core committee. For instance, the tsunami and the Nepali political crisis did fall under any of the thematic groups of SAAPE but SAAPE members still felt it important to respond.

Finally, the delegates agreed to have a collective SAAPE governing body functioning as the core committee. This governing body would have

representation from the regional thematic groups, individual country groups, Secretariat and civil society partners from Europe. The structure of the core committee was agreed as follows:

- Representatives from regional level thematic groups – 5 (one from each theme)
- Representatives from SAAPE country groups – 8 (one from each country)
- Representative from Eurostep – 1 (observer status)
- Regional Coordinator - 1
- Total Core Committee Members = 15

The floor also agreed to use the latest ICT for facilitating effective coordination among all the members of SAAPE and for maintaining regular communication among thematic and country groups for effective implementation of the SAAPE programme activities. The understanding and mechanisms of coordination and communication was reaffirmed so while the responsibility to coordinate and communicate with all the groups rests with the Secretariat, all matters related to the given theme need to be coordinated and communicated directly by the regional thematic focal organisations to their respective constituencies and regional Secretariat. The Secretariat would play the role of a facilitator as per the need of the movement.

The motion was also passed that the SAAPE Secretariat could be transferred to any of the member countries in case of emergencies like the political crisis of Nepal that was faced earlier. Lastly, the floor agreed that the SAAPE Secretariat should be strengthened and some full time staff could be hired for the effective functioning of SAAPE.

KATHMANDU DECLARATION

The Kathmandu Declaration was adopted during the second General Assembly of SAAPE, that took place on 2-3 July 2006 on the theme, "Struggles for Grassroots Democracy: South Asian, Civil Society Perspective."

WE, THE PARTICIPANTS OF THE SECOND GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE SOUTH ASIA ALLIANCE FOR POVERTY ERADICATION (SAAPE), meeting in Kathmandu, Nepal, July 2-3, 2006, felt the energy, excitement and anticipation of the people of Nepal, at this historic and precarious point in their history – Nepal's recent *Jana Aandolan II* (people's movement) for *Lokatantra* (democracy).

Over the two days of meetings, we, the members of SAAPE and observers – a widely representative group of civil society organisations and movements from the eight countries of South Asia, and from Europe – learned from each other, and from the experiences of the Nepal *Jana Aandolan*, and pledged their solidarity to establish a real and lasting democracy in Nepal.

We are committed to the Eradication of Poverty in the Region, and reaffirm the Manesar Declaration adopted in 2000, and the Kathmandu Declaration adopted in 2002. We are inspired by the principles that the courageous people of Nepal have articulated as the foundation principles for a New Nepal. We have also increased our understanding of the difficulties and possibilities in poverty eradication, as a result of sharing the work and conditions in our countries.

SAAPE is becoming a Platform for a large number of like-minded organisations, movements and persons in the region, who have come together to eradicate poverty and to strengthen grassroots democracy. SAAPE is a socio-political force to work for change and to work with different groups of people in attempts to unite to achieve different goals that

are important in the overall struggle to eradicate poverty and protect grassroots democracy.

With this understanding, we declare that we will eradicate poverty in South Asia –

Realising that poverty and hunger in the region is not natural, but something created and perpetuated by the Global powers of plunder and exploitation, working in collaboration with the elitist regimes in our own countries; we commit ourselves to fight these forces until we take control over our lives, our natural resources, and the right to plan and decide on the use of such resources. We commit ourselves to facilitate the mobilisation of the millions of poor and their organisations to complete the process of the de-legitimisation of the Global financial powers such as the International Financial Institutes (IFIs), and international capital in their self-proclaimed right to set agendas for poverty eradication and development.

Realising that "Growth" alone is not the remedy for "Poverty," neither in rural nor urban areas, neither in the agriculture nor in the industrial sector, and knowing that logically those claim "responsible" for poverty (e.g., WB, IMF and WTO) cannot tell us how to solve the problems of Poverty – their "solutions" so far have only led to the aggravation of poverty all across the region (hundreds of thousands of farmer suicides in India, pauperisation of the peasantry, promotion of the corporate farming model, loss of jobs and labour opportunities); and therefore, we need to struggle with farmers and labourers for establishing and strengthening grassroots democracy, and against labour policies that are exploitative.

Realising that a large number of children are engaged in labour work in the region – markets exploit them in the pretext of poverty; we declare that SAAPE will fight against child

labour and fight for their right to education.

We declare that we will work towards realising food sovereignty and food security for the people of the region, and struggle to create a supportive policy framework – promoting Eco-Agriculture, opposing GM food, and promoting peasant alliances for ensuring food sovereignty.

Realising that the forces that/who benefit from the poor remaining poor, are strong, powerful and well-connected, we commit ourselves to a more powerful struggle against the root causes of poverty in the South Asian region. We declare we will not rest peacefully, even if intermediate victories have been won, but will continue to struggle together, as a Regional Alliance, solving problems as we go, until Poverty is eradicated from all of the South Asian countries.

Anti-poverty work is often done by people who work on behalf of others, and people living in poverty themselves are often involved as “targets” or “beneficiaries.” We know that there is great strength and ability in the men, women and children living in conditions of hunger and poverty, and we declare that we are committed to all Inclusive and Participative, including poor men and women, excluded castes and indigenous communities, integrally and strategically in the decision-making and work of SAAPE.

Realising that Peace in the Region still eludes us – civil strife in Sri Lanka and Afghanistan; growing state repression in Bangladesh, India and Pakistan; and continuing repression in Bhutan - we declare that the members of SAAPE will support each other in the struggles for peace. The problems are many – Bhutanese refugees feel unable to return to their homes in Bhutan, state repression in India in Gujarat and other states by religious fundamentalist political groups, and the use of military power by the South Asian governments to suppress movements and struggles of indigenous citizens for their political and economic rights. The people want peace and democracy in the region; national and international governments in many cases do not. SAAPE will work with

the people in reinstating peace and democracy.

Realising that the continuing Indo-Pakistani conflict over Kashmir is a serious obstacle to both peace and grassroots democracy in the region, and realising that the enormous defence budgets of both countries deprive the poor of their countries of needed health, education, food security, etc., we declare that SAAPE will do everything possible to mobilise its members, along with others in the region working for peace and justice for the Kashmiri people, to pressure the two governments to resolve the conflict in accordance with the wishes and needs of the Kashmiri people.

Realising that poor governance, the absence of free and fair elections, and violence of the rule of law undermines genuine democracy in the region, we declare that SAAPE will work through its members by advocacy and public awareness, to bring about true democracy and democratic processes in the countries of the region. Monitoring and reforming the education systems will form part of this public awareness – SAAPE will work on education policies, and insure qualitative and progressive education so that democracy can be sustainable.

Realising that in the region, where patriarchal customs and practices continue, we declare that SAAPE will make sure that Women have equal participation as members of decision-making bodies and that the Poverty of Women will be a constant concern and focus. Women must form at least 50% of all bodies that work within SAAPE. Women bring real strength to struggles for social justice and human rights, they are tenacious, fearless, and in their lives, used to solving problems. They have experienced suppression, and given a chance to participate, are creative, courageous and effective partners in the struggles against poverty and injustices in the region.

Realising that in the region, fundamental religious sentiments and revivalism mingled with politics, have caused deprivation, poverty, destitution, agony and atrocities, and having seen the impact and effect of the rise of

fundamentalist forces in Afghanistan, Bangladesh and India, we, therefore, declare that all activities undertaken by SAAPE will be secular in perspective. Indeed, SAAPE will take initiatives to promote secularism in the societies of the region.

We declare and demand that poverty and hunger be considered a Disaster and an Emergency, not something that can be delayed as decided by the planners of MDGs, or the FAO that promise to reduce hunger by half by 2015 (only). Often, but not always (as is seen in the delayed relief efforts of the recent

earthquake in Pakistan and Kashmir), response is quick and effective, if a situation is dealt with urgency under the disguise of "Disaster." For example, the response to the great disaster Tsunami showed how the world would/could respond to poverty and hunger if they are seen and declared as such Emergencies.

This Declaration of the members of SAAPE, made in solidarity, is adopted by the 130 members from eight countries of South Asia along with our European partners assembled in Kathmandu, Nepal, on this 3rd day of July 2006.

PROGRESS REPORT OF SAAPE DURING THE YEAR 2005-2006

After introduction, Mr. Sarba Raj Khadka made a presentation about the activities of the SAAPE Secretariat during the period covering July 2005-June 2006 (see Annex Six). He briefed the participants about the SAAPE annual general meeting held in Kandy, Sri Lanka on 26-28 June 2005. He added that the Secretariat has finalised the proposal for the period 2005-08 and that SAAPE, together with an Italian NGO VIDES International, organised a mid-day NGO interactive workshop in New York in September 2005 during the 58th annual DPI/NGO conference. SAAPE also organised the Poverty Report 2006 Authors' Workshop in November 2005 in Kathmandu.

Similarly, SAAPE organised an international conference on "Democracy, Peace, Food Sovereignty and Action Plan for Road to Hong Kong" jointly with All Nepal Peasants Association (ANPA) in December 2005. The meeting was attended by 1,200 peasant activists from Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Philippines, Indonesia and Europe and concluded by adopting the Kathmandu Declaration. SAAPE also organised a high-level panel discussion on "The Future of Democracy, Peace and Human Rights in Nepal" on 1 February 2006 at the EU headquarters in Brussels to support Nepal's on-going pro-democracy movement. In the afternoon, a demonstration was organised in front of the European Commission and the

Council of the EU, calling for an end to the autocratic rule of King Gyanendra and restoration of peace and democracy in Nepal.

SAAPE provided financial support to different delegates attending the International Conference on Peace and Justice in South Asia organised in Mumbai in February 2006. Similarly, SAAPE also organised a conference on the theme "Struggle for Democracy and Survival in the Age of Globalisation: Towards a South Asian Perspective" on the third day of the World Social Forum (26 March 2006) in Karachi, Pakistan. SAAPE was also involved with hosting and redesigning its website, www.saape.org.np, and has been publishing newsletters regularly. Lastly, Mr. Khadka presented the administrative and financial statements of the period.

After Mr. Khadka's presentation, delegates from the member countries commented on the progress report of the SAAPE. Representatives from the five different thematic groups then made their presentations. Thereafter, Ms. Mirjam Van Reisen and Mr. Pieter Van Veneen presented the SAAPE-Eurostep evaluation report, which was followed by floor discussion, presentation of summary and the closing of the session.

Ms. Farah Jabeen and Dr. Arjun Karki moderated the session.

ANNEXES

Annex -1

Remarks by Babu Mathew on the SAAPE movement and future challenges

This meeting is quite important in the present context. What we are doing catches the imagination of South Asia in a very powerful way. SAAPE is a very strong organisation, a platform with tremendous amount of goodwill, tremendous amount of unity and tremendous amount of commonality between its members. It is in that context that we try to look at how to strategise our work for the future. We have also seen the struggle for grassroots democracy. When we talk of grassroots democracy, we are talking about building this kind of alliance of grassroots organisations in order to end hunger and malnutrition in some region.

Take note of the work going on in Sri Lanka, for example, regarding the struggle to ensure food sovereignty. It was pointed out that there are five hundred organisations working on ecologically sustainable agricultural practices. Out of them, 150 have already received training in order to see how such economically sustainable agriculture can be practised. I pick this up as an example in order to take note of the fact that the style of working in a platform way is already something that is happening at the grassroots level. It's not a foreign invention nor is it an alien invention or something that comes to our mind. It is something that is already happening at the grassroots level not only in Sri Lanka but in other countries, as well.

Nepal points out that it wants to take the issue of deciding its future through the constituent assembly elections. That is something extraordinarily big and now those experiences from different parts of South Asia should be quickly brought together. We need to realise that it's a historic opportunity for organisations like ours to take our ideas directly into the Constituent Assembly. That's the process which is going on and in that process, many friends in Nepal and top positions of leadership and every step of leadership are in the mood to help each other. That itself is a political platform.

Additionally, consider the labour theme. In many places by ignoring existing labour laws, new practices have begun. So all over this region, female and male workers are coming under a slot and that is clearly part of the political agenda. In informal sectors, even minimum wages are not paid.

It is same on the health issue. These are the thematic issues where we can lobby. We have to take these issues to our European partners. We should oppose the WTO agreement related to food.

We have felt that the SAAPE Secretariat which is located in Kathmandu is functioning in a fantastic way. Despite the subjective reality within the SAAPE, the SAAPE Secretariat has functioned brilliantly and we must remember and recognise its work and assure our needful help in this regard. Very important from this reflection is the recognition that what we now need is political leadership in order to carry forward the work of SAAPE. The Secretariat has not been playing a leadership role. Now the time has come for it to take up the role of political leadership.

One very strong observation of the second General Assembly is that we should have enough preparatory time in relation to all sorts of interventions going on in different parts of the country. So, future General Assemblies should not be for two days only; they should be extended to may be for three or four days. We also need to strengthen our relations with Eurostep and convert this relationship into a formal relationship. We need a kind of international solidarity committee, which will be appropriate in order to strengthen this part of the work. Two messages that have clearly emerged over the last two days are: We want to take up the fight against poverty seriously and focus on hunger, malnutrition and starvation. Equally important is when and how to do it and which is something that needs to be addressed by the Kathmandu declaration.

Annex - 2

Inaugural speech by the Speaker of the House of Representatives of Nepal, Honourable Subash C. Nembang

Mr. Chairperson

Comrades

Ladies and Gentlemen

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you all to a New Nepal, one that is being established following a successful struggle of the people, which we proudly call the 'Rhododendron revolution'. The reactionary forces led by absolute monarchy are heading speedily down the hill now. We are cautiously struggling to keep them out as well. While sharing the joy of success of the first battle with you all, in which you have supported us invariably, I do request you to keep a watchful eye, as ever, on the second one, which is going to be more arduous. I will shortly return to this.

Dear comrades and colleagues, the passing reference I have just made has a close link to the theme of deliberation for which you are gathered in Kathmandu. It is said that the 21st century is the century of democracy. I put it a bit differently, and say, the 21st century is the century of grassroots struggles - the struggles of peasants, women, environmentalists, human rights defenders, and of every group and community that feels oppressed, alienated and marginalised under the dominant political and socio-economic systems of the current times. I believe the vibrancy and maturity of these struggles leads to the attainment of people's democracy worth of serving their own interests and aspirations. Hence, it is crystal clear that the struggle for democracy is no more the sole business of political parties, but an avenue where the marginal groups of people are essentially amalgamated for attaining their fundamental human rights. Political parties are only the vehicles to channel the movements

into a governance structure, to create synergy out of the wide range of movements and echo them in the 'high politics' of the state. If we politicians fail to concur with this reality, it will be a blunder.

Poverty and hunger do not merely dwell on the technical aspects but are strongly rooted in the political formations that govern the societies. South Asian societies suffer more by social exclusion, injustices, discrimination and marginalisation that create and perpetuate poverty and hunger, than the current state of poverty itself. The initiatives that SAAPE has upheld developing synergy between grassroots struggles, linking them horizontally and vertically and further strengthening their movements towards eradicating poverty and all other forms of deprivations with the help of appropriate tools of equity and justice. I take this opportunity to thank SAAPE for initiating this discourse at all levels. It should be taken further to a wide cross section of the population, including politicians, to make sure that the struggles are not divided into 'ours' and 'theirs' but consolidated well ensuring complementarities of each of them for creating societies free from poverty, hunger, malnutrition, and all other forms of injustices.

Another important dimension of the 21st century struggles is their ardent appeal to peaceful means. We have seen, and some of us even gone through, various forms of armed struggles being waged as a tool of securing freedom, liberation and emancipation. Unfortunately, these struggles have, generally, failed to deliver on their promises. In many cases, they have become a pretext for further oppression and have contributed to strengthening oligarchy and authoritarianism

rather than providing an enabling environment for freeing the oppressed and empowering the marginalised. This encourages me to refine the earlier statement. Now I say, the 21st century is the century of “peaceful grassroots struggles for democracy”.

In Nepal, we have tested both forms of struggles. After the 1990 People’s Movement restoring democracy, various forms of grassroots struggles started to emerge. A little later, in 1996, started an armed movement under the command of the Communist Party of Maoists to overthrow the existing state and establish a new one. This, the Maoists claimed, was necessary to genuinely liberate Nepali people from all forms of age-old feudal exploitations, denials and discriminations. Contrary to the claims, I observe, the armed path worked only as a pretext for reactionary forces, dispersed and sidelined by the 1990 People’s Movement, to regroup and regain their power to dismantle the fledgling democratic setup that was constructed during the 1990s. In a way, the armed struggle contributed to the overthrow of the democratic state and not the reactionary one.

After 10 years of its onset, the champions of the armed struggle path started to reconsider their strategy. Following the success of the Rhododendron Revolution in April 2006, which was fully peaceful enjoying a broad-based support of all kinds of grassroots movements, the Maoists have publicly committed themselves to, among others, fundamental freedoms and liberties and the multiparty system of power politics through peaceful means. I take it as the success of the peaceful means of politics, as championed by the grassroots movements, over the armed one.

Let me also share with you briefly about the Rhododendron Revolution that I have been referring to. On 4 October 2002, King Gyanendra unseated an elected prime minister alleging him of incompetence to deal with the Maoist-led armed conflict. Then on, he started to actively engage in politics going beyond the limits imposed by the 1990 Constitution.

Capturing the opportunity created by ensuing political uncertainty, he seized executive power on 1 February 2005 blaming political parties for the deteriorating state of state affairs. He curtailed fundamental rights, including the freedom of press, speech and movement. He restricted the activities of political parties although did not dare to ban them. He tried to force civil society organisation to kowtow to his design.

After 15 months of his direct rule, tired of all misdeeds a dictator could engage in, political parties, students, youths, trade unionists, professionals, intellectuals, civil society actors and every one conscious of their rights and responsibilities rose to fight the repression to free Nepal from the clutches of this dictator. An alliance was formed of seven political parties, which entered into an understanding with the Maoists to push forward the movement against the dictator in a peaceful way. The movement started with a 4-day national strike on 6 April, the month that sees the blooming of rhododendron—the national flower—throughout the hills of Nepal. The royal regime responded to the peaceful demonstrators with batons and bullets charging them as being a ‘terrorist instigated handful of crowd.’ To prove its words, the regime got vigilantes and disguised security personnel infiltrated into the peaceful movement. The people reacted to this with more dedication and courage. Finally, around mid-night, on 24 April, King Gyanendra bowed to the people and their struggle. He restored the parliament, dissolved four years back in the midst of political wrangling, as demanded by the seven party alliance.

The restoration of parliament was necessary to transcend the conflict that the nation has faced over the decade by bringing the Maoists into the political mainstream, to curtail the power of the king, to bring military institution under the control of parliament and prepare ground for constituent assembly, which has become an imperative for a peaceful transition of Nepal.

Today, I am in front of you as the Speaker of the Sovereign Parliament restored by the power of

the people- by the convergence of grassroots struggles that each of you is part of. The restoration of parliament has, in a manner it did, proved that there is neither a room for autocracy nor an ultra-leftist fancy. The future is that of peaceful movements which are rooted in socio-economic diversity and pursue the goal of freedom and empowerment of every person recognising them as political equals.

We have a long way to go ahead. And we are prepared for that. Let me assure you comrades and colleagues, within a year or so, we will have a new constitution written by people's representatives, and a state in which every Nepali will have a dignified place to live in the state of peace, harmony and prosperity. Within two years from now, there will not be an insane ruler ruling the Nepali people in iron fist. We will have everyone ruling ourselves as political equals through a structure created by us collectively.

I earnestly hope all grassroots movements in

South Asia, and beyond, and all counter movements will sincerely learn from the background leading the Rhododendron Revolution in Nepal. Comrades and colleagues, I have a lesson to share with you from our experience. The lesson is - there is no room for exaggeration, hypocrisy, force and extremist propaganda in politics.

Dear friends, welcome you all, once again, to the naturally beautiful terrain and lovingly caring people of Nepal. I wish you all a pleasant stay here. I am fully confident that your deliberations and interactions through this General Assembly will certainly help to further consolidate the grassroots movements around the world to achieving the ultimate goal of ensured access to and control over the state power by the people to serve their cause of eradicating poverty, hunger and discriminations of all forms.

Thank you,

2nd July 2006

Annex - 3

Highlights of discussions on the structure and strategies of SAAPE

- SAAPE could use the latest ICT tools to ensure transparency among members so that each and every member is able to participate in SAAPE activities. SAAPE should also focus on empowering the national chapters and to pressurise the national governments and make them more responsible, besides having a regional focus.
- Poverty research should not be confused with poverty eradication. The output of poverty research could be used as a tool for poverty eradication. The SAAPE Secretariat as well as the network itself should be strengthened with strong emphasis on frequent communications. There should be interaction with people belonging to all strata of the society.
- SAAPE could have culture as a separate theme.
- SAARC has been facing constraints in proper functioning; one prime reason being the conflict between India and Pakistan. SAAPE should work on such type of issues.
- SAAPE's primary focus should be on food sovereignty. Food sovereignty has been promoted as an alternative to globalization and neoliberalization.
- Some coordination mechanism needs to be in place at the national level and the Co-ordinator should be elected.
- A full-time working person is essential in all the thematic groups. For example, there would be one focal person in the labour thematic group who would work full time on the labour theme. In addition, there should be a governing body, comprising seven to fifteen people, who would provide the necessary political leadership. This body should be composed of representatives from all the thematic groups, country groups, the Secretariat and other stakeholders as appropriate.
- SAAPE should not follow SAARC'S footsteps; rather, direct its energy towards solving the conflicts that are coming in the way of progress in the region. Instead of just pressurizing governments to reduce the defence expenditure SAAPE should try going a step further on making governments resolve the conflicts, particularly, the conflict of Kashmir.
- The logo of SAAPE which represents only the original seven countries, should now also include the new arrival of Afghanistan.
- Poverty eradication in South Asia is the main agenda of SAAPE but strategies for achieving the goal could not be discussed at length in the GA, so due focus should be given in the future.
- It is important to clearly understand the nature and characteristics of all member organisations. Since they already are very strong grassroots organisations, the strength and synergy adds to SAAPE as a regional voice. Since its not just a national but regional network, strategies need to be drawn up as to how various groups could be pulled into the SAAPE network.
- There needs to be a clear understanding of SAAPE's relationship vis-a-vis political parties or the role of political parties in SAAPE in order to engage in platform politics. The political parties are key actors in mobilising people.
- The Chair of the session acknowledged that the GA was not interactive enough due to time constraints and assured that the issue of time and time management would be dealt with properly in the next GA. It is necessary to think of mass action otherwise the programmes and plans envisioned would not be implemented properly or

- effectively.
- The SAAPE Secretariat is fine in RRN; maybe shift it from the first to the fifth floor of RRN- remarks by a delegate from Bangladesh
 - RRN is suitable for hosting the Secretariat but alternatives need to be discussed and arranged in case of emergency and problems like that being faced in Nepal in the past years- remarks by a delegate from Pakistan.
 - RRN could continue as the Secretariat and if any problem or emergency arises then RRN could hand it over to any other country of their convenience. The SAAPE Secretariat should be ideally housed at RRN for at least the next three years- remarks by a delegate from Bangladesh.
 - RRN is appropriate but problems or constraints if any could be shared. The efficiency of RRN over the last two years proves RRN is the best place so it should continue as the Secretariat of SAAPE-remarks by a delegate from India.
 - Some kind of political, conceptual leadership and capacity building of SAAPE is necessary. The Secretariat may expand its role and one or two staff could be hired to do the work of the Secretariat. The staffs need not be based in Kathmandu itself but may be also in the focal organisations. The Committee members should take up the leadership of SAAPE- remarks by a delegate from Maldives.
 - It is essential that to start with collective leadership is developed in SAAPE. SAAPE is a platform for discussing regional issues. It is imperative to expand grassroots representation as the goal is exercising grassroots democracy to eradicate poverty. Members of the Secretariat used ICT to work effectively for achieving the goals –remarks by a delegate from India.
 - The goal of SAAPE should be clear and comprehensible before talking about its leadership role if SAAPE is to engage in platform politics. People taking up the leadership role should also have the total conceptual clarity in order to properly perform the role.
 - The idea of identifying five thematic regional focal organisations is okay. While selecting the five country thematic focal organisations, an organisational level meeting of the respective organisations should be called and country representatives should be elected. As we are working at the grassroots level, we should have extensive discussion in this regard while selecting respective representatives- remarks by a delegate from Sri Lanka.
 - SAAPE being a regional body; every country might have their own priorities – remarks by a delegate from Sri Lanka.
 - Just I want to hear that we shouldn't get confused on the number of people you should start forming the core committee, for example, seven or eight people if we want to get representation from each country could be enough. We should look at the quality of contribution not the number. We should make the basic structure inclusive otherwise I think we may not reach to the destination where we have to - remarks by a delegate from Bangladesh.
 - Each country should represent in the secretariat. Then country could set up country level committee among themselves. In coordination with the thematic groups and the country focal organisation, it may decide who to represent at the SAAPE Core Committee.
 - The process of forming thematic groups and selecting representatives in respective countries is a problem. There need not be representative (s) in every country-remarks by a delegate from Maldives.
 - Every committee representation should be gender sensitive or gender balanced.

Annex - 4

Panel discussion on Nepal's *Jana Andolan II*: Changes and Challenges

SAAPE organised a special evening panel discussion session in day one of the GA to share the recent celebrated political developments in Nepal on the theme of "Nepal's *Jana Andolan II*: Changes and Challenges."

The Deputy Speaker of the reinstated House of Representatives, Mrs. Chitra Lekha Yadav said that the upcoming Constituent Assembly elections should establish inclusive democracy offering equal participation from all sections of the Nepali people. To ensure the changes desired by the Nepali people, the political parties and their leaders need to correct themselves and change their mindset, she maintained. The elections to the Constituent Assembly was the only demand of the people on the streets during the people's movement and people seek guarantee of it, she added, also reminding that Nepali women had significantly participated in the people's movement.

Likewise, central committee member of the CPN (Maoist), Mr. Suresh Ale Magar argued that the Maoists regarded the recent political turn only as a partial change and that their struggle was still on. He accused the parties of lacking the will, commitment and confidence to turn the country into a democratic republic. Mr. Ale Magar added that the Maoists have accepted multi-party democracy but was against the present form of parliamentary democracy. His party is a separate political entity, not a constituent of what some say the 8-party alliance. Mr. Ale Magar further said that the Maoist army would never be a problem for peace. "There is much hue and cry about arms management. Ours is an army with a clear political philosophy and it will not be a problem for peace and development," he said. He highlighted that their party is moving ahead with ideological rigidity and tactical flexibility to resolve the current problems and lead the nation towards a revolutionary transformation.

Addressing the programme, leading human rights and peace activist Prof. Mathura Prasad Shrestha said that complete socio-economic and cultural

transformation was the main goal of the recent democratic change in Nepal. Reconstruction, rehabilitation and reconciliation should now be the main focus of the state, he said.

Saying that Nepal had the worst form of tyranny in the form of the King's direct rule that was blown away by the April Revolution, Shrestha said that the country should completely do away with monarchy. "Lokatantra (people's democracy) should not have any form or vestiges of monarchy, forget about ceremonial monarchy some people are talking about," he said. He further said that the state must work towards bringing 'distributive justice' and need-based development to the people.

Prof. Shrestha lamented at the growing influence of what he called bad elements within the ruling seven-party alliance as well as the CPN (Maoist) party. Collective intellect of the people should be the basis of governance, not military might. Foreign powers would hardly be kind to the Nepali people so the foreign policy of the country should be based on the *Panchasheel* he added.

Speaking at the same programme, senior journalist Mr. Kanak Mani Dixit said that the pluralism of Nepali society must be preserved for the country's progress in the right direction. He opined that there was no need to reconfirm Nepal's sovereignty because Nepali people had already risen up as responsible citizens. Mr. Dixit further said that moderate politics was the only way to move forward given the plurality of the Nepali society. He added that socio-economic rebuilding was the clear message of the people's movement, which displayed an unique example of people's participation. Monarchy has now become redundant in Nepal, he said.

The Chair, Dr. Arjun Karki thanked the speakers and guests and expressed hope that the talk programme proved instrumental in informing the delegates about the sudden welcome but fragile turn of events in Nepal.

Annex 5:

SAAPE annual progress report for the year 2005-2006 (highlights)

Prepared by the SAAPE Secretariat

1. SAAPE Annual General Meeting 2005

The second SAAPE Annual General Meeting (AGM) was held in Thilanka Hotel, Kandy, Sri Lanka on 26-28 June 2005. It was attended by 130 participants, from across the region and Europe. As agreed during the Delhi Strategic Planning Meeting in March 2005, the AGM was preceded by a two-day, five simultaneous thematic workshops on gender; labour; food sovereignty; peace and demilitarization and governance, democracy, rule of law and accountability. The aim of the workshops was to build on the country position/thematic papers that the participants had come prepared with, in order to develop a regional perspective on the five themes and plan strategies for action at the organisational, national and regional level, which was duly accomplished. The final day was productively used for SAAPE's administrative issues, membership, Poverty Report '06 and SAAPE's possible input to WSF, WTO and SAARC. Besides, a special resolution on Nepal was unanimously endorsed, providing solidarity and support to those fighting for the establishment of democracy and peace in Nepal.

2. Finalisation of the SAAPE proposal for the period 2005-08

The funds supported by Novib and Hivos for the implementation of SAAPE activities were for the period, 01.09.04 – 15.07.05. Hence, the Secretariat engaged itself in preparing a new proposal for a prospective three-year term. The draft proposal drafted by the Secretariat was shared among the participants at the SAAPE AGM '05 and after receiving inputs from the members it was finalised by the Secretariat.

The Secretariat also drafted a proposal on the theme of food sovereignty and submitted to a prospective partner, German Agro Action (GAA)

and Action Aid India but failed to receive a positive response.

3. 58th Annual DPI/NGO Conference

The 58th Annual DPI/NGO Conference with the theme of "Our Challenge: Voices for Peace, Partnerships and Renewal", took place on 7-9 September 2005, at the UN Headquarters in New York. South Asia Alliance for Poverty Eradication (SAAPE) in partnership with International Volunteer Organisation for Women, Education and Development (VIDES International), an Italian NGO working on Peace and Security, jointly organised a Mid-day NGO Interactive Workshop on "Challenges and Opportunities in Combating Poverty" on 8 September 2005.

Dr. Arjun Karki, SAAPE Regional Coordinator, participated on behalf of the alliance, and focused on the role of power and politics in perpetuating and combating poverty. He underscored the fact that poverty is a political issue, hence needs a political solution to replace the technical quick fixes often used in addressing the problem. Good governance and political will are key to achieving results. The case of Nepal was highlighted where, despite huge borrowings from the World Bank, IMF and the ADB in the name of poverty reduction, no visible impact has been seen except huge debts for the already debt ridden country. Poverty is also a human rights issue. Gross violations of basic human rights will continue until the poor themselves are empowered to participate in political decision-making in order to bring about workable, sustainable changes in their lives.

4. Poverty Report 2006 Authors' Workshop

The authors' workshop was organised on 7-8

November 2005 in Kathmandu and was attended by respective authors and representatives from Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Two members of the editorial team were also present. The workshop deliberated on the entire modalities of the report including the desired content of the regional chapter plus the five thematic chapters. The workshop concluded that the report would be out by early April 2006. The report is now at its final stage and the Secretariat is aiming to produce it within a month's time.

5. International Conference on Democracy, Peace, Food Sovereignty and Action Plan for 'Road to Hong Kong'

An international conference on Democracy, Peace, Food Sovereignty and Action Plan for 'Road to Hong Kong' was jointly organised by the All Nepal Peasants Association (ANPA) and the South Asia Alliance for Poverty Eradication (SAAPE) on 3-4 December 2005, Kathmandu, Nepal. The conference was held prior to the 6th WTO Ministerial Conference held on 13-18 December 2005, Hong Kong.

Given the trade distorting policies of the WTO and its negative impact primarily on the livelihoods of countless peasants, small farmers, workers and other vulnerable and marginalised sections of society, this meeting focused on bringing together peasant activists from the region and beyond with the aims of:

providing an impetus to the already existing global resistance movement against the neoliberal policies of the WTO

further strengthening people's strategies in the struggle

and extending solidarity to fellow friends mutually fighting against the anti-people agenda of the WTO

The conference was also an ideal people's forum to highlight Nepal's present political crisis featuring absolute autocracy against the backdrop of a decade-long Maoist conflict. The key message of the meeting was that an inclusive people's democracy is a prerequisite to achieving

peace, food sovereignty and every other basic human right. The meeting was attended by 1200 peasant activists from Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Philippines, Indonesia and Europe. A declaration was adopted in closing wherein the international participants and friends also added their voice to the ongoing struggle for the restoration of democracy and peace in Nepal.

6. High-Level Panel Discussion on "The Future of Democracy, Peace and Human Rights in Nepal"

On the anniversary of King Gyanendra's take-over, 1 February 2006, a coalition of autonomous European development organisations working in solidarity for Democracy, Human Rights and Peace in Nepal, in collaboration with the South Asia Alliance for Poverty Eradication (SAAPE) organised a high level panel discussion to discuss the current political and human rights situation in Nepal and explore potential policy avenues towards a peaceful and democratic solution.

Dr Arjun Karki was a key invitee and speaker at the panel. A number of representatives from NGOs, EU Member States, the Council Secretariat, European Commission, European Parliament, academics, Nepalese diaspora as well as journalists from across Europe participated in the programme. The highly successful panel discussion on the Nepal Crisis concluded with a presentation of two new reports by Dr Arjun Karki to Mr Michael Matthiessen, Personal Representative of the Secretary General Javier Solana, High Representative for Human Rights – a civil society report from Nepal entitled *The Royal Military Coup: 365 Days of Consolidating Power* and another by the Asian Centre for Human Rights and Forum-Asia entitled *Nepal: One Year of Royal Anarchy*.

7. Demonstration of European Solidarity for Democracy, Peace and Human Rights in Nepal

In addition to the high level panel discussion conducted in the morning of 1st February 2006, a demonstration was held in the afternoon, in front of the European Commission and the Council of the EU. Hundreds of supporters of the Nepalese diaspora groups from Belgium,

Germany, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands and members of European development and human rights organisations appealed for the restoration of democracy in Nepal, also calling for a peaceful rather than military solution to the current political crisis on 5th February 2006 in Brussels.

Dr. Arjun Karki explained "The aim of this gathering is to draw the attention of the European Union and the European Parliament to express their solidarity in defending democracy, human rights and peace in Nepal." Mr. James Moran, Acting Director for Asia from the European Commission visited the demonstration and received a statement of solidarity and petition from Dr. Karki. Soon after, BBC Asia broadcast a live interview of Dr. Arjun Karki.

8. International Conference on Peace and Justice in South Asia

On 24-26 February 2005, organisations in Mumbai who were working actively on conflict, peace, security, justice and gender issues came together as "Peace Mumbai" and organised an event on the theme of "Peace and Justice in South Asia". SAAPE provided financial support as well as sponsoring SAAPE representatives from the whole South Asia region. More than 250 participants from all over the world attended including from USA, Iran, Palestine, Australia, Europe and Asia.

The event was all about building up peoples' solidarity, cutting across the constrictive state borders to forge a greater South Asian identity based on common cultural roots and heritage, and creating a new world – a world based on Peace and Justice, free from violence and oppression.

The main thrust of the conference was to explore and establish the links between "increasing incidence of poverty, economic exploitation, environmental degradation, militarisation, religious fundamentalism, fanaticism, corporate globalisation and consequent erosion of democratic institutions in the region of South Asia." The venture was driven by the urge "to work on alternatives to

the current paradigm" so as to move towards "a South Asia that is based on peace and justice," based on "a framework that is democratic, peaceful and nuclear-free" with "just economic policies with regard to trade and sharing of natural resources." It maintained the conviction that "the countries of South Asia have a long history together and strong cultural, social and political links" and hence, the "region can show the way for greater political, regional, cultural cooperation that is outside of the neo-liberal, militaristic, corporate led path that governments are choosing".

The conference has opened up the immense possibility of working towards a truly collective South Asian effort by building "organic linkages with similar organisations, movements, and individuals across the globe." Finally, in the light of recent political developments in Nepal, a Special Resolution was developed and unanimously endorsed by all delegates, which condemned the undemocratic royal takeover of 1 February and called for a return to democracy.

9. SAAPE event at the World Social Forum (WSF)

The World Social Forum was held from the 24th to the 29th of March, 2006, at the City Sports Complex, Kashmir Road, Karachi, Pakistan. More than 40,000 delegates from all over the world actively participated in this mega event.

SAAPE organised a conference on the third day (26th March) on the theme of "Struggle for Democracy and Survival in the age of Globalisation: Towards a South Asian Perspective." It was one of the major events during WSF and was attended by about 700 participants from all over the world. It was addressed by prominent academicians and social and political activists from South Asian countries, namely, Professor Kamal Mitra Chenoy, Jawaharlal Nehru University; Dr. Arjun Karki, the Regional Co-ordinator of SAAPE; Mr. B.M Kutty, a founding member of PILER; Prof. Mesba Kamal of Dhaka University; Dr. Gopal Krishan Siwakoti, Representative of the Defend Human Rights Movement Nepal; Ms. Sausi Palejo, a

Member of Parliament in Pakistan; Mr. Rasool Bux Palejo from the Awami League; and Mr. Ashok Bharti from the World Dignity Forum.

The assembled speakers represented the true face of South Asia and were able to demonstrate the synergy present in their respective countries in the struggle of the people to achieve a democratic reality. They spoke about the effect of globalisation on the poor masses in the developing countries and the urgent need to build and strengthen alliances to eradicate poverty and injustice, particularly in South Asia. The event was also well regarded by the daily newspapers and the electronic media sources.

10. Hosting and Overhaul of SAAPE web site

The SAAPE website is being hosted by the Secretariat and is regularly updated for effective information sharing and coordination. The website has been redesigned and can be viewed at www.saape.org.np. In addition, the list serve is being maintained and managed through which information is exchanged with all SAAPE members who have access to email. The members have found the information circulated to be useful which updates on SAAPE activities, thematic issues, relevant news; also providing a forum for discussion on concerns of mutual interest.

11. Publication of SAAPE newsletter

The newsletter is instrumental in raising awareness and advocating on key regional issues; besides serving as a means of information sharing about SAAPE, for it endeavours to target non SAAPE organisations and donors as well. The Secretariat published a new edition in December 2005 covering a six-month period from June 2005 to December 2005 and another one on June 2006 covering the period of January 2006 to June 2006, which has also been uploaded on the website.

12. Building CSO partnerships

SAAPE's work is focused on developing a shared civil society vision for the region and bringing key campaigns on its agenda at the regional level. The Secretariat is engaged in building and strengthening relations with civil society organisations working on similar issues within and outside the region, particularly EUROSTEP, NOVIB, HIVOS, EURODAD, APMDD, ARENA, Social Watch and the Global Call to Action against Poverty (GCAP).

13. South Asian Regional Seminar on "Preparing inputs to the Special Session of the Committee on Food Security"

The All Nepal Peasants' Association (ANPA) and South Asian Alliance for Poverty Eradication (SAAPE) jointly organised a seminar on *"Preparing inputs to the FAO special session of the committee on food security"* on 29-30 June, 2006 in Kathmandu, Nepal.

The objectives of the seminar were to prepare inputs to the Special Session of the Committee on Food Security to be held in Rome, Italy and to gather support and inputs from the broad range of sectors to push for the people's Convention on Food Sovereignty and raise awareness amongst the peasants, women, indigenous people, consumers, policy makers, media workers, fisher-folks and the like on the important issue of food sovereignty. The seminar discussed on the civil society perspectives and plans to voice their positions on GE, the increase in hunger and malnutrition as well as to gather support for peasants, rural women and indigenous people's rights to land and productive resources and right to food.

14. Preparation of the 2nd SAAPE General Assembly

The SAAPE General Assembly (GA) is scheduled to be held on 2-3 July 2006 in Kathmandu, Nepal. Bearing in mind the recent historical achievement of the Nepalese People's Movement, the theme has been decided as 'Grassroots Democracy'.

Annex 6:

Programme schedule

2nd July 2006	Day One
08:30-09:30	Registration
09:30-10:30	Inaugural Session
	Session Chair: Arjun Karki, Regional Coordinator, SAAPE
	Sharing of Nepal's current struggle for restoration of democracy and welcome remarks by Bidya Bhandari, President, ANWA
	Inauguration session by the Chief Guest (lighting panas)
	Sharing from selected members of SAAPE groups:
	Shobha Raghuram, India
	Sarath Fernando, Sri Lanka
	Sharing by Simon Stocker (Eurostep representative, Belgium)
	Inauguration Address by the Chief Guest - Hon. Subash Nembang, Speaker, House of Representatives, Nepal
Vote of Thanks and closing session by Chair	
10:30-11:00	Tea/Coffee
11:00-12:40	Session 1: Plenary One
	Moderator - Babu Mathew
11:00-12:20	Country presentations: Each constituency presents on the main theme of the GA
	Pakistan- Zulfiqar Shah
	Sri-Lanka- Sarath Fernando
	Bangladesh- Rokeya Kabir)
	Nepal - Gauri Pradhan
	India - Rukmini Rao
	Bhutan - DNS Dhakal
Afghanistan – Isanullah Dileri	
12:20-12:30	Sharing of experiences in the international context - Simon Stocker
12:30-13:00	Plenary Summary Presentation by the moderator
13:00-14:00	Lunch
14:00-15:30	Session 2: Group Work (Workshops)
	Participants will break into groups to discuss the theme in depth, relating SAAPE's contribution towards developing a regional agenda (each workshop group will select a moderator and a rapporteur for Plenary Two)
15:30-16:00	Tea/Coffee
16:00-18:00	Session 3: Plenary Two
	Moderators: A panel of representatives from each workshop group will moderate this session
	Presentation by a representative of each workshop group
	Floor discussion and consolidation of the recommendations on future action
	Closing of the Plenary Two
	Set-up a committee to draft declaration (announcement of the names)

3rd July 2006	Day two
09:00-09:30	Recap of the day one and setting up of an environment for day two- Dr. Sandeep Pendse
09:30-11:30	Session 1: Report on the progress of 2005-06
	Moderators: Farah Jabeen and Arjun Karki
	Introduction of the GA delegates/ participants (25 minutes)
	Presentation of the secretariat report – Sarba Raj Khadka (10 minutes)
	Presentation of the progress report on thematic activities-representatives from five different thematic groups (10 minutes each)
	Presentation of SAAPE+Eurostep evaluation report- Mirjam Van Reisen+. Pieter Van Vaneen (10 minutes)
	Floor discussion, summary, session closing (25 minutes)
	Tea/ Coffee
11:30-12:00	Session 2: Strategising future directions for building socio-political forces that can make a change by eradicating poverty from the region
12:00-13:00	Moderators/presenters: Mohiuddin Ahmad, Babu Mathew and Arjun Karki
	Floor discussion
	Lunch
13:00-14:00	Session 3: Discussion on structure of SAAPE and other administrative/coordination issues
	Moderator: Rokeya Kabir
14:00-16:00	Discussion of regional concerns
	Country Focal Organisations
	Thematic Focal Organisations
	(Responsibility) of the Communication Officers
	Election of the SAAPE Secretariat/ host organisation
	Newsletter
	Reporting formats
	Executive Committee
	Discussion on international concerns
	SAAPE-Eurostep coordination
	Tea/Coffee
	Discussion on any other remaining issues
16:00-16:30	Session 4: Closing of 2nd GA
16:30-17:00	Moderators/Panelists: One representative from each country in the region and Europe
17:00-18:00	Presentation of the draft declaration- drafting committee
	Discussion and approval of the declaration-all interested
	Closing remarks by session moderators

Annex - 7

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