



Fighting unitedly against poverty, hunger and injustice in South Asia

SAAPE Bulletin

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EDITORIAL

Supporters of ousted Maldivian president Mohamed Nasheed clash with soldiers during a protest in Male

Photo courtesy: <http://rt.com>

Immediate Restoration of Democracy in the Maldives

The small island state of the Maldives experienced an army backed coup d'état on 7 February 2012, ousting the first democratically elected government in the country - another telling sign of impingement of democracy in South Asia. Had it been a large and geo-politically significant country in the region, such undemocratic and unconstitutional development would have caused a huge political furore; however, the illegal transfer of power that took place in the smallest country of South Asia, was almost no news at all for the regional bloc, the

South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). The SAARC adamantly remained silent over the issue, in violation to its ambitious SAARC Charter of Democracy which aims to bolster the spirit of consolidating democracy in the region.

The regression of democracy in the Maldives, has hit hard the peoples of the country who were only beginning to enjoy democratic rights and freedom, from the clutches of a 30-year autocratic rule by previous President Gayoom. Since the unconstitutional power transfer in February, there has been an

outpouring of news of massive human rights violations in the country; from political repression and arbitrary detentions to beatings, torture and forced disappearances. Women forming the critical mass of peaceful demonstrations against the coup d'état, have been in the frontline of manhandling and political

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detentions.

Against this background, at its core committee meeting in February in New Delhi, SAAPE discussed the development in the Maldives in great detail and demanded immediate restoration of democracy in the Maldives. SAAPE concluded that what happened in the Maldives was the illegal and unconstitutional overthrow of Mohamed Nasheed through a coup-d'état backed by the old discredited regime of Gayoom with the active involvement of armed forces in collaboration with the then sitting Vice President who has now sworn himself as the new President and has already started to unleash a state of terror suppressing the spontaneous uprising of thousands of Maldivians in support of Nasheed. SAAPE supports the call of Mr. Nasheed to conduct early elections and calls upon the international



Ousted President Mr. Mohamed Nasheed

community through the Human Rights Council of the Security Council not to recognise the illegally installed new regime. SAAPE also emphasises on the formation of an interim government led by the Speaker to take care of the government until fresh elections are held and a new government elected by Maldivians takes charge.

Further, SAAPE urges for the strengthening of the rule of law (RoL) and democracy in the Maldives and has requested the UN to form an impartial team of



Current President Mr. Mohammed Waheed Hassan

eminent persons from South Asia to act as independent observers mandated to support free and fair elections at the earliest.

The meeting decided that SAAPE and all South Asian Civil Society organisations must assist the people of Maldives in every possible way to restore genuine democracy and ensure that "Sovereignty" is immediately restored into the hands of the Maldivian people through immediate elections and restoration of the RoL and Constitutional order.

Photo courtesy: Wikipedia

SAAPE Strongly Condemns the Threat to Life of Herman Kumara, President, National Fisheries Solidarity Movement (NAFSO), Sri Lanka

4 MARCH 2012, KATHMANDU, NEPAL

The South Asia Alliance for Poverty Eradication (SAAPE), a regional civil society network encompassing all eight countries of South Asia, strongly condemns the imminent threat to life of Mr. Herman Kumara, the President of our member organisation National Fisheries Solidarity Movement (NAFSO) in Sri Lanka.

Mr. Kumara is a senior human rights defender, engaged in defending the rights of Sri Lankan fisher folks, who are currently agitating against the steep fuel price hike that has

unjustifiably hit them the hardest. In this context, he has been alleged of instigating the fisher folk constituency into steering the ongoing agitation against the Government of Sri Lanka, and has been thus intimidated with attempts of abduction and even life threats. Although NAFSO has already filed an official complaint with the Pannala Police station, no credible actions have been taken to investigate this genuine complaint.

SAAPE resolutely stands up for human rights, democracy and

the rule of law and hence, urgently calls on the Government of Sri Lanka to ensure the full protection of her citizen Mr. Herman Kumara, as duly enshrined in the Constitution of the country. We also request the international community to extend all possible support to uphold and defend the rights of human rights defenders including all Sri Lankan citizens.

Dr. Arjun Karki
Co-ordinator, SAAPE

Programme on World Food Day and International Day for the Eradication of Poverty concludes



Mass rally organised in Kathmandu to conclude the week-long programme

The week-long programme to celebrate the World Food Day and International Day for the Eradication of Poverty was concluded on 22th October 2011 with a morning mass rally organised by South Asia Alliance for Poverty Eradication (SAAPE) members and National Network on Right to Food, Nepal (RtFN).

The rally passed through Bagbazar, Putalisadak, Exhibition Road, Shahid Gate and converged into a mass meeting at Shantibatika, Ratnapark chanting various slogans on right to food, food security and food sovereignty. More than 500 people from the peasant movement, women movement, civil society organisations, NGOs and INGOs participated in the rally.

Addressing the mass meeting, Ms. Sabitra Bhushal, CA member revealed the fact that Nepal Government is trying to endorse

the Bill on GMOs (Genetically Modified Organisms) in the legislative parliament to facilitate the agro-based Multi-national Companies, like Monsanto, to hold their monopolistic control over Nepalese agricultural inputs. She said "the Bill on GMOs has been postponed due to the objection of some conscious CA members realising the adverse impact on Nepalese agricultural economy."

Dr. Sarba Raj Khadka, Director of Rural Reconstruction Nepal (RRN) and Programme Coordinator of SAAPE, urged the government to remove all adulterated and contaminated food items from the market and called for an immediate intervention to regulate the market price of daily consuming goods as well as food items.

Mr. Prem Dangal, Secretary General of All Nepal Peasants' Federation (ANPFa) said

government should take responsibility to feed all adversely affected people from poverty and hunger, which are the consequence of the neo-liberal policies.

A series of programmes was organised during the week (16th October to 22nd October) to celebrate the World Food Day (16th October) and International Day for the Eradication of Poverty (17th October). Press conferences, media interactions, mass mobilisation on right to food, picketing in solidarity to the 'Occupy Wall Street Movement' and a seminar on right to food were organised during the week.

'Assure the civilian's right to food and food sovereignty and ensure affordable, accessible and quality food for all' was the main theme of the week long national programme.

South Asia Workshop on WTO, Agriculture and Sustainable Development

A regional workshop on WTO, agriculture and sustainable development was held in Calcutta, India in 12 December 2011. The workshop mainly focused its discussion on the role of the World Trade Organisation and its adverse impact on agriculture and sustainable development. The workshop was organised by the Asian Peasant Coalition (APC) and Our World Is Not For Sale (OWINFS) and co-organisers were SAAPE, ANPFa, Indian Federation of Toiling Peasants (IFTOP), and Institute for



Panelists at the South Asia Workshop on WTO

Motivating Self-Employment (IMSE). Representatives of farmers' groups from the South Asian countries, and civil society activists participated in the workshop. The panelists were Mr. Rahmat Ajiguna (APC), Mr. Prem Dangal (SAAPE/ANPFa),

Balram Banskota (APC/ANPFa), Mr. Subal Sarkar (Bangladesh Bhumihin Somiti). The workshop deliberated on the role of International Financial Institutions (IFIs) and its adverse consequences on agriculture and development.

63rd Human Rights Day Celebrated

SAAPE Members in Nepal participated in a mass rally organised by the National Human Rights Commission-Nepal and coordinated by the NGO Federation of Nepal, on the occasion of 63rd Human Rights Day on 10 December 2011 in Kathmandu.

The rally passed through the major streets of Kathmandu including Exhibition Road, Martyr Gate, New Road, and finally arrived at Basantapur where it converged into a mass meeting. Senior human rights defenders, activists, government officials, civil society members, students,



SAAPE joined the rally organised on the occasion of Human Rights Day in Kathmandu

representatives from Nepal Police participated in the rally. Senior human rights activists and civil society representatives addressed the mass meeting. The

speakers of the programme emphasised on the effective implementation of all the international human rights conventions at the national level.

SAAPE Core committee meeting held

The Core Committee meeting was held in New Delhi, India on 28-29 February, 2012. To provide political leadership and strategic management guidance, SAAPE is organising this meeting twice a year. The major decisions of the meeting are as follows:

- To condemn the coup in Maldives and call for fresh elections as well as demand appropriate action against the perpetrators
- To finalise the SAAPE campaigns viz. Food Sovereignty, Gender Justice and Demilitarisation, Democratisation, and Social Justice.
- To publish the fourth SAAPE Poverty and Vulnerability Report by January 2013. Secretariat is coordinating this process.
- To actively mobilise and prepare towards the People's SAARC in Nepal in 2013, where the official SAARC is scheduled to be held.
- To organise the Annual General Meeting/General Assembly of SAAPE in 2013.



SAAPE Core Committee Meeting

SAAPE absolutely denounces the threats, intimidation and harassment towards human rights defenders and journalists by the Government of Sri Lanka

28 MARCH 2012, KATHMANDU, NEPAL

The South Asia Alliance for Poverty Eradication (SAAPE), a regional civil society network encompassing all eight countries of South Asia, absolutely denounces the threats, intimidation and harassment directed to Sri Lankan human rights defenders and journalists by the Government of Sri Lanka, against the background of the recent resolution on Sri Lanka adopted by the United Nations Human Rights Council on 23 March 2012 in Geneva.

SAAPE members Nimalka Fernando, Sunila Abeysekera and Dr. Paikiasothy Saravanamuttu have been particularly attacked by the hate campaigns sponsored by the government and its crony media on

the basis of their active involvement with regard to the aforementioned 19th session of the Human Rights Council. All three human rights defenders and journalists have a long-standing credible history in the field of promoting and protecting human rights, exposing as well as opposing the culture of impunity and the lack of accountability and justice by the state to her innocent citizens. On this note, SAAPE also extends its solidarity and support to the statement jointly issued by these three members on 23 March defending their cause in continuing to uphold their commitment to their democratic ideals and goals.

SAAPE is strongly concerned for the full safety and dignity of its members who are firmly standing up against all types of injustices and

gross human rights violations. SAAPE firmly believes that human rights violations of any kind is non-negotiable and hence, urgently calls on the Government of Sri Lanka to abide by the Constitution of the country including the international human rights conventions to which it is signatory. SAAPE demands that the Government of Sri Lanka is obliged to allow its citizens to fully and freely exercise their democratic rights for the promotion and protection of democracy, human rights and peace. SAAPE also appeals to the international community to support Sri Lankan peoples in their fight against the undemocratic culture propagated by the Government of Sri Lanka.

Dr. Arjun Karki
Co-ordinator, SAAPE

People's SAARC-2011 Country Processes

The People's SAARC is a regional civil society platform aiming to forge broad-based people's movements and alliances in the SAARC region in order to present a unified and consolidated people's agenda and alternatives to the official SAARC. One of its key activities is mass regional mobilisation including people's assembly in the official host country of the regular SAARC summit. With regard to the forthcoming 2013 SAARC Summit - Nepal being the designated official host - the respective country processes of the People's SAARC have already kicked off.

Bangladesh

The People's SAARC country process meeting was held on 3 November 2011 in Bangladesh, in order to gather and submit the collective voice and recommendations of Bangladeshi civil society to the 17th SAARC summit to be held in Maldives on 10-11 November.

The meeting was attended by representatives of women's movements, trade unions, teachers' association, NGOs, social movements and concerned citizens. The meeting was coordinated by SAAPE Members Bangladesh Nari Progati Sangha (BNPS) and EquityBD.

Participants of the meeting urged that the leader of South Asia should focus on making South Asia visa-free for the South Asian citizens. Similarly, participants stressed on initiating enhanced cooperation among South Asian countries for the eradication of poverty in region. Participants discussed about the upcoming SAARC summit in Maldives and prepared a brief statement through consensus for incorporation in the memorandum/declaration of the People's SAARC to be conveyed to the official SAARC process.



People's SAARC 2011 Country Process in Nepal

Participants also stressed on effective implementation of the SAFTA (South Asian Free Trade Agreement).

Participants decided to convene a meeting in Dhaka after the summit to discuss and reflect on the summit declaration and outcome document of the governments. Participants agreed to host a special session in the context of South Asia Social Forum (SASF) scheduled on November 18-22, 2011.

The participating eighteen civil society groups were BKF, BDPC, BNPS, BTUC, CDP, CSRL, DCI, EquityBD, IED, KishaniShoba, LDC Watch, Incidin Bangladesh, Nobodhara, OKS, SAAPE, SANGAT, Supro and Voice. Prior to starting the meeting, participant organisations organised a human chain and

rally in front of the National Press Club.

Nepal

The country consultation meeting in Nepal was organised on 4th November 2011 in Kathmandu by the NGO Federation of Nepal. The programme was inaugurated by Hon. Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Government of Nepal, Mr. Narayan Kaji Shrestha.

Representatives from various civil society organisations participated in the discussion which was focused on incorporating important issues to the draft version of recommendations from Nepalese civil society organisations, presented at the beginning of the programme.

The issues related to women, children, indigenous people, human rights, human trafficking, farmers, agriculture, trade, labour market, free movement of South Asian people, free access and movement of media personnel, climate change, climate finance, community forestry, conservation of bio-diversity, and promotion of local governance were discussed and included in the draft recommendations which would be submitted to the official SAARC process. The discussants mainly emphasised in effective implementation of all commitments made by the governments of South Asian countries.

Pakistan

A round-table discussion programme “SAARC: the Journey so far and the Way Ahead” was organised by Pakistani civil society members on 05 November 2011 in Karachi as a People’s SAARC country process. Human rights and peace activists, trade union leaders, student leaders, women and other representatives of civil society participated in the discussion.

Participants expressed their deep concerns over the hegemony inherent in the India-Pakistan-centric discourse which is dominating all interactions at the SAARC level. They demanded the government of Pakistan to end the confusion regarding the Most Favoured Nation (MFN) status to India and complete all the requirements in this regard. Similarly participants also raised the need for common language and free movement of media

personnel in the South Asia region. The meeting stressed the need for increasing people-to-people contact and promoting trade within the region so that more friendly ties between the countries and the people could be established. Participants of the discussion strongly demanded the government for investing in social sector instead of excessive use of national income in war and military expenditure.

A memorandum from the civil society organisations of Pakistan also presented at the programme.

The programme was jointly organised by Pakistan Peace Coalition (PPC), Pakistan Institute of Labour Education and Research (PILER), the Pakistan

Trivandrum, Kerala for a two-day South Asian Assembly under the banner of 'People's Movements Unite South Asia' from 8 to 9 November 2011.

The programme was organised to raise the demands, concerns and voice of Indian civil society. Mr. Mani Shankar Iyer (former Minister and member of the Rajya Sabha) inaugurated the programme and provided historical overview of conflict based on the exploitation of natural resources, which has been the basis of the imperialist hegemony that began with the exploitation of coal and iron in Europe. He also criticised the SAARC bureaucratic processes which has miserably failed to live up to its own ideals and the aspirations of the people. He further emphasised the role of



People's SAARC 2011 Country Process in India

Studies Centre, University of Karachi, and the Arts Council of Pakistan, Karachi.

India

Several people’s organisations and social movement groups of India, gathered at the Mannam Memorial National Club,

civil society movement like the People’s SAARC and interpreted it as a catalytic role in the regional politics of the SAARC countries. Mr. Ashim Roy (trade unionist), Dr. K.N. Panikker (senior historian, writer), Mr. B. M. Kutty (human rights activist), Mr. Babloo Loitongbam (human rights activist), Mr. Sudheer

Kumar (social activist), Mr. Someetharan (film maker from Sri Lanka), Mr. T. Peter (Kerala Independent Fish Workers Association) and other representatives from peasant, labour organisations participated and discussed the issues and way forward for a better South Asia.

Maldives

Due to resource constraints the usual regional mass mobilisation was not possible, like in the past. Nonetheless, a press conference was organised on 8 November 2011 in Maldives to release the final memorandum. The SAAPE Coordinator Dr. Arjun Karki and SAAPE Member Dr. Gopal Krishna Siwakoti were present on behalf of the People's SAARC.

People's SAARC - 2013 Planning Meeting held in India

Members of People's SAARC India and some representatives from Nepal, Pakistan, Bhutan, Maldives, and Afghanistan briefly met on 29 February 2012 in New Delhi for an informal strategy planing of the 2013 People's SAARC process. The meeting reviewed the past People's SAARC Processes and on that basis, discussed the future strategies including necessary preparations.



Dr. Siwakoti and Dr. Karki addressing the Press Conference during People's SAARC 2011, Maldives

The meeting also shared the forthcoming NATO withdrawl in Afghanistan and the recent unconstitutional power-transfer in the Maldives.



People's SAARC Planning Meeting in New Delhi.

People's SAARC Memorandum

People's SAARC – A South Asian Civil Society Platform Presented to the 17th SAARC Summit, Addu City, Maldives 10-11 November 2011

The Context

The seventeenth official SAARC Summit is taking place at a time when South Asian states are beginning to look inwards to realise the region's immense political, economic and diplomatic potentials. This is reflected in a number of initiatives undertaken by the SAARC countries to forge closer alliances to harness these potentials. The recent developments for the resolution of bilateral disputes between SAARC countries including India-Bangladesh, India-Pakistan, Afghanistan-Pakistan, are certainly encouraging and signal the SAARC states' willingness to move beyond the age-old divisions to work with each other as regional partners for the growth and progress of the countries in engagement.

While the agenda of economic and social development might have moved up as a priority item for the SAARC countries, South Asian states, at the same time, continue to veer towards their aspirations for superior military might. This prompts them to scale up their military budget, diverting resources away from developmental goals, thereby compromising the basic living standards of a large section of the region's population. A region that houses 23% of the total world population contributes less than 3 percent to the global GDP and houses 400 million of the world's poor. As a region, South Asia can hardly afford to undertake projects that undermine the well-being and development of its people.

We, at the Peoples' SAARC, a parallel process to the official SAARC aimed at presenting the South Asian civil societies' collective voices on most pressing regional issues, have convened a series of country processes to evolve consensus on the future direction of the SAARC process, and consolidated the outcomes of these country processes into this regional Civil Society Memorandum which is forwarded to the official 17th SAARC Summit process for urgent consideration. We believe the SAARC process should be more pro-people and

committed to eradication of poverty and injustices through regional developmental process.

Some Areas of Hope

As the representative of the civil society of the South Asian states, the People's SAARC sees the official SAARC as a significant process to boost regional development. However, we do underline the need for SAARC to expand its ambit to cover all areas of political, environmental, economic and social spheres of the South Asian region. SAARC must also strengthen its structures to deliver on the aspirations for growth and progress of the people of South Asia.

South Asia has recently registered substantial progress in democratic development. All eight SAARC countries: India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Maldives and Bhutan have elected representatives today. This is a positive development for a region that has come to assume an important position in the world's efforts for global peace and development. We are encouraged to see the recent spate of developments in the bilateral relations of a number of South Asian states. These include the commitment for an extended bilateral cooperation along with improved trade ties between India and Bangladesh; the facilitation of overland transit to Nepal from Bangladesh; the restoration of the dialogue process between Pakistan and India – emphasised by the official machinery as serious and "uninterruptible"; the recent announcement by the two countries to work towards improved trade links, enhanced diplomatic support on a bilateral level at global forums; and the execution of the Afghan Transit Trade along with improved political links between Pakistan and Afghanistan, to name few.

We also welcome the decision by the Government of Pakistan on granting the status of the Most Favoured Nation to India. The decision has wide-ranging benefits that cover both economic and social realms. Apart from the much desired normalisation of trade relations between the two

countries, the GoP's move shall hopefully also pave the way for facilitating greater people-to-people contact which shall contribute in bringing the two nations a few steps closer to the resolution of their outstanding disputes.

The withdrawal of the US troops from Afghanistan – a process that is underway – marks the move towards the closing of a foreign imposed war in the region. The 'war against terror' brought endless miseries to the people of Afghanistan and Pakistan and also altered the dynamics of engagement between South Asian states, pushing the region unnecessarily to adopt a security posture that fuelled regional tensions and conflicts.

We welcome the establishment and functioning of the SAARC University and emphasize that it must specialize on social issues relevant to the quality of life of the majority of our people such as: human rights, basic entitlements, sustainable development, secularism, fair trade, environmental justice and the like.

While there are some positive developments, the region is also bogged down by a series of actions, especially those taken by the states, and events, that bear negatively on the enjoyment of fundamental human rights, including right to life, right to equality and access to and control over basic services. These actions and events seek to hinder and thwart the realisation of the massive potential of the region as a democratic, progressive, economically developed, peaceful and stable society. We express our concern at these developments and point these out as follows to urge the SAARC body and the member governments to address them on a priority basis.

Our Demands

We, the members of social movements, civil society organisations, labour unions, peasant movements, academics, other working people's organisations and women's groups from across South Asia forward the following demands to the heads of the state meeting in Addu City in Maldives for the 17th SAARC Summit on Nov 10-11, 2011:

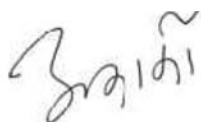
- We call for the South Asian states to recognise the universality of opportunity, and equality in rights and dignity of all people including so far excluded groups and minorities on the basis of ethnicity, gender and the physical/mental ability. Therefore, we urge the SAARC states to recognise the prevalence of patriarchy, masculinity, religious extremism and caste-based discrimination that deny human rights, human dignity, socio-economic and political equality, justice and peace to the millions of marginalised groups and classes, in the SAARC countries.
- We urge the governments to take essential steps to ensure that South Asia maintain its unique civilisation strength of 'unity in diversity'.
- All our countries are suffering from the economic travails of neo-liberal economic policies with rampant poverty marginalising a large section of the population, especially women and the girl child. It is time that the member states develop new paradigms of peaceful, equitable, and sustainable paths of development that truly reflect the economic potential of our countries and meet the needs of the vulnerable section of the society such as children, the disabled, aged and all other marginalised groups.
- In all our countries full enjoyment of human rights has become a critical problem. Generally, the international Human Rights Instruments and Humanitarian Laws are never implemented, even if already ratified. This leads to the flagrant suppression of peoples' movements that challenge the state. All our states must respect universal human rights while managing and allocating resources, addressing internal conflicts or external interstate disputes and all spheres of national life.
- People's movements to protect the forests, lands, the rivers, and other natural resources from which their livelihood is derived are often brutally repressed by the state. Peoples land is acquired for a relatively paltry sum in the name of development, and their rehabilitation is well below international standards. The states must devise a system of checks and balances for its elites who have repeatedly demonstrated the tendency to succumb to the lure of the powerful development giants. We call the SAARC governments to ensure development processes that must be pro-poor people, consultative and consensus driven with human rights as the basic fundamental.
- SAARC countries must ensure the rights of all workers, especially women and Dalit workers in accordance with international standards including ILO conventions, international covenants and national laws. The rights of

indigenous people should be recognised, safeguarded and promoted.

- Fisher peoples' rights to fish in territorial waters be recognised and legally protected through proper mechanisms. Innocent fisher folk incarcerated for wandering into neighbouring, sometimes disputed, territorial waters be immediately released and the presence of deep sea trawlers and foreign vessels should be banned as these are continuously depleting fish stock and pursuing an unsustainable path apart from severely diminishing the catch of the ordinary fisher folk.
- Climate change and ecological degradation have become a threat to the very survival of all life on the planet. Melting of snow in the Himalayas, desertification and sea level rise are the stark phenomena that South Asian states are facing simultaneously. Unfortunately, the South Asian governments have taken no urgent steps towards reversing ecological degradation, the reduction of greenhouse gases, adaptation initiatives, all necessitating more sustainable forms of transport, construction, workers and peasants conditions and mining among others. It is imperative that vast areas of Bangladesh, parts of India and island states in the Indian Ocean are not submerged because of a lack of commitment by the states to address environmental concerns.
- Increasing restrictions by the South Asian states on people-to-people dialogue are highly retrograde. The South Asian states must facilitate people-to-people contact and promote solidarity throughout the region to enable wider sections of the population to interact across countries and regions to explore possibilities of just, peaceful, sustainable and equitable path of development which is also gender just.
- There is a need for alternate regional trade and economic framework that meets the needs and aspirations of small and medium producers and labourers. The SAARC states need to work out fair trade relations within South Asia as a precondition for fair trade relations with the rest of the world. This would also provide a democratic alternative to exploitative and regressive free trade arrangements.
- The 'terror like acts' and 'war on terror' have been serious problems in Afghanistan, Pakistan, India and recently in Sri Lanka. Where these movements involve alienation or deprivation of natural resources, there must be dialogue. We urge the South Asian government to shun military means as a method of countering them. Militarism as a state ideology is a threat to democracy and peaceful dissent.
- The SAARC states must extend recognition of health, education, housing, adequate food, water and energy poverty as critical to maintain basic living standards of the people of the region. Increased and accelerated investment in the social sector by states is essential for a more equitable, peaceful, corruption-free and sustainable society. The billions of dollars spent on 'national defence' not only foster aggressive militarism but also take away scarce resources otherwise available for the investment in social sector and basic human rights promotion.
- The South Asian states must uphold knowledge commons rather than patents which exploit our heritage, markets and people. New attempts in WTO to bring generic drugs into TRIPS must be resisted so that vital medicines for HIV, new strains of Tuberculosis, Malaria, etc., do not become unaffordable. There must be a knowledge commons created in SAARC which are accessible to all people, inclusive of data, proven practices, and science and technology cooperation.
- Food banks also should aim at delivering the essential food grains to the victims of natural calamity through a rapid response mechanism. Remunerative prices must be given to farmers for their produce. The poor must be provided food at subsidised prices. GM seeds should be entirely banned. Agricultural inputs such as seeds, fertilizers and pesticides must be provided at subsidised prices, along with necessary energy. Urgent steps should be taken for the forest dwellers that should have a right to the forest resources, and food and other subsidies in times of drought and other hardships.
- The South Asian states must respect the right to mobility with dignity as a human right. Migrants should be assured of dignity and the right to work as well as physical protection, basic amenities and adequate wages. Survivors of trafficking, especially women and children must be protected. Similarly the rights of individuals and communities subject to forced

displacement, disasters and forced eviction should be protected.

- South Asian Governments and civil society must work together and lead the world in the struggle for climate justice demanding legally enforceable international standards on the lines of and beyond the Kyoto Protocol and not succumb to the machinations of the perpetrators who want to push for accords in place of treaties.
- A monitoring body to regularly audit the compliance of the member states with the benchmarks set to safeguard and institutionalise democracy, human rights, justice, and the rule of law based on the SAARC "Democracy Charter" should be established.
- The long-cherished Regional Human Rights Mechanism should be created without further delay in conformity with the principles of universally accepted human rights standards to protect and promote human rights and social justice of the people in the region.
- An independent Climate Commission should be constituted with a view to promote more effective mitigation and adaptation programme to climate change to ensure environmental protection and sustainable development at the regional level
- The rights of migrant workers and their families as well as refugees should be protected by



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immediately ratifying the UN Convention on Migrant Workers and Rights of their Families-1990 and the Convention on the Status of Refugees-1951 respectively and (barrier) free mobility of people across the region by guaranteeing the notion of "Visa-free South Asia" should be ensured.

- Fully funded national plans to achieve universal health, education, water and sanitation, rights to food and housing, rights to productive employment amongst others as a core part of the constitutional arrangements should be ensured.
- All possible measures to ensure zero tolerance on violence against women should be exhausted and an enabling environment to promote leadership of women from all strata of life in peace-building, security and conflict transformation endeavours should be created.
- Constitutional, legal and administrative framework and effectively implement it to end social anomalies including existing caste/faith based discrimination and all forms of problems of impunity should be guaranteed.
- Last but not the least, the large numbers of the poor and the vulnerable in South Asia need to be freed of poverty and the attendant loss of dignity, social protection and their rights to health, education and productive livelihoods.

Thank you,



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