



*Fighting unitedly against poverty, hunger and injustice in South Asia*

# SAAPE Bulletin

Half-yearly publication of SAAPE (No. 19, September 2016)

## Gender, Poverty and Constitutional Rights: South Asian People's Struggle



Group photo of General Assembly participants

Despite the continuous struggle of women's movements for liberation from gender-based discrimination, women in South Asia are deprived of their fundamental rights to dignity with patriarchal systems impinging every spheres of their lives. Economically, they remain without access to control of resources, rights, and equality. There are uneven level of constitutionally recognised rights that women enjoy in countries of South Asia. However, such rights also do not get automatically implemented in the absence of political will.

In this context, the 5th General Assembly of South Asia Alliance for Poverty Eradication (SAAPE) held from 02-03 September, 2016 at Kathmandu chose "Gender, Poverty and Constitutional Rights" as its principal theme. The speakers and participants discussed the key challenges in South Asia

including fundamentalism, shrinking of civic spaces and violation of human rights.

The General Assembly also discussed on the SAAPE Poverty and Vulnerability Report 2016. Country perspectives on People's SAARC 2016 and preparations for the same were deliberated. Besides, the General Assembly threw light on the progress made so far on different SAAPE campaigns. Lastly, SAAPE's strategic direction for the future was also discussed along with the adoption of Kathmandu Declaration.

Netra Timsina, Regional Coordinator of SAAPE, welcomed the delegates and participants in the inaugural session and highlighted how SAAPE has been continually engaging over the years in strengthening and consolidating the socio-political movements in South Asia.



Netra Timsina, Regional Coordinator of SAAPE highlighting the GA agenda

The delegates from all eight South Asian countries represented peasant organisations, women's movements, trade unions, social movements, environment movements and also included academics, human rights activists and other civil society members.

They deliberated on the issues of gender, poverty and constitutional rights and also shared about the ongoing people's struggles in South Asia. The outcomes of the deliberation would play a vital role to shape SAAPE's strategic direction for 2017-2020.

## Interrelations between Gender, Poverty and Constitution

The keynote speech was presented by Sapana Pradhan Malla, Honourable Justice, Supreme Court of Nepal. She explained how women bear the brunt of larger global economic-political processes that affect poorer economies, such as the increased burden of care-work as a result of the breakdown of state welfare funds following the implementation of structural adjustment policies. Emphasising on the links between the SDGs and constitutionalism and the common rights-based framework between them which bear commitment to ensuring justice, non-discrimination, equality, and liberty. She highlighted the Nepalese constitution as one of the most progressive ones in recent history. Despite challenges in implementation and reservations in recognising citizenship through the mother, the rights of women and marginalised groups have been

widely recognised. The CEDAW framework became an important point of reference in the constitution-making process, especially its language of non-discrimination and equality.

She appreciated SAAPE's poverty report as a credible tool to keep state accountability in check, especially with the critical lens it provides and also how SAAPE could generate pressure to change constitutional rights in a positive direction. She concluded by stressing the importance of the constitution as an effective and powerful tool. Constitutionalism has the potential to encompass both issues of poverty and gender as well as a wide range of concerns regarding inclusion, socio-economic and political justice, and the rights to live a full, dignified and enriching life.

## Key Challenges in South Asia

Speakers from different South Asian countries took the floor to explore the theme. Bandana Rana, Expert Member, United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) deliberated on the "Partnership between CEDAW and Civil Society of South Asia in Promoting Gender Equality". She explained the context in which CEDAW operates to promote gender equality and how it is touted as

the foremost global tool in this aspect. The multiple opportunities for civil society and networks like SAAPE to engage with the convention and to ensure its effective implementation in domestic policy was reiterated.

Another area in which civil society attention is needed is in pushing states to ratify the Optional Protocol to CEDAW.

## People's Struggles against the Rising Fundamentalism in South Asia

Farooq Tariq, M M Akash & Nooria Sultani explored the theme of People's Struggle against the Rising Fundamentalism in South Asia. Speaking on Migration, Fundamentalism, Terrorism in South Asia, Farooq Tariq stressed how religious terrorism has become one of the major challenges in South Asia and how the region has witnessed various instances of mass migrations by persecuted religious minorities. He emphasised on the role of mass working-class alternatives in the shape of trade unions and political parties linked with social movements as the most effective manner to counter religious fundamentalism.

M M Akash spoke on the issue of religious fundamentalism in Bangladesh. He urged civil society organisations to play leading role in countering fundamentalism as repression alone is not likely to produce results conducive to democracy. A possible solution could involve the introduction of religious education and tolerance in the formative schooling years under the subject of moral principles, coupled with socio-cultural and non-repressive movements by civil society.

Deliberating on religious fundamentalism in Afghanistan Nooria Sultani narrated how Afghanistan's experience and struggle with religious fundamentalism has been marked by the horror of copious numbers of civilian deaths. Urging SAAPE to play a meaningful role in combating fundamentalism through several avenues such as ensuring proper monitoring of religious institutions, or of any group preaching fundamentalism and terrorism she emphasised that forums to enable dialogues are useful in clearing misconceptions and the need for regional level research on the causes and roots of terrorism must not be sidelined.

Akhil Ranjan Dutta deliberated on the theme "Shrinking Civic Spaces and Citizen Rights in South Asia." He asserted that civil society networks like SAAPE must differentiate their principles by generating alternate discourses to those of the global financial institutions. Speaking on the attacks on universities and free-thinking in India he stressed on the role of public institutions like universities where such new ideas germinate. Once, such institutions are targeted, the civilisational process gets strangled.



Panelists attending discussion session on Key challenges in South Asia

Dilli Raj Khanal spoke on the lessons from Nepal's constitution-making process providing socio-economic perspectives on the newly promulgated constitution of Nepal and its progressive nature grounded on the three principles - equity, inclusiveness and self-reliance. He also addressed the problems with its implementation. According to him, networks like SAAPE should monitor the deviations and wrongful practices of actors who wish to maintain status-quo tendencies by neglecting the implementation of constitutional rights.

Udan Fernando deliberated on the theme "Citizen Rights of Conflict Affected People in the Countries in Post Conflict: People's Struggles for Peace and Democracy in Sri Lanka." He explained how reconciliation remains an ongoing challenge in the Sri Lanka and how SAAPE can contribute by shifting attention towards discussion on structural causes of poverty by bringing poverty back into the macro political discussions within the discourse of post-war recovery.

The final speaker in this panel, Ahmed Nizam, deliberated on the theme "Autocratic Regimes and Violations of Human rights in South Asia: People's struggle in Maldives." The negative developments that thwart pro-democratic values signal a return to the long experience with one-party totalitarian rule and throw draconian obstacles in the face of peoples' struggle for good governance and democracy in the Maldives.

## SAAPE Poverty and Vulnerability Report 2016

Shobha Raghuram moderated the session while Farooq Tariq and Deepa KS presented. Shobha termed the report as a history of time and explained the process followed in crafting the Poverty Report and its long continuum. She reported how the credibility of the report and the authenticity of the work find a great space in the debates that are happening today regarding the role of state, market and civil society and particularly post-1991 period. The poverty report serves as the historical record of the struggles and the people who have sacrificed their lives for social transformation and also

to ensure that this report stands as a reminder that economics hasn't actually changed the unequal order that we have to live with today. It serves as the record of our times, a chronicle of peoples struggle to change the situation around them and their attempts to transform society. It also serves as an eye opener for the people who cannot travel within the region due to visa or other issues. While making a critical assessment of the report, Farooq Tariq said that the present report aimed to have a intriguing perspective from the ground.



He explained how poverty for SAAPE is not a limited term but a wider perspective. Implementation of the neo-liberal agenda has almost the same effect in all the countries: reduction of labour processes, less social security, contract system, new restrictions on trade unions and other right to associations by the states. These issues are all included under the



Deepa K. S. presenting Progress Report on SAAPE Poverty Report 2016

theme of how neo-liberalism affected the organised labour, informal sectors, religious minorities, working-class women, etc.

Deepa K S while presenting the contents of the report explained how tradition, continuity and change have

always propelled the poverty report. The team was deliberately careful in preserving the fundamental essence of SAAPE that comes through its ideals, its unique modus operandi, and nature of its work through campaigns as the voice of South Asian people and concomitantly what could be reemphasised differently with a great care. The narratives included in the report provide a sort of completion to the mainstream narratives including state-sponsored reports and multi-governmental reports by critiquing their reports and taking the same issues forward, or by bringing in other aspects that remain invisible like empowerment, poverty and inclusiveness. Hence, the report is both the completion of the narration of history as well as critiquing what was lacking in the state-sponsored or multi-governmental bureaucratic reports, as she called. The report also believes that along with a new language and new method of resistance, new forms of solidarity is the need of the hour for trade unions, peasant movements, social movements and environmental



Farooq Tariq sharing Progress Report on SAAPE Poverty Report 2016

movements. This was followed by a lively plenary discussion with M M Akash, Akhil Ranjan Dutta, Udan Fernando and others about the definitions of poverty, indicators, role of judiciary in enacting pro-poor legislations, alternative dimensions of the report, etc. Deepa and Shobha responded by admitting that the report is in progress and is in evolving process and they pledged to accommodate the recommendations and suggestions floated by the participants during the floor discussion. They invited impressions and reflections on the report. For them, the report is the reflection of real struggle in the ground.

## People's SAARC

The session was moderated by Sarba Raj Khadka and presentations were made by Farooq Tariq and Shujauddin Qureshi. The session basically discussed about the preparations of People's SAARC and its role as a regional convergence. The issue of the Indian state boycotting the 19<sup>th</sup> SAARC summit and non-granting of visas by the Pakistani state was also discussed.

The speakers stressed on the continuity of the process. Perspectives from regional secretariat which SAAPE facilitates was also shared.

The secretariat was requested to document suggestions that have been floated in the GA and share it with the host group as well as the Regional Steering Committee, who in consultation makes the final decision.



Shujauddin Qureshi sharing updates of People's SAARC 2016 preparatory works in Pakistan

## SAAPE Process and Campaigns



Nalini Rathnarajah moderating the Session

This session was moderated by Nalini Rathnarajah, while Praman Adhikari presented the activity plan.

Nalini Rathnarajah reported about the core committee decisions and plans about activities which are as follows:

- to publish poverty report by the end of November;
- to organise the General Assembly;
- to organise core-committee meetings every six months;
- to facilitate the organising of People's SAARC regional convergence in Pakistan;
- to organise regional workshop of critical think tanks;
- to co-ordinate three major campaigns-- Food Sovereignty, Women Rights and Social Protection.

During discussions Shobha Raghuram stressed that a lot of work is being done on the field but it is simply not being communicated and may disappear. These could range from policy work, campaigns ratification of bills or working with national or local governments. Lack of communication make our engagements or work at the field level invisible. SAAPE should focus on improving communications between the secretariat and the campaign groups.

Secondly, there is a need to look into the field experiences and document it bring it to a wider context. Rokeya Kabir emphasised on the differences between SAAPE's and other funded-

NGOs work. Raz Mohd Dalili reported about the vibrant process in Afghanistan and their future plans. Balram Banskota, M M Akash, Mohd Abdul Matin, Sushovan Dhar, Herman Kumara, Akhil Ranjan Dutta, Nalini Rathnarajah, Udán Fernando, Sharmila Karki, Sarba Raj Khadka, Netra Timsina and others contributed to the discussion.

The session was summed up with the following important reflections.

- The relevance of the models and approaches that SAAPE has adopted for the last many years.
- An assessment about the campaigns and focal groups in the national and regional level. Their levels of interest to subscribe or engage with the



Praman Adhikari reporting from the Secretariat

political position that SAAPE upholds.

- SAAPE is not a separate entity but, a common platform. It is not a registered body as it wants to remain a platform and retain its political autonomy.

## SAAPE Structure

### Core Committee and Advisors

Deliberations regarding the role of members and advisors, and changes in membership of SAAPE's Core Committee were facilitated and the following decisions were reached:

- New members for the Core Committee must come from consensus during the country-process through consultation by December 2016. The Core Committee would have 16 members, 8 men and 8 women. Selection and approval of members must be mandated by the General Assembly. The key to be followed during the selection process is that of retaining one old member and welcoming one new member from each country in the Core Committee. Continuity and change - whereby an experienced member trains a new member of the

Core Committee - was stressed. A list of potential Core Committee members from each country was requested.

- For campaign groups, a mandate was taken on the decision to map and assess potential campaign focal members and campaign partners.
- The advisory committee members will be converted into invitee advisors; their consultation will be sought as deemed necessary. A rotation system for advisory position will be put in place. The balance of gender ratio of invitee advisors will also be recognised.
- For the next three years, 2017-2020, SAAPE Campaign groups will focus on land and resource grab; promotion of women's rights/ unconditional ratification of CEDAW; and social protection.

## Strategic Direction 2017-2020

Babu Mathew revisited the core principles and visions of SAAPE reflecting on the enriching and insightful deliberations of the GA which captured SAAPE's process of the past 15 years. He asserted SAAPE's position as an independent civil society and not a donor-driven organisation and insisted that it must continue to retain its credibility through non-partisan affiliations. In going ahead, SAAPE must continue to be mindful of the uniqueness of each country however, despite this politico-cultural specificity, the common vision, goals and aspiration shared by the network must not be lost to these singularities. The three-day General Assembly provided insights into the common problems the region battles with, especially with regard to constitutionalism and its relation to fundamentalism. Secondly, the deliberations urged SAAPE to revisit its ideological stance on the economics and polity in the region, and finally laid the groundwork for formulating possible strategies to meet its objective as a network.

During this General Assembly an outstanding reality that made its presence felt was uncharacteristic in the previous

general assemblies; the recognition that fundamentalism of one kind or another plagues all parts of South Asia. Based on these deliberations, SAAPE would collectively find the terminology or expression to capture the idea of fundamentalism in a manner that is valid for the whole of South Asia even though it is not manifested in the same way everywhere. SAAPE as a network aims to study the manifestations of fundamentalism further, and members would familiarise themselves with the histories of the other countries in the region. A priority area for SAAPE is to identify areas of discussion and engage with experts on fundamentalism to grasp the complete picture of the issue.

This would be driven by the agenda to reinforce secularism, to approach secularism as a constitutional goal, again taking notes from the recent example of Nepal's journey from a Hindu Kingdom to a secular country. SAAPE would reflect on an approach that reaches beyond campaigning for the next three years, introspect to re-conceptualise in which direction it is to head and strengthen its association with and participation in social movements.



As far as theoretical questions are concerned, the presentation on CEDAW lent insight into a number of areas where SAAPE finds a space to campaign. In relation to human rights campaign, there is a national human rights framework and an international human rights framework. The latter would be used to criticise the former and vice-versa. Supporting certain constitutional provisions or critiquing certain provisions is very important for SAAPE's work, both of which would again be coupled with evidence-based research in order to demand policy change.

Finally, new techniques of reaching people need to be identified. Existing powerful campaigns need to be located and taken on board. Effective and momentous campaigns are likely to work with SAAPE only if it has something unique to offer, and only when it is able to increase its visibility on a regional level as a network committed to social movements. Between the GA and the adoption of new plans, SAAPE's specialisation as a regional level network needs to be revisited, revised and reconstructed for efficiency.

**Comments:**

- SAAPE must be mindful of what kind of civil society organisations to be associated with and what kind of



Babu Mathew sharing his thoughts on SAAPE's Strategic Direction 2017-2020

funding is to be sought.

- SAAPE can provide a platform to pressurise the governments regarding the implementation of the constitution.
- The need to coalesce social movements across the region was reiterated.

## Interrelations between Gender, Poverty and Constitution

**- Sapana Pradhan Malla**

*Hon'ble Justice, Supreme Court of Nepal and legal activist*



The theme of the General Assembly 'Gender, Poverty and Constitutionalism' allude to deeply integrated and contextually relevant concepts. The theme of the GA directly implicates the notion of the feminisation of poverty, wherein the experience of poverty is in itself disparate between men and women. Women bear the brunt of larger global economic-political processes that effect poorer economies, such as the increased burden of care-work as a result of the breakdown of state welfare funds following the implementation of structural adjustment policies. Further, gender is connected to the SDGs since gender equality as an issue intersects with goals 1-17 of the SDGs. The links between the SDGs and constitutionalism become clear once we explore the common rights-based framework between them, which bear commitment to ensuring justice, non-discrimination, equality, and liberty.

Instances from my own practice as a cause-lawyer make apparent the unforbearing nexus of poverty, gender and violence. Domestic violence is both a cause and consequence of poverty. This inter-linkage can be illustrated through its operation in court where female victims of domestic violence are unable to tell the truth and become hostile because of the fear of becoming homeless. At the same time, domestic violence generally emanates from the poorest families. Mechanisms must be put in place that empower women to tell the truth about

their experiences without fearing for their lives.

Nepal's constitution is one of the most progressive constitutions in recent history. Despite challenges in implementation and reservations in recognising citizenship through the mother, the rights of women and marginalised groups have been widely recognised. The constitution has mechanisms to ensure socio-economic rights, the right to appropriate housing, right to food security and right to social security. Moreover, the constitution recognises pluralism through the language of diversity as central to democracy and rule of law. Although Nepal follows a unified code based on Hinduism, the constitution makes provisions to recognise all traditions, laws and customs and simultaneously, regards any discriminatory religious law as exploitative. Monthly social security allowances have been guaranteed to marginalised and vulnerable groups such as senior citizens, Dalits, and people with disabilities. Though the amount does not add up to much, the sense of entitlement felt by senior citizens when collecting their allowances is a positive reflection of constitutionalism. A wide range of definitions of poverty were explored during the constitution making process. The human capabilities approach, social inclusion and representation were however deemed best suited to measure poverty in South Asia, which became indicators that formed the framework during Nepal's constitution drafting process.

Inclusion constitutes a central organising principle in the constitution, whereby the state has made provisions that commits to monitoring the process of inclusion. Nevertheless, the issue of inclusion has remained contentious in Nepal wherein it is not only regarded as a gateway to opportunities but also a threat. However, a missing element that remained was intersectionality, which led to challenges in understanding the multilayered inequalities and discrimination within the clusters of caste, class, ethnicity and geographical areas. For example, divisions based on class within the Tharu or Brahmin castes are often not appropriately acknowledged.

With regard to formulating a gender-inclusive constitution, the CEDAW framework became an important point of reference in the constitution-making process, especially its language of non-discrimination and equality. It provided guidance in differentiating between non-discrimination and equality. The principles of non-discrimination are used to locate institutional barriers but equality requires the use of corrective measures through the substantive model of equality. CEDAW's framework was used as a guide to draft progressive rights particular to women, examples of which are the recognition of reproductive rights as a fundamental right and non-discrimination based on marital status and pregnancy, 33 percent reservation in the lower house and 40 percent in the local government, and reservations either in the positions of President or Vice-President, Speaker or Deputy-Speaker. Two areas in which inclusive framework has been put into effect but proportional representation has not been granted are the judiciary and political parties. Further, general recommendation 30 of the convention was used to formulate laws on women's migration and ensure safe migration. The CEDAW framework and the language it provides, allows great negotiating power for those working to ensure gender justice through gender-inclusiveness.

SAAPE's poverty report is a credible tool to keep state accountability in check, especially with the critical lens it provides. Input from research done during the course of preparing the report on strategies to deal with the barriers in

eradicating poverty can lend much needed negotiating power for civil society. There are several areas where SAAPE can generate pressure to change constitutional rights in a positive direction. For example, debates about accountability focus exclusively on the public sphere, neglecting the private sector altogether.

The fact that most opportunities are concentrated in the private sphere calls for generating more pressure on the private sphere to become accountable. The linkages of business and human rights are becoming increasingly recognised as evident in the appointment of a Rapporteur on Business and Human Rights. However, efforts from the business sectors need to go beyond the practice of corporate social responsibility and must address human rights issues of workers. The injustice experienced by the victims of the Bhopal disaster is an example of human rights violation caused by a disregard for human life on the part of the corporate sector. Civil society can provide the much needed voice to push for accountability from the private sectors as it has done from public sectors.

Other areas in which civil society networks such as SAAPE can contribute are assessments of the use of mechanisms that we are party to as member states such as the Optional Protocol within ICSCR, as well as other opportunities provided by human rights instrument to engage in constructive dialogue with the state. The question is how to use SAAPE's report to encompass this issue. A persistently neglected aspect of advocacy by civil society is related to treaties and jurisprudence, which in most post-colonial countries is still based on colonial framework. It takes a dualist approach to national and international law, which is where the problems with implementation of international laws and treaties are located.

In closing, the importance of the constitution as an effective and powerful tool must be reiterated. Constitutionalism has the potential to encompass both issues of poverty and gender as well as a wide range of concerns regarding inclusion, socio-economic and political justice, and the rights to live a full, dignified and enriching life.

## Partnership between CEDAW and Civil Society of South Asia in Promoting Gender Equality

**- Bandana Rana**

*Expert member at CEDAW*



The facts and figures of gender violence in South Asia are persistent and staggering. In South Asia, more women die during child birth than in any other part of the world, except sub-Saharan Africa. Almost fifty per cent women report physical violence by intimate partners. Only 20 per cent of women in South Asia are in non-agricultural wage employment, the lowest figure in the world. Ownership of farmland is negligible even though fifty per cent of the region's women are employed in agriculture. Gender inequality with regard to wages remain persistent with women earning 70-90 per cent less than men. Discrimination against women begins right from conception as

evident by the increasing rates of female foeticide. Dowry deaths are responsible for the deaths of thousands of women in addition to alarming rates of honor crimes and acid attacks. Women are vulnerable to early pregnancy owing to the continued practice of child marriage.

These statistics outline the context in which CEDAW operates to promote gender equality. It is touted as the foremost global tool in the work on gender equality. It instigates domestic policy change by influencing domestic legal processes, altering national policy agenda and legitimising political mobilisation.

The convention serves two purposes; i) it defines and identifies public and private practices that reinforce gender inequality and ii) ratifying states are required to take active measures to guarantee women enjoy rights granted to them through CEDAW. Thus it acts as a binding agreement to ensure that women are treated as equal citizens to men across a range of civil, political and social rights. As well as possessing the strength of a human rights treaty, the specific significance of CEDAW goes beyond conventional approaches, working to unravel the deeply embedded structural and dynamic processes that underpin the various manifestations of inequality. As a treaty, it demands practical realisation of rights and compels state parties to eliminate all forms of discrimination through law, policy practice or custom. CEDAW can be taken as a road map to ensure substantive equality, which is equality not limited to law and policy but practical manifestations of these in public and private domain.

There is much cynicism surrounding the convention, which mainly stems from the failure of states to implement its principles as part of the domestic legislation. A discussion of the major loopholes in the implementation of CEDAW policies despite ratification by all South Asian countries could yield insight into civil society's collective role in harmonising the potential of CEDAW in their respective countries. Implementation of CEDAW is hindered by reservations to article 2 (a country's obligation to pursue without delay policies to end all discrimination against women) and article 16 (a country's obligation to end discrimination within family and marriage relations). Considering that fact that these two commitments are responsible for rendering CEDAW a landmark for women's rights, the CEDAW committee regards reservations to these two articles as incompatible with the spirit of the convention. The

civil society can work towards withdrawing those reservations that are in effect in almost fifty percent of South Asian countries, particularly that pertaining to family code and discrimination. Family law systematically denies the same basic citizenship rights to women as men by limiting their ability to select a career, own property and make decisions regarding children from birth to death. Family law disbars the rule of law from entering the private domain and thereby from effectively reaching out to victims of domestic violence. There are multiple opportunities for civil society and networks like SAAPE to engage with the convention and to ensure its effective implementation in domestic policy. First, the network needs to take a strong stance on withdrawing the reservations to articles of the convention. Second, it can present comments on government papers during each week of the deliberations of the CEDAW committee. Additionally, the committee is also open to alternate or shadow reports from civil society. The committee regards this as an opportunity to gather grounded and critical knowledge which then guides the concluding comments and observations as well as implementation timelines provided to each member state. Another space for civil society networks may be in the drafting of general recommendations. The CEDAW committee started drafting general recommendations in urgent emerging and cross-cutting themes, some of which were issues not interpreted in the article but which were issues that member states were encouraged to include in their reporting mechanisms. Briefing papers on matters of serious concern are also resourceful ways to improve implementation of the convention, as these could be distributed directly to committee members or sent electronically. My own experience as a civil society activist in pushing the CEDAW committee to adopt general recommendation 30 (on women, peace and security) may provide a clear picture of the process.

## People's Struggles against the Rising Fundamentalism in Afghanistan

- Nooria Sultani

*Equality for Peace and Democracy (EPD), Kabul, Afghanistan*



Fundamentalism is closely associated with experiences of disenchantment and disillusionment with the dominant economic and political ideology of capitalism or socialism, the roots of which are present in all societies. Afghanistan's experience and struggle with religious fundamentalism has been marked by the horror of copious numbers of civilian deaths. Just between January and August 2016, there have been more than 17 suicide attacks out of which 246 deaths and 819 serious injuries. The major causes for the evolution of extremist ideologies are illiteracy or the partial and doctrine-based education in madrasas, and sectarian conflict and tension brewing from discontent with the government.

The state has dealt with fundamentalist attacks and threats by investing more and more in defense sectors, thereby ignoring structural causes such as poverty. Socio-cultural and economic reform and programs for the reduction of poverty have been neglected in favor of strategies and tactics related to defense. An example that illustrates the massively disproportionate budget allocation between the two sectors is revealed by the

1.598 billion for the Ministry of Defense, for the defense of civilians annually relative to areas of reform, especially pertaining to poverty reduction. This clearly shows that the state's attention is misplaced and needs to be brought back to the importance of investing in human development rather than defense projects.

With regard to the role of SAAPE in combating fundamentalism, several avenues can be explored such as ensuring proper monitoring of religious institutions, or of any group preaching fundamentalism and terrorism. Protecting the youth as a social group against the traps of fundamentalist ideology is extremely important. Forums to enable dialogue such as consortiums and gatherings are useful in clearing misconceptions and the need for regional level research on the causes and roots of terrorism must not be sidelined. Finally, the network must openly and consistently condemn the financing and sponsoring of terrorists groups, and thus fundamentalist ideologies.



We started by initiating a dialogue through hearings and plenary discussions on the cross cutting issues of women, peace and security at important UN meetings, where we invited CEDAW committee members. As a result of our advocacy coupled with submissions of comments from UN agencies and NGOs we were able to convince the committee to adopt recommendation 30. This is directly related to increasing the accountability of member states in that it obligates member states to include the issue of women peace and security in their reporting to the convention. Another area in which civil society attention is needed is in pushing states to ratify the Optional Protocol to CEDAW. This gender-specific international complaint procedure has only been ratified by Nepal, Maldives and Sri Lanka in this region. This convention has two parts: the communication procedure and the inquiry procedure. Under the communications procedure, groups of women can file a complaint directly to the committee in confidence. Through the inquiry procedure, the committee can launch an inquiry

into a certain women rights issue in any country that has ratified the protocol. SAAPE must work to promote the Optional Protocol by all states in the region. CEDAW is a dynamic tool for advancing women's human rights and to end gender-based discrimination. Civil society possess a critical role as citizens and advocates, as watchdogs and as active participants in ensuring that governments fulfill all its promises to women and that women claim those rights. Gender equality and empowerment are not merely a part of development but rather constitute its core elements. The elimination of poverty cannot be foreseen without gender equality. The realisation of better lives for women, whether through access to education, healthcare and technology or the control of resources, lands and markets and roles of breadwinners, peace builders and leaders are part of the process of poverty eradication. In closing, to effect real change, I encourage everybody, including men in all realms of life to feel a sense of ownership to the issue of women's rights by internalising the principles that CEDAW stands for.

## Citizen Rights of Conflict Affected People in the Countries in Post Conflict: People's Struggles for Peace and Democracy in Sri Lanka

- Udan Fernando

*Center for Poverty Analysis (CEPA), Sri Lanka*



The end of the nearly thirty-year Sri Lankan civil war in 2009 has not necessarily meant the end of the conflict. Resettlement of internally displaced persons (IDPs), the heavy militarisation of the Northern and Eastern regions of the country, land-grabbing by the military for personal ventures and the constricted civic spaces by military and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) militants were immediate challenges after the war. Though resettlement projects have largely been put into effect, demilitarisation remains a persistent challenge as the military continue to occupy strategic positions in the North and East.

Reconciliation remains an ongoing challenge in the Sri Lanka. The road to reconciliation has been a central preoccupation and addressed under the framework of transitional justice. The four aspects to transitional justice are i) truth-seeking ii) accountability from militants and government to civilians iii) reparation/compensation to communities, localities and people iv) non-recurrence. Under the new political establishment since 2015, the democratic spirit and political stability in Sri Lanka has somewhat been revived and reclaimed, allowing certain practical realisation to the four aspects of transitional justice. The positive milestones in seeking transitional justice so far have been setting up the Ministry of National Dialogue, Languages and Co-existence, the Office of National Unity and Reconciliation under the purview of the President, the task force on reconciliation under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Office of the Missing Persons. In the present context, transitional justice in

Sri Lanka has also received a high degree of attention from the international community. However, we must be mindful whether people and communities are critically engaged in dialogues and discourses about post-war reconciliation. Most civil society members who represent the common people have now become a part of the government processes, either as part of the task force or related ministries. Although in some ways this may lend an upper hand to the agenda of civil society, there is great risk of civil society becoming co-opted into the government. Therefore, civil society must take caution to maintain their independent stance and ability to represent the voice of the people. Post-war reconciliation and recovery involve other pertinent aspects: that of poverty and gender. Even though statistics show that between 2002 and 2012 the poverty level has decreased from 22 per cent to 6.7 per cent, there are disparities in poverty rate from region to region all across the country. As far as gender is concerned, one of the main demographics that need attention in the post-war recovery are the expanding number of female-headed households, whose protection various organisations have been working towards.

The post-war recovery in Sri Lanka has focused heavily on political process and neglected the structural causes of poverty. With respect to SAAPE's responsibility areas, the network can contribute by shifting attention towards discussion on structural causes of poverty by bringing poverty back into the macro political discussions within the discourse of post-war recovery.

# Migration, Fundamentalism, Terrorism in South Asia

- **Farooq Tariq**

*Pakistan Kissan Rabita Committee (PKRC)  
SAAPE Core Committee Member*



Religious terrorism has become one of the major challenges for most of the countries in Asia, particularly in South and West Asia. It has resulted in a seemingly nonstop series of incidents where ordinary citizens are killed on daily basis. On the 1 July 2016, after an 11-hour-long hostage situation, 20 hostages were killed in a restaurant packed with foreigners in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Nine of them were Italian, seven Japanese, one US citizen and an Indian. The responsibility for the barbaric act was claimed by the so-called Islamic State. The incident is a manifestation of the international character of the threat posed by Islamic religious fundamentalists. Over the course of 20th century, Islamic fundamentalism has emerged as the most serious threat to democratic values, peace and security in most of the Asian countries. In Pakistan, the menace of terrorism, in particular terrorism of the religious kind, has spread throughout the length and breadth of the country. There are people and groups who extend direct or indirect support to the terrorist activities of the Taliban and its ilk in the name of religion. Violence has become a norm and religion is routinely used to silence voices of reason and compassion. The society has taken a turn towards the right-wing.

In India, attacks by fanatic Hindu fundamentalists on minorities are becoming increasingly common. As part of its campaign to spread its reactionary political ideology to all of the country, the governing fascist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is patronising communal violence and promoting communal polarisation. For quite some time now, Afghanistan has been embroiled in conflict involving religious terrorist organisation and a weak government supported by US imperialism. Suicide attacks have become a norm. The strategy of the NATO forces has not resulted in peace and security in Afghanistan. The influence of the Taliban remains intact despite the killings of some of its top leaders in US drone strikes. Daish's spectacular growth in West Asia has resulted in some of the most barbaric acts of terrorism witnessed in history. The so-called Islamic State has emerged as the most dangerous religious terrorist organisation in the region. It has taken over parts of Iraq and Syria and now controls or can operate with impunity in a great stretch of territory in Western Iraq and Eastern Syria, making it militarily the most successful jihadi movement ever. It has the resources at its disposal to organise terrorist activities across the globe.

The tactical differences among Western countries in dealing with Daish have resulted in new contradictions. The Syrian

government, supported by Russian Federation, is on for an all-out bombing campaign, reducing to rubble various towns under Daish control. Mass migration of people out of these conflict zones has led to an unprecedented refugee crisis and taken the miseries of the affected people to a whole different level. This state of affairs has shattered all the established relations among nations throughout Asia and Europe. The whole project of European Union is under threat amid differing strategies to deal with the issue of migrations and border controls.

Migration of people from zones affected by religious conflict is not just confined to Western Asia. South Asia has witnessed various instances of mass migrations by persecuted religious minorities. In Pakistan, scores of Ahmadis, Christians and Hindus have left the country for safer shelters. Over 800,000 people have left their homes in the Federally Administrated Tribal Areas (FATA) linking Pakistan and Afghanistan in the wake of an ongoing military operation since December 2014. Most of these have ended up as internally displaced people (IDPs) and are forced to live in inhumane conditions in refugee camps.

In Pakistan, religious fundamentalism is fighting on several fronts to gain more mass support. They do not spare a single opportunity to promote their "anti India" sentiments, a pillar in developing Islamic religious fundamentalism in the country. Weak civilian governments, littered with neo-liberal agenda, are cornered by mass disconnect to take any decisive action against fundamentalism. The Pakistani state has failed miserably to curb the rise of religious fundamentalism. There is always a soft spot for them. For a long time, they were encouraged by the state as a second line of security. The security paradigm meant that an anti-India enmity was the core purpose of state patronage. The process of Islamisation was accelerated by military dictator ZiaulHaq, with the full support of US imperialism. Apart from creating and supporting jihadist groups for decades, the state and military with the financial and political assistance of imperial power has indoctrinated millions with conservative Islamic ideology for the purpose of safeguarding its strategic interests. What is religious fundamentalism? "Essentially the term fundamentalism suggests going back to the basic texts and reproducing as closely as possible the laws and institutions found then. It has also come to imply a dogmatic adherence to traditions, orthodoxy, inflexibility and a rejection of modern society, intellectual innovation and attempts to create a 'golden era'.

Islamic fundamentalists have exploited the dream of the 'golden era of Islam', in poverty stricken, economically backward Muslim countries through the local "mullahs".

Religious fundamentalists are not an anti-imperialist force. They are not a class-based social set up. They are new kind of neo-fascist groups. Opposing imperialism does and should not mean an alliance with the religious fanatics, or vice versa. Fundamentalism finds its roots in the backwardness of the society, social deprivation, a low level of consciousness, poverty and ignorance. To sum up, it can be said that religious fundamentalists are against democracy, pluralism, religious toleration, and free speech. They fear of being annihilated by secular modernity. Religious fundamentalists are a new kind of fascists in the making. This phenomenon now dominant is the assertion of fascist currents with religious references (and no longer the triptych "people/state, race, nation"). They appear in all the "great" religions (Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism and so on). They now pose a considerable threat in countries like India or Sri Lanka. The Muslim world thus does not have the monopoly in this field; but it is certainly there that it has taken on a particular international dimension, with "trans-border" movements like Islamic State or the Taliban and networks which are connected more or less formally from Morocco to Indonesia.

The religious fanatic groups are internationalists. They want an Islamic world. They are against democracy and promote Khilafat (kingdom) as a way of governance. They are the most barbaric force recent history has seen in the shape of "Islamic State" and Taliban. There is nothing progressive in their ideology. They are not anti-imperialist but anti-American and anti-West. They must be countered; however, a military

solution to end fundamentalism has a very limited scope with long term negative effects. The US way of fighting back in shape of "war on terror" has failed miserably. Despite all the US initiatives of occupations, wars and creating democratic alternatives, the religious fundamentalists have grown with more force. Fundamentalists are stronger than they were at 9/11, despite the occupation of Afghanistan. In several Muslim countries, strategies to counter religious terrorism have been misused against working class activists and peasantry. Anti terrorist laws are used against opponents to jail them for lives. Progressive groups and social movements are becoming target of these laws. In Pakistan, anti-terrorism laws are very often used against climate change activists, striking workers and peasantry along with political opponents. To effectively curb the growth of religious fundamentalism and religious terrorism, the state must break all links with fanatic groups. The mindset that religious fundamentalists are "our own brothers, our own people, our security line and guarantee against 'Hindus'", "some are bad and some are good" and so on must be changed.

There is no short cut to end religious fundamentalism. There is no military solution. It has to be a political fight with dramatic reforms in education, health and working realities in most Muslim countries. Starting from nationalisation of religious madrassas, it must go on to provide free education, health, residence and transport as one of most effective means to counter fundamentalism. Right-wing ideas are promoting extreme right-wing ideology. A mass working-class alternative in the shape of trade unions and political parties linked with social movements is the most effective manner to counter religious fundamentalism.

## People's Struggles against the Rising Fundamentalism in Bangladesh

- M M Akash

*University of Dhaka, Bangladesh*



Religious fundamentalism stems from the politicisation of religion, which then takes on an anti-democratic, anti-human rights, and dogmatic face, leading to claims that one's own is the most superior religion. The psyche of a religious fundamentalist operates in such a manner that victory is claimed in either dying for their beliefs or succeeding in their agenda.

Though Islamic fundamentalism predominates in Bangladesh, fundamentalist versions of all religions exist. This is evident from the terrors caused by Buddhist, Hindu and Christian fundamentalists in the region and across the globe. A theoretical dimension to understanding religious

fundamentalism can be conceptualised by invoking Gramsci's notion of hegemony. The display of hegemonic control by religious fundamentalists can be observed in the embedding of religious fundamentalist groups in society through the establishment of commercial institutions, educational institutions, business institutions, nurseries, banks, insurance companies, hospitals and so on.

The emergence of religious fundamentalism in Bangladesh can be traced all the way back to the origin of the Jamat-e-Islam party, the defeat of this party during the liberation struggle in 1971, the consequent exile of the chief of the party to Pakistan all the way to the present scenario.



The Jamat-e-Islam characterised a very organised militant force in Bangladesh. In the present context particularly 2009 onwards, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has sanctioned repressive mechanisms to deal with religious fundamentalism that has culminated in bringing war criminals to trial. The five war criminals that have been hung were all members of the Jamat-e-Islam party.

Going forward, there are three possible routes Bangladesh polity could take with regard to tackling religious fundamentalism and in introducing a secular democratic nation. One possibility is that Bangladesh will continue to be an authoritarian “democracy” if Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina keeps with her decision of non-compromise with fundamentalist religious parties, whereby terrorists are captured and put on trial.

A complexity has been added as she faces pressure from US and Europe to compromise with moderate Islam. WikiLeaks sources have uncovered the tactical plans of Jamat-e-Islam since 2010 to reintroduce the party as representing moderate Islam and to continue terrorist activities under this new label. The terrorist atrocities and attempted attacks in Bangladesh have been unfolding at an alarming scale, for instance the failed attempt during a prayer meeting of about 2 million people. Perpetrators have been killed in what is often termed as a ‘crossfire’ between state forces and militants. Although repressive,

it is speculated that this authoritarian democracy will continue so long as the state is able to deliver services in the forms of infrastructural development and welfare policies. Another possibility could be a turn towards democracy and the legitimization of state rule through popular vote. However, reforms for this legitimization needs to take place through the enforcement of correction measures to deal with rampant corruption by the ruling party. At the same time, this would necessitate the defeat of the popular base of BNP, an ally of Jamat-e-Islam. Only then the spirit of the liberation movement manifested in the four fundamental principles and enshrined in the constitution: nationalism, secularism & democracy, socialism is likely to be reinstated in the country.

A third route and worst-case scenario could be the strengthening of Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and launching of movement in the name of democracy with allies as Jamat-e-Islam for the creation of an Islamic upsurge. In this context, NGOs could become major actors in countering fundamentalism as repression alone is not likely to produce results conducive to democracy. A possible solution could involve the introduction of religious education and tolerance in the formative schooling years under the subject of moral principles, coupled with socio-cultural and non-repressive movements by civil society.

## SAAPE Members’ Meeting with the Right Honourable President of Nepal

The founding members and the Core Committee members of SAAPE visited the Office of the President of Nepal on 01 September 2016 at Kathmandu. The Right Honourable President of Nepal, Bidhya Devi Bhandari, actively engaged as a SAAPE member till 2012, organised an informal meeting with the delegation. She warmly welcomed everyone from different South Asian countries and also shared some of her past experiences with SAAPE. Her suggestions to the SAAPE constituency to play an effective role to eradicate poverty in the region were noteworthy. She identified patriarchy as a major challenge in overcoming gender inequality.

Babu Mathew, one of the founding members of



SAAPE Members with Right Honourable President of Nepal

SAAPE, delivered short speech of gratitude to the President representing all SAAPE members.

## Autocratic Regimes and Violations of Human Rights in South Asia: People's Struggle in Maldives

- **Ahmed Nizam,**

*Maldives NGO Federation  
SAAPE Corre Committee Member*



The process of democratisation began in Maldives in 2008 following the promulgation of the new constitution. It ensures all basic rights for the people. With the new government a modern regime was also introduced, which promoted local tourism development as a corrective measure to deal with the widening socio-economic gap. The Tourism Goods and Services Act and Business Profit Act enacted in 2011 under the first democratic rule posed threats to the oligarchy that assumed entitlement and control over the nation's wealth. However, in February 2012 a military coup ousted the democratic government supported by loyalists of the past regime. Since then, political instability has occupied the economic and political landscape of Maldives. Meanwhile, the current government which came to power through elections in 2013 has widely been criticised for alleged misappropriation in the elections.

After just three years of economic transition, the Maldivian democratic transition has come to an abrupt end. All recently introduced democratic rights and practices are being eroded daily. In order to deflect the blame, the current autocratic regime uses anti-colonial rhetoric, illustrated in claims by the President such as - "the international community's admonitions for the country regarding internationally accepted democratic

principles stems from their 'envy' of Maldivians sovereignty and faith." Most of the opposition leaders today are either in jail or exile, which includes the former President, two of the former Vice Presidents and first Defense Minister of the current government, and the Leader of the Pro-Islamic Adhaalath Party. With regard to violations of human rights, two important areas must be discussed. Recently a law was passed by the Maldivian Parliament which was introduced in March 2016 called, the 'Defamation and Freedom of Expression Act', introduced shortly after an audit report revealing the theft of USD 226 million from the state coffers by senior government officials. It criminalises content that is defamatory, breaches social norms and Islamic tenets, and threatens national security. Free speech has been curtailed in this manner, and restrained the jurisdiction of media, civil society and pro-democracy advocates. This Act comes with a penalty of USD 130000 fine if found guilty. Another threat to democracy is posed by the denial of the right to freely hold assemblies without the consent of the police. These negative developments that thwart pro-democratic values signal a return to the long experience of one-party totalitarian rule and throw draconian obstacles in the face of peoples' struggle for good governance and democracy in the Maldives.

## Shrinking Civic Spaces and Citizen Rights in South Asia

- **Akhil Ranjan Dutta**

*Human Rights Activist & Professor at Gauhati University, Assam, India*



Multiple contradictions have emerged as a result of the seemingly similar discourses engaged in by civil society networks and global financial institutions. Their overlap on concepts such as poverty, civil liberties, capacity building and empowerment render urgent the need for civil society networks like SAAPE to differentiate their principles by generating alternate discourses to those of the global financial institutions. Another site of contradictions that requires critical analysis comes in the aftermath of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs), where on the one hand decentralisation of power to grassroots people is vehemently advocated, and on the other, public resources

have become rapidly privatised by corporate institutions under direct patronage of the state.

The deepening nexus between global financial institutions with state institutions, feudal forces and corporate media are a lethal combination that works to compress and minimize civic spaces where creative debates and discourses can be generated. While state 'fundamentalism' and imperialist (market) 'fundamentalism' have been in operation for long, the statist, unconstructive and provocative tendencies of digital media are examples of growing media fundamentalism.

Left leaning activists and intellectuals who are in a position to engage in public discourse and challenge the status quo through alternate discourses are regarded as the real threats to such forms of fundamentalism in India. As a result, the government and also those media increasingly targets public institutions such as universities, a clear example of which is the recent crackdown on JNU and Hyderabad University in India. Discourse on 'nationalism' and 'national unity' is reduced to state's obsession with territoriality devoid of substantive rights of the citizens. Public institutions are crucial locations where critical interrogation of a wide range of subjects can take place inclusive of government policies, discussion of civic and substantive rights, citizenship, and issues of national security etc. Civilisation lives with new and creative ideas, and it is the public institutions like a University where such new ideas germinate. Once, such institutions are targeted, the civilizational process gets stagnated.

SAAPE is a credible platform to facilitate critical and creative civic deliberations in local communities and economies to alter the current state of conflicts over community and natural resources engineered by neo-liberal corporate greed. SAAPE because of its close engagement with local dynamics,

can engage local communities in conversation about their claims or share over common property and resources such as the river or forests. They can help bring attention to the voices of discontent and frustration resulting from forced dispossession of these resources by the government. Villages are increasingly becoming conflict domains rather than civic spaces for deliberations because of common resources being leased out to the contractors etc. in the context of neo-liberal mode of decentralisation and self-governance under which grassroots self-governing institutions like Panchayats in India are required to generate their own revenue and become self-reliant.

The conversion of people from citizens to subject is deeply lamentable. The state has restrained local ownership of resources and increased local communities' dependence on the government by offering token benefits. This lack of ownership has meant that deliberations between citizens regarding the nature of ownership they need and policies they require have been systematically disbarred. In closing, the need to help reclaim peoples' spaces to deliberate for alternate policies especially in local economies cannot be stressed enough.

## Constitutionalism in South Asia: Lessons from Nepal's Constitution- Making Process

- Dilli Raj Khanal

*Former Member of Parliament and National Planning  
Commission & Senior Economist, Nepal*



The speech provided an economic perspective on the newly promulgated constitution of Nepal.

As the preamble itself shows, the New Constitution of Nepal is progressive as it is grounded on the three principles- equity, inclusiveness and self-reliance. These components may be regarded to be contextual to and aligned with main elements of various forms of anti-globalisation struggles that are being mounted across the world against mainstream politics that demand a return to people-centric economic system. One of the main features of the Constitution is that it has assured some fundamental rights such as right to health, education, shelter and food. It has also included employment as one of the fundamental rights. It has further added women's rights, Dalit rights, and other disadvantaged groups' rights within more distinct wider banner of economic rights. There is also an especial provision of social protection which has exclusively been targeted to the marginalised people and vulnerable population. In combine, they entail the progressive orientation of the constitution. The main problem, however, is how to ensure the effective implementation of such provisions laid down in the constitution. The major problem is that still the development course is primarily driven by the neo-liberalism led policies and hence are embedded in the economic and development system. Therefore, how to make the policies

compatible with the spirit of the constitution are major problems for the realisation of the economic, political and social rights that have been engrained in the constitution. One of the problems is that despite such commitments collectively in the constitution, the status quo or regressive political forces oppose steps that are directed to fulfill the commitments made in the constitution. One of the best examples of this is that they vehemently opposed the doubling of social protection benefits and extending its coverage proposed by this fiscal year 2016/17's budget. This illustrates the erupting tensions between political progression and political regression.

There is an urgent need to locate the real beneficiaries and losers of this neoliberal economic and political setup, bringing into notice the plight of certain actors in the market that become marginalised and unaccounted for in the process such as the massive pool of people involved in informal employment. This group of people, without a formal mechanism of guaranteed wages or social protection are placed in an extremely vulnerable position in the market. There is much divergence between these progressive state policies and their implementation. The expertise of networks like SAAPE are needed to monitor the deviations and wrongful practices of actors who wish to maintain status-quo tendencies by neglecting the implementation of constitutional rights.



# Kathmandu Declaration

## South Asia Alliance for Poverty Eradication (SAAPE)

*Fifth General Assembly, 2-3 September 2016*

We, the members of the fifth General Assembly, of SAAPE, having met at Kathmandu, Nepal from 2-3 September, 2016 do hereby, unanimously adopt this declaration.

We have assembled at this fifth General Assembly as South Asians drawn from Afghanistan, Bhutan, India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Maldives and Nepal and have taken note of the emerging situation in our respective countries and in South Asia.

We are deeply disturbed at the all-round degradation in the quality of life that the majority of South Asians are experiencing. We are witnessing increasing deprivations in the human, cultural, economic, social and political spheres of our people.

1. We condemn the warmongering and spawning of trans-border hostilities by South Asian states to suit their sectarian political interests. We condemn the violence, cruelty, arson and looting injected by extraneous thinking into the locality, the class room, the market place or at places of worship.
2. We condemn religious fanaticism and its recourse to terrorist methods in which unarmed civilians are the worst affected. Indeed, these sort of terrorist attacks have become one of the major challenges for most of the countries in South Asia. We unequivocally denounce the use of terror against civilian populations in all forms and circumstances. Today, that means first and foremost we must condemn the bombings, suicide attacks and other means of terrorism. The attack on the Holey Artisan Bakery in Gulshan, Bangladesh; the series of terrorist attacks in Pakistan and Afghanistan; the rise of various religious fundamentalisms across South Asia ; all bear signs of a society where violence has become a norm and religion is routinely used to silence voices of reason and compassion. We demand that states restrain from supporting groups/organisations that attack unarmed civilians for political or other goals.
3. We pledge to carve out a new narrative of radical peace and equality from the ruins of our violent past. All the progressive, secular and democratic forces must come and stand together, under the banner of radical peace, justice and equality for all. Despite all the setbacks of the last few years, the potential growth of a genuinely progressive alternative has not been extinguished and, most importantly, has never been more necessary than now.
4. We also condemn acts of terror when these are perpetrated by our own governments. We strongly denounce the repeated acts of state-terrorism by

South Asian governments. We condemn state-terror pursued by repressive movements, suspending civil liberties, militarising the public space, hardening the Penal Code and rousing religious and racial animosity. Perpetuating a coercive police-state in the guise of so-called anti-terrorism agreements, does not address the root causes. These are only superficial answers dished out to masses and which further contribute to the endless spiral of global terror.

5. We also condemn another form of terrorism – that imposed by neo-liberal economic fundamentalism - in all South Asian countries millions of children go to bed hungry and grow up in acute malnutrition resulting in stunting and underweight, thus affecting their ability to study and grow up. They are forced to live without full citizenships due to increasing income gaps. This is happening after more than two decades of neoliberal growth in all countries of South Asia. The story of hunger, unemployment, disease, illiteracy, homelessness, child labour, gender inequality, discrimination and deprivation, especially against the excluded social groups of our region is writ large in every corner of South Asia. It is our considered opinion and our lived experience that this condition of all round human misery stands further accentuated ever since neo-liberalism invaded our lands. Unfortunately, the ruling class across the region in spite of their mutual differences and hostilities are united in imposing this economic model which has spread inequality, human deprivation, discrimination and caused erosion of the quality of life of the millions.
6. SAAPE stands committed to help appraise the situation of Bhutanese refugees in Nepal. The international community has not been able to significantly contribute to ease this pending problem. There has been no sign of immediate repatriation of the refugees by the Nepal government. The Bhutan government is adamant in refusing the refugees' right to return back to Bhutan.  
  
We also demand that Sri Lankan refugees wanting to stay back in India are given citizenship. The Sri Lanka government must provide security and assistance to those wanting to be in their homeland.
7. We demand 'Rights to Minorities' and 'No to Majoritarianism', 'full citizenship with all entitlements to minorities'. All cases of cross border inceptions where migrants have not been treated well even within legal framework must stop. We also demand full citizenship rights for migrant workers.

8. We demand that People's SAARC and the Official SAARC are linked and exchanges are maintained so that the two bodies do not work in isolation. People's SAARC should be accredited with Observer status to voice grass-roots opinion and work for a better South Asia.
9. Land and natural resource grab in South Asia is a serious issue that has led to the alienation of people from their rights to live and rights to livelihoods. The land grabbing must be stopped urgently. We demand rational utilisation of natural resources and democratic control of communities over them to eradicate poverty. A democratic and ecological regional planning for water and other resources must be ensured as a priority. -
10. We urge states to respect the rights of land locked countries of the region.
11. We urge states to unilaterally repudiate sovereign debts.
12. We realise that the marginalisation and structural exclusion of women from governance, economic and political participation has reinforced the feminisation of poverty; discrimination and violence against women are further hindering women's accession and influence in politics and governance; exclusion of women and other sexual minorities from politics and governance is a violation of fundamental human rights and breaches the spirit of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. We recognise that women's meaningful engagement in politics and governance can contribute in reducing gaps in society and promoting peace and dignity for all. We reconfirm that women's participation in politics and governance is a right. The historical and structural exclusion of women needs to end. All forms of patriarchal authority need to end. Violence against women must have zero tolerance in society.
13. We pledge ourselves in favour of a secular, democratic, humanist order free from discrimination of all kinds, denial of dignity, and artificial boundaries that impede our travel and our friendships, especially at a people to people level. We demand barrier free movement and visa free regime in South Asia. We want a society that guarantees us all Human rights, especially those contained in the international Bill of Rights. We want the South Asian governments to ratify all Human Rights conventions and implement them strictly. The South Asian society can only claim itself democratic when the rights of people at the bottom are guaranteed.
14. We want a people-friendly Rule of Law based political order which is guaranteed by a constitutional arrangement in which Sovereignty rests entirely with the people, with the right to recall corrupt officials along with the machinery that can put such usurpers of power behind bars, following due process of the law.
15. The SAARC charter as well as the agreements must be immediately implemented.
16. We call upon all our friends in the Civil Society and in people friendly political processes to wake up to the needs and aspirations of ordinary people and to strive for a new world order and to make efforts for the same in South Asia. Let us prepare well for the People's SAARC and use the coming opportunity to ascertain the will of the widest sections of the civil society and move forward to defeat the forces of fundamentalism, elite rule, and exploitation, discrimination based on gender or social group affiliations and end all forms of poverty, inequalities & religious fundamentalism.
17. Full social security needs to be guaranteed for all vulnerable populations in South Asian countries by the national governments. Given the rise of inequalities this is mandatory. We must ensure minimum living wage and job-security for all workers in the region.
18. We are aware that catastrophic levels of climate change would make the poor even more vulnerable. To fight that we need to institute sustainable patterns of production and consumption. We demand that governments take affirmative steps and firmly commit to hold global warming below 2° Celsius increase. This would imply phasing out fossil fuels, investments in renewable energy, stopping the loss of biodiversity, and ending overfishing, deforestation, and desertification.
19. While we appreciate the Sustainable Development Goals' affirmation to reduce inequality, combat climate change, strengthen labour rights, eliminate Western agricultural subsidies, etc. we have apprehensions that the efforts to eradicate global poverty only through economic growth, export-oriented models, trade liberalisation, etc. within the existing neo-liberal paradigm would be counter-productive and would perpetuate poverty. We assert that the attainment of SDGs are dependent on structurally changing the current socio-economic model and its institutions.

## SAAPE Bulletin

(No. 19, September 2016)

### Contributions from:

Sushovan Dhar  
 Praman Adhikari  
 Sugat Bhattarai  
 Reshma Shakya  
 Sabhyata Timsina  
 Gaurav Bhattarai



### Published by:

South Asia Alliance for Poverty Eradication (SAAPE)  
 P.O. Box: 8130, 288, Gairidhara Marg,  
 Gairidhara, Kathmandu, Nepal  
 Tel: +977-1-4004985/ 4004976  
 Fax: +977-1-400 4508  
 Email: saape.network@gmail.com  
 Website: www.saape.org