

Proceedings of People's SAARC 2007

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Summary

The events of People's SAARC in Kathmandu were organized from 23 to 25 March 2007 with an objective of strengthening the people's solidarity in South Asia in tune with the vision and perspectives of an alternative model for political, social, economic, and cultural order that must ensure democracy, justice and peace for all in the region. Moreover, it aimed to strengthen people-to-people relationships in the region that would inaugurate a climate to revive the balance and harmony among the people. It should liquidate artificial and inhuman barriers that divide lands, people and minds, transcending all the boundaries.

More than 20,000 people had participated in the event held in Kathmandu alone; it had already created a wave among thousands across the South Asian countries before arriving in Kathmandu. People from all walks of life – peasant organizations, trade unions, women organizations, youth organizations, religious groups, students, forest and water users, dalit organizations, people affected by HIV/AIDS and Sunami, and parliamentarians – participated in the event.

Altogether 21 parallel forums (Peasant Forum - Food Sovereignty / Ecological Agriculture and Farmers Rights, Labor in South Asia and Trade Union Rights, Peace Process in South Asia, Peace and Demilitarization, State Democracy and Governance in South Asia, Women in Peace in South Asia, Inter Religious Issues, Women's Rights in South Asia, Why APPACHA and HIV/AIDS?, Disabled People's Issues, Youth and Politics in South Asia, Children's Rights, Women in Politics, Dalit and Social Inclusion, NRM (Land, Forest and Water) Issues, Issues of Refugees in South Asia, Migration and Human Trafficking, Parliamentary Forum, Education Rights in South Asia, Janajati and Indigenous Issues, War on Seeds, and Himalayan Policy) were organized on 23rd and 24th March. On an average, each session was attended by some 115 participants.

The forums were organized by the concerned federation and network agencies at their own initiative, interests and costs. International delegates participating in the programs bore the expenses by themselves. About 100 delegates from Uttaranchal of India had come by buses (which they had reserved at convenient rates that included the cost of boarding and lodging as well). They had also brought their indigenous musical instruments to play live with the folk songs and poetry.

On 25th March, the third day of the People's SAARC, thousands of people joined in the mass rally that culminated into a mass meeting. The Kathmandu Declaration of People's SAARC was read aloud in front of thousands of people gathered there. The Declaration includes the remarks that cropped up during the discussions held for two days. A number of political and civil society leaders of South Asian region addressed the mass meeting and reiterated their commitment for democracy, justice and peace in the region.

People's SAARC Secretariat

Kathmandu

June 2007

1.0 Introduction

The People's SAARC was jointly organized by the representatives from a number of organizations (such as trade unions, peasants' associations, cultural groups, religious councils, Dalits and indigenous nationalities, disabled people's unions, women's associations, natural resources users' groups, professional organizations, parliamentarians, and media professionals) and South Asian Alliance for Poverty Eradication (SAAPE). The events were held in Kathmandu from 23rd to 25th March, 2007 on the principal theme of "Strengthening South Asian People's Solidarity for Democracy, Justice and Peace." More than 20,000 participants had attended the assembly representing the SAARC countries. A total of 21 parallel sessions and forums were organized on social, political, economic, and cultural issues concerning South Asia, viz. food sovereignty, ecological agriculture, farmers' rights, disability, youths and politics, children's rights, women in politics, Dalits and social inclusion, natural resources management, refugees, migration, human trafficking, parliamentary forums, right to education, and janajatis and indigenous issues. A campaign on "Imagine a New South Asia" was also launched along with the opening program of the People's SAARC.

The assembly began with the inaugural session on 23rd March. It was concluded on 25th March after a huge mass rally followed by public meeting that proclaimed the "Kathmandu Declaration."

1.1 Background

The people of South Asia share contiguous geographical space and similar social and cultural ethos that shape the people's life style, belief system, cultural specialties, material practices and social relationships in the region. Their beliefs and cultural practices are also influenced by one another.

It is unfortunate that the rulers have endeavored to keep their people isolated by erecting walls of suspicion, encouraging hostility and intolerance, feeding disinformation, and prohibiting interaction amongst the peoples of the region in order to maintain their control in the land. This has resulted in fraudulent legitimization of the system of oppression and exploitation. Such system also creates conducive conditions for the proliferation of paranoia, war hysteria, militarization, nuclear weapons, and authoritarian domination of the security forces by adhering to an ultra-nationalist ideology that self-righteously curbs debates, discussions and disagreements on many vital issues.

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) was established at state level with the main objectives to promote welfare of the people of South Asia, to improve their quality of life, to accelerate economic growth, social progress and cultural development in the region, and to provide all individuals an opportunity to live in dignity and to realize their full potential. As such, it was expected to overcome the traditional geographical hostilities, rivalries, and conflicts as well as to create a culture of friendship, mutual trust, understanding, confidence and economic cooperation among the countries of the region.

The people across the region welcomed the formation of SAARC and it aroused their hopes and aspirations for a better South Asia. It was hoped that SAARC would enhance inter-society linkages to build a vibrant socio-political region. A new era of relatively more prosperity and sustainable quality of livelihood was envisaged in the entire region, which would have been humane, egalitarian, secular, democratic, ecologically balanced, and socially just. But, contrary to the expectations.

The SAARC failed to fulfill the promised goals for a better South Asia. Instead, the policies pursued by the ruling classes and parties of the region created conditions of exclusion, marginalization, and denial of rights, justice and democratic freedom to the majority of the people of the region. Consequently, South Asia and its people now stand at very testing time and critical crossroad in the history of the region. The rationale and trustworthiness of its policies and programs have led to surrendering the sovereignty of the people, including their economic, social and cultural rights.

The present crisis calls for a novel response. The regionalization of South Asia and its people, buttressed by the Structural Adjustment Policies (SAP), spells doom on the economic front. It represents a threat to democracy and unleashes the demon of communalism, thus increasing disparity and discrimination. It erodes livelihood opportunities, withdraws existing services and facilities, and encourages militarization and gender violence, bringing forth social and cultural deprivation. This process further reinforces and reconstitutes the older form of exploitative and oppressive structures in innovative forms. All this, of course, is going on in the name of progress, modernization and reform.

Thus, the state level SAARC being unable to fulfill its promises, the idea of People's SAARC was floated almost a decade ago. The South Asian Alliance for Poverty Eradication (SAAPE) and other like-minded organizations had discussed and deliberated in several forums on the idea, concept, nature, role and objectives of the People's SAARC.

1.2 Vision and Objectives of People's SAARC

Vision

People's Solidarity in South Asia must legitimately cherish the vision and perspective of an alternative political, social, economic and cultural system in the region which will do away with all distinctions and discriminations of gender, caste, religion, language and ethnicity; will lead to a situation free from exploitation and oppression; will inaugurate a climate in which each individual will have the opportunity to realize the full development of her/his potential; will restore the balance and harmony with nature; will liquidate the artificial and inhuman barriers that divide lands, collectivities and minds and transcend all boundaries. Such a South Asia must be the goal of the people of this region and of their solidarity.

Objectives

As a process, we feel that the people of South Asia should come together to face the challenge of combating marginalization of vulnerable groups, communal division and fragmentation, and degradation of environment through widespread sharing of ideas and experiences and by forging solidarity across the borders. This may constitute the following pertinent issues.

- **Democracy:** strengthening democracy through human rights and justice.
- **Harmony:** promoting communal harmony and combating religious and ethnic violence.
- **Environment:** maintaining sustainable development and resolving river water issues.
- **Economic:** resisting neo-liberal policies and exploring possible alternatives.
- **Peace:** striving for demilitarization and denuclearization.
- **Gender:** devising a common charter of civil rights

2.0 Inaugural and Thematic Session

2.1 Inauguration

More than 2,200 (700 from other South Asian countries and 1500 from Nepal) had participated in the inaugural session of the Assembly. Honorable Speaker of the Legislative Parliament of Nepal, **Mr. Subash Nemwang** had inaugurated the seminar as the chief guest by lighting a *panas* (traditional lamp). Dr. Arjun Karki, the president of NGO Federation of Nepal and the coordinator of South Asian Alliance for Poverty Eradication (SAAPE) facilitated the session. Dr Karki and senior leaders of various movements in South Asia



addressed the session. The national media highlighted the Assembly proceedings in their regular news bulletins and the daily newspapers published it prominently.

The inauguration ceremony was also attended by the leaders of civil society, human rights movement, trade union movement, peasants' movement, women's movement, and members of parliaments in South Asian countries.

Mrs. Sahana Pradhan, Senior leader of women's movement in Nepal and former Member of Parliament chaired the inaugural session. Special guests at the occasion were: Mr. Daman Nath Dhungana, former Speaker of the House of Representatives of Nepal; Mr. Sundar Lal



Bahuguna, senior leader of natural resources movement of India; Mr. Sarad Fernando, senior civil society leader and leader of Save Rice Movement of Sri Lanka; Miss Fatima, leader of women's rights movement of Maldives; Dr. D.N.S. Dhakal, leader of democracy movement and refugee movement of Bhutan; Professor Babu Mathew, expert in constitutionalism and people's democracy from India; Mr. Karamat Ali, leader of trade union movement of Pakistan; Mr. Pramod Mankim, senior advocate and former M.P. of Bangladesh; Dr Sunil from Sri Lanka; Dr. Sudha Sharma, president of Nepal Medical Council, Mr. Sushil Pyakurel, senior human rights defender of Nepal; Dr. Mathura Prasad Shrestha, senior human rights defender of Nepal; Mr. Santa Lal Mulmi, General Secretary, NGO Federation Nepal; Mr. Kanak Mani Dixit, senior journalist and human rights defender of Nepal; Mr. Gauri Pradhan, president of Human Rights Alliance of Nepal; Mr. Kapil Shrestha, senior human rights defender of Nepal; Mr. Vishwa Kanta Mainali, president of Nepal Bar Association; Mr. Bam Dev Gautam, president of South Asian Peasants' Coalition; Mr. Birendra Pokhrel, president of National Federation of Disabled Nepal; and Mrs. Durga Soph, leader of Dalit Movement in Nepal. More than 700 leading personalities from various movements, media and other like-minded institutions of entire South Asian region were also present at the inaugural session.

Mr. Binod Kayastha, President of Nepal Tarun Dal, warmly welcomed all the participants and guests on behalf of the organizing committee and Nepalese youth. He expressed solidarity to the struggle of South Asian people for democracy, peace and justice. He also expressed Nepalese youths' solidarity for the transformation toward the People's SAARC.

Dr. Arjun Karki briefly outlined the objectives of three-day Assembly and described how SAARC has been unable to fulfill its predetermined goals and commitments in the region, citing the example that about 100 million people go hungry everyday



in the South Asian region. He emphasized the need for a cumulative strategy to address the issues in a concrete manner and remarked that the governments have not yet taken an action and remain very slow to respond to such alarming situation. He criticized the governments for imposing the so-called liberalization, free market economy, and WTO, which merely are different categories of unseen imperialism. He cautioned that such challenges cannot be successfully tackled by a single country acting alone; rather it calls for a sound collective effort at the regional basis. Describing the rationale of the Assembly and the need to fight against such forces, he implored that a strong alliance from among the people of South Asia has to be developed, which would formulate a cohesive strategic plan to ensure the success of People's SAARC in the region.



Addressing during the ceremony, Chief Guest **Subash Nemwang**, Speaker of the Legislative Parliament, stressed on effective implementation of poverty reduction programs to strengthen democracy and to ensure its sustainability. He said that unless the basic problems related to poverty are resolved with utmost sincerity, regressive forces would continue to engage in their ulterior motives against the democratic movement. He said that inexpensive and easy access to and speedy dispensation of justice to all was another factor that affects the smooth functioning of a democratic system. But, we have not been able to win the confidence of the people that our system is geared toward fulfilling their aspirations. He observed that Nepal is engaged in the task of holding election for Constituent Assembly to set up an inclusive and democratic Nepal and that the People's SAARC would prove an important forum to enhance the democratic process in Nepal.

He wished for the success of the Assembly toward promoting democracy, peace and justice in South Asia. And he inaugurated the signature campaign for 'Save Rice Movement' by signing on the special banner.

Speaking at the ceremony, Mr. Karamat Ali of Pakistan thanked the organizing committee for providing him an opportunity to attend the assembly on such crucial issues. He admired the Nepalese people for their continued fight against the

autocratic regime and their success in restoring democracy. He described the prevailing situation of South Asia as though the region has been recolonized due to the mental factors left behind by the colonizers. He criticized the increasing militarization and nuclearization. He appealed to eradicate poverty and abolish the caste system. He described that religion has become a psychological weapon to rule the poor people. It is therefore necessary to fight against religious fundamentalism. He appealed to fight for equality and women's rights and against feudalism, religions fundamentalism, imperialism, and militarization.

Addressing the inaugural ceremony, **Dr. D.N.S. Dhakal** of Bhutan said that one-seventh of the population of Bhutan is still in exile. He reminded that



the pain of a refugee is aggravated as s/he is voiceless, rights less and landless. He hoped that the forum would help raise voices to solve the problems of displaced persons and refugees in the region.

Addressing the session, **Miss. Fatima**, the Representative from Maldives, said that women remain vulnerable in South Asia since the violence against women as defined by the existing legislative frame is not sufficient. Therefore, the rights to livelihood, food and sanitation should be duly incorporated. She requested to support the large number of women who had suffered from Tsunami in this region. She also exhorted to end violence against women.



Speaking at the inaugural ceremony, **Mr. Pramod Mankin**, former Member of Parliament in Bangladesh, said that SAARC is for regional cooperation and it is not to compete for war and



conflict. He observed that SAARC should act as per the people's interests. He demanded for friendly relationship, free movement and free trade amongst the SAARC member states. He further added, "Our heads of states should listen to the voice of this People's SAARC."

Similarly, addressing the session, **Mr. Sharat Fernando**, representative from Sri Lanka, described the rationale behind the People's SAARC, which is to dream about and create a new South Asia. He pointed out the bitter fact of South Asia that 100 million people go hungry everyday. He suggested the remedy of the crisis by citing a very simple example: No bird or animal is hungry, as it does not require permission or payment for food. He further added, "If we create the same situation,



no man will go hungry either; it can be achieved by reviving natural resources and establishing food sovereignty in the region." He urged the poor people to claim their rights on natural resources for their livelihood as well as for recreation.

Speaking at the inaugural ceremony, **Professor Babu Mathew** provided some analytical criticisms about the activities of SAARC in the last two decades. He pointed out that instead of listening



to the people's voices, SAARC followed the Washington Consensus in the name of liberalization, globalization and free market economy. He also criticized the Indian rulers' strategies of militarization and nuclearization in the name of defense by ignoring the voice of indigenous people, Dalits, and those in informal sector. So, half of the Indian population is in constant threat. He criticized the divisive factors of religion. He observed that South Asia is a beautiful place having unity in diversity. He demanded to adopt the

principles of plurality, secularity and majority in the region. He appealed to reject the dogmas of superiority, inferiority, religious faiths, and caste system. Finally, he predicted that along with a New Nepal, a New South Asia would emerge.

Mr. Daman Nath Dhungana, senior human rights defender and former Speaker of the House of Representatives of Nepal, pointed out the need



of reviewing and revisiting the objectives of SAARC, which were developed two decades ago. He said, "We have to rethink what we have achieved within the period of two decades." He also observed that every country of South Asia is presently suffering from both internal as well as external violence, and democratic norms are being undermined in the name of fighting against terrorism. He emphasized the need of People's SAARC to revisit the overall activities and achievements of the (state level) SAARC to create a real new South Asia. Finally, he thanked all the concerned for organizing the Assembly just one week before the inception of the SAARC Summit in Delhi.

Mr. Gauri Pradhan, President of Human Rights Alliance, presented a paper on "*Jana Andolan*, 2006 (People's Movement II) in Nepal" to inform about the movement and share solidarity amongst South Asians. His presentation was designed to address the curiosity of the participants regarding the success of the movement that made the

autocratic monarchy kneel down before the people's power and democracy was restored in the country.



The keynote speaker of the session, **Mr. Sundar Lal Bahuguna** from India, described the challenges and opportunities in South Asia. He described the importance of Nepal as the birthplace



of Lord Buddha who spread the light of knowledge to the World; so he wanted Nepal and Nepalese people be given due importance: "Let's make Nepal as Inspiration Recharge Center." He described hunger, pollution and war as threats of South Asia. He said that denudation of soil and destruction of forests would create devastating crisis in South Asia very soon. He announced to contribute his one-month's pension toward reforestation movement in the Himalayas. He criticized the so-called modern civilization as the father of all pollution.

Mr. Bahuguna further criticized the imperialist designs to sell arms and ammunition to both neighboring countries Pakistan and India where the governments create a fear of war. He requested the South Asian people to overcome the common problem of war psychology. He opined, "We would feel secure if we may create South Asia into a big community where all the people are brothers and sisters." He stressed to follow the ancient South Asian perception, *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*, that is "sisterhood and brotherhood of humankind transcend the sovereignty of nations." Mr. Bahuguna launched "Imagine a New South Asia", a documentary on unified vision of South Asia developed by the organizers as a campaign for democracy, peace and justice in the region.

Presenting the vote of thanks, **Miss Sabitri**, a differently able Nepalese girl, thanked the delegates to the People's SAARC, national and international guests, and all other participants.



She requested to extend support to create pressure on the governments for the ratification of UN Convention on the Rights of Disabled. She thanked from the core of her heart to all the individuals and organizations that have contributed directly or indirectly to make the mega event a success and wished a very pleasant and comfortable stay to all the foreign delegates.



Mrs. Sahana Pradhan, the chairperson of the inaugural ceremony remarked that it was fitting to hold the People's SAARC here in Nepal to mark the people's victory over autocracy. She said, "The People's SAARC would obviously create pressure upon the (state level) SAARC so as to realize that people have power to overthrow any kind of system whether it is monarchism, feudalism or imperialism."

The two songs, entitled *Jana SAARC* and *Rise from Everywhere*, presented in the session made the inaugural ceremony very lively.

2.2 Thematic Sessions organized from 23 to 24 March 2007

Various thematic sessions were organized on the first day immediately after the inaugural session and continued on the second day of the Assembly at the Administrative Staff College, Jawalakhel, Lalitpur. More than 2,000 people across the South Asian countries had participated in the sessions. The

participants included ministers, members of parliament, senior civil society activists, senior human rights defenders, child rights activists, and leaders of various movements involving peasants, women, Dalits, Janajatis, refugees, and trade union workers.

Altogether 21 forums were organized, which were as follows:

1. Peasants' Forum – Food Sovereignty / Ecological Agriculture and Farmers' Rights
2. Labor and Trade Union Rights in South Asia
3. Peace Process in South Asia – Peace and Demilitarization
4. State of Democracy and Governance in South Asia
5. Women for Peace in South Asia
6. Inter-Religious Issues
7. Women's Rights in South Asia
8. Why APPACHA and HIV/AIDS?
9. Disabled People's Issues
10. Youth and Politics in South Asia
11. Child Rights
12. Women in Politics
13. Dalits and Social Inclusion
14. NRM (Land, Forest and Water) Issues
15. Issues of Refugees in South Asia
16. Migration and Human Trafficking
17. Parliamentary Forum
18. Education Rights in South Asia
19. Janajati and Indigenous People's Issues
20. War on Seeds
21. Himalayan Policy

(The outcomes of the sessions are presented in Appendix 1)

3.0 Closing Session, 25th March 2007

3.1 Public Rally

A grand rally was organized before the mass meeting. The rally marched from Shantibatika, Ratnapark to Basantapur Durbar Square. A huge mass of individuals, foreign delegates and different organizations participated in the rally carrying their placards, banners and flags. Some of the participants were also exhibiting their demands as slogans on the placards. The rally was able to draw a good deal of people's attention and most of its activities were covered by the media. The rally converted into a mass meeting when it reached at Basantapur Durbar Square in the heart of the Kathmandu city.

3.2 Mass Meeting at Basantapur

The three-day People's SAARC Assembly had concluded with a huge mass meeting at Basantapur Durbar Square by issuing the *Kathmandu Declaration*.



Participants of closing ceremony

The concluding session of the Assembly was able to draw the attention of all South Asian leaders in order to establish a democratic, peaceful and justifiable South Asian society. Mr. Madav Kumar Nepal, the General Secretary of Nepal Communist Party (Unified Marxist and

Leninist) had presented his views as chief guest. Besides, senior leaders of all principal political parties of Nepal and the leaders of various movements in South Asia gave their valuable observations and suggestions. The meeting was attended by many political leaders, foreign delegates, renowned campaigners of different movements in South Asia, and heads of various national organizations. The local, national and international media also gave high priority to the Assembly and covered its proceedings in their regular publication, broadcast and telecast.

Mrs. Suprava Ghimire, Central Member of Nepali



Guest leaders participating in the closing ceremony

Congress and the president of inter-party network of Nepal, chaired the mass meeting. The special guests on the occasion were: Mr. Minendra Rijal, Central Member of Nepali Congress (Democratic); Mrs. Sarita Giri, Central Member of Nepal Sadbhawana Party; Mr. D.N.S. Dhakal, delegate from Bhutan; Mr. Basudev Nanayaka from Sri Lanka; Mr. Pramod Mankin from Bangladesh; Mr. Mansur Guest leaders participating in the closing ceremony Ahmad from Pakistan; Mr. T.B. Ekanayaka, Minister of Highway, Sri Lanka; Mr. Kailash Satyarthi from

Global March; Mrs. Zakia Johler from women's movement of India; Mr. Uma Kant, leader of Dalit Movement from India; Dr. Sarojini Rangam, leader of peasants' movement from Malaysia; Mr. Sundar Lal Bahunguna, noted leader of environment movement from India; Mr. Sephul Haq from Bangladesh; Mr. Bam Dev Gautam, president of South Asian Peasants' Coalition; and Mr. Minar Pimple from United Nations Millennium Campaign. More than 20,000 people had attended at the declaration meeting. Mrs. Shanti Adhikari, General Secretary of Human Rights Alliance of Nepal, felicitated the mass meeting.

Addressing the welcome session, Mr. Thakur Gaire, president of All Nepal National Free Students' Union (ANNFSU), warmly welcomed the chief guest, special guests and all the personalities for their valuable presence at the occasion. He said that the People's SAARC forum has been successful to create pressure on the forthcoming 14th SAARC Summit in Delhi to address the people's agenda for South Asia. He also urged to implement scientific educational system to reduce the problem of unemployment among the educated youths.

Presenting the *Kathmandu Declaration*, Mrs. Sarmila Karki, secretary of NGO Federation of Nepal, described that the declaration was the reflection of South Asian people's aspirations, wishes and will. She read the text in Nepali and the mass meeting ratified the declaration in ecstasy along with loud clapping.

On this occasion, Dr. Netra Timsina, coordinator of the Organizing Committee of People's SAARC and vice-president of NGO Federation of Nepal, presented the gist of the declaration in English. The declaration urges the governments of SAARC member-states to ensure visa-free South Asia; to strengthen and institutionalize democracy, human rights, and justice; to demilitarize and denuclearize

the states; to promote communal harmony; and to undertake the demanding contemporary issues actively as they emerge.

Speaking at the occasion, Mr. Minar Pimple, the representative of UN Millennium Campaign in South Asia urged to implement the commitment made by the SAARC on poverty elimination by 2015. He suggested creating pressure for the inception of the SAARC Development Fund to accelerate poverty eradication campaign in South Asia.

Addressing the meeting, Dr. Uma Kant, the leader of Dalit Movement from India, described the bitter truth that 260 million Dalits are suffering from caste discrimination in South Asia. He described the caste system as a unique feature of South Asia that had caused gross violation of human rights in the name of caste and religion. He demanded for social and economic democracy and human rights along with political democracy to ascertain the rights of Dalits in real sense. He criticized the hypocrisy and muteness prevailing everywhere regarding Dalit issues. He demanded that the South Asian governments must terminate all sorts of caste discrimination and called for the formation of a SAARC level Dalit Commission. He welcomed that the People's SAARC Assembly had declared the period from 2007 to 2017 as the SAARC Dalit Decade.

Addressing the meeting, Mr. Mansur Ahmed, Member of Parliament of Pakistan said, "South Asia is the crown of Asia and Nepal is the jewel on the crown." He further described the features of South Asia as the land of ancient Sindh civilization, land of the Himalayas and K-2 mountains, fertile land, rich in natural resources, land of four seasons and brave people. But contrary to these, he lamented, South Asia is a mass of poverty and hunger, increasing unemployment, extensive exploitation, dispersed terrorism, and hysterical corruption.

He condemned the governments that use huge part of their budget on arms and defense, instead of bread and welfare of the people. He demanded that defense budget be heavily curtailed and the amount be utilized to attain the goals of 21st century socialism rather than nurturing a puppet political system of imperialism.

Speaking on the occasion, Mr. Basudeva Nanayaka, the political and peace activist from Sri Lanka, urged to stop resorting to military strategy to solve the problems and handling the grievances of the people. He advised to seek people's consensus for resolving the problems. He hoped for a new South Asia where poverty would be history.

Addressing the meeting, Miss. Zakia Jowher from India congratulated Nepalese sisters for their boldness while fighting against autocracy to establish *Loktantra* (full-fledged democracy) in Nepal. She expressed her belief that the *Jana-SAARC* would eventually defeat the motives of WTO, IMF, and US policies and overcome the troubles of South Asia.

Mr. Javed Islam, the president of trade union alliance of Bangladesh, criticized the U.S. imperialism, globalization and liberalization for making South Asian people from poor to poorer.

Mr. D.N.S. Dhakal of Bhutan demanded to stop the categorization of the Bhutanese refugees. He also pointed out that uncontrolled increment in population would be a major threat in this region.

Mrs. Sarojini Rangam, the leader of peasants' movement in Malaysia, demanded to protect the rice diversity from the paws of WTO as well as to prevent the commercialization of genetic engineering in seeds.

Addressing the meeting, Mr. Kailash Satyarthi from Glabla Mach appreciated the People's Movement II of Nepal in an appealing verse. He criticized

that the officials of SAARC have been running after the same issues for the last 20 years. He further condemned child trafficking with a moving example that children are sold away for much less a price than a buffalo in all the countries of South Asia. He demanded to root out child trafficking and youth unemployment from South Asia.

Mr. Bamdev Gautam, the president of South Asian Peasants' Coalition and member of the Legislative Parliament of Nepal, said, "Some 900 million poor



peasants are dwelling in South Asia, the prevalent poverty is a gift from former colonialists, feudalists, imperialists, and neo-liberalization through ADB, IMF, and WTO." He requested all the peasants to become united to render the people's control over SAARC a reality. He also warned the WTO not to enter into the agricultural sector.

Addressing the meeting, Mr. Saiful Huq, General Secretary of Bangladesh Workers' Party, appealed to fight against the common enemies of South Asian People, i.e. WTO, IMF, liberalization, and imperialism.

Addressing the meeting, **Mrs. Sarita Giri**, Central Member of Nepal Sadbhawana Party (Anandidevi) remarked, "The South Asian politics has entered a new stage due to rapid globalization and imperialist interest to keep the big South Asian market with its huge population within their grip. Therefore, the South Asian politics is revolving



within the periphery of the market." She also pointed out the need of strong political will and commitment to overcome the devastating circumstances of the region.

Dr. Minendra Rijal, Central Member of Nepali Congress (Democratic), said, "The problem of people in South Asia can be addressed by converting the (state level) SAARC into the People's SAARC." He congratulated the organizers for the noble effort and splendid outcomes.

Addressing the meeting, Chief Guest **Mr. Madhav Kumar Nepal**, General Secretary of Communist Party of Nepal (United Marxist and Leninist)



thanked all the concerned for organizing the event at people's level and through their initiative that would awaken the rulers of South Asia. He hoped that such programs would pressurize the governments to accelerate the works for the good of the people. Appreciating the *Kathmandu*

Declaration, he further elaborated, "It will support the genuine demands of the South Asian people on their common problems in the region." He also added, "We should be united together to fight against feudalism and imperialism where a handful of people are ruling the region to fulfill their personal interests." He pointed out the need of revolutionary land reforms to uplift the living standards of South Asian people. He expressed his sincere gratitude to all the organizers for choosing the venue of the Assembly in Kathmandu that would inspire to fight against autocracy and dictatorship.

Chairperson **Mrs. Suprabha Ghimire**, Central Member of Nepali Congress (also president of inter-party network and member of Legislative Parliament of Nepal), thanked all the national and



foreign delegates for their active participation in the People's SAARC. She remarked that the People's SAARC would be able to focus upon the emerging issues concerning the people of the region. She hoped that the state level SAARC would also pay enough attention to the *Kathmandu Declaration* of the People's SAARC.

3.3 Declaration of People's SAARC 2007

We, the participants of People's SAARC from Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka met in Kathmandu from 23rd to 25th March 2007 to affirm our commitment to justice, peace and democracy in the region. We also affirm and commit ourselves to the vision of

an alternative political, social, economic, and cultural system in the region that will do away with all distinctions and discriminations of gender, caste, religion, language and ethnicity; lead to a situation free from exploitation and oppression; create a climate in which each individual will have the opportunity to realize full development of her or his human potential; restore the balance and harmony with nature; liquidate the artificial and human barriers that divide lands, collectivities and minds; and transcend all boundaries.

Shared socio-cultural history of the region

We, the people of South Asia, not only share a contiguous geographical space but also a social and cultural history that shapes our life styles, belief systems, cultural particularities, material practices and social relationships. Our natural environments are related, interdependent, and form elements of a common eco-system. There is a similarity in our life practices. Our belief system and cultural practices have been influenced by one another, which exhibit distinct similarities. On the other hand, the unique diversity of our region in all aspects has enriched the common heritage, and we celebrate a sustained history of mutual respect for one another.

However, we also recognize the reality that the ruling elites in the postcolonial period within our respective countries have kept the people of our region apart through the creation of walls of suspicion, hostility, intolerance, disinformation, misinformation, and prevention of interaction amongst the people in order to maintain the status quo. Whilst recognizing the existence of natural boundaries and identities of the people in the region, we take a note that one of the mechanisms for the creation of spurious consent and fraudulent eslegitimization for the rule of the ruling class and systems of oppression and exploitation is due to the constant creation of suspicion and fear among the neighbors leading to constant insecurity toward national security and

hence to militarization. This system also creates favorable conditions for the advancement of paranoia, war hysteria, militarization, proliferation of nuclear weapons and dominance of security forces having ultra-nationalist ideology, which self-righteously curbs democratic debate and dissent on many vital issues.

The formation of SAARC was welcomed by the people across the region, as it aroused the hopes and aspirations amongst them for a better South Asia and the hope that SAARC would enhance people-to-people linkages, free flow of people across the borders of the region and mutual cooperation amongst the people to build strong, vibrant societies as well as create a new era of prosperity and be qualitatively more humane, egalitarian, secular (promoting religious harmony, respecting each other's religious and cultural beliefs), democratic, ecologically balanced, and socially just and sustainable societies hitherto unknown in the region.

The Present Predicament

However, contrary to the expectations, the SAARC failed to fulfill the promised goals of a better South Asia. Instead, economic policies pursued by the ruling classes and parties of the region created conditions of exclusion and marginalization and denial of rights, justice and democratic freedom in different countries of the region. Consequently, South Asia and its people stand at a very testing and critical crossroad in the history of the region. The logic and thrust of the policies and programs of SAARC have failed to address the issue of sovereignty of the people, including their economic, social and cultural rights.

The present crisis calls for a new response. The globalization of South Asia and its people, buttressed by the Structural Adjustment Policies (SAP), spells doom on the economic front; presents a threat even to the existing democracy and unleashes the demon

of communalism and fundamentalist intolerance; increases disparity and discrimination; erodes livelihood opportunities; withdraws existing services and facilities, and instead encourages militarization and gender violence; and brings forth social and cultural deprivation. This process further reinforces and reconstitutes exploitative and oppressive structures in newer forms. Finally, it breaks up the social cohesion by the degradation of human spirit. All this is, of course, in the name of progress, development, modernization, and reform.

Changing Politics of the Region

- a. The states seek to control and contain all potential or actual discontent through strict regulation and use of naked force. The actual solutions vary depending on specific situations. From monarchic or military dictatorships to the exercise of dictatorial powers under the guise of democracy and to 'functioning' of formal democracies, all variations exist in the region. In substance, the regimes severely restrict the rights of the people, particularly through modifications of labor laws and limits on legitimate protests in words and action.
- b. The rulers direct the people's wrath against soft and false enemies. Chauvinism, nationalism, and fundamentalism thus flourish under covert or overt state/ruling class patronage. Border conflicts, national chauvinism, ethnic strife, religious fundamentalism, and revivalism thus dominate politics.
- c. The state as an instrument for peaceful resolution of various forms of social conflicts remains fragile since the political institutions have been robbed of their relevance and there grows the danger of completely normative framework of democracy becoming undermined. Ironically, while the state has abdicated its social responsibility, it has equipped itself with draconian powers

(legal or extra-legal) of control, which aim to curtail the people's rights of movement, organization and protest.

Our system has constructed political, constitutional, administrative, and developmental mechanisms in a manner that denies the masses' the rightful access to the instruments necessary for realizing these rights. The parliamentary democratic processes in one way has provided a space for legitimate social action but, on the other hand, the system has exploited each and every situation of crisis and has taken away the democratic rights of the masses and imposed the laws and rules that in reality have spelt a deliberate violation of the spirit of the people, of their own constitution and commitment to uphold the principles of human rights. These laws have empowered security forces to arrest citizens without warrants and detain them for a long time without fair trial. Incidents of torture, custodial rape and extra-judicial killings have become common occurrences.

Neo-liberal growth model, marginalization and exclusion

The last three decades of this century have witnessed an unprecedented neo-liberal growth model that has severely and even violently restructured the region's economic policies and cultural life of the people. Inequality and exclusion are not merely extravagant outcomes but the results of systematic distortion of the system that have been put forth again to form the very logic of the new paradigm for sustaining the growth and permanence of the system.

The growing economic power of TNCs and MNCs and the role of international financial institutions, as well as unequal and unfair trade relations under the WTO regime have resulted in severe erosion of our sovereignty, means of livelihood, agriculture, and destruction of natural resources.

Agriculture

Agriculture along with related activities is the main stay for millions of people in South Asia. A vast majority of the population of almost all countries in the region survive on subsistence and small-scale agriculture. The current economic trends have plunged agriculture into a crisis, and particularly the cultivating peasantry is in deep distress. Corporate logic, single cash crops, dependence on corporate seeds, fertilizers, and pesticides as well as vulnerability to vagaries of the market have made agriculture cash intensive. This has pushed the cultivating peasants into a debt trap that often becomes a death trap. Millions are forced to sell off their land and become urban destitute in search of any means of livelihood. The forcible acquisition of land of the peasants in the name of development compounds the problem. The increased over-urbanization in South Asia is an indicator of agrarian destitution and transfer of the poor from countryside to cities.

Dangerous Moves

The governments of the north and south including those of South Asia inspired by the strange logic of their multilateral donor's indulgence in policies and moves, all in the name of progress and development, have increased the stranglehold of capital and large corporations over the people and their lives. Their grandiose schemes seriously undermine the living standards and livelihoods of the people. The achievements of so-called Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in South Asia are minimal till now. Hence there is a strong doubt that majority of these goals will be achieved by the set dateline of 2015. Moreover, the livelihood needs of the people are urgent and have to be addressed earnestly. It would be ridiculous to ask the people to wait until 2015. The MDGs have also failed to take into account the gender dimension of poverty. We therefore, fear that these may prove to be the essential mechanisms to pave the way

for an entry of private capital in all sectors including public services and supply of essential commodities rather than addressing the fundamental needs of the marginalized groups of people.

While we laud and support free exchange between the people of the region, we are very suspicious of market driven and dominated mechanisms like the South Asia Free Trade Area that may further exacerbate the inequalities and disparities in the region and, in turn, intensify poverty. Therefore, the SAARC states should first present a true account of their achievements in the fields for which they have made public commitments, for example reduction in poverty.

Gender Justice

Women in South Asia particularly become the victims of oppression, exploitation and violence that are now a regular feature in this region. Traditions as well as modern forms of patriarchy have pushed the women into virtual servitude in various forms. Violence is perpetrated against them in various ways. We believe that all actions and struggles for democracy, justice and peace will have to put women at the center of their thinking. None of these can be achieved unless gender equity and justice is simultaneously achieved.

We affirm

The participants are unanimous that today's economic globalization aggravates inequality and it is socially unjust and disruptive. It must be firmly resisted as it represents the triumph of corporate capitalism that endeavors to restructure the economic, social and cultural life of the people in the region totally. We resist the dominance of financial capital, which imperils monetary equilibrium in the world. It transforms states into mafia. It proliferates the hidden sources of capital accumulation such as trafficking, arms race and child slavery. It is high time to refuse the dictatorship of money.

We shall tirelessly work to develop and strengthen people-based governance systems from grassroots to national and regional levels. We also affirm that organic and sustainable agriculture is an imperative method for food security in households both at local and national levels, which is based on the age-old practices and knowledge systems inherited from our ancestors.

We also commit ourselves to conserve biodiversity, land, water and marine ecosystems and marine life and simultaneously resist the intellectual property rights imposed by the northern countries as a mechanism to take away the living resources of the people of the South. We also commit ourselves to reduce the hostilities and tension in the region that can release critical energies and scarce resources towards the betterment of the living conditions of the masses in the region.

We, the people of South Asia, in solidarity declare that we are not enemies of one another, that we do not want war against one another, that we do not want to be armed into starvation. We further call upon all the governments of different countries in the region to cease all covert and overt hostilities, to resolve all disputes through amicable dialogue for immediately reducing tensions, to decrease the militarization of the borders and to take urgent steps to bring about total disarmament in the region.

We immediately demand the following:

1. Ensure (barrier) free mobility of people across the region by guaranteeing the notion of visa free South Asia;
2. Strengthen and institutionalize democracy, human rights, justice, and proportional participation of women at all levels of state and civil society institutions;
3. Demilitarize and denuclearize the states and its machineries;
4. Promote communal harmony within and among communities, societies and states;

5. Combat religious, ethnic and gender based violence and outlaw all types of fundamentalism;
6. Address environmental sustainability as an urgent priority;
7. Protect biodiversity, water, forests, fisheries and other natural resources from which the majority of the people derive their livelihood and protect indigenous community wisdom;
8. Guarantee women's rights to be free from all kinds of discrimination and to live a life without any form of violence;
9. Guarantee sovereign rights of the people for food;
10. Respect independence of all judiciary and judicial system;
11. Solve the issues of refugees and IDPs; support just struggle of Bhutanese refugees;
12. Respect the right to information and promote free media;
13. Promote gender equality in all spheres— economic, social, political and cultural; Make provision for at least 50% reservation to women in all political, social and economic spheres of the society;
14. Make firm commitments regarding state obligations to provide health, education and basic needs with due consideration toward women's rights to their body, sexuality and reproduction with special provision for women's access to healthcare from women's perspective;
15. Stop free trade model that has been responsible for increasing poverty, trafficking of human beings, food insecurity and environmental destruction in the region;
16. Freeze defense budget and cut it at least by 10% and divert this amount to social development; [We realize that the lavish spending on weapons by poor South Asian countries is one of the major causes of rampant poverty in the region. We also demand that India and Pakistan stop arms

- race and give up nuclear weapons which pose great threat to 1.5 billion inhabitants of this peaceful region];
17. Ensure enforcement of Core Labor Rights by all SAARC states at work places, including Special Economic Zones (SEZs) and informal work sector (since globalization has resulted in eroding labor rights);
 18. Stop using state force against own citizens in the name of so called war on terror and stop operating as agents of America by allowing land to be used as military bases;
 19. Declare 2007-2017 as SAARC Dalits' Rights Decade with enactment of concrete acts, policies, programs and action plans;
 20. Formulate separate policies for Himalayan and mountainous regions because of regional specificity and ecological sensitivity of the region;
 21. Broaden the definition of Violence Against Women (VAW) and provide justice to the victims of all forms of violence. VAW must not be limited to physical or mental violence, but also include all forms of discriminatory practices against women;
 22. Ban the use of genetically modified seeds and organisms and save the genetic contamination of the vast biodiversity of the SAARC region by taking urgent action;
 23. Stop commercialization of basic education, ensure right to education for all, and treat all the students equally in terms of fee payment (e.g., applicable fees should not be charged in US Dollars irrespective of the country of origin of the student of the SAARC region);
 24. Ensure rights of children, include child rights in school curricula, and declare children as zones of peace;
 25. Promote religious coexistence, cooperation and harmony among the communities of the region;
 26. Recognize labor as one of the important resources of the region and make provision for Labor Advisory Committee with the involvement of trade unions as a formal recognized body in SAARC;
 27. Respect and recognize the identity of South Asian Indigenous Peoples and ensure their social, political, economic and cultural rights in the constitution;
 28. Free the region from all forms of bonded labor;
 29. Review present SAARC Convention on Trafficking in Women and Children and reformulate it from human rights perspective by broadening its definition on trafficking that can encompass trafficking for all purposes and add provisions which can protect the rights of trafficked persons to have access to justice, to voluntarily return home and to have fund for appropriate support and care;
 30. Protect the rights of migrant workers and their families by signing the UN Convention on Migrant Workers and Rights of their Families 1990;
 31. End HIV and AIDS related stigma and discrimination at all levels by introducing and implementing progressive HIV and AIDS legislation to protect the rights of the people living with HIV and AIDS;
 32. Guarantee free access to HIV and AIDS related medicines, including ART, for people living with HIV and AIDS with their meaningful participation and representation at all levels of decision making process, both in state and non-state domains;
 33. Ensure focused intervention of SAARC on HIV and AIDS;
 34. Ratify the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2006 (CRPD) by all the countries of SAARC as state party; and
 35. Ensure effective implementation and monitoring of CRPD so that persons with disabilities are truly liberated from being

poorest among the poor and at the extreme end of isolation, exclusion and all forms of discrimination. This is expected to ensure full and effective enjoyment of human rights, fundamental freedoms and social development on an equal basis with others as per the UN standards.

The delegates also met in specific thematic workshops to discuss the issues of vital concern for the people of the region. The resolutions, declarations and demands of the workshops that dealt with specific sectors, areas, and concerns form the Annexure to this Declaration.

We conclude this declaration by:

1. Expressing our solidarity with the people of

Nepal in their struggle for realizing loktantra, further strengthening it, and defending the gains of pro-democracy movement;

2. Expressing our concerns of the present predicament of the peace process in Sri Lanka, and vehemently request the parties to recommence negotiations and end armed hostility forthwith.

We also call upon all the democratic forces in the region to extend all possible support to strengthen democratic movement in Nepal.

We warn from the topmost range of the world 'the Himalayan Mountains' that the people of the region are sovereign and they are independent to decide the way they like.

Appendix I

Outcomes of Thematic Sessions

1. South Asian Parliamentary Forum

This forum was coordinated by the members of interim Legislative Parliament of Nepal. The members of parliaments of all the South Asian countries participated in the forum. Senior political leaders and the Speaker of the Legislative Parliament of Nepal also actively participated in its proceedings and they made the following declaration at the end of the session:

Recalling the historic movement of the establishment of the SAARC in 1983 and different regional documents and mechanism under its august initiatives,

Realizing, however, that the SAARC has not been able to address the people's aspirations and has become a formal talk forum,

Emphasizing the need to take initiatives from the people's perspectives for strengthening the SAARC Charter, its working modalities and space for sharing the people's agendas,

Requesting to pursue for common values, problems, standards, and agendas in order to codify and institutionalize any mechanism to be established,

We, the delegates from Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka of the People's SAARC Parliamentary Platform hereby declare the following:

- Urge the SAARC to review its Charter to make it more pro-poor and pro-people and change its modalities for letting the people's agendas to be allowed in and be included during the discussions.

- Urge all the parliamentarians of the South Asia region to search for common issues, problems and agendas for further strengthening and bring them for discussion at the Regional level through the People's SAARC Parliamentary Forum.
- Urge the members of all the parliaments of South Asia to take initiatives for the establishment of a Parliaments' Forum, of permanent nature, with its regular meetings in official capacity to further explore the initiatives to strengthen the Forum in the years to come.
- Urge the members of the parliaments to work closely, on the common issues, with the civil society to address the issues of constitutionalism, rule of law, inclusiveness, equality, justice, and protection of human rights. Further, request that reform in the South Asia must be based on the historical context of our civilization.
- Urge that democracy, independence of judiciary, protection of human rights, measures to tackle corruption, and law enforcement authorities must be reformed and strengthened.
- Urge that any armed conflict in the Region must be solved through dialogue.

2. Peasants' Thematic Forum on Food Sovereignty/Ecological Agriculture and Farmers' Rights in South Asia

Bam Dev Gautam, President of South Asian Peasants Coalition, inaugurated the session. Some two hundred peasants from the SAARC member states including Nepal participated in the session.

An extensive discussion was carried out on the paper and a declaration was prepared on the related theme. All the participants actively took part in the discussion.

Declaration of Peasants' Forum

We, the people of SAARC countries, the CSOs and mass organizations from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka representing the movements of peoples' organizations, peasants, landless farmers, women, indigenous people, Dalits, pastoral herders, fisher-folks, rural youths, small and medium sized producers and agricultural workers assembled in the international conference on the Forum for Food Sovereignty and Peasants' Rights under the People's SAARC on 23-25 March, 2007 at Kathmandu,

Notice it with great concern that most people of these countries are falling in the grip of hunger and starvation due to the denial of access to peasants to land and food producing resources which abounds in the Nature's endowments in this quarter,

Consider this grim situation as a result of the governments' subjugation to neo-liberal policy regimes concocted by the imperialist forces in a new form and implemented in conspiracy with IFIs, such as World Bank, IMF, ADB etc., to exploit and extort high profits for TNCs which are based in developed countries at the cost of toiling masses,

Strongly believe that peace and social justice will get their roots only when the people of these countries become successful to have genuine land and agrarian reforms, establish food sovereignty and inclusive democracy,

Congratulate Nepalese people for their heroic April Revolution 2006, which restored not only Democracy in this Himalayan Land but also tracked the country to republicanism and for their

arduous struggle to put Food Sovereignty in national agenda, which has already been included in the Interim Constitution of Nepal, 2006,

Express our warm solidarity with the people and peasants of the SAARC countries in particular, and other countries in general, in their just struggle to put an end to the autocratic rule in whatever form it exists in any quarter and establish peace, social justice, and people's democracy with food sovereignty in their respective countries,

And, call upon all the concerned stakeholders to put pressure on the heads of states and governments going to be assembled in New Delhi for forthcoming Fourteenth SAARC Summit to declare the region hunger free zone.

Due to the failure of the governments and their mentors like the IFIs to reduce hunger and poverty over many decades, we state that they have lost their legitimacy to so-called PRSPs. Therefore, now is the time that peoples' organizations claim their right to formulate plans to reduce hunger and poverty by themselves. We resolutely support peasants' struggles whether in Nandigram of West Bengal, in South India or in the Philippines or Pakistan or anywhere and express our solidarity to fight ahead. Let's fight in unison for "No Privatization on Air and Water." We claim our rights to :

- Protect community wisdom with Biodiversity-based Ecological Agriculture System;
- Implement comprehensive land reforms and genuine agrarian reforms;
- Ensure women ownership on seed and right over land and productive resources;
- Revoke patent on life forms and food as traded commodity only;
- Stop neo-liberal policies and negotiations thereof such as WTO, FTA etc.;

- Conserve, preserve and protect the farmers' knowledge of traditional rice culture and rice cultivation;
- Implement the program of food sovereignty as the basis of international treaties;
- Protect our bio-diversity wealth and their community usages, both product and processes;
- Hate bio-piracy and IPR provisions that deprive local communities their legitimacy over "improved" genre;
- De-privatize productive resources, social services and common property;
- Resist process of imperialist globalization and call moratorium on GMOs;
- Assert peasants' rights to land and productive resources;
- Avert increasing vulnerability of marginal land holders and stop them falling into landlessness;
- Abolish all forms of bondage, including debt-bondage, that victimize agricultural wage laborers;
- Ensure fair wages to agricultural workers and minimum social protection for all poor farm families, both wage workers and self-employed;
- Enlarge and establish agriculture market in rural areas by increasing rural electrification and other infra-structures;
- Ensure unemployment benefits to rural agricultural laborers;
- Ensure livelihood of indigenous people and Dalits;
- Condemn international organizations like IRRI that collaborate with industry against peasants; and
- Take away WTO from agriculture to avoid privatization of common pool resources.

3. Thematic Forum on Labor and Trade Union Rights in South Asia

Mrs. Rama Poudyal, Vice President of

Democratic Confederation of Nepalese Trade Unions (DECONT), chaired the program. Altogether 80 participants from different trade unions of South Asia had taken part in the session. After substantial interaction and discussion, the following declaration relating to labor rights was accepted by the session:

1. Recognizing labor as the most important resource of South Asia, there must be Provision of Labor Advisory Committee with the involvement of Trade Unions as a formal recognized body in SAARC Chamber of Commerce and Industry (Justification: While negotiating agreements like SAFTA only governments and employers' organizations have never been included in the consultations, which has direct effect on labor and millions of working masses. On labor and labor market issues, the policy evaluating, recommending and intervening body like Trade Union Advisory Committee in OECD countries is an urgent need in South Asia also)
2. Struggles and efforts must be focused to create uniformity in the minimum wages in South Asia.
3. Implementation of minimum labor standards in South Asian countries must be made obligatory.
4. Protection of rights of South Asian migrant workers within and outside South Asia
5. Focus towards ensuring gender equality and effective maternity protection in labor market and workplaces in South Asian countries.

Bonded Labor

- Proper rehabilitation of freed *Kamaiyas* (in the case of Nepal)
- SAARC region should be free from all kinds of bonded labor and slavery system.

- All the *Kamaiyas* should be immediately registered and identity cards should be provided to them so as to rehabilitate them along with other identified *Kamaiyas* before the Constituent Assembly poll.
- Stop eviction of *Kamaiyas* and provide them land for their resettlement.
- Provide 85 cubic feet of timber and 25,000 rupees for housing per family.
- In case of resettlement in any other place, the government should provide land certificate and guarantee the land entitlement.
- Free access to water, education and health should be provided.
- Freed *Kamaiyas*, whose land has been allocated in rivers, roads and riverbanks, should be given proper land.
- All domestic child labor must be abolished. Rehabilitation with education should be provided to the child servants, including Kamalaharis.

4. Thematic Forum on Peace Process in South Asia - Peace and Demilitarization

More than 150 participants from civil society, political parties, and media from Nepal and the international delegates actively participated in



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the program. The Honorable Minister Mr. Pradeep Gyawali from Nepal and members of parliament from Sri Lanka had also participated in the program. Different papers and perspectives from Nepal, India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Pakistan were presented in the session. The major conclusions and concerns drawn from the session are as follows:

1. School textbooks and curricula in all the countries of the region should have content of inclusion and tolerance, not the phrases like “we are superior” that have no sensible meaning. The idea must be propagated that closer ties in business, education, cultural exchanges, and exchanges between professional bodies, etc., should be promoted and national integrity and sovereignty should be respected.
2. Massive publicity campaigns should be undertaken on the issues of human rights and common heritages binding the people and stressing that tolerance and pluralism are the essential ingredients in tomorrow's society.
3. All the SAARC countries should guarantee the right to information by enacting laws. This will promote and strengthen both issues of peace and governance.
4. Travel within the SAARC countries should be facilitated with the provision of free visa.
5. The issue of fundamentalism should concurrently be addressed, but with a soft touch as in all the other campaigns.
6. A SAARC media organization, including a common television channel, should be established with broad perspective of culture, history and aspirations of the SAARC countries. It should run independent of government policies.
7. Defense budgets of each of the countries should be cut by 10% with each successive year for the next 10 years and the amount

- be diverted toward development in social sectors.
8. India's desires to establish itself as a global player in defense should be halted at least until the MDGs have been achieved.
 9. Legal Commissions on Minority Communities in all the SAARC countries should be established and strengthened and they should be able to exchange useful information on minority issues across the countries.
 10. Each of the SAARC countries should include and/or improve the constitutional provisions for affirmative action to raise the social status of its minority population.
 11. A massive student exchange program should be started in all the countries with students as peace activists.

5. Thematic Forum on Inter Religious Issues in South Asia

We, the religious communities from South Asia region, have gathered in the Administrative Staff College, Kathmandu as a part of Peoples' SAARC for Democracy, Peace and Justice under the coordination of Inter-Religious Council Nepal (IRCN) to undertake as follows:

Objective

- To promote inter-religious cooperation and communal harmony at SAARC level,
 - To analyze problems related to increasing religious fundamentalism and religious conflicts in the subcontinent,
 - To come up with concrete suggestions for resolving the different common problems being faced by South Asian people and to recommend the same to the state level SAARC meeting to be held in Delhi,
 - To exchange the experience of different religious communities in the SAARC region,
 - To come up with the action plan for implementation, and
- To evolve a code of conduct for inter-religious relationship and pluralistic living together in South Asia.

We affirm that

- Religious harmony is possible only by transcending the boundaries of fundamental religiosity and ritualism.
- Religions have a positive role in meaningful human coexistence and instead of being perceived as pro-establishment should be able to play a pro-active and pro-life influence in society and in strengthening the moorings for morality, ethics and common good.
- The understanding of 'fellow pilgrimage' should be strengthened in all religious communities by affirming the right of fellow citizens to believe and profess differently.
- Religious communities must join hands in strengthening the basic unit of life – family by realizing that the mother-child relationship is the core of social transformation and family is where the future is.

We recommend that

- Coexistence, cooperation and harmony among the religious communities in the SAARC region should be highly promoted.
- Social issues like poverty, HIV/AIDS, drugs, girls trafficking, violence against women and child issues should be addressed.
- "Peace with Justice" should act as a mandate for SAARC people for its unity and prosperity.
- Religion should be separated from the stake of political sector.
- Religious communities should have important role in working against environmental devastation and denial of human rights and in providing viable and meaningful alternatives to oppressive structures --

economic, cultural, and socio-political be imposed on the people.

- Religious communities should be officially included in the SAARC Summit.
- The yearly calendar indication of the significant days for inter-faith groups should be prepared.
- A SAARC level Inter-Religious Council should be formed which should be given statutory status in the state level SAARC.

We declare solidarity with

- All the peace initiatives – both at government and people's level in South Asia and all over the world,
- All the suffering masses in violence torn areas of South Asia and the world over,
- All the movements towards democracy, peace, justice, and good governance, and
- All the movements of women, dalits, ethnic and minority groups in South Asian countries.

We are concerned that

- Religion is merely being reduced to its simplistic ritual dimensions robbing it of its inherent potential for social transformation.
- The religious communities in South Asia are collectively silent in the context of massive poverty, devastation, dehumanization, oppression and injustice.
- Violence is escalating all over and nothing tangible is being done to address the root causes of people's unrests and brutal responses towards crushing people's awakenings.

6. Thematic Forum on Women Rights in South Asia

This forum was organized by Global Alliance against Women Trafficking, Sangat, Women Human Rights Defenders and Dr Renu Raj Bhandari facilitated the session. At the end of the

discussion, the participants agreed for the following declaration:

1. Demand for a commission for women empowerment.
2. Declare South Asia as a conflict-free zone.
3. Ensure women's access to productive resources.
4. 50% reservation for women in political, economic and social spheres. Women should be given their rightful space in political decision making in all countries of the region.
5. Leadership role to women in building peace and solidarity for the people of South Asia.
6. Justice to the victims of all sorts of violence, including domestic violence, communal violence, ethnic violence, and violence by armed forces. We demand total end of immunity to the perpetrators of violence.
7. Immediate end to human rights violations of ethnic, religious and other identities and all other human rights violations on the pretext of fighting the so-called War on Terror.
8. A democratic, just and plural socioeconomic political climate for women and men of the region to come together to celebrate the unity in diversity rooted in our vibrant culture.
9. All constitution statutes, laws and policies of the SAARC nations should be gender sensitive.
10. Affirmative actions should be taken to achieve the proportional participation of women in all spheres of life.
11. Capacity building programs for women leaders and cadres should be undertaken as a continuous task.
12. Implementation of the laws and policies having major concern for women. In spite of specific laws and policies favorable for women, there exists an immense gap in their accomplishment.
13. Formation of a network of South Asian women politicians.

7. Thematic Forum on Violence Against Women

WOREC and ATTWIN had jointly organized this forum which was actively participated in by the representatives from all the South Asian countries. It adopted the following declaration in relation to violence against women:

1. We urge the members of SAARC to broaden the definition of VAW which must not be limited to physical or mental violence, but also recognize all forms of discriminatory practices against women.
2. Social provision for disabled women should be included in the Interim Constitution of Nepal through an amendment in order to provide them space and opportunity based on the principles of inclusion to raise their concerns that need to be dealt with effectively.
3. Women's informal labor should be recognized and respected in all spheres of labor sector.
4. Government should be sensitive and aware of the needs of women from different segments of the society, such as dalits, disabled, HIV/AIDS patients, sexual minorities, and geographically disadvantaged communities and create special mechanisms to fulfill their demands.
5. Nepal must endorse and respect the UN resolution on sexual minorities.
6. Women Human Rights Defenders should be recognized and their rights should be promoted and protected.
7. Governments should create policies to address rehabilitation and create necessary centers for rehabilitation.
8. The phenomenon of internal trafficking should be recognized and addressed by the government of Nepal.
9. Both sending and receiving countries should

be accountable and responsible in meeting the needs of trafficked persons and have adequate mechanisms based on human rights.

10. Persons should have the right to choose their occupation and the country of work within the region and women's right to mobility be ensured.
11. Governments should guarantee safe mobility to women and consider it as human rights of the concerned person.

8. Thematic Forum on Asia Pacific Peoples Alliance to Combat HIV/AIDS (APPACHA)

Reflecting upon the critical realities of South Asian region, the participants of the People's SAARC representing different countries and constituencies, developed and endorsed a 9-point charter of demands in relation to HIV/AIDS as follows.

We want the national governments, donor agencies, IFIs, and the SAARC Secretariat to immediately act on the following demands:

1. End HIV and AIDS related stigma and discrimination at all levels.
2. Introduce and implement progressive HIV and AIDS legislation to protect the rights of people living with HIV and AIDS at all levels.
3. Guarantee the free access of HIV and AIDS related medicines including ART for people living with HIV and AIDS with their meaningful participation and representation at all levels of decision-making process both in state and non-state domains.
4. Introduce and implement HIV and AIDS work place policy in both public and private sectors.
5. Cancel the debts of the world's poorest countries in full, by fair and transparent

means, allowing them to divert the resources to national priorities ensuring predictable resources for HIV and AIDS treatment, prevention and care.

6. Stop immediately all the conditional bilateral and multilateral funding related with HIV and AIDS.
7. Ensure focused intervention of SAARC on HIV and AIDS, for public health rights must have precedence over pharmaceutical patents through further reform of TRIPS rules.
8. Support the growth of regional and national industries for generic medicines in the worst affected countries.

9. Thematic Forum on Disabled People's Issues

The forum on the issues of disability was organized by the National Federation of Disabled Nepal. Member of Legislative Parliament Ms. Kamala Pant, Chief Spokesperson of NCP-UML Mr. Mahendra Pandey and 140 national and international participants declared to start the process of ratification of the relevant convention in Nepal and the Secretary of Ministry of Women, Children, and Social Welfare expressed commitment to do so. The session was facilitated by Birendra Pokhrel, Chairman of the Federation. They made the following declaration at the end of the session:

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2006 (CRPD) was adopted on December 13, 2006 and it was opened for member states of the UN to sign on March 30, 2007.

The Peoples' SAARC Forum urges all the SAARC countries to ratify and sign the Convention and be established as "state party" of the convention all the way so as to ensure its effective implementation and monitoring so that persons with disabilities are truly liberated from being the poorest of the poor, from suffering at the extreme end of isolation and

exclusion and from all forms of discrimination. It is through this process that we can ensure their full and effective enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms on an equal basis with others. Most importantly, this process should set a good standard for UN in coping with the other aspects of human rights and social development.

10. Thematic Forum on Youth and Politics in South Asia

The Youth Forum of the People's SAARC concluded as follows:

Youth are not only the future leaders; they are the present partners too.

Youth force is one of the major contributing factors in national building. The ramification of this vital force would cross national borders as well. So, the issues on livelihood and availing opportunity would be discussed and incorporated to extend its horizon and range of interest for various activities.

1. Fulfillment of basic necessities (food, shelter, clothing, education, water, and sanitation)
2. Right to technical and vocational education for capacity development
3. Creation of employment opportunities at national and regional levels (work permit and free visa)
4. Human resource planning and management and its strict implementation at regional level
5. Sharing and exchange of knowledge and experience
6. SAARC must guarantee the youths the right to rehabilitation.
7. Must fight against exclusion of youths in politics.
8. Must make policies that inspire the youths to do a good job.
9. Youths must be included in the decision making process.

11. Thematic Forum on Child Rights

Children are the fundamental part of human development and their rights is a vital component for quality enhancement of national development. Conflict can have very direct negative impact on child rights including their education. It challenges the existing socio-cultural and economical balance that affects national planning and policy, such as education system, quality management, EFA goal, and school structure. National and international planning, policy and investment are under increasing pressure to improve child rights in a global concept. Children are targeted for finding new recruits in a conflict. Poverty, economy and conflict can have a straight negative impact on child rights. So, the SAARC countries must build and improve their capacity for secular, professional, and legal child rights for the 21st century.

Socio-political conflicts, security management, vulnerability to sexual violence, pregnancy, HIV/AIDS, lack of sanitary supplies, early marriage, household responsibilities, and frequent movement from one location to another are the major barriers for the safety and welfare of children in Asia.

1. Commitments made so far on child rights in SAARC region need to be practically implemented and the reports should be published annually.
2. Accessibility to equal education for all should be guaranteed and 'Children as Zone of Peace' should be declared in the SAARC region.
3. The concept of child friendly schools should be promoted in the SAARC region.
4. The government should pay attention for strengthening the structures built for the protection of children at national level.
5. Common policy should be formulated and implemented for the basic rights of children, such as education, health, nutrition etc.,

including the policy against child abuse and exploitation.

6. Children's voice should be heard for the promotion of child participation.
7. Coordination should be strengthened among SAARC countries while carrying out activities concerned with child rights.
8. Basic principles of child survival, protection, development, and participation should be practically implemented.
9. Social justice and peace should be promoted in the child sector of the SAARC region.
10. Common policy should be formulated and implemented in the SAARC region to track the trafficking of children in the border areas of Nepal, India and Bangladesh and to rescue, repatriate and rehabilitate them.
11. Joint monitoring and awareness campaigns should be launched to enhance the participation and vigilance on child trafficking by the common people, government enforcement agencies and legal fraternity.
12. National and regional level initiatives made so far should be strengthened for the elimination of child labor exploitation.
13. A common concept should be developed for socialization, rehabilitation and reintegration of children at risk.
14. A common forum should be formed to conduct the activities for the promotion and protection of child rights at SAARC level.

12. Thematic Forum on the Issues of Dalits and Social Exclusion in South Asia

This forum was organized by Dalit NGO Federation of Nepal and more than 200 people including politicians, dalit rights activists and representative of various people's organization participated in the program. Dr Uma Kant, Dalit Rights activist of India, presented a paper on *Dalits and Exclusion in South Asia*. At the end of the session, the participants of the forum concluded with the following declaration:

1. Declare 2007-2017 as SAARC Dalit Rights Decade with concrete acts, policies, programs and action plan.
2. Ensure proportionate representation in the public and the private sector as well as an affirmative action policy.
3. Constitute SAARC level Dalit Rights Commission and upgrade National Dalit Rights Commissions as Statutory Commissions in all SAARC nations.
4. Abolish all forms of bonded labor, forced labor, and related systems.
5. Promote and protect indigenous knowledge, skills, arts and occupation among Dalits.

13. Thematic Forum on NRM -Land, Forest and Water Issues in South Asia

A number of people's organizations such as Federation of Community Forest Users Nepal, COFSUN, HIMAWANTI, Federation of Irrigation Water Users, Community Self Reliant Center, National Land Rights Forum, Community Development Organization and National Federation of Drinking Water and Sanitation organized the forum.

Sundar Lal Bahuguna stressed on the importance of conservation of Himalayan region as recharge center of South Asia. He appreciated the successful example of community based forest management in Nepal. Land rights activists demanded for equitable distribution of land and land entitlements to the tillers. The participants also demanded for review of all treaties between India and Nepal concerning the policy and use of river waters which are urgent.

14. Thematic Forum on the Issues of Refugees and IDPs in South Asia

This forum was conducted by the Organization of Bhutanese Refugees and felicitated by Mohan Tamang, one of the activists for refugees' rights. Parliament members, ex-ministers, ambassadors

and political leaders actively participated in the discussions. And following declaration was made at the end of the session:

1. The whole of South Asia has refugee problems; the situation is especially alarming in Pakistan, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Maldives in addition to Tibet and Burma. So, the people of South Asia propose to set up a people's task force to look into the problems of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDP) in order to deliver rational justice.
2. We support the just struggle of Bhutanese people to find an amicable solution to the protracted refugee problem.
3. Categorization of Bhutanese refugees into four groups is an unacceptable procedure to resolve the refugee problem. The categorization should be between Bhutanese and non-Bhutanese and option should be open for all of them to return to Bhutan or seek any other solution of their choice.

15. Thematic Forum on Migration and Human Trafficking

Considering and respecting the issues raised by the women of South Asia, the following points have been put forward as the demands of South Asian women:

- Numerous forms of structural violence are deeply rooted in South Asia. Therefore, we urge the members of SAARC to broaden the definition of VAW. It must not be limited to physical and mental violence; it must recognize all forms of discriminatory practices against women.
- Social provision for disabled women should be included in the Interim Constitution of Nepal through suitable amendment and adequate space and opportunity based on the principles of inclusion must be provided

to raise the concerns that need to be dealt with effectively.

- Women's informal labor should be recognized and respected in all the spheres of labor sector.
- People are not trafficked for prostitution alone, but for other purposes as well. Therefore, the definition of Trafficking in the SAARC Convention 2002 must be enlarged and be looked upon through holistic approach.
- The government should be sensitive and aware of the needs of women from different segments of the society such as dalits, disabled, HIV/AIDS patients, women district officers, sexual minorities, geographically disadvantaged people and create special mechanisms to fulfill their demands.
- The UNHCR and the Government of Nepal should work together to eliminate gender discrimination during the process of protecting refugees, registering them at the camps, and distributing the ration cards.
- Nepal shall endorse and respect the UN Resolution on Sexual minorities.
- Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRD) should be recognized and their rights should be promoted and protected.
- The phenomenon of internal trafficking should be recognized and addressed by the government.
- The governments should create policies to address the problems of rehabilitation centers.
- Both the sending and receiving countries should be accountable and responsible for meeting the needs of trafficked persons and have the mechanisms based on human rights.
- Persons should have the right to choose their occupation and the country of work within the region.
- The governments should guarantee safe mobility to women and consider it as one of

the basic human rights of the person concerned.

16. Thematic Forum on Education Rights in South Asia

A number of student bodies organized the Forum on Education Rights in South Asia. The forum concluded the session with the following declaration:

1. All SAARC countries should have a visa free policy for the citizens of SAARC countries in order to extend harmony, cooperation and mutual benefits.
2. Students from one SAARC country should not be made to pay the fees in dollars in another SAARC country.
3. The expenditure on education in a SAARC country must be increased in proportion to the GDP of the country.
4. The neo-liberal policies that make our education more and more inaccessible to poor people through privatization and commercialization of educational institutions must be resisted firmly.
5. The education policy should give priority to the interests of the people of the concerned country first. Only then can they dream of making education internationally competitive.

17. Thematic Forum on Himalayan Region Policy

All SAARC nations must formulate separate policies for Himalayan and mountainous regions because of the specific problems of the region. The specific problems of the Himalayan and mountainous regions in the SAARC countries relate to the fragility of the youngest mountain system of the Globe. The natural resources in these regions face major threats of over exploitation. This results in depletion of forests, soil and water reserves, which is threatening the survival of the

people of the regions. Not only this, the degradation of eco-system and depletion of natural resources in these regions affect the quality of living and the existence of human life in the plains too.

Therefore, it is the right time for SAARC nations to wake up and formulate special policies for the Himalayan and mountainous regions.

18. Thematic Forum on Issues of Janajatis and Indigenous Nationalities

Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities organized this forum and a number of scholars, politicians and indigenous leaders participated in the session. They concluded the session with the following demands that are relevant across the South Asian countries.

1. Respect and recognize the identity of South Asian indigenous people and ensure their social, political, economic, and cultural rights in the constitution.
2. Make the governments of South Asian countries agreeable to ensure proportional representation of indigenous people at all levels of government's policymaking.
3. Respect and recognize the customary rights of the indigenous people over their lands, forests, waters, and other natural resources.
4. End discrimination against indigenous people on the basis of their ethnicity, language, religion, sex, class, and territory.
5. Extend regional solidarity and moral support to the ongoing movement of the indigenous people of Nepal for restructuring the state and their proportional representation in the constituent assembly.

19. Thematic Forum on State of Democracy and Governance in South Asia

The discussion on "Democracy, Governance and State" drew an enthusiastic number of students, politicians, activists, and academicians from all

parts of South Asia. The workshop also had speakers from all South Asian countries, except Maldives.

The discussion was chaired by Sandeep Pendse and Dr. S A Samad of Bangladesh initiated the discussion by pointing out the present political crisis and need for democratic reforms in his country. He stressed on the need for democracy for poverty alleviation, although there are precedents especially in East Asia where growth has been achieved even within a limited democracy. However, democracy ensures the possibility of equality of access to resources and opportunities, and thus creating possibilities for distribution of wealth. He insisted that the prerequisite to a functioning democracy is the will of political parties to carry forward the mandates received from the people. The ideas of liberty, freedom, rights, and security of citizens are other preconditions for functioning democracy, without which the governance will fail.

The next intervention was made by Dr. D. N. S. Dhakal who traced the rise of the Bhutanese state to its theocratic origin of the 16th century and its evolution into an absolute monarchy in 1907. The democracy movements of the late 1980s and the resulting human rights problems put cultural pressure on the Nepali speaking community, the Lotshampas, and created huge refugee problems in 1990. It demands a political change and the restoration of human rights in Bhutan. The cultural and religious rights of the Lotshampas must also be protected. According to him, the lack of human rights, political parties, and civil society makes the situation complicated in Bhutan and without these, the promised elections of 2008 will not deliver the results favoring the people. Only a subtle arrangement can be made by the government to continue its own control. Hence, a strong grassroots movement is necessary to achieve democracy in the country.

The presentation by Prof. K. C. Suri from India outlined the experiences of Indian democracy for the last 50 years in the midst of linguistic, religious, regional, and ethnic diversities. He said that in spite of democratic practices there is a high level of poverty, high illiteracy, low HDI, and differences growing with different sectors of the population. In spite of the semblance of functional democracy in India, there exists increasing marginalization. He lauded such parallel efforts like People's SAARC to examine the role of governments and states. It is necessary to inquire into the possibilities of achieving economic growth in a democratic framework. According to him, the challenges before us is to maintain a secular state, more inclusive growth, equitable distribution of the growth, participatory democracy, responsible citizenry, reduction of corruption, and electing right leaders. He presented Kashmir and North-East as two glaring examples of the failure of Indian democracy. Finally, he emphasized that democracy is a political question and should not be confused with economic issues as there are examples of economic growth under dictatorships with no or minimum formal democracy.

The next presentation was by Gopal Krishna Thalipal from Nepal who stressed the role of free media in a functioning democracy and the Right to Know as a basic democratic right without which democracy is at risk since rulers control the information and thereby participation and action. Social justice and democracy are preconditions for real justice, but there still exist vast gaps between the two. He stated that the Nepalese people feel that religion is a major obstacle to democracy. The governments of all South Asian countries take advantage of religion to limit democracy. Even republican forms of governments in South Asia are failing to solve the basic problems of the people and hence, these should be made pro-poor and extended to people's democracy.

Mr. Vasudeva, an ex-Member of Parliament was the presenter from Sri Lanka. He felt that there is an urgent need to restate democracy and formulate a people's charter on democracy since in the neo-liberal age democracy is celebrated in such a manner where the subversion of democracy is inherent in the celebration. Individuals are getting alienated and social movements are increasingly fragmented. He pointed out that compromised judiciary, monarchy, military dictatorship, feudal system, neo-liberalism, imperialism, hegemony, and state domination constitute anti-thesis of democracy. The electoral patterns need to be drafted by the people and the popular movements should strive for deepening and enhancing democracy so that they are not subverted by the elite and the ruling class.

The last presentation was made by Mr. Karamat Ali from Pakistan who stressed the need for democracy as an essential component in South Asia which comprises multinational entities.

Democracy has to be federal, not unitary, and this is the current problem of Pakistan where the state is highly centralized. The state has to ensure the rights of the citizens since marginalization does not ensure proper governance or functioning democracy. There must be class-based reservations for the people through the electoral system. In his view, militarization is a big hurdle to the functioning of democracy, since violence is incompatible with the ideas of democracy. The crisis in democracy was also fuelled by the nationalism that we developed in the last hundred years.

The presentations were followed by lively interactions, exchanges and debates which went on even beyond the scheduled time of the workshop.

20. Thematic Forum on Women in Politics in South Asia

This forum was coordinated by All Nepal Women's Association (ANWA). Participants from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Bhutan and Nepal attended the session and got heavily engaged in discussing the problems and prospects of women in politics in South Asia. Leading representatives presented the situation of women in politics in their respective countries. They were: Sahana Pradhan, senior woman leader of South Asia and Member of Legislative Parliament of Nepal; Madhusudhan Mistri, Member of Parliament of India; Asia Hajim, Member of Parliament of Pakistan National Assembly; Lageshwori from Sri Lanka; and Monira from Bangladesh.

The participants of the forum demanded for equal partnership of women in politics in South Asia. They also urged Government of Nepal to implement the proclamation of the Legislative Parliament in relation to 33 percent compulsory participation by women in every sphere of state mechanism.

21. Thematic Forum on Women in Peace in South Asia

This session was coordinated by Ms Sharmila Karki, Secretary, NGO Federation of Nepal and President, Jagaran Nepal. The forum discussed on the inadequacy of women's participation in leadership in a number of sectors like governance, planning, distribution of resources, and access and control of education. In order to combat such situation, women should not only have participation but also partnership in politics with special attention to the inclusion of youth. Sustainable development of society is ensured only when proper remedy on citizenship issues for self-identity of women and property rights for poverty eradication is met upon. There should be uniformity in the wages for equal work. The urgency of the matter demands for the proper plan of action to address the issues of gender imbalance and a

unified education system to maintain harmonious environment in South Asia. A regular monitoring mechanism on the implementation of CEDAW and CRC must be developed and minimization of vulnerability among women and children in conflict situation needs mechanized approach.

Recommendations

- South Asian countries being perpetuated by social and cultural milieu need to have a network of South Asian Women's Alliance for peace.
- Establishment of South Asian Women's Peace Commission with access for regular dialogues needs initiation.
- South Asia must be declared a conflict-free zone.
- Women's participation at all levels of peace building process needs to be guaranteed.
- South Asia must be liberated from the grip of violence against women.
- Construction of regional policies for women with disabilities is needed.
- Endorsement of youth participation in all levels of the structures of society is needed to increase accountability.
- Leadership role of women in building peace and solidarity among the people of South Asia is called for.
- An immediate end to nuclear race and a complete withdrawal of armed forces of all kinds and disposition of arms are required.
- A visa-free SAARC where the women and men of the region can freely move, live and work is desired.
- 50% reservation for women in all political, social spheres needs to be guaranteed.
- Justice for Victims of violence of any kind including domestic, communal, ethnic, and that by armed forces must get justice and any kind of impunity to the perpetrators of violence must end.

- Women must be ensured their rightful place in political decision-making in all countries of the region.
- All sorts of human rights violations against ethnic and religious minorities and under the pretext of fighting so-called war on terror must be stopped immediately.
- The Bhutanese refugees' campaign to abolish the denationalization policies of Bhutan that validates discriminatory citizenship and marriage laws must be supported.
- Categorization of the Bhutanese refugees must be revised by the Joint Verification Team on the basis of the male head of households and international standards of human rights must be maintained.
- A democratic, just and plural socioeconomic political climate for the women and men of the region must come together to celebrate unity in diversity rooted in our vibrant culture.
- The voice of the sexual minorities must be paid

Appendix II

Coordination & Organizational Arrangements

1) Regional Coordination Committee for Organizing People's SAARC:

The preparatory meeting, organized in Kathmandu on 19th February, 2007, constituted a People's SAARC Regional Coordination Committee to manage effectively and facilitate the process. The Committee comprised of the following members:

- Zakia Jowher India
- Arjimund Kashmir (India)
- Karamat Ali Pakistan
- Rokeya Kabir Bangladesh
- Mohammed Mahuruf Sri Lanka
- Mohan Tamang Bhutan
- Ajit Muricken India
- Netra Timisina Nepal-Coordinator of People's SAARC Secretariat

- Democratic Confederation of Nepalese Trade Unions (DECONT)
- Democratic National Youth Federation
- Federation of Community Forest Users-Nepal (FECOFUN)
- Federation of Drinking Water and Sanitation Users-Nepal
- Feminist Dalit Organization
- General Federation of Nepalese Trade Unions (GEFONT)
- Global March against Child Labor
- Himalayan Grassroots Women's Natural Resource Management Association (HIMAWANTI)
- Inter Religious Council-Nepal
- National Federation of Disabled-Nepal
- National Federation of Irrigation Water Users' Association-Nepal
- National Forum of Advocacy-Nepal
- National Land Rights Concern Group
- Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities
- Nepal Students' Union
- Nepal Students' Union (Democratic)
- Nepal Tarun Dal
- Nepal Tarun Dal (Democratic)
- Nepal Trade Union Congress (NTUC)
- NGO Federation of Nepal (NFN)
- Rastriya Dalit Network (RDN)
- South Asian Free Media Association
- Teachers' Union of Nepal
- Women Security Pressure Group-Nepal
- WHRD Network

2) Organizations/Networks Involved in Organizing People's SAARC as Host Country Organizers:

- Alliance against Trafficking in Women and Children in Nepal
- Alliance for Natural Resources, Nepal (ANAR)
- Action Aid Nepal
- Human Rights Alliance
- All Nepal National Free Students' Union
- All Nepal Peasants' Association
- All Nepal Women's Association
- Civil Solidarity for Peace
- Confederation of Nepalese Professionals (CONEP)
- Children's Zone of Peace
- Dalit NGO Federation

3) Regional Organizer:

South Asia Alliance for Poverty Eradication
(SAAPE)

- Tham Maya Thapa
- Gagendra Nepal
- Birendra Pokharel
- Tej Sunar
- K B Rokaya
- Balram Baskota
- Sabitri Bhushal

4) Financial Committee

- Bharati Pathak
- Tej Sunar
- Ramesh Dhamala
- Thama Maya Thapa
- Gopal Lamsal

5) Local Coordination Committee

- Dr. Netra Timsina
- Sharmila Karki
- Dr. Sarba Raj Khadka
- Shanti Adhikari
- Rama Paudel
- Chongduk Bhote
- Samir Nepal
- Bharati Pathak

6) Volunteers at Secretarial

- Dinesh Bhattarai
- Ram Hari Tripathi
- Indira Shankar
- Naveen Ghimire
- Indira Bohara
- Raju Khadka

7) Volunteer Coordinators

- Arjun Bhattarai
- Gopal Lamsal
- Prakash Dulal