

The SAAPE Communiqué

We, the participants of the South Asia Alliance for Poverty Eradication (SAAPE) Annual General Meeting held in Kathmandu on 29-30 July 2007, representing various civil society groups, social movements, mass organizations, trade unions, professional societies and NGOs from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka reaffirm our commitment to the full realisation of peace, justice and food sovereignty in South Asia. We strongly believe that:

1. A growing democratic deficit is starkly noticed in almost all countries of South Asia. This deficit has been accentuated by both internal and external factors;
2. The internal factor that was clearly manifested in the entire region was the growing subservience of the ruling elite to the tenets of dogmatic neo-liberalism; and in all countries of the region, local and global hegemonic forces are creating conflicts, militarization, exclusion and growing sense of insecurity among the people;
3. As a consequence, there has been an unprecedented drain on natural resources of the region. The overall result is increased destitution in the countryside. The landless are driven out of the rural economy as the corporate logic of globalised agriculture replaces labour and offers no employment opportunities. The rural economy with the destruction of sustenance and sustainable agriculture is unable to accommodate the poor. They are, therefore, forced to migrate to the urban centres to suffer further. They migrate as penniless poor with no adequate skills required in urban areas. As new immigrants, they have no access to any welfare and security services, obviously, their food sovereignty is virtually destroyed;
5. Water, land, food, forests, seeds, biodiversity and culture are common assets of humanity for present and future generations. We strongly believe that people have the right to safe food, continuously, free from genetic modification;
6. Food sovereignty at the family, society, national, regional and international levels is a basic human right. In this regard, scientific land reforms assuring peasants' access to and control over land resources are fundamental requirements, along with the protection of indigenous knowledge system and practices. The age-old practices and knowledge systems of our people preserved soil fertility, evolution of sensible ways and means to conserve water and forests. The current development trends threaten these historic gains and achievements of our people;
7. The plunder, reminiscent of the days of colonial rule, has serious manifestations on climate change. National governments are allowing the exploitation of mineral wealth, oceanic wealth, forest wealth, genetic wealth and all forms of natural endowments in the name of market reform, undermining the rights of the people to these resources;
8. Failures in agrarian reforms, egalitarian distribution of resources, development of infrastructure and provision of health and child-care facilities have taken gender-specific forms. Livelihood resources for women have dwindled and new ways of curtailing their consumption have emerged even as the commodity market expands and proliferates. At the same time, women have become the objects of numerous unsustainable

development interventions. Women in the labour market have not been either fully or partially in control of the incomes they generate and what should have been their purchasing power. Women still do not participate substantively in the political-public domain or in the non-state juridical domain of local decision-making and arbitration;

9. The absence of peace is evident everywhere in South Asia, encompassing the political, economic, social, communal, ethnic, class, caste, and gender arenas, all of which are interconnected. This absence of peace and proliferations of conflicts is the pretext being used by South Asian governments to suspend democratic exercises and curtail human rights of citizens. Democracy and a democratic culture are at their worst; militarism and militarization are at their height. The global powers under the imperialistic leadership of USA government, still chants the song of "War on Terror" to implement its agenda of domination and denial;
10. The present system exploits each and every situation of crises for taking away democratic rights and substituting with draconian powers and crushing civil liberties, eroding human rights, branding all dissents as 'terrorism', instituting new curbs on freedom of expression, breeding xenophobia urging to eliminate the 'other'. All these tendencies entail gross denial of justice and growing violations of democracy, human rights and the right to self-determination;
11. A holistic understanding of peace has to be discovered by rejecting the current dominant culture of war and cultivating the culture of peace. Peace is a pre-condition for fullness of dignified life. Human beings can become fully human only in the condition of peace. Creativity, spirituality, individual and collective achievements attain glory in the climate of peace;
12. Justice is the pre-condition for peace. We hasten to add that the war against poverty cannot be achieved through pious platitudes contained in such hypocritical pronouncements as the MDGs. The true solution lies in respecting the sovereignty and autonomy of each community to plan its own future using its own resources, knowledge and local ingenuity. We affirm our commitment peace with justice;
13. An end to nuclearisation at global, regional and local is urgent. We demand de-nuclearisation in our region and drastic reduction of defense expenditure. We call upon national governments to begin by reducing their defense expenditures annually at least by ten percent of the current allocation and reallocating the same for social security purposes. As a first step in this direction we demand the introduction of people's social security system to cover all segments of the economy– the unemployed and the marginalised people;
14. Among various forms of marginalization and exclusion we find the problems of refugees particularly of Bhutan, is alarming. Minimum standards must be followed immediately to arrest the continuing violation of Human Rights of the Bhutanese Refugees. Social and political security and the rights of refugees must be guaranteed without further delay. Similarly, the rights of all the people subjected to involuntary displacement, internally as well as externally, must be restored immediately; and
15. We express our serious concern in the renewed war in Sri Lanka and hardships of large sections of people in addition to the killing and wounding of countless numbers. We urge the parties in conflict to arrive at a speedy settlement and promote sustainable peace and reconciliation mechanism to prevent further conflict in the future.

We, the people of South Asia, unitedly in solidarity declare that we are not enemies of each other, that we do not want war against each other, that we do not want to be armed into starvation. We further call upon all the governments of the different countries in the region to cease all covert and overt hostilities; to resolve all disputes through amicable dialogue, to immediately reduce tensions, to decrease the militarization of the borders and to take urgent steps to bring about peace, justice and ensure social security for the people to live in dignity.