

PEOPLE'S SAARC

History and Evolution



South Asia Alliance for Poverty Eradication (SAAPE)

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Foreword

This publication of the history and evolution of People's SAARC is about the voices of people of South Asia to affirm their commitment to justice, peace and democracy in the region. This is also about 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. The SAARC has failed to deliver what it promises to people of South Asia and the South Asian states and the ruling class continue to create artificial barriers that divide lands, collectivities and minds; and transcend all boundaries. The People's SAARC has a common platform of South Asian social movements and critical groups that create pressure for democratisation of the society, dignity of people and distributional justice.

Began with an interaction of a small group in 1992 in Bangkok, the idea of initiating civil society process in South Asia to extend people to people solidarity for democracy and human rights, some South Asian groups and concerned individuals met in Kathmandu from 16th to 17th February 1993. Representatives of civil society organisations and social movements assembled in Kathmandu on 18th-19th May 1994 to discuss the ways and means to foster cooperation, solidarity and action at people's level in fragmented South Asia; jointly signed a declaration titled 'Toward People's SAARC: Statement of Concerns'. In the meantime, many of the protagonists of the People's SAARC initiative formed a regional alliance - South Asia Alliance for Poverty Eradication (SAAPE) in 2001. Since its inception, SAAPE took an initiative to revive People's SAARC process. The efforts culminated in 2004 on the occasion of the SAARC Summit at Islamabad. Afterwards, the People's SAARC has been a common space that more and more social movements, organisations and individuals come together to raise the voices against poverty, injustices and marginalisation created by the ruling elites of South Asia.

We highly appreciate the contribution of Mr. Mohiuddin Ahamad – one of the founding members of the People's SAARC for the comprehensive documentation of the emergence and development of People's SAARC over time. We are thankful to Mr. Sushovan Dhar for his contribution in compilation of People's SAARC processes and editing this document. Similarly, thanks are due to the members of SAAPE secretariat Ms. Prerna Bomzan, Mr. Som Rai, Mr. Praman Adhikari, Mr. Sugat Bhattarai and Ms. Ankur Thapa.

Hope, this publication will remain a living document to trace the history and understand the dynamics of the emergence and development of People's SAARC as a common platform to fight against poverty and injustice in South Asia.

Dr. Netra Prasad Timsina

Coordinator, SAAPE

People's SAARC Secretariat, Kathmandu

Introduction

The idea of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) was first mooted by President Ziaur Rahman of Bangladesh in a letter to King Birendra Shah of Nepal on 2 May 1980. Almost identical letters were hand delivered by special envoys to heads of government of Bhutan, India, Maldives, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. The first meeting of Foreign Secretaries of seven South Asian countries was held in Colombo in April 1981, which set the stage for further dialogue for a course of action for regional cooperation. The declaration of SAARC was signed in August 1983 in a meeting of Foreign Ministers of South Asian countries in New Delhi. Eight objectives of SAARC were to:

- Promote the welfare of the people and to improve their quality of life;
- Accelerate economic growth, social progress and cultural development;
- Promote active collaboration and mutual assistance in economic, social, cultural, technical and scientific fields;
- Strengthen cooperation among themselves in international forums and with other developing countries;
- Promote and strengthen collective self-reliance among the countries;
- Strengthen cooperation with other developing countries;
- Continue mutual trust, understanding and appreciation of another's problems; and
- Cooperate with international and regional organisations.

The summit of the heads of governments of seven South Asian countries was held in Dhaka in December 1985. The summit formally launched SAARC and adopted the SAARC Charter on 8th December, 1985. Several years later, Afghanistan joined SAARC as the 8th member.

While the need for regional cooperation in South Asia has become ever more urgent, and the recognition of this fact is growing at the ground level, the states in South Asia continue to pursue their anachronistic

conflicts and antagonisms. SAARC has not yet been successful in bringing any meaningful cooperation and have so far not been able to address many of the real concerns faced by people of the region.

Although several attempts were made to conceptualise regional cooperation and integration from a more 'humane' standpoint, they did not transcend national and sectoral boundaries. When South Asian participants heard the news of the demolition of the *Babri Masjid* while attending the People's Plan for Twenty First Century (PP21) assembly in Bangkok in December 1992, it sparked off spontaneous protests and the desire for coming together at the regional level. Some participants quickly drafted a 'protest note' and marched to the Indian embassy in Bangkok to hand it over to the embassy officials. They also decided to do something concrete in South Asia.

In the beginning of 1993, civil society's initiatives started evolving within the framework of PP21, however, with a pro-active quest for a South Asian agenda for people's plan, action and solidarity. Some South Asian groups and concerned individuals met in Kathmandu in February 1993 to chalk out a program of action. It was the beginning of a collective journey that continued erecting building blocks for an inclusive platform and campaign involving the common people of the region. The phrase 'People's SAARC' was used formally for the first time on 24 July 1993 in Dhaka and then on 8th November, 1993 in Kathmandu when some South Asian groups attempted to conceptualise a South Asian vision. After a series of consultations and going through a painstaking process, the first assembly on "Towards People's SAARC" took place in Kathmandu in May 1994. This was followed by a more rigorous consultation on People's SAARC in New Delhi in July 1995. Thus a process of regional integration that started from above in the early 1980s and largely eluded the people at the grassroots, an alternative process of integration from below found its expression within a decade.

With the change of circumstances in PP21 after its assembly in Kathmandu in March 1996, the process of People's SAARC was temporarily interrupted. The process then reappeared in January 2004 in Islamabad as an outcome of joint efforts of SAAPE and SAP and has been continuing since then with ups and downs. Meanwhile, ground realities have changed in many spheres, and so also the language of processes and protests. Peoples SAARC has received widespread resonance and witnessed participation from people's movements of the region. The events at Kathmandu in 2007,

Colombo in 2008, New Delhi in 2010 and Thiruvananthapuram saw enthusiasm brimming and imaginations fired for a better South Asia. It is also one of the leading South Asian forum where activists and intellectuals, academics and members of civil society; all meet to articulate and share their common South Asian dream. The dream of People's SAARC that first found its expression in Kathmandu in May 1994 would be revisited in 2014 after a span of two decades. This would provide all concerned to look back, scope for stocktaking, learn lessons and move forward.

In this text, it has been endeavored to dig out the past that corresponds to organised actions towards people's solidarity at the South Asian level. This is not the comprehensive history of the People's SAARC, but a narrative of the initial years that grounded the collective dream of the people of South Asia for a People's SAARC and also the journey which saw its evolution in the last two decades and more.

Setting the Tune

People's Plan for Twenty First Century (PP21), a civil society initiative for achieving trans-border democracy in Asia, took off at Minamata, Japan, in 1988. During the PP21 Assembly in Bangkok in December 1992, South Asian participants informally discussed the idea of initiating a similar process in South Asia. As a follow up of this discussion, some South Asian groups and concerned individuals met in Kathmandu from 16th to 17th February, 1993 to discuss issues faced by the people of this region on a day to day basis. Discussions were centered round three major issues:

- South Asian realities and challenges, particularly communalism, poverty and effectiveness of SAARC;
- Reflection on PP21; and Action agenda.
- As a process, participants felt that PP21 could play a catalytic role in the ongoing efforts of the people in South Asia through facilitating wider sharing of ideas and experiences and forging solidarity alliance across borders.
- The meeting in Kathmandu identified the following areas as a basis for further action:
- Promoting communal harmony and combating religious, and ethnic violence;
- Environmentally sustainable development and river water issues;
- Economic issues: structural adjustment and its effects on the people, possible alternatives;
- Indigenous people and ethnic minorities;
- Demilitarisation and denuclearisation;
- Human rights; and
- Overall South Asian perspective and future vision.

Seven working groups jointly prepared a preliminary outline for action. The basic thrust was to identify groups and organisations who had been working on these issues and set up a mechanism whereby they could help groups to elaborate the proposal further.

A coordination committee was formed to work until an extended meeting was organised in the later part of 1993. Among members of the coordination committee were Luingham Luithui, Om Srivastava, Prem Chandran John, Sushil Pyakurel, Nighat Said Khan, Abdul Majid Mallik, Abdus Sabur and Rajendra Wijetunga.

ACHAN, a network of health activists based in Madras (Chennai), volunteered to function as the secretariat. It was agreed that preliminary work would be done in each country to expand contacts and invite groups and movements to join the South Asian process.

List of participants

Bangladesh: Abdul Majid Mallik, Rosaline Costa, Sanwara Begum Sara, F.R. Timm, Mayenuddin Khan Badal, Habibur Rahman.

Bhutan: Om Dhungel.

India: Minar Pimple, Tapan K Bose, K M Thomas, Prem Chandran John, C H Preetha, Buddhadeb Chaudhury, Biplab Halim, Ranjit Roy Chaudhury, Thomas Kocherry, Shubra Hanjabam, Rajesh Tandon, Luingham Luithui, Kamla Bhasin, Justice P N Bhagawati, Om Srivastava.

Pakistan: Anita Mir.

Nepal: Gopal Siwakoti, Sushil Pyakurel, Govinda Singh Rawat, Bhogendra Sharma, Pradeep Nepal, B P Kahatiwada, Arjun K Karki.

Sri Lanka: Rajendra Wijetunga, A T Ariyaratne.

USA: Clarence J Dias.

PP21 Secretariat, Bangkok: Abdus Sabur, Boonthan T Verawongse.

Convention on Communal Harmony

Within the framework of the South Asian process, a People's Convention on Communal Harmony was held in Dhaka from 23rd to 24th July, 1993. Among participants were representatives of citizens' groups, NGOs, political parties, and cultural organisations. On the second day, many victims of communal violence narrated their story of agony, plight and persecution. In the final session, a declaration titled "People's Plan for

Communal Harmony" was endorsed by the participants to reflect people's concerns (See Annex1).

South Asia Convention

A South Asia Convention was held on 26-28 August 1993 in Madras (Chennai), which was the culmination of past efforts to bring the spirit of Minamata and Bangkok to the subcontinent. As never before in the history of South Asia, is this spirit sorely needed, to correct the aberrations in the body politic of the region and to bring about grassroots democratisation. About one hundred delegates from different countries spent three days: the first day in communion with three hundred peasants, child workers, dalits, tribals and others, looking in depth into common problems of the region and making positive action plans to set in motion transformation processes. Alliances between believers and transcending borders would form the basis of this hope.

The convention was organised by ACHAN. The first day was dedicated to separate workshops around issues, such as, women, fisherfolks, industrial workers, democracy, development and human rights, urban issues, peasants, indigenous people, environment, human rights and child labor, dalit, and displaced people. Discussions on the second day centered round perceptions and visions of the poor as expressed by them in the sectoral workshops held on the first day. On the final day, working groups were formed based on issues identified and prioritised through the process of the previous two days. These issues were considered as most important and necessary to be addressed immediately:

- Militarisation; working group: Mayenuddin Khan Badal, Tapan Bose.
- Women and child trafficking; working group: Rosaline Costa.
- Communal and ethnic violence; working group: Madeeha Gohar, Kailash Satyarthi, Majid Mallik, P Tamang.
- River water and environment; working group: Mohiuddin Ahmad, Biplab Halim, Arjun K Karki.
- Human rights; working group: Tapan Bose, Sushil Pyakurel, Shiva Hari Dahal, Ravi Nair.

A steering committee for a South Asian collective was formed that included Om Srivastava (India), Sushil Pyakurel (Nepal), Karamat Ali (Pakistan), Mohammad Zahid (Maldives), Abdul Majid Mallik (Bangladesh),

Rajendra Wijetunga (Sri Lanka), Prem Chandran John (India) and Abdus Sabur (ACFOD/PP21 Secretariat). ACHAN was nominated as the secretariat.

List of participants

Bangladesh: Sanwara Begum Sara, Amita Dey, Rowshan Rahman, Rosaline Costa, Ali Ahmed Ziauddin, Abdul Majid Mallik, Md. Abu Nayem, Habibur Rahman, Iqbal Mazumdar, Khorshed Alam, Mohiuddin Ahmad, Mayenuddin Khan Badal, Sharif Nurul Ambia.

India: Alpa Vora, Swami Agnivesh, Angam Tipnis, Aziz Pabaney, Bernaud Andrews, Bhagwan Das, Biplab Halim, Fatima Burnad, Ilaya Perumal, Freda Chandrasekaran, Felix Sugirtharaj, Harry Holloway, Rev. Isaac Kadirvel, Jyotirmoy B R Chowdhury, Jagabondhu Ghosh, Kailash Satyarthi, J John, Joe Madiath, Mira Shiva, Mustafa Mochalla, Mathew Koshy, Merentien Jahir, Manubhai Shah, Nandini Das Gupta, Ossie Fernandes, Om Srivastava, Pskiriswami, Rev. P J Premaiah, Paul N Diwakar, Prem Chandran John, C H Preetha, S J Prabhu, Ranjit Roy Chowdhury, Ravi Nair, Sidda Reddy, A K Sindh, Sailendranath Ghosh, Sandeep Pendse, Siddhartha, K T Suresh, Shivraj Rao, Shubra Hanjamam, Tapan Bose, K M Thomas, R L Tiwari, Kirtee Shah.

Maldives: Aishath Velezine, Md. Zahid.

Nepal: Arjun K Karki, Gopal Siwakoti, Govind Shah Rawat, Kundan Aryal, Meena Poudel, Padmalai Biswakarma, Parshuram Tamang, Sushil Pyakurel, Shiva Hari Dahal.

Pakistan: Farhat Parveen, Madeeha Gohar, Sharafat Ali, Sheema Kermani.

Sri Lanka: Rev. Isaac Kadirvel, Nimalka Fernando, Jagath Siriwardhane, Thirunavakarasu, Upali Magedaraggamage.

Others: Jeferson R Plantilla and Muto Ichiyo (Japan), Lai Suat Yan (Malaysia), Estrella Gonzaga (Philippines), Clarence Dias (USA)

PP21 Secretariat (Bangkok): Abdus Sabur, Boonthan T Veerawongse, Wilaiwan.

Proposal for South Asia Initiative

As a follow up to the Madras Convention of August 1993, core members of South Asian working group met in Kathmandu from 7th to 8th November, 1993 in connection with a conference organised by the YUVA. The main objective was to prepare a draft proposal for the South Asia Initiative. The group consisted of Prem Chandran John, Abdus Sabur, Karamat Ali and Mohiuddin Ahmad. This was the first attempt to outline relevant conceptual issues. The group concluded that:

The SAARC had not yet been able to go beyond mundane rhetorics. Democratic institutions with the acceptable level of accountability and transparency are very weak in the region and are still confined within narrow limits of franchise. States as they exist today are hegemonic to their people. Due to their divisive policies and coercive activities, South Asia has become a hot bed of communal and ethnic violence, trafficking of women and children, wasteful arms race and state terrorism. The people at the grassroots are increasingly being marginalised by the states and their dominant classes, supported and promoted by the global hegemonic system. The people are losing their rights over their resources and constituencies, and are being uprooted from their social and economic base. The right to life and livelihood are increasingly being threatened. The biggest challenge for the people in South Asia now is to fight back, to combat divisive ideologies and coercive institutions imposed on them and to assert power as free members of a civil society. To achieve this, the people need to have a vision for the future, their own agenda and concerted action.

The region has been subject to political and social fragmentation. In order to foster solidarity, understanding and cohesion among the people, concerted actions are necessary at the levels of ideas and institutions in order to put forward an alternative view and paradigm. In this backdrop, and in the context of realities of the region, series of activities are required in several broad areas as follows:

- Environment and people's right on natural resources
- Human rights and demilitarisation
- Ethnic/communal harmony and right of the ethnic/religious minorities, dalits and other oppressed groups
- People's perspective on development alternatives

Already many activities are going on in each of these above-mentioned areas by different forums and groups at different levels. However, there has been little coordination between these activities, as well as among the actors, at the trans-border level. Planned trans-border actions are necessary in order to accelerate social activism both at the local and at the regional level.

It is expected that after necessary preparatory work in each of the areas mentioned above, the pertinent issues would surface with their real trans-border character and would no more be narrowly handled by the people with state-biased ideologies. This is very important in the context of present day realities of South Asia where states and their institutions have so far failed to address these issues because of political rivalry and other vested interests.

The state of women in South Asia is precarious. However, 'women' have not been bracketed as a separate agenda, as it may make them non-visible in other fields of intervention. It has to be borne in mind that each issue has a gender dimension, be it human rights or environment or militarism. This dimension needs to be brought in every stage of study, campaign, networking and social mobilisation.

A two year action plan is proposed to prepare the ground for fruitful interaction among people. The plan envisages activities at three levels: at the level of ideas, at the level of activists and at the level of the people in the grassroots. These three levels are not mutually exclusive, but are complementary. The methodology would be sequenced as follows:

- Study and information communication on pertinent issues;
- Interaction and exchange between social activists;
- Interaction and exchange between people's groups;
- Solidarity and networking between social movements;
- Influencing policymakers through campaign, lobby and formulation of alternatives.

The South Asian process basically aims at achieving a higher level of people's unity for a better quality of life in a socio-economic-cultural environment in harmony with nature. One immediate objective is to develop and accelerate critical awareness for trans-border information and people. We vow to fight out all obstacles hindering freedom of movement of the common people across borders by artificial barriers created by

dominant groups and classes. This is perceived as the basis for "People's SAARC".

South Asian Perspective

In the Madras Convention of August 1993, formulation of an overall South Asian Perspective was identified as an important task. As a follow up of the Madras Convention and the Kathmandu working group meeting of November 1993, a small meeting was organised by ASPBAE at the PRIA campus in New Delhi in April 1994. A team of civil society representatives met for two days to draft a declaration on South Asian Perspective. The team consisted of Kailash Pyakurel (Nepal), Mohiuddin Ahmad and Abdus Sabur (Bangladesh), Rajesh Tendon, Ranabir Samaddar, Om Srivastava and Maria Lourdes Almazan-Khan (India) and Villipuram Thirunavukkarasu (Sri Lanka). The regional context was aptly summarised in a declaration. It was aimed at developing, strengthening and updating conceptual foundation and guidance for the South Asia Initiative See Annex2).

People's Commission on River Water and Environment

Just before the Madras Convention, participants of Bangladesh, Nepal and West Bengal held a daylong meeting in Kolkata on 24 August 1993. They decided to form a People's Commission on River Water and Environment. Participants of the Madras Convention endorsed the idea. The Commission was comprised of CDL (Bangladesh), RRN (Nepal) and IMSE (India). CDL was nominated as the secretariat.

The Commission members first met in Dhaka on 26-27 November 1993 and decided to do a study of the *Ganga* basin. Main tasks of the Commission were identified as to:

- Make an inventory of all state-sponsored interventions in the *Ganga* basin;
- Study the impact of these interventions on the people and their environment;
- Interact with institutions which are working in this field and with grassroots groups who are affected in various ways by these interventions;

- Prepare independent country status report on the *Ganga* basin by Commission members of respective countries by June 1994;
- Meet in Kathmandu in July 1994 to discuss three country status reports and decide about the integration of the reports; and
- Launch campaign and solidarity actions on the basis of the study as part of the endeavor to change state policy in favor of the people on river water.

The Commission after discussion on the past, present and emerging problems strongly felt that “viable and acceptable alternatives for optimal use of water resources by the people of the *Ganga* basin is possible only and if only integrated development programs are drawn up and implemented taking the basin as a unit.” Among the Commission members who participated in the meeting were Dilip Kumar Barua and Mohiuddin Ahmad (Bangladesh), Sunil Sen Sharma and Biplab Halim (India), and Shree Govinda Shah and Arjun Karki (Nepal).

A South Asian Convention on River Water and Environment was held in Kathmandu from 16th to 18th July, 1994. The Convention was jointly organised by the people’s commission and RRN. The event coincided with the second meeting of the Commission. In total, there were thirty participants including some from outside the region. Three independent country status reports on the *Ganga* basin were presented in the Convention and were discussed in details. It was decided to hold an extended meeting of the Commission in early 1995 to integrate and finalise the study on the *Ganga* basin.

List of participants

Bangladesh: Farzana Siddique, Mohiuddin Ahmad, Dilip Kumar Barua, Harun ur Rashid, Muniruzzaman, Abul Haseeb Khan, Sharif Nurul Ambia.

India: Meghnad, Ghunshi Soren, Samir Das Gupta, Biplab Halim, Sunil Sen Sharma, Buddhadeb Chaudhury, Smitu Kothari, B N Aich.

Nepal: Arjun Karki, Ashish Gurung, Shree Govinda Shah, Ganesh Ghimire, Pramod Parajuli, Gopi Upreti, Netra B Chhetri, Bharat Sharma, Nanda P Joshi, Jhalanath Khanal.

Pakistan: Mohammad Taj, Haider Hayat.

Sri Lanka: Jayaratna Malyagoda, Seneka Weeresinghe, D A Jayawardhana.

Others: M S Zulkarnaen (Indonesia), Kuwahara Mamoru (Japan) and Dilok Sarawadi, Thongjareon Srihtham, Vanida Tantinitayapitak and Abdus Sabur (Thailand).

Challenging Destructive International Aid

In January 1994, a national consultation on the Campaign against World Bank and Destructive International Aid (CAWBADIA) hosted by the *Narmada Banchao Andolon* was held at Badbani of Madhya Pradesh in India. This was followed by a South Asian meeting in New Delhi, which decided to organise a South Asia Forum on Challenging Destructive International Aid (SAFDIA). Accordingly, representatives from various civil society forums gathered at Dhulikhel in Nepal from 19th to 21st July, 1994 to discuss issues on destructive international aid and people's movements. The meeting was jointly organised by RRN and CAWBADIA. The meeting formally launched SAFDIA and RRN was nominated to function as its secretariat.

The campaign proposed five preconditions for the World Bank-IMF to consider including openness and full public accountability, to reorient economic policies in line with equitable development and an end to environmentally destructive projects. The meeting represented two axis of struggles. While some were involved in reforming the policies, some are actually mobilising people to resist such projects/policies. Finally the participants shared a common hope that "people to people" dialogue can bring about significant understanding, sharpen vision and prepare grounds for collective action.

One significant remark was made about the decline in states' accountability to their own people in South Asia. The challenge is how to democratise the state. It is generally agreed that the present "representative democratic system" dominated by the vested interests and reactionary forces is not delivering goods to the people. Therefore, this system has no interest to resist the global capitalist development patterns.

A sad but necessary conclusion was drawn that people could no longer rely on their present forms of nation-states represented by reactionary forces to protect them from this unfolding tragedy. Although the dominant actors in today's global economy might have considered South

Asia as a basket case, the elite and ruling oligarchies have not abandoned their infatuation with the theory of trickle-down effect. Their dream of catching up with the North still lingers on, while lives of the South Asian people are sinking in despair. People's struggles and movements in various forms will help to come out of the impasse.

Several new programs and areas of joint deliberations were identified in the meeting. These are mainly as follows:

- Coordinated action at the regional level on mega projects including displacement
- Comparative studies on South Asian economies
- Cultural programs at the regional level
- Closer collaboration with the "fifty years is enough" campaign which has been initiated by several groups in the USA
- A critical look at Indian aid and its impact on other South Asian countries
- Act towards forming a People's Parliament at the South Asian level
- Participants signed a Dhulikhel Declaration against Destructive International Aid and Structural Adjustments. Participants emphasised the following in the declaration:

We, the participants of this South Asian forum, demand from our governments, international financial institutions and bilateral donors that aid should not be linked to conditionality. We also demand that the outstanding external debt be written off. We are of the opinion that we should consciously pursue autonomous development policies arising endogenously from the region as a whole that strengthen national and regional self-reliance, and promote social justice and ecological sustenance. A South Asian civilisational alternative has to be evolved. Towards this end, we pledge to work together for strengthening alliances of South Asian people's organisations and movements. We commit ourselves to create wider awareness on the adverse impact of the new economic regimes and to mobilise our people to struggle for alternative development in South Asia.

List of participants

Bangladesh: Farzana Siddique, Mohiuddin Ahmad, Harun ur Rashid, Muniruzzaman, Abul Haseeb Khan, Sharif Nurul Ambia, Tofazzal Hossain, Abdus Sabur.

Bhutan: R P Subba.

India: Dalip Swami, Smitu Kothari, Kavaljit Singh, Jaya Srivastava, Dinesh Abrol, J John, A J Vijayan, Valiathura Trivandrum, D Barreto, Awadesh Kumar, Meghnad.

Nepal: D R Khanal, Pramod Parajuli, Shiva Maya Tumbahangphe, Parshuram Tamang, Ashish Gurung, Tej Ram Poudyal, Ganesh Ghimire, Bimal Chapagain, Gopi Upreti, Arjun K Karki, Parthibeshwar P Timilsina.

Pakistan: Shahrukh Rafi Khan, Karamat Ali, Ismat Shahjahan, Prof. Karamat Ali, B M Kutty.

Sri Lanka: Senaka Weerasinghe, Jayaratna Malyagoa, D A Jayawardana, M S R Wijetunga.

Others: Lori Udhal (USA).

Pakistan-India People's Forum for Peace and Democracy

The idea of a Pakistan-India people's convention grew out of the recognition among a section of the people in both countries that a people to people dialogue across the border can effectively reassert the voice of peace and sanity over the cries of war hysteria of the governments of the two countries.

Preparatory work for such a convention on peace and democracy began with a meeting in Lahore on 2nd September 1994, where a group of concerned citizens from India met a group of Pakistani citizens and agreed on four basic issues around which a campaign could be launched in both the countries:

- Outlawing war and attempts to create war hysteria;
- Denuclearisation and reversal of arms race;

- Peaceful and democratic solution of the Kashmir problem involving Kashmiri people;
- Curbing religious intolerance.

The Lahore meeting which set up the People's Forum for Peace and Democracy was followed by a series of regional meetings in different parts of India, as well as in Pakistan, evoking tremendous positive response among peace activists, artists and social workers. Participants of the Lahore meeting were:

India: Nirmal Mukherji, Rajni Kothari, K G Kannabiron, Dinesh Mohon, Gautam Navlakha, Kamal Mitra Chenoy, Teesta Setalvad, Tapan K Bose, Amrita Chachi.

Pakistan: I A Rehman, Khaled Ahmad, Haroon Ahmad, Karamat Ali, Mubarak Ali, Mehdi Hasan, Shahid Kardar, Madeeha Gohar, Nighat Saeed Khan, Hussain Naqi, B M Kutty, Anees Haroon, Iftekharul Haq, Rashid Ahmad, Mubashir Hasan.

This led to the second meeting of representatives of these groups and committed individuals from India and Pakistan in Delhi on 25-26 November 1994, where the participants signed a joint statement asking their governments to honor their wishes for genuine peace and friendship between two countries; a democratic solution of the Kashmir dispute; and the signing of an unconditional no-war pact between two governments. The Delhi declaration was endorsed by organisations of physicians, academics, journalists, lawyers, trade unions, writers, artists and social activists. Among the participants were:

Pakistan: Mubashir Hasan, Haroon Ahmad, Beena Sarvar, Madeeha Gohar, Karamat Ali.

India: Nirmal Mukherji, Dinesh Mohon, Sumanta Banerji, Gautam Navalakha, Tapan K Bose, Kamla Bhasin, Teesta Setalvad, Achin Vanaik, Kamal Mitra Chenoy, Anuradha Chenoy, Rita Manchanda, Amrita Chachi, Smitu Kothari, E Deenadayalam.

The increasing pace of activities around the desire for a people-to people dialogue found their ultimate expression in the Pakistan-India People's Convention on Peace and Democracy convened by the forum. In New Delhi, 100 delegates each from Pakistan and India assembled from 24th - 25th February, 1995 and freely discussed issues of concerns. They

demonstrated the popular urge to come to an agreement on contentious issues which have kept the ruling elite of the two countries locked in a never-ending conflict.

Towards People's SAARC

Representatives of civil society organisations and social movements assembled in Kathmandu from 18th -19th May, 1994 to discuss ways and means to foster cooperation, solidarity and action at the people's level in the fragmented South Asia region. The assembly was organised by the South Asian Forum on Human Rights (SAFHR). Participants deliberated on issues that they had been discussing all these years at the regional level and jointly signed a declaration titled Toward People's SAARC: Statement of Concerns. A team of representatives of the participants marched in a procession to the SAARC secretariat and submitted a copy of the declaration to the Secretary General of SAARC (See Annex3).

Alternative Agenda for South Asian People's Solidarity

An assembly of representatives of various people's organisations of South Asian countries was held in New Delhi during 21-24 July 1995 to discuss the Alternative Agenda for South Asian People's Solidarity. It is widely felt that the SAARC has not been able to meet the aspirations of the people of this region. During its one decade of existence, the SAARC has, in fact, ignored the basic issues of the people.

It was in this background that the representatives of the people's organisations of SAARC countries held this consultation to explore an Alternative Agenda. The consultation was jointly organised by INSAF, PILER, INSEC and PP21. The steering committee for the assembly was comprised of Rajendra Sail, Anand Swaroop Verma, Abdus Sabur, Mohiuddin Ahmad, Karamat Ali, Sushil Pyakurel, Sarath Fernando and Tenzing Zangpo.

The concept of People's SAARC was discussed by the participants to emphasise the need for people to people cooperation in South Asia. The idea was to help strengthen the forces of the region which seek to contribute to peace, freedom, democracy and equality in the larger interest of the people of South Asia. Drawing upon the region's common

history, shared eco-system and fundamental values, the participants expressed that there were strong bases for extensive regional cooperation.

Participants decided to consolidate and strengthen the process of the People's SAARC. A Coordination Committee comprising country coordinators was formed to steer the process until a broad-based convention is held in next six months to one year period. The country coordinators were Mohiuddin Ahmad (Bangladesh), Tenzing Zangpo (Bhutan), Anand Swaroop Verma (India), Sushil Pyakurel (Nepal), Karamat Ali (Pakistan) and Sarath Fernando (Sri Lanka). INSAF was nominated as the interim secretariat for People's SAARC.

Participants signed a declaration (See Annex4) and members of the coordination committee met the Speaker of the *Lok Sabha* (Lower House of Indian Parliament) and formally handed over a copy of the declaration.

People's SAARC Takes Off

In the meantime, many of the protagonists of the People's SAARC initiative formed a regional alliance, SAAPE in 2001. Since, its inception SAAPE was keen to revive People's SAARC process. The efforts culminated in 2004 on the occasion of the SAARC Summit at Islamabad. People's SAARC event at Islamabad was held at the joint initiative of SAAPE and SAP International.

A People's Summit for People's SAARC 2005 was held at Dhaka during the thirteenth SAARC Summit. A declaration was issued on this occasion (See Annex5)

People's SAARC 2007

The SAARC Summit was scheduled at New Delhi from 3-4 April 2007. At a meeting organised at the sidelines of the World Social Forum in Nairobi, Kenya in January 2007, the organisers of People's SAARC decided to hold it at Kathmandu instead of New Delhi. This was primarily for a few reasons; firstly, the tremendous security enclave that was being built in and around New Delhi for the 'security' of dignitaries arriving for the SAARC Summit offered bleak possibilities of holding any civil society event at the city that could mobilise people in large numbers. Secondly, it was also decided to celebrate the tremendous achievement of the Nepalese people and the success of Janandolan II by holding the People's SAARC at this historic location. It was also decided to send a delegation of People's SAARC to the SAARC Summit at New Delhi and handover the resolution and the set of demands. SAAPE took an active role to make the event a great success.

The event generated overwhelming enthusiasm from the local population. There were participants from all the eight countries of the South Asian region who collectively stressed the need to address the pressing needs of the people of the region and translate the commitments of member states into action. The three-day People's SAARC held at Kathmandu from March 23-25 adopted a declaration (see Annex6) vowing to work for a people-based democratic system of governance to develop and strengthen good governance from the grassroots to national and regional levels.

Of the many demands put forward, the conference called for strengthening and institutionalising democracy, combating religious, ethnic and gender based violence, guaranteeing sovereign rights of the people for food, solving the problems of refugees and internally displaced people, extending support to the struggle of the Bhutanese refugees, promoting free media, downsizing the defence budget, declaring 2007-2017 as SAARC Dalit decade, guaranteeing 50 percent reservation to women in all aspects of governance and ending of all forms of indentured labour in the region. Current MPs, former MPs and political leaders from Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka and Pakistan participated.

People's SAARC 2008

The fifteenth summit of SAARC was held in Colombo on 1–3 August 2008. The organisers of People's SAARC decided to hold the event in the same city prior to the Summit, from 18-20 July 2008. The event had, by that time, received wider response from all across the region. A Regional Preparatory Committee was formed including civil society members from all across South Asia to assist the Sri Lanka Preparatory Committee of People's SAARC 2008.

The South Asian People's Assembly (SAPA) as a part of the process of People's SAARC attempted to forge a vision for a People's Union of South Asia. It witnessed participation of over 1000 Sri Lankans and 400 delegates from other South Asian countries including India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Maldives, Nepal, Bhutan and Afghanistan.

Following the 29 workshops, representatives of People's SAARC resolved to issue the Colombo Declaration as the People's SAARC Declaration (See Annex7). The Declaration incorporated the major recommendations made by various country consultations and workshops of SAPA 2008. It was adopted at the plenary in the morning of the third day at the New Town Hall. This was followed by a rally of nearly 4,000 people in the main streets of Colombo, demonstrating their spirit of commitment and solidarity, reflecting their unity in diversity. The colorful rally highlighted the issues of democracy, justice, war, economic issues, etc. Creative banners and picket boards with anti-war slogans were carried in the procession, e.g., 'no to violence', 'stop the war', 'no killings', 'stop disappearances', 'end domestic violence', 'yes to democracy', etc.

The 2008 event with the wider participation and enthusiasm was another milestone to the People's SAARC process.

People's SAARC 2010

The sixteenth summit was held at Thimpu, from 28–29 April 2010. This was held in Bhutan for the first time. The previous host, the Maldives, had expressed its inability to arrange the Summit due to the economic recession. However, political conditions at Bhutan and also the lack of any civil society initiatives there did not permit holding the event at Thimpu. People's SAARC. In the meantime, a Regional Steering Committee of People's SAARC was formed earlier in 2010 for taking the process forward. The committee decided to hold the event at New Delhi from 22-23 April at the Jawaharlal Nehru University Auditorium, New Delhi.

Apart from the inaugural session there were conferences and panel discussions on 'Climate Justice and Economic Cooperation: Impacts on Livelihoods, the Discriminated and Human Rights', 'Politics of hate, terrorism and militarism, fighting imperialism and building people's foreign policy', 'Building South Asian unity through federalism, deepening democracy and freedom of movement' and 'Review of People's SAARC Process so far and Conceptualisation of a People's Union of South Asia'. A Parliamentary Forum was organised where parliamentarians from India, Nepal and Pakistan spoke on issues affecting the people of the region.

A number of workshops were organised on Feminism, Socialism and Ecology, Universal Social Security, Migration, Environmental justice and livelihood rights, Climate Justice and Water, Free Trade, Health, Minorities and Marginalised communities, Social Justice, Labour, Post conflict Society, Social Exclusion, etc.

A People's SAARC declaration (See Annex8) was issued calling for people's commitment to create a South Asia free from all forms of discrimination, exclusion and domination. It urged all SAARC countries to struggle against militarism and jingoism; and demanded reduction of military expenditure and make this fund available for socially useful spending on public welfare and social security for all.

People's SAARC 2010 was attended by delegates from all the countries of SAARC as well as delegates from Tibet and Philippines. There were

discussions on the issues and people's demands to be presented to the official 16th SAARC summit at Thimpu.

A South Asia labour movement interaction workshop was organised on as part of broader People's SAARC summit held in New Delhi from the 21-23 April 2010. The workshop issued a statement (See Annex9)

Seminar on the Right to Repartition of Bhutanese Refugees: Sharing testimonies by Bhutanese refugees with South Asian representatives Since SAARC Summit was held in Bhutan for the first time it was anticipated that Bhutan would take this opportunity to showcase its success to the external world, especially those relating to its "democratic transition" and its "well being" as defined through the concept of "Gross National Happiness".

However, at the same time, 108,000 stateless Bhutanese people were living in 7 refugee camps in Nepal whom the Bhutanese authorities refused to take back. SAAPE in coordination with the Bhutanese Refugees Civil Society Committee held a programme on the issue of refugees at Jhapa on April 25, 2010. The Bhutanese refugees shared testimonies to civil society members from Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan. Thereafter, a seminar was held which issued a statement (See Annex 10).

People's SAARC 2011

The Seventeenth Summit was held from 10-11 of November 2011 in Addu City, Maldives. While there were attempts to hold People's SAARC in Maldives during the SAARC Summit, it could not be organised due to the inherent weakness and limitations of the Maldives Civil Society. Maldives NGO Federation organised a meeting of a few civil society members from South Asian countries at Male and issued a press statement (See Annex 11)

People's SAARC India Assembly 2011

A two-day Assembly, People's Movements Unite South Asia, was held at Trivandrum, Kerala from 8-9 November 2011. The Assembly addressed the question of people's movements and their struggles and organised a process to expand and pro-actively bring on board mass organisations and social movements. The themes discussed at the Assembly were Democracy and Human Rights with a special focus on people's struggles and security legislation in South Asia; Trade and Livelihood; Women's Role in People's Movements; De-Militarisation and De-Nuclearisation; Natural Resources

and People's Movement; Rebuilding Labour Movement in the region; Exclusion, Discrimination, Oppression; and Tolerance, Syncretism and Secularism.

The assembly saw the participation of organisations representing all sections of society and progressive perspectives which enabled the meeting to translate into continuing solidarity across the region. The Thiruvananthapuram Declaration was passed on this occasion (*See Annex 12*)

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Annexes

Annex 1: Declaration of the Convention on Communal Harmony

23-24 July 1993, Dhaka

People's Plan for Communal Harmony

South Asia is the birthplace of many religions and a region where the people from different faiths have lived amicably together for centuries. Despite its historical rise and fall, the subcontinent has also succeeded in strengthening its secular institutions and some of the values, beliefs and practices of such institutions have made a significant contribution to human civilisation.

The destruction of the *Babri Masjid* last year, however, meant destruction of the symbol of India's secular identity. The *Babri Masjid* was a symbol of the sense of security among Indian Muslims. In its destruction, a large section of the Hindu population misguidedly saw a vindication of their right to assert their dominance over the Muslim minorities. The shock waves from the demolition have rapidly traveled across the country and its frontiers carrying in their wake bloodshed, fear and anger.

Although, following these events, the urban areas soon became tinder boxes of communal tension, in rural areas the country's old bond between the two communities endured to a large extent. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that the carefully woven tapestry of peaceful co-existence has been stretched and in many areas the fabric held only by a slender thread of sanity.

If the demolition of the *Babri Masjid* on December 6th was a watershed, then the continuing bloodbath, carnage and looting in Bombay, Karachi and Bhola was the flood. In what is one of the poorest regions of the world where millions of children sleep hungry in the streets, do not get a square meal in weeks and often do not have access to pure drinking water, self-seekers, power hungry politicians and their cohorts went on the rampage with the result that everything including age-old traditions of communal

brotherhood, came down. As the crisis developed, states and governments took a rear seat as observers hoping to reap some benefit in the aftermath of the carnage.

After a careful analysis of the events, we have made the following observations:

The people, especially the minority communities, have developed a deep sense of anger at, and distrust of, state systems i.e. the bureaucracy, parliament and the judiciary; the police (who instead of protecting the victims, often connive with the perpetrators), all of whom they feel have failed them. They also include the politicians in their anger, since for the most part they refused to risk their safe seats by calling for sanity and humanity.

States have failed to protect their people by refusing to act to enforce the rule of law, or to protect and safeguard the interests of minority communities. It was observed that states instead of acting, have merely reacted and even this was painfully slow.

Established political organisations which uphold secular and democratic values, have failed to live up to their commitments and have not extended effective safeguards to minority communities. Nor have they succeeded in mobilising public opinion in favor of communal harmony. Their commitment to the people has seldom graduated from rhetoric.

The existence of a strong communal bias in our ideology has significantly influenced the politics of governments in the subcontinent. This has led to massive militarisation in the region including intense competition for production of nuclear bombs. Increased allocation of funds to the military has meant less resources for social sectors, thus undermining efforts towards development and the alleviation of poverty.

The institutionalisation of a form of democracy where institutions are solely concerned with vote-seeking in order to demonstrate state sanction for activities which only serve the interests of those with resources and power, and the failure of this democracy to address the interests of ordinary people has resulted in a political vacuum in which religious fanaticism and fundamentalism have thrived.

The impact on the morale of minority communities of the violence and loss of life and property has generated a deep sense of insecurity, which has

seriously undermined their long-term commitment to their countries. This has, in turn, affected the economic and social investment plans of these communities leading to underdevelopment.

Since the state has monopolised all decision-making processes and the people have been marginalised, the forces of religious fanaticism and fundamentalism have gained the upper hand and, as always in situations of confusion and uncertainty, vested interest groups have moved in fast with carefully designed instruments for profiteering. In this process, society has been polarised between the state and the government on the one hand civil society on the other. While the dominant interest of the former remains power, including state power and wealth, the civil society agenda focused on democracy and development.

Areas such as urban slums with lower literacy, high unemployment and poor sanitation were the worst hit.

Rural areas with a lower concentration of conflicting interest groups experienced less violence and intimidation.

Some sectors of the civil society, with or without institutional support, and often risking their lives, moved in and helped by trying to mobilise community support, protection for the minorities, resettlement, food, shelter and services and enlisting media support.

The unfortunate events which followed the controversy surrounding Rama's birthplace in Ayodhya, calls for increased trans-border political action in the form of human rights education, support to and solidarity with the campaign for communal harmony and promotion of human values across cultures. Such people's actions across borders must be seen as a new beginning towards resolving issues at the people's level and, as such, will contribute significantly towards materialising our common dream of a People's SAARC.

In view of our shared observations, we, the participants, make the following appeal to the civil society, as well as to the governments of the region for their support in achieving what must be seen as our common objectives:

- We appeal to all governments of this subcontinent to compensate the victims of communal disturbances since 6 December 1992 for

- loss of life and property and to take stern action against perpetrators of crimes.
- The convention calls on the people of South Asia to exert pressure on respective governments to bring about constitutional changes which will result in the separation of the state from religion. This separation should be introduced in all spheres of public life, especially in education and mass communication.
 - We appeal to all the people of this region to come forward and bring strong cultural bonds between communities to avert future communal discord.
 - We appeal to develop and strengthen networks in order to widen the scope of SAARC and make it functional for the people.
 - This convention proposes the complete removal of all types of travel restrictions within SAARC.
 - We appeal to all governments of this subcontinent to call a complete halt to further militarisation, and to undertake gradual disarmament and transfer of military expenditure to social sectors.
 - We appeal to all the people of the region to observe a Communal Harmony day every year across South Asia, thus building a human chain of communal fraternity.

List of signatories

Bangladesh: Ahmad Rafique, Mayenuddin Khan Badal, Ali Ahmed Ziauddin, Mohiuddin Ahmad, Abdul Majidmallik, Saiful Haque, Ali Ahmed, Habibur Rahman, Adilur Rahman Khan, Khairuzzaman Kamal, Kashem Chowdhury, Amita Dey, Dilruba Haider, Ayesha Parul, Kamal Uddin, Mohsin Ali, Selim Jahangir, Shirin Akhter, Sharif Nurul Ambia, Ayesha Arshad, Bhagabati Gghosh, Ajoy Roy, Fazlul Haque Ripon, Abu Sayeed Khan, Ali Sanowar, Baby Moudud, WahidaBanu, Ferdous Azim, Kamrun Nahar, Abul Haseeb Khan, Sadhana Das Gupta, Iqbal Mazumdar, Tofazzal Hossain, AbdusSabur.

India: Kailash Satyarthi, Buddhadeb Chaudhury, Sumita Chaudhury, Ranjan Mukherjee, Arghya KusumDatta, BithalRao.

Others: Habib Chirsen (Indonesia), Imtiaz Yusuf (Thailand).

Annex 2: Regional declaration on the South Asia perspective

It is necessary in the first place to define the region, to articulate it regionally, as well as to combine the current ethos of regionalisation with the spirit of people's plan for the twenty first century.

In human development index, the countries of South Asia occupy almost the same position. Widespread illiteracy, low position of women, child malnutrition, low wages, poor health services, heavy incidence of external debt, unfinished agrarian reforms, fallout of structural adjustment program at the behest of the Fund-Banks, high military spending, discrimination of indigenous peoples and the minorities, communal tension, migration – all these are but some of the problems facing South Asia region as a whole.

There are very noticeable differences among the countries of the region such as the size of territory, population and natural resources endowment. Ethnically, countries are diverse from each other. Development of civic politics and of popular movement for democracy and justice also vary from country to country. These differences rule out any standard prescription of development for all the countries of South Asia. Particularly, differences in economic strength remains a forbidding factor towards regional integration. Narrow delimitation of South Asia is another such deterrent.

Yet similarities override dissimilarities and differences. They demand that a regional perspective be adopted. Only by defining South Asia regionally, geographically, geo-economically and geo-ecologically, countries and peoples of this region can negotiate the arrival of the twenty first century and can have meaningful dialogue with other parts of Asia and the world.

Due to a shared past, problems of communal violence, ethnic unrest, language conflicts and eviction of cross state boundaries are some of the prevalent regional problems. Migration, water sharing, energy harnessing, combating fundamentalism, protecting minority rights, and such other issues have to be tackled both bilaterally and multilaterally, in other words regionally. It is imperative to share knowledge, skills, resources and abilities, even if at a gradual pace, in the context of a dominant agrarian milieu, natural and man-made disasters, drought and flood, energy crisis and adverse terms of trade with the North.

In this age, when knowledge itself is an important component of power, such sharing of knowledge at the primary level is important. Therefore, whether for intra-region trade or for support to economic activities, solidarity with democratic activism and upholding commonalities, sharing of information and knowledge becomes crucial at all levels. Sharing is the first step towards forming an agenda of people's plan in and for South Asia.

Yet, can we rely on the states of South Asia to steer this process of sharing? These states have only brought misery, fed on rivalries, nurtured chauvinism and jingoism, supported mutual conservatism, have looted natural resources, arrogated to itself all power while selling their own dignity to the masters abroad. The existing power structure stands in direct opposition to all the popular movements, forces and formations, and various attempts to empower the people. Elites and the ruling oligarchies in South Asia do not have faith in the destiny of their own region. They look to the Northern powers for succor, while these powers of today consider South Asia a hopeless region, marginalised and damned possibly forever.

People's panning thus implies, opposing reactionary forces everywhere in South Asia, criticising the existing power structure, plans and programs and suggesting an alternative paradigm. This process has started in South Asia sporadically within the limit of national boundaries. People are on the move in all the countries struggling for empowerment, livelihood and dignity. The task is to bring out the regional imperatives in this process, regional dimensions of all future-building activities. It is a moral urge upon the people of South Asia to realise the identity of South Asia, as well as to reflect South Asian plurality.

In order to devise an effective process for alliance building across the region, it is necessary to establish horizontal linkages with all types of people's formations. In this backdrop, it is necessary to build Alliance of Hope around slogans of common concern irrespective of political boundaries:

- Right to free flow of people and information
- Moratorium on all state-sponsored projects which undermine the environment and cause involuntary displacement
- Stopping arms race and to foster collective security for the people

- South Asian common market based on the needs and aspirations of the people and grassroots communities
- Adoption of a uniform charter of human rights based on the principles of secularism, gender equality and cultural plurality
- An effective trans-border alliance would develop and would be strengthened if meaningful interactions and actions are facilitated around these slogans at the level of ideas, activists and social movements. This would form the basis for a sustainable people's alternative at the South Asia level which would lead us to the twenty first century.

Annex 3: Towards People's SAARC: Statement of Concerns

We, the representatives of mass organisations, citizens' groups and concerned individuals from South Asia met in Kathmandu on May 18th and 19th, 1994 and have taken stock of the problems in the SAARC region. We are a slowly and modestly evolving regional cooperation at a people-to-people level and have now pledged ourselves to widen national and regional dialogues towards forming and strengthening People's SAARC.

We would like to express our deep concern regarding the following problems. We submit that urgent strategies will have to be evolved by states, by SAARC and by people's organisations to constructively address these outstanding issues. Only then can regional cooperation have a lasting meaning.

Severe restrictions on the movement of the people and information within the SAARC region: Also the need for uniform valid travel documents.

Militarisation: Both the increase in internal militarisation and nuclearisation, as well as escalating intra-country conflicts. Not only does escalating expenditure on arms and advanced military technology in the name of defense and national security inhibit the realisation of regional cooperation and democracy, it severely limits the realisation of people's security.

Violation of sovereignty by state forces of another country: For instance, as evidenced by recent actions of the Indian police in Nepal.

Communalisation of the polity: Growing ethnic and inter-community strife, tension and conflict, as well as state repression of religious and ethnic minorities.

Severe trans-border ecological crisis: For example, the outstanding conflicts surrounding the sharing and management of river water (e.g. *Ganga* and *Kosi*).

Increasing trend towards export-oriented commodity-based agriculture at the cost of sustainable and equitable food production.

Discrimination, exploitation and exclusion of women as equal partners within the family and society, including the imposition of intrusive

contraceptive devices. Also statutes which violate gender equality, particularly concerning inheritance, marriage, divorce and guardianship.

Discrimination against and assimilation of indigenous and tribal people, ethnic and linguistic minorities. Also discrimination on the basis of caste.

Continuing incidence of bonded and slave labor, sale and trafficking of women and children and repression of workers' movements.

Criminalisation of politics: The degeneration of political culture and the increasing influence of black money and mafia forces.

Destructive development: Politics and projects which create displacement, economic dependency and environmental degradation in the name of development.

Increasing pressures from international and regional economic powers, financial institutions and transnational corporations at the expense of not only national and regional interests of social justice and ecological sustainability in the region, including unjust and unfair agreements like GATT which undermine both national and international sovereignty, as well as the realisation of a strong and self-sufficient South Asian region. Also escalating external debt which accentuates dependency on the dictates of multinational interests.

Growing cultural pollution through western-influenced mass media.

Trade barriers and discriminatory trade policies and practices.

The continuing violation of democratic rights: Particularly the rights of refugees. Also bilateral and multilateral treaties and conventions that are contrary to the principles of justice, equality and sovereignty.

Non-implementation of the conventions and agreements of land-locked countries.

The declaration of SAARC not to concern itself with serious bilateral problems.

This is not a comprehensive list but is indicative of the range and complexity of the problems that severely restrict the realisation of a just and peaceful region. It is in this context we believe that a wide range of people's movements, citizens' groups and individuals are attempting not

only to respond to these realities, but to evolve a people to people relationship towards envisioning a democratic and peaceful South Asia. We are joining them in their efforts towards strengthening regional cooperation.

List of signatories

Bangladesh: Mohiuddin Ahmad, Abdus Sabur, Justice K M Subhan, Mayenuddin Khan Badal.

Bhutan: Jiwan Pradhan, Setu Nepal.

India: D Prempati, Smitu Kothari, Anand Swaroop Verma.

Nepal: Sushil Pyakurel, Arjun Karki, Gopi Upreti, Krishna Upadhaya, K P Siwakoti, N B Singh, B K Mainali, G Siwakoti Chintan, Pramod Kafle, G K Siwakoti, Meena Sharma, Chandra Sreshtha, Meena Poudel, P L Biswakarma, Shiva Hari Dahal, Shanti Kafle

Pakistan: Karamat Ali, B M Kutty, Joseph Francis, Hanif Baloch, Ashraf Khan, M Mateen, Jawed, Bukhat Zameen, S Shaheed.

Annex 4: Declaration of the People's SAARC 1995, New Delhi, 24 July 1995

While the need for regional co-operation in South Asia becomes ever more urgent, and the recognition of this fact grows at the people's level, the states of South Asia continue to persist in their anachronistic conflicts and animosities. The official body for regional co-operation, the SAARC, has failed to bring about any meaningful co-operation between the seven states of South Asia, and has failed to address the real concerns and aspirations of the people of South Asia. It is therefore, time that the people of South Asia took the initiative in their own hands to build a peoples' alliance.

We, the representatives of peoples' movements, mass organisations, citizens groups and concerned individuals, affirm yet again the urgent need for regional co-operation. The process towards a People's SAARC has been going on for the past few years. The last meeting was held in Kathmandu in May 1994, and adopted the Kathmandu Declaration expressing the concerns of the people. We endorse the Kathmandu Declaration and express our disappointment with the fact that practically no steps have been taken to address the concerns, and realise the objectives expressed in that Declaration.

Indeed, if anything, our states have, in the meantime, further relinquished their responsibility to their people, and become even more coopted by the process of re-colonisation that is presently underway. The interests of international financial institutions, the IMF and the World Bank and transnational corporations have become ever more entrenched. The result has been that unprecedented levels of poverty, inequality and social and ecological disruption now hold sway over the developing world in general and South Asia in particular.

Responding to the urgency of the need for pooling our resources to meet the challenges posed to the people of South Asia by this hostile inter and intra-national order there has been a spurt of people's initiatives in recent years; South Asia Initiative of PP21, Pakistan India People's Forum for Peace and Democracy, Bangladesh-West Bengal People's Dialogue, and India-Bhutan People's Dialogue are only some examples. We welcome and endorse all these initiatives and seek to build upon their efforts.

The People's SAARC affirms the need for an alternate agenda that will address the concerns and aspirations of our people, rather than those of the microscopic elite. Such an agenda must reflect the struggle for empowerment, livelihood and dignity of the South Asian people as a whole. To this end we believe that the following objectives must be realised:

1. At present, there exists in South Asia severe restrictions on the movement of people and information. This must end. As a first step, all states in South Asia must ensure the people of South Asia a visa-on-arrival facility.
2. Violent means of resolving interstate conflict must be immediately renounced. Growing nuclearisation and militarisation in the region pose the greatest threat to the security of the South Asian people. We demand that our states commit themselves to a nuclear-free South Asia, and denuclearise immediately. Steps towards radical demilitarisation must also be taken now, and scarce and precious resources presently wasted on the so-called defense expenditure be redirected towards social development.
3. Inter-state relations must be based on respect and equality, and all unequal treaties should be annulled. Above all, states must respect each other's sovereignty. A military intervention and espionage operation on each other's territories is the most glaring violation of this sovereignty.
4. The South Asian region has long been known for its unity in diversity. In the colonial and post-colonial period, however, there has been an unprecedented increase in communal and ethnicity-based politics. Such trends of inter-community strife, tension and conflict must be reversed, and state repression of ethnic and religious minorities must immediately stop. Also, the principle of sovereignty cannot be used to legitimise the violation of human rights.
5. The South Asian region constitutes an integrated eco-system. The management of natural resources which the states of South Asia share must be a joint and co-operative effort. The ecosystem and the livelihood of communities tied to it must not be disrupted by unilateral intervention by any state. Relatedly, we call for a moratorium on all state-sponsored projects that cause displacement of people and degradation of the environment.

6. Patriarchal structures presently in existence in the region must be dismantled, and all forms of discrimination and exploitation of women must end. The women of the region must be recognised as equal partners in the life and development of society.
7. The rights of indigenous and tribal people must be recognised as sacrosanct, and all forms of discrimination and forcible assimilation of their communities must stop.
8. Bonded and slave labor, trafficking of women and children and the repression of workers' movements are some of the most dehumanising practices that now exist in the region. All such exploitative practices must end.
9. Even those states of the region that have democratic structures in place can hardly claim to be truly representative and democratic. All states must commit themselves to democratic decentralisation. Relatedly, the criminalisation of politics that has badly damaged representative democracy in the region must end.
10. The states of South Asia must resist encroachment by international and regional economic power, financial institutions and transnational corporations, and protect the interests of the people against these neo-colonial powers. To counter these powers, trade barriers and discriminatory trade policies must be removed to facilitate the creation of a SouthAsian common market.
11. The people's right to self-determination must be recognised as inviolable by states.
12. The convention and agreements on land-locked countries must be implemented and transit routes opened up.
13. The South Asian states must show their commitment to the universal declaration of human rights, and a joint people's tribunal for adjudication of human rights violations must be set up.
14. The SAARC Charter must be revised to allow the discussion of bilateral issues, and must reflect the aspirations of the people. We commit ourselves to working with people's groups and organisations to realise these objectives, and appeal to all political parties and citizens groups to join hands in furthering the same.

List of signatories

Bangladesh: AinoonNaher, RahatFahmida, SohrabHasan, AdilurRahman Khan, LutfurRahmanShahjahan, Mohiuddin Ahmad, AbdusSabur.

Bhutan: NaradAdhikari, ViswanathChhetri, DilmayaSubba, RatanGazmere, Om Dhungel, SukhBahadurSubba, HariAdhikari, Bangalay, TenzingZangpo.

India: Samsheer Singh Bishat, Buddhadeb Chaudhury, Prem Chandran John, Balraj Puri, Biplab Halim, Kailash Satyarthi, Vinod Raina, Justice Ajit Singh Bains, Nabin Mundu, Arun Srivastava, Jayaprakash Rao, Asghar Ali Engineer, Bishop A George Ninan, Reggie Gomes, K N Panikkar, Aditya Nigam, D Prempati, B D Sharma, Kuldeep Nayar, Monoranjan Mohanty, Kavaljeet Singh, Dalip Swami, Sunilam, Anand Swaroop Verma, Rajendra Sail, Sandeep Pendse, Anil Chaudhury, Qamar Agha, Arun Kumar Singh, Philip Jadav, Ajit Muricken.

Nepal: Nanda Bahadur Singh, Yogesh Bhattarai, K C Uddav, Krishna Upadhyaya, Badri Prasad Kathiwada, Sushil Pyakurel, Keshab Prasad Badal.

Pakistan: M B Naqvi, B M Kutty, Sheema Kermani, Nauman Naqvi, Karamat Ali, Nadira Alvi.

Sri Lanka: Nirmala Das, Nimalka Fernando, Vasudeva Nanayakkara, Sritunga Jayasuriya, Sarath Fernando, U D M Seelawathic, Freddy Ganage.

Annex 5: Declaration of People's Summit for People's SAARC 2005

5-6 February 2005

This representative assembly of civil society organisations and networks of South Asian countries (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka) condemns the unwarranted postponement of Summit of the SAARC head of states and calls for immediate convening of the Summit to discuss the current social, political and economic issues.

The People's assembly have been deeply devastated and grieved by the Tsunami disaster and offer their heartfelt sympathies to the survivors and express concern over neglect of states in providing relevant information to citizens and failing to forewarn the people. We also express anger and shock over mishandling of the post-disaster situation, failure in creating systems to reach the victims and delivery of relief and assistance in rehabilitation. We recognise that disasters in our era are magnified by the failure of policy and poor governance, beyond natural phenomena. We appreciate unprecedented generosity and benevolence of the people of the world and call for an effective mechanism to coordinate the relief efforts. We endorse the priorities and commitments made in the World Conference on Disaster Reduction (WCDR) framework of action. We urge an effective South Asian system with sound organisational structure to share expertise, knowledge and hydro-meteorological information.

This assembly views with concern the recent development in Nepal and the suspension of fundamental rights and civil liberties as unacceptable. It calls for the restoration of basic human rights and democracy in Nepal forthwith. The states must not be allowed to suspend fundamental rights and civil liberties under any pretext. Rights to information and communication as fundamental rights of respective citizens must be ensured.

The People's Summit expresses concern over the rapidly growing militarisation of the states in the name of national interest and security. Such policies are detrimental to peace and democracy in the region and give rise to extremism, intolerance, confrontation and conflict. It therefore demands an end to recent arms deals and immediate reduction in military expenditures.

We urge immediate negotiations without pre-conditions among SAARC states on existing and potential conflict-generating issues such as territorial disputes, shared water resources, and hydrocarbons resources. The Assembly demands the suspension of all mega hydroelectric projects that adversely affect the lives and livelihoods of millions and call for development of a mutually agreed code of conduct for projects that negatively impact neighbouring countries.

The assembly demands the right to live in a peaceful environment, not threatened by national nuclear policies and demands immediate freeze on all nuclear designs, missile systems. We urge the states to take express measures for the eradication of nuclear weapons to make South Asia a nuclear free zone. Further, states should enhance culture of peace through dialogue, change in curricula and media.

The Summit notes that a majority of our people depend on agriculture for livelihood and food security. It reiterates the urgent need for measures for land reforms and land rights for indigenous people with special efforts for the inclusion of the people of coastal and resource poor areas. It calls for legislation on rights of people employed in the informal sector such as domestic and agriculture workers.

Recognising the ever-increasing global interdependence, we welcome mutually beneficial cooperation between countries and regions; however we deplore the trends of corporate culture promoted adversely affecting marginalised and poorer sections of South Asia. The assembly strongly urges the states to abolish monopoly of MNCs over patent rights and corporate farming.

The Assembly advocates a comprehensive mechanism to deal with voluntary repatriation of refugees and internally displaced persons keeping in view the refugee situation in almost all the SAARC countries. South Asia should be a refugee free zone. Also required are measures to protect the rights of the migrant workers.

The Assembly denounces the privatisation of basic services mainly water, health, education and power, and demands an end to neo-liberal economic guidelines detrimental to the survival of poor and marginalised people.

The Assembly urges all states to ratify and implement the SAARC Convention on Trafficking of Women and Children. We urge the ratification

of the Regional Victim/Witness Protection Protocol to "Combating Commercial Sexual Exploitation and Abuse of Women and Children in South Asia" and the establishment of a Regional Tribunal for Protection of Trafficked Persons.

The gathering takes serious note of gender disparity and insensitivity in various National policies and practices and demands from the SAARC states to implement gender equality in all areas of national control and influence. The state parties should take actions for increased participation especially of women and excluded sections of the society in decision-making bodies at all levels through affirmative actions.

To advance good governance throughout South Asia, we advocate policy action by all states in two areas: to establish stronger legal frameworks and implementation of devolved local government, and to institute reservation of seats for women to at least one third of all elected bodies at all levels of government.

The assembly reiterates the need for ratification and implementation of various United Nations international and regional conventions, covenants and treaties signed by the states.

The participating organisations committed themselves to bringing these messages to their governments and to report on their progress at the next People's Summit.

Annex 6: People's SAARC Declaration 2007

Democracy, Justice and Peace

25th March 2007, Kathmandu, Nepal

We, the participants of people's SAARC from Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka met from 23rd to 25th March 2007 at Kathmandu 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; inaugurate a climate in which each individual will have the opportunity, in concert with the collectivity; realise the 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. Such a South Asia must be the goal of the people of this region and of their solidarity.

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 systems and cultural practices have been influenced by each other 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 recognise the reality that the ruling elites in the post colonial period within our respective countries, have kept the people of our region apart through the creation of walls of suspicion, hostility, intolerance, dis- and mis-information and the prevention of interaction amongst the people, in order to maintain their status-quo over their societies. Whilst recognising the existence of the identities and natural boundaries of the people in the region, we note with concern that one of the mechanisms for the creation of spurious consent and fraudulent legitimisation for the rule of the ruling class and systems of oppression and

exploitation is due to the constant creation of suspicion and fear among neighbours leading to constant insecurity over the national security and hence to militarisation. This system also creates ideal conditions for the advancement of paranoia, war hysteria, militarisation, proliferation of nuclear weapons and dominance of the armed security forces along with an 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 people to build a strong, vibrant societies as well as create a new era of prosperity; of a qualitatively more humane, egalitarian, secular (promoting religious harmony, respecting each other's religious and cultural beliefs), democratic, ecologically balanced, socially just and sustainable societies hitherto unknown in the region.

The Present Predicament

However, contrary to expectations, the official SAARC failed to fulfil the promised goals of a better South Asia. Instead economic policies pursued by ruling classes and parties of the region created conditions of exclusion and marginalisation, denial of rights, justice and democratic freedom in different countries of the region.

As a result, 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 programmes 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 globalisation 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 militarisation and gender violence; and brings forth social and cultural deprivation. This process further reinforces and reconstitutes exploitative and oppressive structures in newer and newer forms.

Finally, it breaks up the social cohesion by the degradation of the human spirit. All this is, of course, in the name of progress, development, modernisation and reform.

Changing Politics of the Region

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 exercise of dictatorial power under the guise of democracy and to 'functioning' formal democracies, all variations exist in the region. In substance, the regimes severely restrict the rights of the people, particularly through modifications of labour laws and limits on legitimate protests in words and action.

The rulers direct popular wrath against soft false enemies. Chauvinism, nationalism, and fundamentalism thus flourish under covert or overt state/ruling class patronage. Border conflicts, national chauvinism, ethnic strife, religious fundamentalism, or revivalism thus dominate politics. The major causality is of course democracy – in concept, institution or practice.

The state as an instrument for the peaceful resolution of various forms of social conflict remains fragile as political institutions have been robbed of their relevance and there grows the danger of the whole normative framework of democracy becoming undermined. Ironically, while the state has abdicated its social responsibility, it has equipped itself with draconian powers of control, legal or extra legal, which aim to curtail people's rights of movements and legitimate forms of organisation 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 realising 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 these democratic rights of the masses and imposed the laws and rules that in reality have spelt a flagrant violation of the spirit of people, of their own constitution and the commitment to uphold the principles of human rights. These laws have empowered security forces to arrest citizens without warrants and detain them without trial for long periods.

Torture, custodial rape and extra-judicial killings have become common occurrences.

Neo-liberal growth model and marginalisation 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 the extravagant outcomes but the results of systematic distortion of the system which 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 of corporate seeds, fertilisers, and pesticides as well as vulnerability to vagaries of the market has made agriculture cash intensive. This has pushed the cultivating peasant 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 this problem. The increased over-urbanisation in South Asia is an indicator of agrarian destitution and transfer of the poor from the countryside to the 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 indulgement 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. These grandiose schemes seriously undermine the

living standards and livelihoods of the people. The achievements so far of so called Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in South Asia are minimal, hence there is a strong doubt that majority of these goals will be achieved by the set date line of 2015. Moreover, the livelihood needs of the people are urgent and need to be addressed with an urgent action, so it is ridiculous to ask people to wait until 2015. Also the MDGs have failed to take into account the gender dimensions of poverty. We therefore, fear that these may prove to be the essential mechanisms to pave the way for an entry of private capital into all sectors including public services and supply of essential commodities rather than addressing the fundamental needs of the marginalised group of people.

While we laud and support all voluntary 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.

The SAARC states should first give an honest account of their achievements in the fields on which they have made public commitments, for example reduction in poverty.

Gender Justice

Women in South Asia are particularly the victims of all kinds of oppression, exploitation, and violence that are now a feature of 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 and forms. We believe that all actions and struggles for democracy, justice and peace will have to put women in the centre 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 globalisation is unequal, inequality enhancing, socially unjust and disruptive. It must be firmly resisted; as it represents the triumph of corporate capitalism which totally restructures the economic, social and cultural life of the people in the region. We resist the dominance of financial capital which imperils the world's monetary equilibrium. It transforms states into mafias. It

proliferates hidden sources of capital accumulation such as trafficking, arms race and child slavery. It is time to refuse the dictatorship of money.

We shall unitedly 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 for food security at the household, local and national levels based on the age-old practices and knowledge systems of 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 which 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, 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 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 militarisation of the borders and to take urgent steps to bring about total disarmament in the region.

We demand the following immediately:

- Ensure (barrier) free mobility of people across the region by guaranteeing the notion of visa free South Asia;
- Strengthen and institutionalise democracy, human rights and justice and proportional participation of women at all level of state and civil society institutions; ;
- Demilitarise and denuclearise the states and its machineries;
- Promote communal harmony within and between communities, societies and states;
- Combat religious, ethnic and gender based violence and outlaw all types of fundamentalism;
- Address environmental sustainability as an urgent priority;
- Protect biodiversity, water, forests, fisheries and other natural resources from which the majority of the people derive their livelihood; protect indigenous community wisdom;

- Guarantee women's rights to be free from all kinds of discrimination and live a life without any form of violence;
- Guarantee sovereign rights of the people for food;
- Respect independence of all judiciary and judicial systems;
- Solve the issues of refugees and IDPs; support just struggle of Bhutanese refugees;
- Respect the right to information and promote free media;
- 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;
- Make firm commitments regarding state obligations to provide health, education and basic needs; considering women's right to their body, sexuality and reproduction and make special provision for women's access to health care from women's perspective;
- Stop the free trade model that has been responsible for increasing poverty, trafficking of human beings, food insecurity and environmental destruction in the region;
- Freeze defence budget and cut it at least by 10%. This amount should be diverted to social development. We realise 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;
- Globalisation has resulted in eroding labour rights; we demand SAARC states to ensure enforcement of Core Labour Rights at work places including Special Economic Zones (SEZs) and informal sector of work;
- Stop using state force against their 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;
- Declare 2007-2017 as SAARC Dalits rights decade with enactment of concrete Acts, policies, programme and action plans;
- Formulate separate policies for Himalayan and mountainous regions because of regional specificity and ecological sensitivity of this region;
- Broaden the definition of violence against women (VAW) and provide justice to victims of all forms of violence. VAW is not only

- limited to physical or mental violence, but also all forms of discriminatory practices against women;
- Ban use of genetically modified seeds and organisms. Urgent action is needed to save the genetic contamination of the vast biodiversity of the SAARC region;
 - Stop commercialisation of basic education; ensure right to education for all; treat equally to all students in terms of fee payment (e.g., applicable fees should not be charged in US\$ irrespective to the country of origin of the student in the SAARC region);
 - Ensure rights of the children; include child rights in school curricula and declare children as Zones of Peace;
 - Promote religious co-existence, cooperation and harmony among and between the communities of the region;
 - Recognise labour as one of the important resources of the region and provision of Labour Advisory Committee with the involvement of trade unions as a formal recognised body in SAARC;
 - Respect and recognise the identity of South Asian Indigenous Peoples and ensure their social, political, economic and cultural rights in the constitution;
 - Free the region from all forms of bonded labour system;
 - Review present SAARC Convention on trafficking in women and children for prostitution and reformulate it from Human Rights perspective by broadening its definition on trafficking which can encompass trafficking for all purposes, and adding provisions which can protect rights of trafficked persons to have access to justice, voluntary return home and fund for appropriate support and care;
 - We urge our Governments to Protect Rights of Migrants workers and their families by signing UN CONVENTION ON MIGRANT WORKERS AND RIGHTS OF THEIR FAMILIES 1990;
 - 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 people living with HIV&AIDS;
 - Guarantee the free access of HIV & AIDS related medicines including ART for people living with HIV & AIDS with their meaningful participation and representation at all levels of decision making process both in state and non-state domains;

- Ensure the focused intervention of SAARC on HIV & AIDS;
- Ratify the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities" (CRPD 2006) by all the countries of SAARC as state party; and
- Ensure effective implementation and monitoring of CRPD 2006 so that persons with disabilities are truly liberated from being among the poorest of 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 UN standard.

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

We conclude this declaration by:

Expressing our solidarity with the people of Nepal in their struggle for realising loktantra and further strengthen and defend the gains of pro-democracy movement. We also call upon all the democratic forces in the region to extend all possible support to strengthen the democratic movement in Nepal;

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 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.

Annex 7: People's SAARC declaration, Colombo, 2008

The South Asian People's Assembly (Colombo, 18-20 July) resolves to issue the People's SAARC Declaration at this gathering of representatives from SAARC countries.

We, members of social movements, labour unions, women's groups and civil society organisations have gathered here in Colombo from 18-20 July 2008, as part of the process of People's SAARC, to forge a vision for a Peoples Union of South Asia.

This year's People's SAARC culmination in Colombo is the continuum of a process of more than a decade. The last people's SAARC gathering in Kathmandu in March 2007 reaffirmed the South Asian peoples' commitment to creating a better South Asia free from all forms of discrimination, marginalisation and domination.

We represent a rich and wonderful diversity of cultures, languages, religions and a multiplicity of identities and are linked by shared histories, geographies and cultural practices.

For this to become a reality, we must take a collective stand against all structures of oppression, discrimination and violence facing the people of the region. We uphold the equality of all countries in the region, and condemn attempts of any one country to dominate the region. We stand for a secular, democratic, equal, peaceful and just South Asia. We will ensure that those who have been traditionally marginalised from political processes, such as dalits, women, indigenous peoples, ethnic, religious and sexual minorities, will be in the forefront of this political project.

This involves creating a discourse on democratic and participatory political processes which respect national and local priorities and take into consideration the very real inequalities between the different states in the region. We are ready to take on this challenge through resolute struggle.

We hail the people's movements for democracy and peace and against dictatorship and monarchy, that are ongoing in the countries in the region

After discussions and debates for three days at plenary sessions and over thirty workshops we affirm our commitment to achieving the following goals and aspirations:

To build a South Asian identity based on our diversities and common histories. We Reject bigotry, jingoism and hatred and will work towards ensuring that enmity between countries is not propagated through instruments such as the media and education.

Resolutely oppose intervention of USA and war exercises both in the region and elsewhere. Reject the so called War on Terror which is nothing but an attempt to cover up warmongering by USA and its allies to target ordinary citizens.

South Asian countries to commit to a no-war pact and declare the region as nuclear-free. This also involves the drastic reduction of defence budgets and de-militarisation of the region.

Free movement of peoples in the region or in other words a visa-free South Asia

Restoration and creation of rail, road and sea-links that meet the needs of people. Encouraging and facilitating people- to- people contact and communication in the region.

Peaceful and just resolution of all conflicts in the region, including those on the border, through political negotiations, and revoking so called national security laws that give a free-hand to state authorities to commit atrocities against their own peoples.

Operationalisation of food sovereignty through building alliances of women, peasants and agriculture labour. This would involve the creation of seed and grain banks, promotion of participatory research and sustainable technologies and the rejection of monopolistic and environmentally destructive technologies such as genetically modified organisms.

Fisher people's right to fish in territorial waters be recognised and legally protected through proper mechanisms. Innocent fishers incarcerated for wandering into neighboring territorial waters be immediately released.

The right to mobility is a human right. Migrants should be assured of dignity and right of work as well as physical protection, basic amenities and adequate wages. The victims of trafficking must be protected, especially women and children. Similarly, the rights of individuals and

communities subjected to forced displacement due to conflict, disaster, and development projects should be protected.

Ensuring rights of all workers, especially women and dalit workers in accordance with the International Labour Organisation Convention, United Nations Covenants and National Constitutions.

The setting up of regional institutions and mechanisms such as a South Asian Tribunal of Justice to address human rights violations. Those responsible for war crimes and crimes against humanity must be prosecuted. Protection to be guaranteed for right of dissent, protest and organisation. We call for the immediate release of political, social, media activists and prisoners of conscience in the region.

Recognising the universality of visibility, opportunity, equal rights and dignity for all people, including excluded groups and minorities: ethnic, sexual, gender and people with disabilities. Recognise the prevalence of patriarchy, religious extremism and caste based discrimination that deny human dignity, socio, economic, political equality and justice to the 260 million dalits of in the SAARC countries

Achieving Climate justice by ensuring that the burden of adjustment is borne by the elites. This requires a fundamental departure from the current industrial and economic paradigm in the region. Also, people's rights to information, knowledge, skills, housing, education, health, food security and their organisations must be fulfilled to strengthen their resilience to hazards such as floods, droughts and cyclones.

The creation of alternative regional trade and economic co-operation frameworks that meet the needs and aspirations of small producers and labour. This will ensure the defeat of neo-liberal instruments such as the World Trade Organisation and Free Trade Agreements in the region. (In the light of current attempts to revive the flawed WTO Doha Round we commit to work with groups across the region and elsewhere to ensure that no deal comes out of the WTO Mini-Ministerial Meeting at Geneva from 21-25 July 2008.)

Recognition of health, education, housing as basic human rights. The scaling up of public infrastructure such as housing, health, education and other civic amenities through democratic sources of development finance. We urge equitable quality education to all children through common school system in the region. We oppose the privatisation of these services

and uphold the principle of basic services for all. We particularly assert the rights of those affected by disasters.

Upholding knowledge commons, rather than monopolies of corporations. Adoption of free and open source software and open standards in all e-governance projects. Setting up of a South Asian resources pool for free software which enables international relations with knowledge sharing.

Unconditional cancellation of loans from International Financial Institutions & bilateral debt.

We call upon Government representatives at the 15th SAARC Summit at Colombo to seriously address these concerns and demands of the people of the region.

SAARC must be made accountable to the citizens of the countries in the region.

We celebrate the struggles for democracy and resistance to neo-liberalism and imperialism in the region and in particular the victory of the people's movement in Nepal. Our Peoples Union of South Asia is a rainbow coalition of democratic forces. We pledge to continue to learn, inspire and empower each other to realise this vision.

Annex 8: People's SAARC Declaration

April 26th, 2010

We the members of social movements, civil society organisations, labour unions, peasant movements, other working people's organisations and women's groups have gathered here in Delhi from 20th April to 23rd April, 2010 as part of the process of People's SAARC to forge a vision for a People's Union of South Asia. This year's Peoples' SAARC is a culmination of a process of more than a decade. It reaffirms the South Asian Peoples commitment to creating a better South Asia free from all forms of discrimination, exclusion and domination. It also calls for the peoples of all SAARC countries to struggle against militarism and jingoism, and for secularism. In our diverse societies of minorities of all kinds, a secular society is crucial for national and societal harmony, human rights and national unity. It calls for equal respect among all countries irrespective of size, and power.

All our countries are suffer and tribals have suffered more including violence against women. It is time that we develop new paradigms of peaceful equitable, and sustainable paths of development that truly reflect the economic potential of our countries and meet the need of our peoples. SAARC countries must ensure the rights of all workers, especially women, tribal and Dalit workers in accordance with international standards including ILO conventions, international covenants and national constitutions. Fisher peoples' rights to fish in territorial waters be recognised and legally protected through proper mechanisms. Innocent fisherfolk incarcerated for wandering into neighbouring, sometimes disputed, territorial waters be immediately released and the presence of deep sea trawlers and foreign vessels should be banned as these are depleting fish stock and pursuing an unsustainable path apart from severely diminishing the catch of the ordinary fisherfolk.

Climate change and ecological degradation have become a species threat and a threat to the very survival of all life on the planet. Unfortunately the South Asian governments including those like India which were part of the BASIC alliance failed to get an equitable treaty signed at Copenhagen because of resolute resistance by the North led by the USA. Even after the Copenhagen document was arrived at no urgent steps have been taken towards reversing ecological degradation, the reduction of green house gases, all necessitating more sustainable forms of transport, construction,

workers and peasants conditions and mining among others. It is imperative for a Peoples union of South Asia that vast areas of Bangladesh, parts of India and island states in the Indian Ocean are not submerged because of a lack of commitment particularly by the North.

In all our countries Human Rights has become a critical problem. Generally international Human Rights and Humanitarian Law is not implemented, even if already ratified. This leads to the flagrant suppression of movements that challenge the state, only some of which are violent. This is true of the entire sub continent.

People's movements to protect the forests, the rivers, and other natural resources are often brutally repressed.

Peoples land is acquired for a relatively paltry sum in the name of development, and their rehabilitation is well below international standards. This of course is part of neo- liberalism. However the elites have become exceedingly selfish, intolerant and oblivious of the suffering of the people.

A major positive response would be facilitated at the South Asia level if people to people contact throughout the region was facilitated. This would enable experts and activists to interact across countries and regions to explore possibilities of a more just, peaceful, sustainable and equitable path of development which is also gender just. On the contrary, far from instituting a visa free South Asia our governments are increasing restrictions on people to people dialogue and some of these moves have been highly retrograde. This is not only a great barrier too our goal of a Peoples Union of South Asia, but is also a severe restriction on our efforts to move towards that goal.

We recognise the universality of opportunity, equal rights and dignity of all people including excluded groups and minorities; including ethnic, sexual and the differently abled. We recognise the prevalence of patriarchy, masculinity, religious extremism and caste based discrimination that deny human dignity, socio-economic and political equality and justice to the millions of backward classes and deny women sexual and reproductive health rights in the SAARC countries.

There is need for alternate regional trade and economic framework that meet the needs and aspirations of small and medium producers and labour. This will ensure the defeat of neo-liberal instruments such as the

WTO and free trade agreements in the region. We need to work out fair trade relations within South Asia as a precondition for fair trade relations with the rest of the world. This would also provide a democratic alternative to neo-liberal free trade agreements. It would also facilitate a fair wage for those in the import-export and connected sectors.

The SAARC countries must beware of imperialist machinations, designed to overthrow pro-people regimes or to play countries off against another to weaken SAARC unity. SAARC countries must radically cut down expenditures on conventional arms, and move towards a South Asian nuclear weapons free zone. This would save billions of dollars for the social sector. These countries must avoid strategic alliances with the US and allied powers. We urge that there be a no war pact between all SAARC countries.

Inter-state relations must be based on respect and equality and all unequal treaties should be annulled. Above all, states must respect each other's sovereignty. Military intervention and espionage operations on each others territories is the most glaring violation of this sovereignty. Terrorism has been a serious problem in Pakistan, India and recently in Sri Lanka. Where these movements involve alienation or deprivation of natural resources, there must be dialogue. Most terrorist movements are political. Military means should not be the main method of countering them. Fundamentalist movements who refuse dialogue should be countered. Militarism as a State ideology is a threat to democracy and peaceful dissent.

There should be recognition of health, education, housing, employment and adequate food as basic rights. More investment in the social sector is essential for a more equitable and sustainable society. The billions of dollars spent on defense not only foster aggressive militarism but also take away scarce resources otherwise available for the social sector and basic human rights. We uphold knowledge commons rather than patents which exploit our market and people. New attempts in WTO to bring generic drugs into TRIPS must be resisted so that vital medicines for HIV, new strains of Tuberculosis, Hepatitis and Malaria etc. do not become unaffordable. Unconditional cancellation of loans from international financial institutions and bilateral debt with the North, are a must for funds for socio-economic development.

Food banks should be set up of surplus food particularly food grains. Remunerative prices must be given to farmers for their produce. The poor must be provided food at subsidised prices. GM seeds should be banned.

Seeds, fertilisers and pesticides must be provided at subsidised prices, along with diesel and electricity. Urgent steps should be taken for the forest dwellers who should have a right to the forest produce, and food and other subsidies in times of drought. Forest dwellers should have a right to the forest, and the economic exploitation of the forest, though mining and the timber trade by corporate and contractors should be immediately stopped.

The right to mobility with dignity is a human right. Migrants should be assured of dignity and the right to work as well as physical protection, basic amenities and adequate wages. Safeguards for the basic rights of the local people must be instituted. Victims of trafficking, especially women and children must be protected. Similarly the rights of individuals and communities subject to forced displacement, disasters and forced eviction should be protected. Peaceful and just resolution of all conflicts in the region through political negotiations is imperative. This will include negotiations with the people of disputed territories.

We call upon the SAARC governments to seriously address these concerns and demands of the people of the region. Governments must be accountable to the citizens of the countries in this region. We laud the democratic struggles and the resistance to neo-liberalism in the region. Our Peoples Union of South Asia is a rainbow coalition of democratic forces. We pledge to continue to learn, inspire, struggle and empower each other to realise this vision.

Annex 9: Statement Adopted by Trade Unions from South Asia

21 April 2010

Since the formation of the SAARC in 1985, there has been very little progress in promoting regional cooperation among nations and peoples in South Asia. There exists legal and illegal trade of goods and mobility of labour between the South Asian countries. With the negotiations on South Asian Preferential Trade Agreement (SAPTA) and of South Asian Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA) along with the other bilateral and multilateral trade agreements including FTAs between the nations in the region, the legal capital mobility within South Asia has not only magnified manifold but the scope for it is ever-widening with investments from large Multi National Corporations. This has further intensified the attack on labour in these nations. In this context, there is a felt need among the working people in the region for a collective response to this attack from imperialist globalisation.

We recall that many varied attempts that have been initiated in the region to build an alliance among trade unions in the region. Affiliates of both the WFTU and the ICFTU in the region have on several occasions in the past have attempted to broaden the alliance in the region. There have been other attempts initiated by a large number of trade unions in the region since 1996.

We draw upon the South Asian Consultation on Labour Rights, in the context of Multilateral Trade Agreements was held in Kathmandu in May 1996 that affirmed the need for a South Asia Labour Rights Charter. It also affirmed the principle of Universal Labour Rights as an expression of human rights of labour in the work place, and resolved to work towards the promulgation of a UN Labour Rights Convention. The meeting of the trade unions of South Asia took place in Karachi in September 2003 at the South Asia Labour Conference for Peace and Regional Co-operation. It drew up the Karachi Declaration that called for a strengthening of the people's urge for peace and solidarity in the region in general and the working classes of the region in particular. With the worsening of the border disputes and the growing spectre of terror in the region, this effort has also been effectively thwarted. However, there have been efforts, albeit small, to take this process forward. The Kathmandu meeting in

March 2007 and the meeting in Colombo in July 2008 were small but significant steps towards this. These attempts reflect a progress towards broad-based coalitions, reducing previous national and regional divisions in the labour movement. It is now time for a convergence of these diverse efforts.

Regional efforts at cooperation and building solidarity across borders can only be sustained through a cohesive pressure from the labour movement in the region. This requires coordination within the labour movement to promote fraternity and peace based on a systematic coordination of ideas, people and of institutional exchanges in order to build a process for dialogue and consultation of all South Asian trade unions within an agreed democratic framework. This effort should specifically promote consultation, cooperation and solidarity of sectoral unions and in the multinational corporations and their supply chains.

This coordination and consolidation can concretely begin with the framework for:

- Standardisation and Promotion of labour rights and regional institution for protection
- Promotion of peace and development of a People's foreign policy
- Promotion of free movement of people in the region within a legal framework
- Expansion of the scope of SAARC by inclusion of labour in its areas of cooperation
- To widen this process we propose an expanding preparatory committee (through a list serve) of all unions who join this process. Specific Thematic, sectoral and multinational working groups can be developed to actualise the coordination on a regional basis.
- To deepen the engagement we call for a wider consultative meeting of all unions of South Asia in 2010 to evolve the future of this process and beyond it for an alliance with peoples' movement in South Asia.

Signed by

India

3. Rajiv Dhimri, AICCTU
4. Satya Narayan Thakur, AITUC
5. Ashim Roy, NTUI

Nepal

- Binda Pandey GEFONT

Pakistan

1. Dr. Malik Baloch, National Party
2. Adam Malik Pakistan Peace Coalition
3. Chaudhary Mansoor Ahmed, PLB
4. Bushra Khaliq, Women Workers Helpline – Pakistan
5. Yusuf Baloch, National Trade Union Federation, Pakistan
6. Karamat Ali, PILER

Sri Lanka

1. S Murugaiaya, All Ceylon United Workers Congress (PSSF)
2. M Vijandran, Trade Union Confederation/ All Ceylon United Fisherpeople Trade Union
3. Priyadarshini Aryaratna, Janavakesha
4. S R Edwards, Janavakesha

Annex 10: People's SAARC 2010

Seminar on the Right to Repartition of Bhutanese Refugees: Sharing testimonies by Bhutanese refugees with South Asian representatives

25-26 April 2010, Birtamod, Jhapa, Nepal

Organised by: South Asia Alliance for Poverty Eradication (SAAPE) and the Bhutanese Elderly Refugees Repatriative Committee

We, more than 50 Bhutanese refugees representing all seven refugee camps located in Jhapa and Morang districts of Nepal and the members of SAAPE from Bangladesh, India and Nepal, and peasant organisations, academia, women associations and social movements from different countries of South Asia have gathered here in Birtamod, Jhapa on April 25, 2010 on the occasion of People's SAARC 2010 to defend the rights of Bhutanese refugees. As an extension of People's SAARC 2010 Delhi, India, this one day seminar has come up with the following realisations and demands: During our visit to the camps we found the citizens of Bhutan living under total deprivation and in dehumanised conditions. This is a situation which must not be allowed to continue and demands immediate all round intervention to ensure that all basic entitlements are made available without any further delay or prevarication.

Thousands of Bhutanese citizens have been evicted from their homeland by way of political victimisation and intolerance for the voice of democratic dissent and forced to live as political refugees on the borders of India and Bhutan and the refugee camps of Nepal;

This illegality and immorality have been perpetuated for more than 18 years against the norms and standards of international law and violation of human rights;

It is high time for south Asian countries to bring pressure on the government of Bhutan to allow the rights of the refugees to return to their homelands and to facilitate their repatriation with full dignity, honour and the right to equality and full participation as citizens of Bhutan;

We, on behalf of people of the South Asian nations, demand that this issue be taken up on the agenda of official SAARC and an urgent solution found to this aggravated humanitarian emergency prevailing along the borders of south asia, even as the heads of the governments engage in empty

tokenism in the capital of Bhutan, thus bestowing legitimacy to an anti-people and anti-democratic government;

We also demand an immediate end to the suppression of the democratic rights of these refugees and the gross violation of their civil and political rights;

We demand for the formation of South Asia Refugee Commission within the framework of SAARC to engage and take care of the refugee problems in the region;

We take note of the inadequacy of third country resettlement of Bhutanese refugees;

We urge the South Asian governments, particularly India, Bhutan and Nepal to address the Bhutanese refugee's demands to return to their homeland. We request international community to facilitate the process of repatriation to their homelands;

We urge that all South Asian nations follow the lead of Afghanistan and ratify the 1951 UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and enact suitable legal framework to address the problems of the refugees; and

Finally we commit ourselves to continue activities to make South Asia a refugee free region. We believe in solidarity, fraternity and mutual respect for all.

Annex 11: People's SAARC Memorandum 2011 submitted to the 17th official SAARC process

The Peoples' SAARC delegates assembled in Maldives have submitted the "Memorandum" to the 17th official SAARC Summit being held in Addu City through the office of the President of the Maldives.

The memorandum is a common aspiration primed by the representatives of various civil society organisations in the region who have created a parallel process called "Peoples' SAARC". The memorandum reflects the harsh reality in connection with the status of security, peace, justice, human rights, development, environment, refugees, migration, gender among others in South Asia region from peoples' perspective. The memorandum calls upon the SAARC as a regional grouping and the member states to seize the opportunity towards engaging themselves in serious dialogues for envisioning a region fit for over one fifth of the world's population, a majority of which is consistently denied of rights and deprived of basic standard of living.

The memorandum is as follows:

Memorandum

People's SAARC – A South Asian Civil Society Platform Presented to the 17th SAARC Summit,

Addu City, Maldives 10-11 November 2011

The Context

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

age-old divisions to work with each other as regional partners for the growth and progress of the countries in engagement.

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

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

Some Areas of Hope

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

South Asia has recently registered substantial progress in democratic development. All eight SAARC countries: India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Maldives and Bhutan have elected representatives today. This is a positive development for a region that has come to assume an important position in the world's efforts for global peace and development.

We are encouraged to see the recent spate of developments in the bilateral relations of a number of South Asian states. These include the commitment for an extended bilateral cooperation along with improved trade ties between India and Bangladesh; the facilitation of overland transit to Nepal from Bangladesh; the restoration of the dialogue process between Pakistan and India – emphasised by the official machinery as serious and “uninterruptible”, the recent announcement by the two countries to work towards improved trade links, enhanced diplomatic support on a bilateral level at global forums; and the execution of the Afghan Transit Trade along with improved political links between Pakistan and Afghanistan, to name a few.

We also welcome the decision by the Government of Pakistan on granting the status of the Most Favoured Nation to India. The decision has wide-ranging benefits that cover both economic and social realms. Apart from the much desired normalisation of trade relations between the two countries, the GoP's move shall hopefully also pave the way for facilitating greater people-to-people contact which shall contribute in bringing the two nations a few steps closer to the resolution of their outstanding disputes.

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

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

While there are some positive developments, the region is also bogged down by a series of actions, especially those taken by the states, and events, that bear negatively on the enjoyment of fundamental human rights, including right to life, right to equality and access to and control over basic services. These actions and events seek to hinder and thwart the realisation of the massive potential of the region as a democratic,

progressive, economically developed, peaceful and stable society. We express our concern at these developments and point these out as follows to urge the SAARC body and the member governments to address them on a priority basis.

Our Demands

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

We call for the South Asian states to recognise the universality of opportunity, and equality in rights and dignity of all people including so far excluded groups and minorities on the basis of ethnicity, gender and the physical/mental ability. Therefore, we urge the

SAARC states to recognise the prevalence of patriarchy, masculinity, religious extremism and caste-based discrimination that deny human rights, human dignity, socio-economic and political equality, justice and peace to the millions of marginalised groups and classes, in the SAARC countries.

We urge the governments to take essential steps to ensure that South Asia maintain its unique civilisation strength of 'unity in diversity'.

All our countries are suffering from the economic travails of neo-liberal economic policies with rampant poverty marginalising a large section of the population, especially women and the girl child. It is time that the member states develop new paradigms of peaceful, equitable, and sustainable paths of development that truly reflect the economic potential of our countries and meet the needs of the vulnerable section of the society such as children, the disabled, aged and all other marginalised groups.

In all our countries full enjoyment of human rights has become a critical problem. Generally, the international Human Rights Instruments and Humanitarian Laws are never implemented, even if already ratified. This leads to the flagrant suppression of peoples' movements that challenge the state. All our states must respect universal human rights while

managing and allocating resources, addressing internal conflicts or external inter-state disputes and all spheres of national life.

People's movements to protect the forests, lands, the rivers, and other natural resources from which their livelihood is derived are often brutally repressed by the state. Peoples land is acquired for a relatively paltry sum in the name of development, and their rehabilitation is well below international standards. The states must devise a system of checks and balances for its elites who have repeatedly demonstrated the tendency to succumb to the lure of the powerful development giants. We call the SAARC governments to ensure development processes that must be pro-poor people, consultative and consensus driven with human rights as the basic fundamental.

SAARC countries must ensure the rights of all workers, especially women and Dalit workers in accordance with international standards including ILO conventions, international covenants and national laws. The rights of indigenous people should be recognised, safeguarded and promoted.

Fisher peoples' rights to fish in territorial waters be recognised and legally protected through proper mechanisms. Innocent fisher folk incarcerated for wandering into neighbouring, sometimes disputed, territorial waters be immediately released and the presence of deep sea trawlers and foreign vessels should be banned as these are continuously depleting fish stock and pursuing an unsustainable path apart from severely diminishing the catch of the ordinary fisher folk.

Climate change and ecological degradation have become a threat to the very survival of all life on the planet. Melting of snow in the Himalayas, desertification and sea level rise are the stark phenomena that South Asian states are facing simultaneously. Unfortunately, the South Asian governments have taken no urgent steps towards reversing ecological degradation, the reduction of greenhouse gases, adaptation initiatives, all necessitating more sustainable forms of transport, construction, workers and peasants conditions and mining among others. It is imperative that vast areas of Bangladesh, parts of India and island states in the Indian Ocean are not submerged because of a lack of commitment by the states to address environmental concerns.

Increasing restrictions by the South Asian states on people-to-people dialogue are highly retrograde. The South Asian states must facilitate

people-to-people contact and promote solidarity throughout the region to enable wider sections of the population to interact across countries and regions to explore possibilities of just, peaceful, sustainable and equitable path of development which is also gender just.

There is a need for alternate regional trade and economic framework that meets the needs and aspirations of small and medium producers and labourers. The SAARC states need to work out fair trade relations within South Asia as a precondition for fair trade relations with the rest of the world. This would also provide a democratic alternative to exploitative and regressive free trade arrangements.

The 'terror like acts' and 'war on terror' have been serious problems in Afghanistan, Pakistan, India and recently in Sri Lanka. Where these movements involve alienation or deprivation of natural resources, there must be dialogue. We urge the South Asian government to shun military means as a method of countering them. Militarism as a state ideology is a threat to democracy and peaceful dissent.

The SAARC states must extend recognition of health, education, housing, adequate food, water and energy poverty as critical to maintain basic living standards of the people of the region. Increased and accelerated investment in the social sector by states is essential for a more equitable, peaceful, corruption-free and sustainable society. The billions of dollars spent on 'national defence' not only foster aggressive militarism but also take away scarce resources otherwise available for the investment in social sector and basic human rights promotion.

The South Asian states must uphold knowledge commons rather than patents which exploit our heritage, markets and people. New attempts in WTO to bring generic drugs into TRIPS must be resisted so that vital medicines for HIV, new strains of Tuberculosis, Malaria, etc., do not become unaffordable. There must be a knowledge commons created in SAARC which are accessible to all people, inclusive of data, proven practices, and science and technology cooperation.

Food banks also should aim at delivering the essential food grains to the victims of natural calamity through a rapid response mechanism. Remunerative prices must be given to farmers for their produce. The poor must be provided food at subsidised prices. GM seeds should be entirely banned. Agricultural inputs such as seeds, fertilisers and pesticides must

be provided at subsidised prices, along with necessary energy. Urgent steps should be taken for the forest dwellers that should have a right to the forest resources, and food and other subsidies in times of drought and other hardships.

The South Asian states must respect the right to mobility with dignity as a human right. Migrants should be assured of dignity and the right to work as well as physical protection, basic amenities and adequate wages. Survivors of trafficking, especially women and children must be protected. Similarly the rights of individuals and communities subject to forced displacement, disasters and forced eviction should be protected.

South Asian Governments and civil society must work together and lead the world in the struggle for climate justice demanding legally enforceable international standards on the lines of and beyond the Kyoto Protocol and not succumb to the machinations of the perpetrators who want to push for accords in place of treaties.

A monitoring body to regularly audit the compliance of the member states with the benchmarks set to safeguard and institutionalise democracy, human rights, justice, and the rule of law based on the SAARC "Democracy Charter" should be established.

The long-cherished Regional Human Rights Mechanism should be created without further delay in conformity with the principles of universally accepted human rights standards to protect and promote human rights and social justice of the people in the region.

An independent Climate Commission should be constituted with a view to promote more effective mitigation and adaptation programme to climate change to ensure environmental protection and sustainable development at the regional level

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

Fully funded national plans to achieve universal health, education, water and sanitation, rights to food and housing, rights to productive

employment amongst others as a core part of the constitutional arrangements should be ensured.

All possible measures to ensure zero tolerance on violence against women should be exhausted and an enabling environment to promote leadership of women from all strata of life in peace-building, security and conflict transformation endeavors should be created.

Constitutional, legal and administrative framework and effectively implement it to end social anomalies including existing caste/faith based discrimination and all forms of problems of impunity should be guaranteed.

Last but not the least, the large numbers of the poor and the vulnerable in South Asia need to be freed of poverty and the attendant loss of dignity, social protection and their rights to health, education and productive livelihoods.

Annex 12: People's SAARC India Assembly 2011

Thiruvananthapuram Declaration

People's Movements Uniting South Asia

9 November 2011

We, the participants of the People's SAARC India Assembly 2011 met in Thiruvananthapuram on 8-9 November 2011 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 that enables social and sustainable development in the region that will do away with discriminations based on 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 realise full development of her or his human potential; restore the balance and harmony with nature; eliminate the artificial and human barriers that divide lands, peoples and mind; and transcend all boundaries.

The India assembly was privileged to host vibrant social movements, trade unions and activists from across India and abroad. Over 250 activists participated in three plenary sessions and seven workshops on issues such as trade and livelihoods; state repression and militarism undermining democracy; women in people's movements; rebuilding labour movement; exclusion, discrimination and oppression; and community control over natural resources. The Assembly culminated in a colourful march to the Kerala Secretariat.

People's Movements Uniting South Asia

A genuine South Asian consciousness, which has been present in a historical sense, is growing today among the peoples of this region. In recent years the urge for regional cooperation and interaction has manifested itself at different levels. Writers, poets, artists, scientists, social activists, human rights and women's rights activists of South Asian countries have initiated concrete moves towards establishing mutual contacts and developing cooperation among themselves. This declaration captures this paradigm shift of people's movements uniting South Asia.

State Repression and Militarism Undermining Democracy

The people of South Asia are witnessing the militarisation of state and society. The dominance of militarist thinking in the governments, the doctrine of preventive intervention and terrorism as a State policy has prevented the strengthening of the fraternity of the people, consolidation of the political constituency for peaceful resolution of conflict and build a common identity for South Asian people.

The context of rising terrorism is being used by the ruling elite to shift public opinion towards an internal security doctrine that is undemocratic, chauvinistic and anti-people.

We condemn the increasing budgetary allocation on militarisation by diverting resources from social welfare by the governments in South Asia. The reduction of tensions between South Asian countries means the reduction of defence budgets in both countries. This will have a major and meaningful impact on the well being of each country's citizens.

We are also alarmed by the accelerated militarisation in the region in the name of countering terrorism, eroding democratic space, undermining basic human rights and humanitarian law principles, which has resulted in further terrorisation and radicalisation of the affected civilian populations. We are deeply concerned at the expanding role of the military and para-military forces in the development processes including mega development projects and extractive mining, plundering the natural resources, marginalising and displacing the indigenous peoples inhabiting the region. We must ensure that our governments stop militarising society by developing the doctrine of internal security, as extensions of war concepts into society, and creating armed forces for internal war.

We call for the inclusion of a human rights policy in the SAARC. In Sri Lanka, India and Pakistan a vision of national security under the guise of counter terrorism is being used as a tool for suppressing democratic people's movements. The dominant policies in all these states regarding the struggles of communities over control of natural resources and against state repression, corporate power and communal profiling of populations, are against the will of the people. Hence there is a need for a clearly articulated human rights policy to be included in the SAARC.

We salute the extraordinary resilience of Irom Sharmila Chanu as she enters the twelfth year of a hunger strike in solitary confinement

demanding the repeal of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act, 1958, which has chronically militarised and displaced democratic governance in the states of the north east and Jammu & Kashmir. We must ensure the reduction of influence and control of the military and make it accountable and subordinate to the will of the people.

We call upon the governments of South Asia to immediately halt the futile process of militarisation generating a spiral of insecurity and to redirect resources and energy to build genuine democratic institutions to ensure human security including education, health, housing and other welfare of the people.

Women in People's Movements

Women have played a crucial role and spearheaded several movements. However in many movements women and those from marginalised groups including dalits, adivasis, the disabled, minority communities and those from LGBT groups are seldom heard or their separate needs acknowledged. To create a larger people's movement of South Asia this understanding needs to be integrated so that these identities are not submerged in larger forums and spaces but that they are included and made visible.

We need to create ways of working across differences and identities without making them invisible. This has to be based on principles of human rights, commitment to equality and non discrimination focussed on the advancement of human security and human dignity. The intersectionalities between different movements and identities need to be recognised and integrated so that we can look at ways of coming together. This presents us with many challenges and complexities because in practice it is difficult for different movements to come together.

The Women's Movement has been connecting across borders since the 1970's. This has helped in strengthening our work, learning from each other as well as creating stronger bonds between us. As women we have always been suspicious of narrow nationalism and patriotism because of how it affects women. It has also presented many complexities and challenges in our vision of a People's Union of South Asia. There is a need to have dialogues across movements and borders on similar issues, we have a lot to learn and contribute to each other's work. However the question is how to integrate a feminist framework of analysis and

understanding in these various movements. This is so we can create better integrated movements, where the voices of the marginalised are given space as well as awareness about the intersectionalities between different issues and themes.

Rebuilding Labour movement

Contractualisation, migration and the non-implementation of labour laws are common issues in the region. We demand that labour be included as an area of cooperation in the SAARC cooperation framework.

Large scale privatisation, both direct and indirect, closures and retrenchments have led to job losses and created conditions for capital to deny labour rights and introduce new labour practices that affect labour adversely. In the process, Freedom of Association and Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining, have become a casualty. We call for the ratification of ILO core standards by South Asian countries and for the constitution of a SAARC mechanism to ensure reporting on compliance on ILO core standards and redressal of complaints. Further, we call upon South Asian countries to adopt a SAARC Code of Conduct for Trans-National Corporations, based on ILO's Tripartite Declaration.

The right to mobility with dignity is a human right. Migrants should be assured of dignity and the right to work as well as adequate wages and human working conditions. Safeguards for the basic rights of the local people must be instituted. We demand a SAARC mechanism to facilitate labour migration with dignity and the institution of a SAARC work permit as a first step to institutionalise this process.

Labour movements in the region have to establish closer cooperation and develop an organisational structure at the South Asian level. As a priority, we need to work towards integrating different sections of workers currently marginalised and working people not even recognised as workers, into the ambit of labour movements, social security regimes and within the collective bargaining framework.

Trade and Livelihoods

Current trade policy is undemocratic, pro corporate, anti environment and adversely impacts livelihoods of South Asian peoples. Free trade agreements implemented in South Asia such as the India-Sri Lanka FTA have adversely impacted livelihoods of farmers, especially in the state of

Kerala. Free trade policies under the WTO have resulted in loss of food sovereignty due to the loss of control over tariffs and quantitative restrictions. We call for trade and economic cooperation in the region and oppose the current trend of advancing the FTA agenda in South Asia and beyond.

We recognise that to bring the people in the region closer, there should be more people to people contact and cooperation. On trade, this would imply a paradigm shift with due process of consultation with legislative bodies and affected groups such as farmers, fishworkers and labour. Further any trade should be based on complementarity, environmental sustainability, food sovereignty and should enhance livelihoods. There should be due mechanisms to monitor the impacts of trade on livelihoods with policies to protect and compensate any communities that could be adversely impacted. We stand for progressive people-led regional cooperation in South Asia and call for the normalisation of economic relations between Pakistan and India.

Exclusion, discrimination and oppression

We express concern about the increasing incidence of state repression against peoples who are fighting for their democratic rights. Dalits, adivasis, sexual and gender minorities, religious minorities, human rights defenders are under constant threat of a militarised state and corporate greed. The struggle of the marginalised for democratic and participatory political processes needs to be strengthened by rendering solidarity at the South Asian level.

Community control over Natural resources

We note that the current model of development is devastating South Asia's natural resources. Investment zones such as SEZs that displace people, undermine democracy and national laws and destroy the environment must be stopped. The principle of prior informed consent of the local communities should be followed for all projects. We note with concern the revival of the nuclear industry despite the lessons from the Fukushima Daichi disaster. We support the valiant people's struggles in Koodankulam and Jaitapur and call for a halt to these nuclear projects. We call upon Governments to promote people centred non conventional and sustainable energy sources.

We call for a ban on genetically modified seeds in SAARC countries. Governments in South Asia should stop production, distribution, consumption and export of all Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) including endosulfan.

We call upon the people to be cautious that there is an imperialist agenda to use so-called environmental concerns to undermine sustainable development and livelihood needs of the people of developing countries.

South Asian coastal and forest communities are facing the brunt of so-called development and corporate greed. We call for the implementation of progressive legislations for protection of the environment and livelihoods in the coastal and forest regions.

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We resolve to deepen the Thiruvananthapuram process through continuous interaction and consultation to enable people's movements to express and define the South Asian dimensions of their struggles and on that basis build a genuine unity of South Asian people's movements.

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Annex 13: News Clippings

The Daily Bhorer Kagaj, Dhaka, 27 November, 1993

ঢাকা শনিবার ১৩ অক্টোবর ১৯৯৩
২৭ নভেম্বর ১৯৯৩



ভোরের কাগজ

গণনা অববাহিকা ও পরিবেশসংক্রান্ত গণকমিশনের আঞ্চলিক বৈঠক

কাপড় হাজিরবন্দুক : গতকাল শুক্রবার গণকমিশনের মহাপাঠে গণনা অববাহিকা ও পরিবেশসংক্রান্ত গণকমিশনের প্রথম আঞ্চলিক বৈঠক কমিশনের সভাপতিগণী মহিউদ্দিন আহমদের সভাপতিত্বে অনুষ্ঠিত হয়।

সভায় গণনা অববাহিকা অঞ্চলে পানিসম্পদের সুই ব্যবহার এবং রকক ইউনিট হিসেবে সমন্বিত উন্নয়নের তদারকক আয়োজন করা হয়। সভায় বক্তারা অভিমত প্রকাশ করেন যে পানিসম্পদের ব্যবহার নিয়ন্ত্রিত এবং অঞ্চলের রাস্তাঘাটের সংস্কারে দেশে বোঝাবুঝি সৃষ্টি হয়েছে তার অবগান হওয়া উচিত। তারা এ ব্যাপারে জনসচেতনতা বৃদ্ধির উপরও জোর দেন। এছাড়া গণনা অববাহিকার তদারকক একটি যৌথ প্রতিবেদন তৈরির সিদ্ধান্ত নেওয়া হয়।

সভায় অন্যান্যের মধ্যে ঊর্নহিত হিসেব ডা নিশীপ বড়ুয়া, হাওলা-উর-উরীম (বাংলাদেশ), বিক্রম হালিহ, এন্স বি সেন শর্মা (ভারত), ডা গোবিন্দ সাহা, অর্জুন কারকী (নেপাল)। পরে কমিশনের সদস্যরা বিবিধ পানি বিশেষকর আমদান্য হোসেন ঘানের সঙ্গে মত বিনিময় করেন।

উপরে, গত আগস্ট মাসে পিপি-২১ মাদ্রাছে অনুষ্ঠিত দক্ষিণ এশীয় জনসচেতনতা বাংলাদেশ, ভারত ও নেপালের প্রতিনিধিদের সম্মেলনে গণকমিশন গঠনের সিদ্ধান্ত হয়।

News on the planning meeting of the People's Commission on River Water & Environment held in Dhaka in November 1993

WEDNESDAY DECEMBER 22 1993

ISSUES/Sunil Sen Sharma

South Asia People's Commission on River Water and Environment: Background and context

THE WATERSHEDS and rivers had been the lifeline of the people of South Asia region from time immemorial. About half a billion people in this region are served by the three major river systems: the Brahmaputra, the Ganga and the Meghna. These rivers are very important for the ecology and the economy of the people in Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal. Any distortion or undue intervention in the catchment is bound to produce adverse effect.

Human interventions affecting these active basins in the name of development directly affect the life of the millions. As river and more water control structures are built on these rivers offering certain short-term, tangible benefits to a section of the people, human misery is indeed increasing in the society. All these are made in the name of development.

It is clear that appropriate environmental impact assessment (EIA) has not been done before executing river control structures, or to put it in a different way, the effect in the region and among the people outside the jurisdiction of the state sponsoring the project has not been considered so far. This is also true in case of post project appraisal. The EIAs are not yet state-neutral, nor are the ecological issues. This is the crux of the problem in the environmental movement in South Asia.

The state has failed to protect the rivers and the habitat. This has been manifested through the execution of different mega projects. In order to mobilise effective campaign and movement against such projects which undermine the environment and people's livelihood, it is necessary to promote a higher level of awareness about the problem, understanding of the situation, and trans-border interaction of the affected people. In this backdrop, the idea of a trans-border 'People's Commission' emerged.

A day-long seminar on 'River Water and Environment Issues' was held in Calcutta in 24 August 1993 within the framework of P21 (People's Plan for the Twenty First Century) participated by several environmentalists and social activists from India, Nepal and Bangladesh.

tion of a viable strategy for sustainable development in South Asia region. A core group comprising Mr Mohiuddin Ahmad (CIDI, Bangladesh) as the coordinator and Mr Biplob Halim (IMSE, India) and Mr Arjun K. Karik (GSA, Nepal) as members. It was agreed that the Community Development Library (CDL) of Bangladesh will function as the secretariat of the Commission.

It was also decided to take initiative to facilitate exchanges and sharing between the affected groups in the Ganga basin as a complementary activity. Such interaction is conceived as an empowerment process at the grassroots level through access to information, consultation and campaign. All these are expected to contribute to a broad popular movement at the trans-border level against the monopoly of the state on natural resources including the rivers and for establishing right of the people to live in harmony with nature and communities with their accumulated wisdom.

In the first meeting of the People's Commission held in Dhaka on 25-27 November 1993, trans-border interaction and action have been sought

The Commission strongly feels that viable and acceptable alternatives for optimal use of water resources by the people of the Ganga basin is possible only if integrated developmental programmes are drawn up and implemented taking the basin as a unit

In the quest for a sustainable people's alternative, the Commission after discussion on past, present and emerging problems pertaining to the use of the Ganga water, strongly feels that viable and acceptable alternatives for optimal use of water re-

a) Until now, imposed development technical considerations without direct involvement of the people. These models have not been able to deliver benefit to the people. Rather they caused degradation of the environment in many cases. This situation could have been avoided had the people participated in the decision making.

b) A people's team of co-basin countries may visit the areas affected by hydraulic structures on the rivers, study the impact of the interventions and suggest a suitable action plan.

c) A people's afforestation action program in the watersheds of Nepal be taken up as an example of people's cooperation for environmental conservation.

d) To approach the governments in the region to take up a basin approach for management of natural resources.

e) Environmental impact assessment must include the impact of intervention in the entire region of influence irrespective of political boundaries, such as the construction of ARUN III hydro-electric project on the Koshi river and the Taparikh Dam on the Barak river.

f) The South Asia region is a unique ecogeographic region with a delicate balance. Any attempt to destroy this balance has to be resisted.

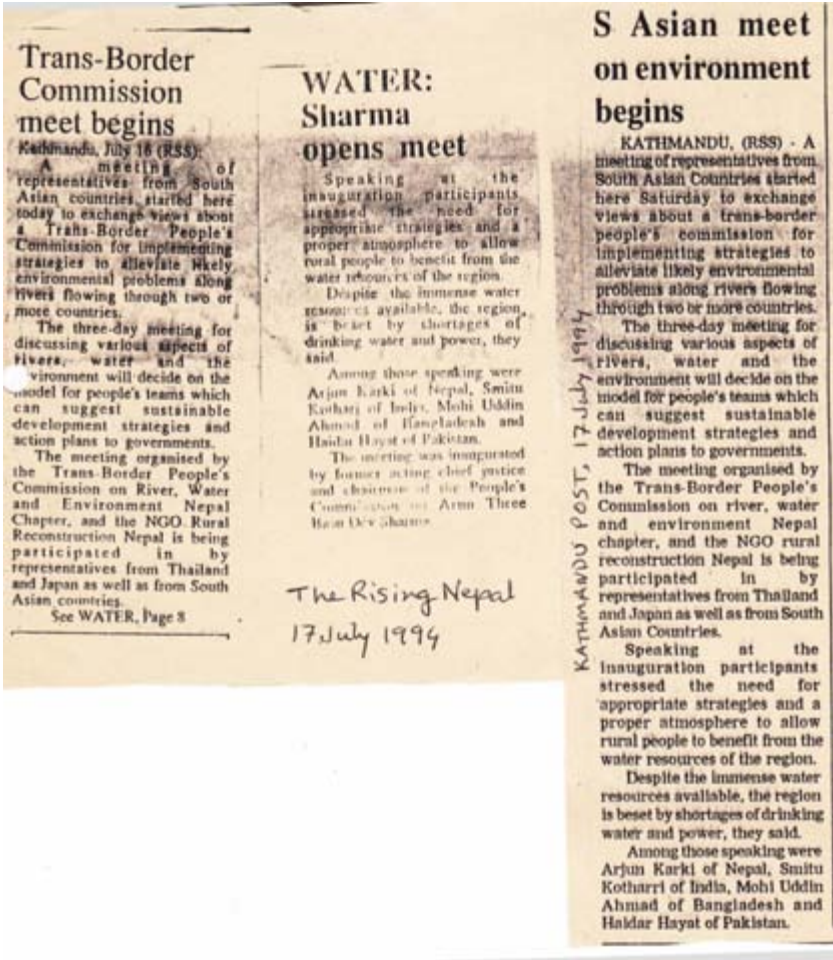
g) A trans-border people's commission be formed on common rivers and other environmental concerns of South Asia.

h) A follow-up group be formed to operationalise the functioning of the people's commission and a convention be organised in the first quarter of 1994 to work out an elaborate action plan. In the meantime, dialogue be arranged with organisations with similar approach.

i) The seminar expresses solidarity with the struggling people of the Narmada basin.

Mr Biplob Halim, Executive Director, IMSE, afterwards participated in the meeting of the P21 South Asian Initiative, held in Madras from 25 to 27 August. The declaration of the preceding Calcutta seminar was highly acclaimed at the Madras meeting and was unanimously approved and adopted.

Background and context of the People's Commission on River Water & Environment published in an Indian daily



News on the second meeting of the People's Commission on River Water and Environment and the Convention on River Water & Environment held in Kathmandu in May 1994

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South Asia

Taming Rivers

By A Correspondent

The South Asian Convention on River, Water and Environment was recently held in Kathmandu under the aegis of the Transborder Peoples' Commission (Nepal Chapter) in pursuance of the meeting of the People's Programme for 21st Century (PP-21) held last year in Madras. Representatives of various NGOs from South Asian countries participated in the two-day convention. There were seven representatives from Bangladesh, eight from India, one each from Indonesia and Japan, ten from Nepal, two from Pakistan, three from Sri Lanka and four from Thailand.

The primary objectives of the convention, as enunciated in the circular issued by its Coordinator, himself a representative of Rural Reconstruction Nepal (RRN), were as follows: (a) to exchange views and opinions pertaining to the concept of Transborder Peoples' Commission itself, (b) to decide on the model of peoples' team which can advise the related government agencies on sustainable development strategies and active plans for mitigating the positive aspects of actions, (c) to establish modalities for continued functioning of the commission at national and regional levels, and (d) to exemplify the actual work it can take up by undertaking afforestation programmes in a catchment of a major hydroelectricity project.

For some unavoidable reasons, however, objective (iv) could not be discussed at length. The venue originally slated for the discussion was the Arun Valley where hydel power stations are already in existence. The related problems of afforestation were discussed in a general way, while Samir Dasgupta, a representative from India, submitted a paper in which the various aspects of social forestry, including women's role in that context, have been put into focus. Dasgupta's paper fell in place following the illustrated deliberations by Dr S G Shah and Dr Nanada P Joshi of Nepal on the massive deforestation and the resulting extensive soil erosion, land degradation and siltation in the rivers and reservoirs, etc. which are taking place in Nepal and affecting the lower riparian regions.

The broad-spectrum meet brought out several shared conceptions and experience, relating mainly to the development of water resources, its technology, modality, politics and social and economic issues. Besides some social and political praxis, often common among the South Asian countries due to prolonged colonial subjugation, oriental traditions and values and geographic proximity, several clusters of countries are identifiable in terms of common regionalism through transboundary river systems. This provides definite advantages if the ecological systems are properly managed, while their neglect can give rise to serious social and political tensions.

News on the South Asia Water Convention held in Kathmandu in May 1994

Holiday, Dhaka, 4 July 1995

People's SAARC consultation held

A five day consultation of the representatives of various people's organisations of South Asian Countries was held here in Delhi from July 20-24 to discuss the "Alternative Agenda For South Asian People's Solidarity". It was widely felt that the SAARC has not been able to meet the aspirations of the people of these countries. During its one decade of existence, on plea of not indenturing into Bilateral discussions, the SAARC has in fact ignored the basic issues of the people, participants felt.

The country coordinators for the consultation were Mr. Karamat Ali (Pakistan), Mr Susheel Pyakurel (Nepal), Mr Anand Swarup Verma (India), Mr Mohiuddin Ahmad (Bangladesh), Mr Sarath Fernando (Sri Lanka)* and Mr Tenzing Zangpa (Bhutan).

The concept of People's SAARC has been discussed for some years now to emphasise the need for people to people cooperation in the South Asian region. The idea was to help strengthen the forces of the region which seek to contribute to peace, freedom, and democracy and equality in the larger interest of the people of South Asia. Drawing upon the region's common history, sharing eco-system and shared fundamental values, the participants from various fields at the consultation felt that there were strong bases for extensive regional cooperation.

Participants observed that the official SAARC which started off with quite an idealistic approach has failed to reflect the interests and aspirations of the people of the region. And, therefore, there is an urgent need to develop a united response from the masses of the SAARC region to face the challenges posed by the situation.

ments should provide transit facilities to each other without any discrimination/arbitrary conditions.

4. Governments should immediately initiate a multi-lateral dialogue to tackle the problem of sharing of waters without further delay.

5. Public tribunal should be organised to try war criminals and also a human rights court that will deal with victimisation of the citizens of SAARC countries.

6. Organise people's conferences on specific bilateral issues concern such as Jammu and Kashmir and the water dispute.

7. Voices have to be raised against all kinds of terrorism in this region and there has to be total ban on weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear weapons.

The consultation felt that the following issues need to be dealt with immediately:

A. Curb cross-border trafficking of women and children through cooperation between both the receiving and sending countries.

B. Revise the SAARC charter to include discussion of bilateral issues.

C. Launch a signature campaign to mobilise people's opinion regarding the most urgent bilateral as well as multi-lateral disputes existing within SAARC countries.

Senior journalists like Mr. M B Naqvi (Pakistan), Mr Kuldeep Nayyar, Mr Balraj Puri and Mr Arun Srivastava (India), Mr Sohrah Hassan and Ms Rahat Fahmida (Bangladesh); trade union leaders Mr Karamat Ali, Mr B M Kutti (both Pak), Mr Keshav Badal (Nepal), Mr Siritihunge, Jayasoorte (Sri Lanka), and women activists Ms Shreema Kerrmand, Ms Nadira (both Pakistan), Ms Atnoon Nahar (Bangladesh), Ms * Nimalra Fernando (Sri Lanka) and

Holiday, Dhaka, 4.8.95

নেপালের প্রধানমন্ত্রী মনমোহন অধিকারীর সাক্ষাৎকার

কোনো কোনো দেশের নেতিবাচক দৃষ্টিভঙ্গির কারণে সার্কের উদ্দেশ্য সফল হয়নি

কাঠমান্ডু থেকে মহিউদ্দিন আহমদ :
নেপালের মার্কসবাদী প্রধানমন্ত্রী মনমোহন অধিকারী বলেছেন, সার্ক নিয়ে এ অঞ্চলের জনগণের মধ্যে যে জাহাঙ্গী ও আতঙ্ক সৃষ্টি হয়েছে তার বেশির ভাগই পূরণ করা সম্ভব হয়নি। কারণটি দেশ দ্বিপাক্ষীয় সম্পর্কের টানাপড়েনই এর কারণ। বিশেষ করে ভারত ও পাকিস্তানের নেতিবাচক দৃষ্টিভঙ্গি সার্কের মূল উদ্দেশ্যকেই বাধিত করেছে।

পূর্বে বৃহৎপত্রিয়ার প্রধানমন্ত্রীর সরকারি কার্যালয়ের এ প্রতিবেদনকে দেওয়া এক সংক্ষিপ্ত সাক্ষাৎকারে তিনি এ অতিমত ব্যক্ত করেন।

পূর্বে অষ্টোত্তরের নির্বাচনে একক বৃহৎম দল হিসেবে ক্ষমতাসীন ইউনাইটেড কমিউনিস্ট পার্টির সংখ্যালঘু সরকারের প্রধান মনমোহন অধিকারী আঞ্চলিক সহযোগিতা গ্রন্থের আলো বলেন, দক্ষিণ এশিয়া প্রাকৃতিক ও মানব সম্পদের বিশেষ অন্যান্য এলাকা থেকে সমৃদ্ধ হওয়া সত্ত্বেও আমরা বিচ্ছিন্ন পড়েছি। কমান্ড সংঘাত এবং সংঘর্ষ আঞ্চলিক সহযোগিতার ক্ষেত্রে বাধা হয়ে

দাঁড়িয়েছে। সার্কের সফল জনগণ পাচ্ছে না।

সার্কভুক্ত দেশগুলোর পরস্পরিক সম্পর্কে মনমোহন ও সহযোগিতার ওপর জোর দিয়ে নেপালি প্রধানমন্ত্রী বলেন, ভারত দেশ সবসময়ই এ ব্যাপারে আন্তর্জাতিক ও উদ্যোগী ভূমিকা নিতে আগ্রহী। এ ব্যাপারে সরকারি



মনমোহন অধিকারী

ব্যবস্থাকারি থেকেও উদ্যোগকেও তারা শংকিত জানাবে।

কোনো কোনো সার্ক দেশে তিসা গ্রন্থের কতকগুলি গ্রন্থে তিনি বলেন, অন্য দেশের কথা আমরা বলতে পারবো না। তবে নেপাল অসন্ন থেকে কোনো বাধা নেই। যে কেউ এখানে আসতে পারলে। যেকোনো বিষয়ে আলোচনা করতে পারেন। আমরা সবাইকেই তিসা দিই।

নেপালকে শান্তি এলাকা বা Zone of Peace ঘোষণার ব্যাপারে ৩০ বছর ব্যয় করব না। নেপালি প্রধানমন্ত্রী বলেন, এই দাবির একটা প্রাচীনত্ব পটভূমি ছিল। অসলে এটি এখন নিয়ত মনোনে পরিণত হয়েছে। পুরো দক্ষিণ এশিয়াকেই শান্তি এলাকার হিসেবে গৃহীত করা প্রয়োজন। অসলে কোনো দেশকে Zone of Peace ঘোষণা করতে পারবে না।

বাংলাদেশ ও নেপালের দ্বিপাক্ষীয় সম্পর্ক বিষয়ে অপর এক প্রশ্নের জবাবে মনমোহন অধিকারী বলেন, আমাদের সম্পর্ক চমৎকার। আঞ্চলিক ও আন্তর্জাতিক বিষয়েও এ দুটি দেশের রয়েছে অতিরিক্ত দৃষ্টিভঙ্গি।

Interview of the Prime Minister of Nepal Manmohan Adhikari by Mohiuddin Ahmad in November 1995 published in the Bhorer Kagoj, a Bangladesh national daily. Mr. Adhikari expressed his disappointment about the slow pace of the official SAARC process because of political rivalry among some member countries.