

Call To Action

La Via Campesina condemns blacklists, detentions and deportations from Singapore

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Freedom of speech and assembly curtailed during World Bank-IMF Annual Meetings in Singapore

Over 80 representatives of social movements and civil society organisations planning to attend events in connection with the recent World Bank-International Monetary Fund (IMF) Annual Meetings in Singapore were forced to forfeit their participation. According to our reports, 27 people who received accreditation from the World Bank-IMF to participate in the annual meetings were put on a blacklist by the Singapore Government for ostensibly “security and law and order reasons.” At least 54 individuals from 17 organisations—who were not supposedly on any blacklist—were detained at the Singapore airport for several hours without explanation and subjected to custodial interrogation, and many were even deported. Several affected participants affirmed that they were victims of harassment and prevented from sleeping and eating for as long as 12 hours during detention. Irma Yanni and Achmad Ya’kub, both working for the Federation of Indonesian Peasant Unions (FSPI)/La Via Campesina, were detained by the Singapore authorities on the night of September 17 at Changi international airport, were interrogated for 14 hours and deported the following morning to Jakarta. “We were not doing any thing illegal or criminal. We just wanted to prepare a press conference to present our critical views on WB/IMF policies. Peasants have been some of the main victims of these policies which have dispossessed us from our lands, seeds and water. We just wanted to raise the voice of the peasants but we have been silenced,” stated Irma Yanni.

Over three billion people live in rural areas, many of who are being increasingly and violently expelled from their lands and alienated from their sources of livelihood. Mega development projects such as large dams, infrastructure projects, extractive industry and tourism have displaced local populations, and destroyed their social fabric and the very resource bases on which their lives depend. The promotion of agro-export and free trade policies have led to re-concentration of land and wealth in the hands of elites and the destruction of peasant economies. All these policies have been promoted by the World Bank-IMF and have had disastrous impacts on the economic, social and cultural rights of peasants and other rural communities.

Given the overwhelming influence of the World Bank and IMF on the formulation of key social and economic policies, their human rights responsibilities and records need to be directly addressed within the multilateral human rights system. Indeed, these actors are often more powerful than national governments and exercise undue control over governments’ decisions on national policies. Since the World Bank-IMF are adversely interfering in the realisation of the fundamental rights of peoples, La Via Campesina and other social movements are of the view that undemocratic but powerful institutions like these should be dismantled. It is extremely worrying that peaceful protest actions were prohibited in Singapore using security threats as a pretext. The real threat is to not allow people to exercise their fundamental rights to freedom of expression and association. We, the undersigning organisations, therefore call upon the international community to condemn the

Singapore Government's abuses against the freedom of expression, the right to liberty and security of person, and the right to take part in the conduct of public affairs. As affirmed in several international instruments, social movements and groups affected by development processes are entitled to have effective opportunities to participate in shaping these processes. Eventually, the WB and the IMF must bear the final responsibility for the silencing of civil society because they have not been able to guarantee freedom of expression at their meetings.

We call on all movements and organisations committed to upholding the fundamental rights of peoples to protest against the World Bank-IMF's refusal to guarantee full participation in the events in Singapore and to resist those institution's policies everywhere, from village level up to international level.

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