

Europe Solidaire Sans Frontières > English > Asia > India > Antiwar & nuclear (India) > **Invitation to an International Conference on Peace and Justice in South Asia**

February 24th-26th 2006, Mumbai, India

Invitation to an International Conference on Peace and Justice in South Asia

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International Conference on Peace and Justice in South Asia

Keshav Gore Smarak Trust, Goregaon West,

Mumbai, India

February 24th-26th 2006

NO NUKES! NO IMPERIALISTIC WAR! NO TO NEO LIBERAL ECONOMIC POLICIES!

STOP US AGGRESSION IN THE NAME OF ANTI-TERRORISM!

PEOPLE, NOT PROFIT! WELFARE NOT WARFARE!

DEFEAT THE AGENDA OF THE WTO, WORLD BANK, IMF, ADB, AND THE US EMPIRE IN SOUTH ASIA!

WTO - WAR BY OTHER MEANS! MANY SOVEREIGN PEOPLES, ONE WORLD!

FOOD, FREEDOM, JUSTICE, EQUALITY, PEACE AND SECURITY FOR ALL!

The entire region of South Asia is scarred by poverty and deprivation on one hand, and on the other, by conflict and war. Both India and Pakistan have developed nuclear weapons, and despite all talk of nuclear deterrence, this makes the region extremely volatile and dangerous. India spent \$5.7 billion for weapons last year, overtaking Saudi Arabia and China to become the developing world's leading buyer. The huge amounts of money that India is wasting on the F-16s and F-18s being peddled by the US, should be more fruitfully spent on critical developmental needs like health, education, housing, public services and social welfare, areas which constitute real human security. The rejection of this arms race would go a long way towards bringing about peace in the region, with Pakistan. Both countries have dismal rankings on the Human Development Index: India being 127 and Pakistan 135 in the world.

Similarly border skirmishes and migration issues divide India and Bangladesh. Sri Lanka, still staggering under the impact of the tsunami and then the politics of Tsunami aid, relief and reconstruction, is being systematically plundered by multinationals, while it is still in the throes of conflict surrounding the statehood of the Tamils. Nepal's economy is in deep crises and the monarchy has thrown out all democratic institutions and established a dictatorship in the name of fighting communism.

India's foreign policy has been extremely short sighted, centering on achieving economic and geopolitical domination in South Asia and even the rest of Asia, rather than developing friendly ties and strengthening equal regional cooperation. The Indian government is also taking about defence liberalization and opening of this sector to private and foreign investments.

India wants to curry favour with the US-UK-Israeli axis and become part of the so-called 'war against terror' peddled by the US, which is nothing but a vicious war against ordinary people, only to promote US military and economic interests; an illegitimate war against the people of Iraq, Palestine, Afghanistan and all the nations of the world.

WTO: War by other means

The US Empire, the corporations and those who control global finance try to maintain their supremacy through their trade and financial institutions, through the neo-liberal market philosophy and by physical force, by war. Trade is war by other means and deeply affects human security everywhere. In Iraq, for example, the invasion was followed shortly by so called 'reconstruction' and imposition of extreme neo-liberal policies of privatization, deregulation and free trade. Even before the Iraqi people could elect a sovereign regime, the govt. had applied for the WTO membership at the behest of the US government.

The WTO and global financial institutions: the IMF, World Bank and ADB often determine national policies affecting the lives of the ordinary people. Through these institutions, the powerful governments of the North drive the hardest bargains possible to gain further access to the resources and markets of the South, without regard for the terrible impact that it may have on the people of these countries, including South Asia.

India's long-term interests are best served by making common cause with the developing countries. In the WTO, the formation of the G 20 and the G 33 at the time of the Ministerial in Cancun in 2003 was a positive step in that direction. Subsequent events, especially India's becoming a part of the "Five Interested Parties" (FIP's), its role in bringing about the "July Framework Agreement" in 2004, and lately, India's co-chairing the Services group with USA, show a different trajectory. Both on Non-Agricultural Market access (NAMA) and GATS, India has broken ranks with the developing countries. The main issues in the Hong Kong Ministerial are agriculture and basic services, provision and access to which entails real human security and it is possible that at the ministerial the developing countries might have to compromise to the market access negotiations, which could be a denial of services to poorer people in the developing countries.

What we need:

Considering all of the above, for lasting peace in South, regional cooperation is crucial at all levels: political, diplomatic and economic. If the region stays divided, it provides a profitable opportunity for the global arms dealers, for the international financial institutions, the multinational co-operations, global capitalism, for the US Empire. The people of South Asia must see through the veil of illusion that has been created by the free market neo-liberal profit mongers, they have to reject the nihilist nationalism that is being used by rightist forces to divide and destroy, and they have to come together on the common aspiration for peace and justice for all.

The main themes of the conference are: War and trade; the nuclear threat, gender violence, nationalism and sovereignty; religious sectarian violence; India-Pakistan peace process; Sri Lanka - ethnic strife and aftermath of tsunami; democracy movement in Nepal; Bangladesh - migrants, water, textiles; etc.

An important aim of the conference is to link the issues and the movements working on Trade issues and Peace issues and also to forge closer links between movements in South Asia.

To discuss all these issues, to develop an alternative paradigm, a three- day conference is being organised in Goregaon from February 24th to 26, 2006. We are still contacting organizations in the

rest of the country and South Asia to co-sponsor the event.

We have made arrangements for moderate accommodation, which is available on a first come first serve basis and the last date to book is 15th January 2006.

The registration fees are Rs. 200/- for 3 days and Rs. 75/- for a single day.

Please join the conference as well as the process of organising it. Please write to us.

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Peace Mumbai

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