

Kathmandu Declaration - Fifth General Assembly, of SAAPE

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The Fifth General Assembly of SAAPE was held at Kathmandu, Nepal from 02 to 03 September 2016. The main theme of the Assembly was "Gender, Poverty and Constitutional Rights: South Asian People's Struggle". The participants from across 8 South Asian countries reflected and deliberated on the current south Asian political and socio-economic situation for two days. SAAPE's intervention strategy in this critical and crucial juncture was also worked out with the adoption of plans. The General Assembly ended with Kathmandu Declaration by delegates and members of SAAPE.

We, the members of the Fifth General Assembly, of SAAPE, having met at Kathmandu, Nepal from 2-3, September, 2016, do hereby, unanimously adopt this declaration.

We have assembled at this fifth General Assembly as South Asians drawn from Afghanistan, Bhutan, India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Maldives and Nepal and taken note of the emerging situation in our respective countries and in South Asia.

We are deeply disturbed at the all-round degradation in the quality of life that the majority of South Asians are experiencing. We witness increasing deprivations in the human, cultural, economic, social and political spheres of our people.

1. We condemn the warmongering and spawning of trans-border hostilities by South Asian states to suit their sectarian political interests. We condemn the violence, cruelty, arson and looting injected by extraneous thinking into the locality, the class room, the market place or the place of worship.

2. We condemn religious fanaticism and its recourse to terrorist methods in which unarmed civilians are the worst affected. Indeed, this sort of terrorist attacks has become one of the major challenges for most of the countries in South Asia. We unequivocally denounce the use of terror against civilian populations in all forms and circumstances. Today, that means first and foremost we must condemn the bombings, suicide attacks and other means of terrorism. The attack on the Holey Artisan Bakery in Gulshan, Bangladesh; the series of terrorist attacks in Pakistan and Afghanistan; the increasing attacks by fanatic Hindu fundamentalists in India ; the attacks by Buddhist groups on Muslims; all bear signs of a society where violence has become a norm and religion is routinely used to silence voices of reason and compassion. We demand that states restrain from supporting groups/organisations that attack unarmed civilians for political or other goals.

3. We pledge to carve out a new narrative of radical peace and equality from the ruins of our violent past. All the progressive, secular and democratic forces must stand together, under the banner of radical peace, justice and equality for all. Despite all the setbacks of the last few years, the potential

growth of a genuinely progressive alternative has not been extinguished and, most importantly, has never been more necessary.

4. We must also condemn acts of terror when these are perpetrated by our own governments. We strongly denounce the repeated acts of state-terrorism by the Indian government in Kashmir, North-East and the tribal heartland of Central-East India; the Pakistani forces that continue their rampage and brutalities across Balochistan; state-backed terrorist activities carried on in the Chittagong Hill Tracts in Bangladesh. We condemn state-terror pursued by repressing movements, suspending civil liberties, militarising the public space, hardening the Penal Code and rousing religious and racial animosity. Perpetuating a coercive police-state in the guise of so-called anti-terrorism agreements, do not attack the cause but only the symptoms. These are only superficial answers dished out to masses and contribute to the endless spiral of global terror.

5. We also condemn another form of terrorism – that imposed neo-liberal fundamentalism – in all South Asian countries where millions of children go to bed hungry and grow up in acute malnutrition resulting in stunting and underweight, thus affecting their ability to study, grow up and live with full citizenships due to increasing income gaps. This is happening after more than two decades of neoliberal growth in all countries of South Asia. The story of hunger, unemployment, disease, illiteracy, homelessness, child labour, gender inequality, discrimination and deprivation, especially against the excluded social groups of our region is writ large in every corner of South Asia. It is our considered opinion and our lived experience that this condition of all round human misery stands further accentuated ever since neo-liberalism invaded our lands. Unfortunately, the ruling class across the region in spite of their mutual differences and hostilities are united in imposing this economic model which has spread inequality, human deprivation, discrimination and erosion of the quality of life of the millions.

6. SAAPE stands committed to help to appraise the situation of Bhutanese refugees in Nepal. International community has not been able to significantly contribute to ease this pending problem. There has been no sign of immediate repatriation of the refugees by the Nepal government. The Bhutan government is adamant in refusing the refugees' right to return.

We also demand that Sri Lankan refugees wanting to stay back in India is given citizenship. The Sri Lanka government must provide security and assistance to those wanting to be in their homeland.

7. We demand 'Rights to Minorities' and 'No to Majoritarianism', 'full citizenship with all entitlements to minorities'. All cases of cross border inceptions where migrants have not been treated well even within legal framework must stop. We also demand full rights for migrant workers.

8. We demand People's SAARC and Official SAARC relationship is linked and maintained so that the two bodies do not work in isolation. People's SAARC should be accredited with Observer status, to voice grass-roots opinion and work for a better South Asia.

9. Land and natural resource grab in South Asia is the serious issue that has led to the alienation of people from their rights to live and rights to livelihoods. The land grabbing process must be stopped urgently. We demand rational utilisation of natural resources and democratic control of communities over them to eradicate poverty. A democratic and ecological regional planning for water and other resources must be ensured as a priority.

10. We urge states to respect the rights of land locked countries of the region.

11. We urge states to unilaterally repudiate sovereign debts.

12. We realise that the marginalisation and structural exclusion of women from governance and

economic & political participation has reinforced the feminisation of poverty; discrimination and violence against women are further hindering women's accession and influence in politics and governance; exclusion of women and other sexual minorities from politics and governance is a violation of fundamental human rights and breaches the spirit of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. We recognise that women's meaningful engagement in politics and governance can contribute in reducing gaps in society and promoting peace and dignity for all. We reconfirm that women's participation in politics and governance is a right. The historical and structural exclusion of women needs to end. All forms of patriarchal authority needs to end. Violence against women must have zero tolerance in society.

13. We therefore pledge ourselves in favour of a secular, democratic, humanist order free from discrimination, denial of dignity, and artificial boundaries that impede our travel and our friendships, especially at a people to people level. We demand barrier free movement and visa free regime. We want a society that guarantees us all Human rights, especially that which is contained in the international Bill of Rights. We want the South Asian governments to ratify all Human Rights conventions and implement them strictly. The South Asian society can only claim itself democratic when the rights of people at the bottom are guaranteed.

14. We want a people friendly Rule of Law based political order which is guaranteed by a constitutional arrangement in which Sovereignty rests entirely with the people, with the right to recall corrupt officials along with the machinery that can put such usurpers of power behind the bars, after due process of law.

15. The SAARC charter as well as the agreements must be immediately implemented.

16. We call upon all our friends in Civil Society and in people friendly political processes to wake up to the needs and aspirations of ordinary people and to strive for a new world order and to make efforts for the same in South Asia. Let us prepare well for the People's SAARC and use the coming opportunity to ascertain the will of the widest sections of civil society and move forward to defeat the forces of fundamentalism, elite rule, and exploitation, discrimination based on gender or social group affiliations and end all forms of poverty, inequalities & religious fundamentalism.

17. Full social security needs to be guaranteed for all vulnerable populations in South Asian countries by national governments. Given the rise of inequalities this is mandatory. We must ensure minimum living wage and job-security for all workers in the region.

18. We are aware that catastrophic levels of climate change would make the poor even more vulnerable. To fight that we need to institute sustainable patterns of production and consumption. We demand that governments takes affirmative steps and firmly commits to hold global warming below 2° Celsius increase. This would imply phasing out fossil fuels, investments in renewable energy, stopping the loss of biodiversity, and ending overfishing, deforestation, and desertification.

19. While we appreciate the Sustainable Development Goals' affirmation to reduce inequality, combat climate change, strengthen labour rights, eliminate Western agricultural subsidies, etc. we have apprehensions that the effort to eradicate global poverty only through economic growth, export-oriented models, trade liberalisation, etc. within the existing neo-li
