

## **India: Maharashtra organisations observe global week of action culminating in float parade in Mumbai on Jan 26<sup>th</sup>**

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Organisations in Maharashtra and Mumbai responded to the call of the WSF for the Global Day of Visibility with various actions in the state. Some of them were:

### **MAHARASHTRA: FARMERS ON DEBT AND SUICIDES:**

CASA (Church Auxiliary for Social Action) in Maharashtra launched a week long campaign on the growing incidence of farmers suicides in the state, particularly in Vidarbha district, and demanded the total cancellation of debts, culminating in protests and demonstrations in different parts of Maharashtra.

In Mumbai, on the 22<sup>nd</sup> after a PRESS CONFERENCE organised to announce and mobilise for the Global Week, there was a FILM SCREENING of "Palestine Is Still The Issue", an award winning documentary by world renowned journalist John Pilger.

### **WOMEN OBSERVE GLOBAL WEEK OF ACTION:**

Around 300 women from working class neighbourhoods gathered in a maidan [sports field] to demand ANOTHER WORLD, a Gender Just World. They said it by flying kites!

On 25<sup>th</sup> Jan. or the eve of India's republic day, women joined the World Social Forum's Global Week of Action by organising their own event in the heart of Mumbai, India.

The event entitled 'And Women also Fly Kites' highlighted women's issues. Women sent a message that as women we have a right to work, to health, and education. They will resist gender discrimination. They demanded that public places be safe for women at all times. Violence against women is a human right violation and women called on the government and concerned agencies to work towards the elimination of all types of violence.

Secondly, there is a symbolic meaning attached to this action. Kite flying is associated with boys and men. By flying kites, women are asserting their right to equality and the use of maidans for sports. It questions masculine stereotypes, which deprive women of the many benefits of games. A kite symbolizes freedom; it defines its own boundaries and goals. It is a fitting symbol of women's search and struggle for confidence, equality and dignity.

The program was jointly organised by women's movement organisation along with community organisations from different working class colonies of Mumbai.

### **PALESTINE SOLIDARITY DEMONSTRATION:**

A Palestine Solidarity was held at Mumbai's busy Churchgate Station on the on Friday the 25<sup>th</sup> of Jan 2008 with slogans of "End the inhuman blockade of Gaza", "We support the Palestine liberation struggle", "Boycott the apartheid Zionist state of Israel", "Establish an independent state of

Palestine with Jerusalem as capital”.

#### MEETING IN MUMBAI ON PAKISTAN:

Pakistan is passing through a critical phase of its history. The military dictatorship is deeply entrenched and people are disillusioned. In such a situation religious extremists' and militants try to fill the void. People at large and civil society are trapped in between. With the assassination of Benazir Bhutto, the situation has worsened. On 24<sup>th</sup> January 2008, the Peace Mumbai network organised a meeting on “Pakistan Today” at Durbar Hall, Asiatic Society. Husain Naqi (Former Editor of 'The News' and Editor 'South Asia Media Monitor') spoke and the meeting was chaired by Kumar Ketkar (Editor of leading Marathi daily, 'Loksatta')

#### PEOPLES FLOATS:

Jan 26: This 26<sup>th</sup> January was different, for people in Central Mumbai, primarily a working class area. In response to the call of the WSF for the global day of visibility, peoples' floats paraded through the area which was earlier known as Manchester of India. Today most of the textile mills are closed down rendering workers jobless. The nexus of builders, mill owners, mafias and government is even depriving workers of their houses.

The themes of the peoples' floats included textile mill land, housing rights, farmers' suicides and onslaught on retails. Workers Mumbai is transforming into Affluent's Mumbai. The peoples' floats generated lots of curiosity amongst the people. On the way to Girgaon Chowpatty from Shivaji Park, Dadar a theater group performed a street play highlighting how poor in the city of Mumbai are thrown out of the city and are compelled to live in the far extended suburbs.

The float on Mill land was modelled by Girni Kamgar Sangharsha Samiti and Focus on the Global South, India; on Housing rights by YUVA & Nivara Hakka Sangharsha Samiti.

Float on agrarian crisis. In the Vidarbha region of Maharashtra, six farmers are committing suicides every day as agriculture has become more and more unprofitable. The float on farmers' suicides modelled by CASA, Movement for Peace & Justice, Focus on the Global South, India and Vidarbha Jan Andolan Samiti. The Float on Retail was modelled by India FDI Watch and VAK.

The floats passed through Central Mumbai and culminated at the historical Girgaon Chowpatty. Various trade union leaders and members of the civil society walked with the floats. Eminent persons like Dr. Shanti Patel, freedom fighter, trade unionist & former mayor; Well known Arjun Dangle, Dalit writer etc joined the parade. The float covered a distance of around 11 km.

Apart from Global Day of Action, it was also India's Republic Day. Today Delhi, India's capital, through floats exhibited India's military power. In contrast, Mumbai groups exhibited the dark realities of India. The marchers carried placards and flags; and the trucks carrying floats were decorated with banners of ANOTHER WORLD IS POSSIBLE and slogans on the issues on which they were themed.