

# SHAPING OUR FUTURE

Asia Pacific People's Convergence



People's Plan for the 21st Century  
Report of the Third Convergence since Minamata  
February-March 1996  
in South Asia

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## ***SHAPING OUR FUTURE***

### **Foreword**

It gives us great pleasure to offer you this celebration of the PP21 process from 1989. From its inception, PP21 has always been ambitious. And yet those who envisioned the process saw opportunity and challenge, in spite of doubts voiced by both detractors and supporters.

Seven years have past since committed groups and individuals met in Minamata, Japan. Our world was in the throes of ideological and economic upheaval then, and we continue to experience its cataclysmic repercussions today.

This book, *Shaping Our Future*, is a compilation of documents primarily from the Kathmandu Convergence held earlier this year, but also including the discussion papers for the "Towards a People's Charter" Workshop, and reports and declarations of international fora prior to the Main Forum. The Minamata Declaration of 1989 and the Rajchadamnoen Pledge from Bangkok, Thailand, 1992 are also included for reference.

The purpose of putting together these documents is not to simply add to the plethora of conference papers. It is to catalogue and evaluate alternative movements and processes, and thereby hopefully encourage others to join further convergences.

The material in this collection is not exhaustive, nor can it be stagnant, as movements, struggles and initiatives continue to develop.

As the editors of this book, we encourage you to share with us your stories and join us in our quest of dismantling those structures that oppress us.



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## **Sowing Seeds of Hope**

### **PP21 as a People's Process**

**Nepalese Organizing Committee for  
the Kathmandu Convergence**

The People's Plan for the 21st Century (PP21) is a unique long-term people's process promoted since 1989 by people's organizations, networks and NGOs mainly in the Asian and Pacific region. PP21 aims to help create people's alliances across national and other borders so that an Alliance of Hope of empowered people will emerge to overcome the still dominant but historically-doomed 20th century paradigm of development and progress - mal-development that sets one people against another, generates widespread poverty and inequality by the side of localized wealth and prosperity, destroys environment and undermines human values and the rich cultural diversity of the people. This process is engendered by dynamic and constructive processes and interactions within and among communities and people's coalitions, networks and movements which address the issues and realities affecting people. This process is substantiated by spreading proactive people's practices creating alternative social relations and running sustainable economic systems.

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PP21 was convened in 1989 jointly by 15 regional organizations in Asia-Pacific allied with a coalition of Japanese movement groups. Launched in 1989 in Japan through 17 international meetings with 350 activists from all over Asia-Pacific and other continents as well as 100,000 Japanese activists, the program culminated in a synthesis conference at Minamata, a city symbolic of industrial pollution, and there adopted the Minamata Declaration. This declaration criticized the 20th century development model, and called for a process of forming an Alliance of Hope so that the people themselves - not the elites, corporations or state - begin to shape an alternative future of the world through achieving transborder participatory democracy. The participants decided that PP21 should be continued as a people's process linking people's groups and movements on a sustained basis.

PP21 had another culmination in 1992 in Thailand in another large-scale program for participatory democracy at the community, national and global levels. It was inspired by Thai people's struggle for democracy in May that year that toppled a military government. The Rajchadamnoen Pledge adopted in the PP21 Thai program emphasized alliance building across borders in various fields and in various locations. This process gave rise to initiatives and interactions across national borders.

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### **Impact and initiatives**

The idea and practice of PP21 have spread to various countries and continents. Prior to the program in Thailand in 1992, PP21 Central America was inaugurated in Managua, Nicaragua, by a broad coalition of people's organizations and research groups from six Central American countries. PP21 national groups were also formed in Bangladesh, the Philippines and Japan while various transborder alliance-building initiatives originated in the PP21 programs.

PP21 also was joined by more regional organizations, in addition to the original 15 co-convenors. In the meantime, PP21 made linkages with other transborder networks, such as the 500 Years of Resistance of Indigenous People and Peoples Movements, Kairos Europe, and networks in the Americas against NAFTA and other forms of MNC-centred hemispheric integration. PP21 also gave rise to grassroots-level initiatives beyond borders including farmers' exchanges between Thailand and Japan, Indonesian initiatives in organizing APEC lobbying, river projects and so on.

In South Asia, subcontinental initiatives were taken by PP21 partners. In January 1993, a meeting was held in Nepal to discuss PP21 in the South Asian context. The meeting recognized that the people's movements and NGOs have been very active on key issues that are affecting people in South Asia, such as widespread poverty, illiteracy, discrimination against women, ethnic and religious minorities, external debt, fall-out of structural adjustment programs (SAPs), militarization, centralization of power, rampant corruption, violation of human rights,

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environmental degradation and natural calamities. This initiative led to the formation of the PP21 South Asia Initiative in a large meeting in Madras in August 1993 and to the inauguration of several transborder actions.

### **Invitation to PP21 Partnership**

After the 1992 program in Thailand, an evaluation meeting was held in May 1993 in Bangkok. The participating organizations, co-convenors and Thai organizers were present. It was agreed that PP21 should not become another regional umbrella organization; rather, it should continue to facilitate interaction, sharing of experiences and information, provide fora to critically examine global, regional trends and mobilize support for collective responses — all for the sake of the formation of an Alliance of Hope. At the same time, the evaluation meeting created a minimum mechanism to monitor and facilitate the alliance-building processes. Thus, the meeting appointed a seven-member Coordinating Team and mandated it to establish a small secretariat in Thailand. The first meeting of the Coordinating Team was held in Seoul in November 1993. From this discussion, APEC emerged as one of the major concerns in the Asia-Pacific region.

An extended meeting of the CT was held in May 1994 in Bangkok attended by many of the co-convenors. The meeting adopted an interim guideline laying down rules of self-management of PP21 as a process. On the basis of this interim guideline, the meeting agreed to constitute PP21 as partnership. While up to that point, PP21 has had as its body only co-convenors which were all regional organizations (except the



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Japanese committee that initiated it), the guideline opened partnership to all groups willing to work together as partners.

As the guideline states, regional and other organizations willing to promote this alliance-building process in the spirit of PP21 (Minamata Declaration and Rajchadamnoen Pledge) are PP21 partners having an equal capacity, who share the collective responsibility to promote the process and to disseminate the spirit of PP21. The partners should define their respective contributions in terms of activities and resources in accordance with their areas of preference, capacities and means available.

The PP21 partners, according to the guideline, meet in a general meeting of partners for decisions concerning the general direction of PP21, major events and programs and other serious matters affecting the whole PP21 process. At the extended Coordinating Team meeting held in May 1994 in Bangkok, it was agreed to convene the first PP21 general meeting towards the end of 1995. The Sri Lanka delegation offered to host the meeting in their country. The CT meeting held in February 1995, considering the overcrowded conference schedules in 1995, proposed to hold the event between 15 January and 15 February 1996 in Sri Lanka.

In May 1995, a planning meeting was held in Colombo to prepare for the Colombo event. The dates of the meeting were fixed for 5-11 March 1996.

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In the last week of January 1996, an extended CT meeting was held in Hong Kong to evaluate the process of PP21 over the years, especially since the Bangkok meeting in 1992, and to finalize arrangements for the Colombo event. As the meeting in Hong Kong ended, a bomb explosion took place in the heart of Sri Lankan capital, Colombo, raising new concerns about the security situation in Sri Lanka and prospects of having the PP21 event there. On 5 February, 1996, a delegation of CT members met with the Sri Lanka PP21 Action Committee in Colombo to assess the situation. Considering the deteriorating security situation and other developments, it was decided to shift the venue of the PP21 event to another country. Groups in Nepal agreed to host the event in Kathmandu.

### **Asia Pacific People's Convergence: Shaping Our Future**

We feel that we from the Asian and Pacific region face the special need to meet, discuss, analyse, share common perspectives, and engage in transborder, trans-network, and trans-issue activities to cope with emerging realities in our region. We also feel that we need not only to react but also to proact in order to fully evolve our alternatives in the midst of these realities in the areas of economics, social relations and culture and values.

This special need arises because a new tide of global and regional integration is rushing ashore following a series of major steps to reorganize global economy taken one after another in quick succession - the formation of the European Union, conclusion of the GATT-Uruguay Round, formation of the World Trade Organization, the conclusion of NAFTA, and the APEC summits

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in Seattle and Bogor. These steps, all taken high above the heads of the billions of people of our region, will certainly affect their lives but have not been fully coped with by people's movements.

We sense that this is time for us to think, rethink, reorient and network on a broader basis, to (a) challenge and halt the dominant paradigm and global regime that victimize the majority of the people and destroy nature, (b) to define and refine the other cosmologies, the other values like caring, nurturing and cooperating; the other ways of being, doing, relating and knowing, that is people's ways, people's paths to development which are much more human and sustainable, and (c) to develop strategies and alliances to expand, multiply and create sustainable ways of production, trade and communications. These are the only paths that can provide some hope, some light in the face of the destructive development we see all around us.

### **Globalization and regional dynamics**

At its close, this century is witnessing historic economic ascendancy of our region in the global economic setting, with rapid GNP growth taking hold of most of the East and Southeast Asian countries including China, and the South Asian subcontinent also being drawn into GNP growth-oriented economic integration process. Asia-Pacific is thus turning into the global centre of capital accumulation, attracting more and more investment and all other economic activities. With 60% of the world population concentrated here, rich in mineral and other resources, offering vast markets and market potentials, and, last but not least, comprising major state regimes including big

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powers like China and India, this region has the potential to shape the world configuration of the coming century.

Asia-Pacific has thus become a major focus of global economic and political contention. The United States is stepping afresh into this region eager to partake of, and benefit from, the Asian economic dynamics with a view to preventing this region from emerging as an auto-centric economic sphere. Having forced NAFTA on Canada and Mexico as a step towards institutionalization of its hemispheric dominance, the United States dreams of annexing the Asia-Pacific region as a vast free trade area under its aegis in order to complement its waning economic competence and to rival the nascent European Union. The 1993 Seattle APEC Summit was a major demonstration of the US will to push itself into the Asia-Pacific scene. The European Union eyes this whole process with suspicion and irritation as Asia is as much a tough rival as a vast market in which its business has excellent business opportunities.

All this is occurring within the context of globalization of economy paralleling globalization of TNC control. This process of globalization from above is ubiquitously promoted by a global power centre formally and informally constituted by Northern governments, IMF-World Bank and GATT-WTO, and enforced through structural adjustment programs, intellectual property rights, trade and investment liberalization, privatization and other free-market policy instruments. India and other South Asian countries as well as heavily indebted countries in Southeast Asia like the Philippines are directly subjected to this global process at the cost of workers jobs, social services and public servants jobs,

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which victimize women, farmers, children and all vulnerable popular segments as well as environment.

It should be noted here that the relatively autonomous regional economic integration that has progressed over the past decades and accelerated in the past few years, particularly in the Northeast and Southeast Asia, proceeded not in a vacuum but as integral part of this globalization process in the sense that all these economies are oriented towards the global market. However, unlike the NAFTA-style formal institutional integration, regional economic integration in Asia has developed rather informally and organically across borders. To simplify, this is a billiard model: Japan played, the pioneer's role, transferring momentum to NIEs, which in turn transferred momentum to ASEAN countries and overseas Chinese capital, all of which delivered final momentum to China and now to Indochina. As it shifted from one group to another, the momentum multiplied with local supply of new energies. The scope of this integration is now extending to South Asia.

The chief organizers of this integration are business interests, supported and serviced by the state. People do not count. Business and governments among themselves decided on projects like triangles of growth, ecologically suicidal dam construction, etc., while business interests are given free reigns to pursue their short-term, mid-term goals through maximum exploitation of labour and natural resources wherever available. These business interests have no qualms about the weakest that they so callously victimize. This integration involves complex pecking orders. For decades, Japan belonging to the Northern group has been striving to shape the regional economy to its

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advantage while guarding its technological near-monopoly privileges, providing aid to promote its business and strategic interests. But now NIEs business operates throughout the area as well as the rest of the world exploiting local labour and resources, in many cases in crude ways. And now, ASEAN countries are following suit. This integration thus badly divided the people in mutual antipathy as they are brought together in hierarchical division of labour.

### **False choices and people's stance**

This dual process of global and regional economic integration with all its destructive consequences on the people, environment and human values is what we, the people of the Asia-Pacific region, are facing.

Because of its duality, the situation is tricky. The free market model of globalization promoted by the US clashes with the state-centred development model (Walden Bello) that underlies the Asian regional integration. APEC is certainly one of the arenas where the clash manifests itself. We are asked to choose one of the two as though they were the only choices.

As both sides entail their respective ideological components, the situation is all the more tricky and confusing. The US poses as the champion of human rights in Asia while trying to strangle a whole nation like Cuba because it does not like its regime. Authoritarian Asian governments invoke the right to development, national sovereignty or, in sheer cynicism even Asian values in order to justify their merciless repression on their own people as well as destruction of their own environment.

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Are these the only choices? Are we to go with the US-promoted APEC and the ideology of free-enterprise-free-market human rights holy trinity for the sake of human rights? Are we to justify all the destructive practices happening in the process of regional integration because we, as Asians, are against US encroachment?

This is a trap. We believe there is a third choice. That is the people's choice from the people's position and based on people's agenda. It is crucial that we once again establish an independent position of the people vis-a-vis the two dominant models. It is from this position that we can intervene in the dynamic on-going process, giving, where appropriate, qualified support for specific policy positions of one government or another without prejudice to our consistency.

The point of departure in determining our position should be our recognition that both models are having devastating effects on the majority of the people, their lives and living, and irreparably disrupt the environment. Though the two models are in apparent conflict, in fact they share the same idea of development and progress - GNP growth through large-scale industrialization at the expense of rural communities and agriculture, environment, human rights and human needs of the majority of the population. What we witness is new discrimination against, and exploitation of, women on the basis of the old commodification of sex, exploitation of the weak by the stronger and destruction of community and inter-human bonds replacing them with commodity relations. The richness of Asian-Pacific cultural diversities is being bulldozed into a homogeneous, standardized cosmopolitan culture. Consumerism and greed for money and material things are replacing decent human values. In both



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models, the elites, whether World Banks or local, corporate or political, are determining the future of the people. With or without the functioning of parliamentary democracy, the masses of people are excluded from vital decision-making processes. In both models, the strong appropriate for themselves the right to exploit the weak to a maximum. Both models are patriarchal and have not only disempowered and marginalized women but also ignored, subjugated and/or exploited reproductive values and labour like nurturing, caring and sharing.

### **People's convergence to cope with the present and create the future**

But the situation is not all that dark. People's movements and communities all over have developed effective critiques of the dominant paradigm and development model. Along with resistance, there have been peoples efforts to create alternatives in different sectors. Alternative practices are increasing, informed by feminist values that present a fundamental critique, of the dominant values that uphold conquest, domination and subjugation, and tapping the best of our region's traditions. We are coping with the present and planning and, in fact, practising the future. This is a time when we can expect unique convergence between resisting and creating. Having identified and defined darkness, we need to focus on defining LIGHT.

In fact, people are taking actions on major national as well as global issues while developing sustainable models of society, economy and culture. While the success of the globalization and new integration programs depends on the further division of and disempowerment of the people, people and their communities are

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not silent. They raise their voices and are steadily empowering themselves and linking up beyond borders. Multiple networking efforts are underway on burning issues - local, national and international - such as human rights, gender and indigenous rights, SAPS, foreign debt, communal conflicts and violence, environment, dams, land and all other issues affecting peoples life. Worthy of special mention is the fact that the Sri Lankan peace movement has been making significant contribution towards resolving the internecine war and restoring peace.

We also witness throughout our region growing efforts of grassroots communities to organize alternative socioeconomic systems through organic farming, agro-forestry, people-to-people trade, cooperatives, workers self-managed factories, people's banks, development and sharing of appropriate technologies and skills and other proactive practices many of which are promoted by women for their empowerment, all over Asia.

Characteristically, in all these areas quite a few transborder linkages, networks and organizations have been engendered in the past couple of years and more are planned ahead, some in the name of PP21 and others in other ways - proof that people have begun to respond to the emergent ominous situation. To name only a few: PP21 South Asia Initiative and various programs arising from it including Peoples SAARC, Indonesian NGO initiative on APEC, Hong Kong-based NGOs initiative for an Asian alliance, the initiative for the UN Social Summit in Copenhagen, Women's transborder action towards the Beijing Women's Conference, popular campaigns on the Bretton Woods system, Mekong Basin (in Indochina) People's Transborder

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Cooperation, farmers' international initiative to have a global gathering in Manila and the Japanese NGOs plan to hold a counter-meeting to the APEC Osaka summit, in addition to counter-NAFTA initiatives in the Americas and Bretton Woods actions in Europe.

In the international arena, NGO coalitions have emerged as a significant actor influencing the discourse and, partially, practices of global political orientation using UN opportunities such as the human rights conference, international women's conference and social summit.

The challenges before the people's movements are to review, consolidate and expand these initiatives. The challenge is to define, further develop and make renewed commitment to people's paradigm, people's plans and practices which offer more ecological and sustainable ways of living and growing.

Consequently, the next PP21 forum will focus on the following three themes:

- (1) Working out a common person's stance of the Asian-Pacific people in a People's Charter vis-a-vis the rapid on-going economic globalization - regionalization process which, unchallenged, would divide us in antagonistic hierarchical relationships set up against our sisters and brothers in other continents;

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- (2) Further evolving a common vision and consolidating the on-going experiments to create alternatives in areas like,
  - people's control over and management of natural resources, common revival of agricultural practices based on eco-cycles and bio-diversity.
  - people's enterprises, economies and trade which provide subsistence to all without destroying nature, diversity, justice and co-existence.
  - people's ways of knowing and creating and preserving knowledge.
  - people's concept of politics which locates holistics in the midst of everyday life, which affirm the feminist slogan "the personal is political" and the PP21 idea of transborder participatory democracy.
- (3) Accordingly, developing concrete PP21 plans and making arrangements for further alliance-building.

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# **The Third PP21 Convergence** **Continuation and Renewal**

**Muto Ichiyo**

In early March 1996, the Nepalese capital of Kathmandu was the venue of a major international gathering, titled "People's Convergence: Shaping Our Future." The event was organized as a part of the People's Plan for the 21st Century (PP21) and hosted by an impressive array of Nepalese people's organizations and NGOs. Participating in the convergence were social movement activists and leaders, mostly from the Asia-Pacific region but also from other continents, including an official representative of the Zapatistas, together with hundreds of Nepalese activists, prominent movement leaders, and grassroots people.

The gathering was convened to pool together people's wisdom and experiences to create transborder alliances of people vis-a-vis the raging waves of destruction of human communities and nature in the name of globalization, free trade, free market, and free enterprise, a ubiquitous process promoted by the global power centres of multinational corporations, governments, and local allies. As a program based in Asia and the Pacific, it was

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designed to address in particular the miracle growths of the whole region now involving South Asia with all the destructive consequences on the majority of the people and environment.

The main forum at Kathmandu was opened on 8 March, International Women's Day, in a large auditorium of the Kathmandu city hall. More than 1,000 participants, men as well as women, joined thousands of Nepalese women in a vigorous march through the city demanding gender justice. Before the main forum, a smaller three-day workshop towards a People's Charter met to prepare inputs into the main forum.

The workshop discussed (1) globalization from above, (2) gender realities in Asia, (3) alternative systems, and (4) networking, on the basis of several discussion papers, some of which were prepared through collective work by authors assigned by the Planning Committee. The People's Plan for the 21st Century, or PP21, was launched in Japan on the initiative of a coalition of Japanese social movement groups in the summer of 1989 in the form of a chain of 19 international events held all over the Japanese archipelago, with a synthesis conference at Minamata, southern Kyushu, a town known for mercury poisoning and the struggle of its victims against the dire consequences of industrialism.

The participants in this program adopted the Minamata Declaration, presenting a fundamental critique of the 20th century paradigm of development and progress, calling for transborder participatory democracy to transform the global structure through an alliance of hope to be forged by the peoples of the world. It was agreed at Minamata that PP21 should be



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continued as a people's process of forming alliances of hopes at the grassroots level.

In December 1992, a coalition of Thai NGOs hosted the second major program of PP21, composed of numerous workshops held all over Thailand. The main forum in Bangkok adopted the Rajchadamnoen Pledge, calling for action for participatory democracy at the global, national, and community levels and emphasizing alliance of hope building work. The program was inspired by the Thai people's triumphant struggle for democracy in May the same year that had toppled a government of military generals. The Kathmandu convergence was thus organized as the rallying point of the third major program of PP21. However, this time the program was not

country-specific: its venue was the South Asia sub-region as a whole. Held preceding the Kathmandu main forum as integral part of PP21 was a series of thematic and sectoral workshops, actions, and people's events. Most of them met beginning on 1 March and sent their representatives to the Kathmandu main forum.

These events were the International Writers Convention (Dhaka, Bangladesh), Forum on Tolerance and Peace (Karachi, Pakistan), Forum on Natural Resources: Relationship and Management (Calcutta, India), Workshop on People's Health in People's Hands (Madras, India), Asian Small Fisherfolk Consultation (Chilaw, Sri Lanka), Asia-Pacific workers' forum (Pattan, Nepal), Asian Peasant Women's Forum (Kathmandu), Forum on Civil Society and Human Rights (Kathmandu). All attracted far more people than the organizers had expected, according to preliminary reports. One workshop, integrating Asian Alternative Development Efforts was held in Kerala, India, on a relatively



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independent initiative, and some participants joined the Kathmandu forum.

All of these events were organized by coalitions of people's groups and NGOs on their respective initiatives, and many were coordinated by the PP21 South Asia Initiative, a coalition of South Asian NGOs and social movements which were inaugurated in Madras in the summer of 1993. Worth special mention in the perspective of the 21st century was a children's march from Calcutta to Kathmandu. Scores of children rescued from sweatshops travelled 1,200 kilometres by bus, appealing for the abolition of child labour. Greeted and joined by local children, the extremely vivacious boys and girls, who were in their low teens, arrived at Kathmandu on 7 March, participating in the main forum opening session where they occupied the front rows. One of them, in a clear firm voice told the audience stories of their suffering and dreams.

A series of multifaceted cultural events integrated with the main forum at Kathmandu was organized by Nepalese cultural groups. A visit to Bhutanese refugee camps was also organized as a satellite program. The PP21 main forum was originally planned to be held in Colombo, Sri Lanka, rather than Kathmandu. At the invitation of a coalition of People's movements and NGOs from Sri Lanka, a Colombo forum was planned, although the plan was based on the assumption that internal peace would be restored after the coming to power of a new government with a peace and devolution program. Broad-based preparations got underway for Sri Lanka not only to host the international project but also as a place to thrash out Sri Lankan People's alternatives vis-a-vis the

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destructive consequences of globalization, which had certainly aggravated their national situation.

The planning committee for the South Asian PP21 program met twice in Colombo, assuming that it would be the venue of the main forum, but the escalation of the internal war situation forced the change of the venue to Kathmandu early in February. This sudden switch of the venue, just three weeks prior to the announced opening of the main forum, would normally have caused a chaotic situation, but delegates arriving at Kathmandu marvelled at the almost perfect preparation done by the Nepalese organizations. Not only was accommodation for the participants and transportation arranged, but even PP21 caps and scarfs were produced for sale, complete with a PP21 song presented by Nepalese musicians and singers at the opening session. The organizational capacity displayed by the Nepalese host organizations, together with their warm spirit of welcome and enthusiasm, was impressive, particularly to those who knew that NGOs were not able to exist legally in Nepal until 1990, inspiring proof which demonstrated that people's struggle can bring about such tangible changes.

### **Diversity vs Homogeneity**

Because the PP21 South Asia program was an extremely complex as well as dynamic process, it is difficult for any participant, even one on the organizing side, to give a full picture of what happened. Nor is it easy to identify a single focus of the whole chain of the South Asian events.

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Several features seem to stand out, however: the manifestation once again of the enriching diversity of the whole region and the participants will to relate and to come together through interactive discovery of commonalities as end-of-the-century contemporaries. The overriding concern of the people involved was how the people of the region, and in fact people of all continents and regions, could cope with, countervail, and find ways to finally overcome the rampage of Globalization from above, which is casting the whole world into a blighting homogeneity geared to the convenience of unregulated, unlimited capital accumulation at the cost of the livelihoods and dignity of the vast majority of the people as well as the environment.

The convergence made visible the assertive presence of rich and enriching diversity in the region and beyond: diversity that inspires resistance and allows us to envision a world tomorrow as colourful and manifold patterns, each with its proper story falling together into a dynamic kaleidoscopic cosmos. South Asia was indeed an ideal venue from this point of view. The juxtaposition is thus asymmetrical: not their homogeneity vs our homogeneity but their homogeneity vs our diversity. I understand that this is what an alternative means: if we were merely anti-something, our vision would be a mirror image of another pattern which could easily be reversed. The sense of diversity and hence of the vastness of our resources convinces us that we can change the existing configuration meaningfully, and this shared awareness generates optimism against apparent formidable odds.

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### **Alliance through Interaction**

The convergence was, in this sense, a unique arena of encounters, mutual discovery, and interaction, generating active interests, will, and plans to link up, a moment essential to alliance of hope perspectives. Of particular importance, it seems to me, was the inter-subregional encounters and exposure of many male participants to forceful feminist discourses.

For grassroots communities the Asia-Pacific region still remains an abstract idea, though for NGO conference-goers and activist intellectuals it may already exist as an imagined community. There are still high cultural and psychological barriers between Northeast Asia, Southeast Asia, South Asia, and the Pacific in addition to the very different economic landscape of South Asia compared to the other subregions.

Talking with South Asian activists, I got the impression that for many the fact of meeting and talking with South East or North Asians, for instance Philippine organizers or Korean activists, let alone friends from Pacific islands, was an entirely new experience. The same was true for many from the Pacific side of the region. South Asia, which consists of societies bound together by history on such an immense scale, even this point seems to feel more or less self-contained, but the tide of 'globalization' of the past decade has invaded the subcontinent quite deeply, if not as drastically and conspicuously as for relatively smaller territories like the NIEs and ASEAN. South Asia and the Pacific side of Asia are being fast integrated into a composite yet single lake of multinationalized capital activities. It appears to me that multinational corporations and governments

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united beyond the barriers before people's movements were aware of the need to link up. PP21 Kathmandu and related events, if properly followed up, will prove to be a significant step towards constituting the whole region as an imagined and actual People's community.

### **Gender as a Focus**

One major step forward in Kathmandu was that feminist perspectives were proposed, discussed, and largely recognized as perspectives providing defining characteristics of alternative societies we envision. Embryonically this idea appeared in the Minamata Declaration where, for instance, the dominant development model was characterized as 'male' development. But it was difficult to free the subsequent process of the conventional field of gravity where gender issues are considered primarily to be "women's issues" to be taken up by one of the many sectors, the women's sector.

In the highly gendered societies of our region, even putting women's issues on the agenda was uncommon. I personally remember an incident that happened some 15 years ago at a regional NGO conference where "women's issue" was being discussed. One philanthropic school director from Pakistan (a male) stood up and said, "I don't discriminate against women. All my secretaries are girls." Now we have come to the point of integrating gender-sensitivity into our common vocabulary, but the mentality and practice of reducing the gender problematique to Women's issues linger steadfastly in social and political movements.

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There are of course legitimate reasons why the gender issue is understood as a women's issue: it is women who suffer most from the gendered (patriarchal) society: trafficking, super-exploitation, unpaid work, violence at home and in the street, dual, triple burdens, all rooted in patriarchal premises of society and civilization: and for this reason they must protest, resist, and fight against all those injustices, and project their struggle as Women's struggle, hence Women's issue.

Women are compelled to emerge as victims, but are they merely victims? No, they are not, for they are also creators and weavers of new culture and relationships, both social and ecological; what is now understood as feminine values: like nurturing and caring should be embraced by all human beings, women and men alike, and should permeate social relationships as well as human relationships with nature: this was the message from a series of forceful inputs at the Kathmandu convergence made by highly articulate Asian feminists.

The forceful mobilization of women of the world at the Beijing Women's Conference obviously had a major impact on the PP21 process. It allowed many of us to envision an alternative society reorganized on a set of different principles and values which are explicitly and implicitly emerging out of women's movements and women's empowerment.

### **Integrating Resistance and Alternative Development Efforts**

Another new focus of the 1996 PP21 process was the integration of sustainable development efforts within the general perspective

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of People's alternatives. It is true that the critique of the dominant development models was at the core of PP21 concerns right from the beginning.

The first program in Japan was inspired by the spirituality and view of nature of indigenous people, and the idea of creating nature-harmonious ways of life was a priority item on the Minamata agenda. In the farmers' programs in Japan in 1989 and in Thailand in 1992, organic farming and other practices for the building of people-centred and nature-friendly systems were highlighted for discussion, exposure, and mutual learning. Various initiatives to develop local and transborder exchanges in skills and philosophies of organic farming emerged out of encounters occasioned by PP21.

Nevertheless, the overall emphasis of the PP21 processes was on political democracy, local, national, and global, as well as the political solidarity to substantiate it, and actual on-going efforts to build alternative, ecologically sustainable systems were not fully integrated with the political aspects of People's struggle. This time, conscious efforts were made starting from the preparatory stage to integrate "resisting" with "building." Protests alone are not sufficient to cope with the rampages of the "globalization" regime which is supported by national governments. Protests and pressures on governments and inter-governmental power sources are necessary, but must be accompanied by processes to begin to operate alternative socio-economic systems based on eco-cyclic processes, empowering communities.



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Numerous small-scale local economic and ecological efforts, organized on a project basis, should be linked in long-term efforts to organize alternative socio-economic systems under which communities can live with dignity, overcoming poverty and environmental degradation. Thus, the traditional separation between building efforts and political struggle against unsustainable development projects and for institutional reforms will be overcome, integrating both aspects of practice into alternative communities of the people. Ethics and practices which are in harmony with the principle of natural circularity should ultimately form the basic character of the future societies we are working together to bring about.

These are some of the issues raised in the discussion paper prepared for the Kathmandu event on sustainable systems. Though there was insufficient discussion on this topic at the Kathmandu forum (due to time constraints), the 1996 PP21 program certainly made a leap forward in integrating this concern into PP21's permanent agenda. The participants included male and female practitioners of alternative development in various forms, ranging from organic farmers, credit union organizers to activists from consumer movements with direct linkages to rural producers.

The Kathmandu program was preceded by a series of new initiatives to promote and network alternatives building practices: a workshop held by Beijing Women's NGO Forum participants on Women's Alternatives in Actions (August 1995), a Southeast and East Asian workshop of alternatives practitioners in Bacolod, Negros Island, Philippines (November 1995), and an Asia-wide workshop entitled "Interating

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Alternative Development Efforts in Asia" in Kerala, India. Directly and indirectly, these events were all linked to Kathmandu.

### **The Need for Intensified Conceptual Work**

During both the preparatory process and the Kathmandu main forum itself, there was a deplorable insufficiency of discussion on important topics, including the ones listed above. Lack of time for discussion during the main forum, failure to present the discussion papers well in advance for preliminary examination by the participants, and the general weakness in coordination and communication all contributed to this.

The rush with which the venue of the main forum was moved from Colombo to Kathmandu had an adverse effect, of course, as the organizers' energies were absorbed into logistic aspects. In fact, it appeared that real discussion was about to begin, following various inputs and exciting insights presented by participants, but it had to be carried over into a future process. We all felt that a huge mass of experience, knowledge, and insight was there to be shared, but that it was not sufficiently tapped.

The Kathmandu program thus set for PP21 the task of promoting vigorous conceptual work to meet the real challenges of the times. The establishment of task forces was proposed as a way to accomplish this, and existing networks doing intellectual organic work with people's movements were encouraged to work together. There is at present a real need for a serious conceptual search for, and productive debate about, people's alternatives, as

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major problems which have no ready answers are emerging with direct relevance to our present and future praxis.

We have analysed the situation and identified the devastating effects of free market-oriented globalization. While much remains to be done in this field, we also face the need to jointly work out strategies to allow us to confront and overcome the dominant regime. In order to do this we must evaluate our own activities, clarify the roles of various change agents such as NGOs, and define more clearly a series of concepts which have entered our movements, such as civil society. We must also resolve knotty issues such as those involving human rights, which sometimes divide us. I understand that one of the Kathmandu mandates is to integrate intense conceptual work into the PP21 processes.

### **Renewing Organizational Mechanisms**

Last but not least, the PP21 Kathmandu convergence, which was also the first general assembly of PP21 partners, made a definitive step forward in resolving the organizational problems of the PP21 process.

From the beginning, this process has been torn by two equally important but often contradictory concerns. On the one hand, we did not want to establish a rigid umbrella organization with a bureaucratic nature, and we declared PP21 to be a dynamic process engendered by initiatives taken by groups and individuals volunteering to facilitate the creation of alliance of hope. On the other hand, we have always lacked clarity on membership and decision-making mechanisms, a fact which did an obvious

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disservice to the need to systematically and consistently develop an alliance of hope with sufficient accountability to PP21 constituencies and to people's movements and communities in general.

While the strength of the PP21 process can be shown through the fact that it has developed through multi-layered structures, the weak coordination stemming from organizational ambiguity and lack of clearly-defined functions of the different structures sometimes caused distrust among its partner groups.

After the Thai program, a PP21 coordinating team was established and a guideline adopted providing for minimum rules of coordination, but the coordinating team of seven individuals was not effective enough to monitor and coordinate the intricate processes, networks, and initiatives related to PP21. A consensus emerged at Kathmandu that this situation should be overcome and a more dependable and representative mechanism for coordination introduced.

The Kathmandu general assembly thus decided (1) to set up a PP21 Council for decision-making and implementation, consisting of representatives from subregions and sectors plus the outgoing coordinating team members, (2) that the coordinating team should consist of committed organizations, and not individuals, (3) that PP21 partners should be recruited anew with defined minimum commitments, and (4) that the guideline should be revised accordingly. At Kathmandu, a committee to organize this Council was appointed, with its main base in Hong Kong. It was heartening to hear that the council for

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organizing the centre in Hong Kong immediately and energetically started to work to fulfill the Kathmandu mandate.

I hope that by the time this essay is published, the PP21 process will have a broad-based council and a coordinating team selected by it, and the coordinating team secretariat will have begun to work energetically on a day-to-day basis. We do not yet have a clear idea of the proper organizational form for this movement, as PP21 does not seem to fit into any of the existing patterns of movement. We are always in search of new and proper forms to link up in dynamic and cumulative ways. But Kathmandu certainly introduced fresh blood into PP21 to revitalize the organizing process, which is key to alliance building. With this renewal and the Sagarmatha Declaration, PP21 has entered a new phase of development.

July 1996

# **PEOPLE'S AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN ASIA INSIGHTS OF AN OUTSIDER**

**Israel Batista**

This document of "witness" is an attempt to approach some actual trends in Asian people's and social movements, and to show some of the results of the "People's Plan for the 21st Century" (PP21) network. This is one of many experiences which aims at building new paradigms in Asia.

## **I. "PEOPLE'S PLAN FOR THE 21ST CENTURY"**

### **A. Background Information**

In 1989, the "People's Plan for the 21st Century", a long term people's process was launched in Japan as a coalition of Japanese social and people's groups and 15 Asia- Pacific regional organizations as co-convenors. During this time three major

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events have taken place, which represent the developments achieved in this Network:

1989: Minamata Assembly: In Minamata, Japan, a place which symbolizes the murderous character of ongoing modern development, the first Declaration of this process was launched. "Janakashaba" is a word in the Minamata dialect, popular among the participants of the event, which means a "world standing not like this". This word captures the spirit of this process. The main achievements of the event are the following:

- (1) To bring Japanese social and people's movements closer to other Asia-Pacific groups. Up to now the increased participation of Japanese groups across the region has been remarkable.
- (2) The events in Eastern Europe affected most of the social movements in the world. This Network, born at the same moment of such events in Eastern Europe, has contributed to keeping alive some of the visions and to bringing together a number of actions. The vision in PP21 to build alliances of hope and transborder connections contributed to create a platform of encounter, exchanges and inspiration.
- (3) A contribution to the analysis of the role of the economies of the New Industrialised Countries (NICs) in the region.



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1992: The Rachadamneon Pledge: In Bangkok the second important event, launching the "Rachadamneon Pledge" took place. As the text says: "The significance of these struggles within the Asia-Pacific reality is that they emphasize a profound commitment to life... Reasserting our humanity means destroying those unjust structures at family, community, national and international levels which de-humanise us and hold us in bondage to wealth and power". In Bangkok the following achievements could be highlighted:

- (1) In 1989 the level of organisation of Thai social movements was not articulated enough. Between 1989 and 1992, the World Bank Meeting (1991) took place and the resistance to the anti-democratic military "coup d'état". The same groups responsible for the PP21 Thai events, were among the ones who "paved the road to democracy" at a cost of one hundred lives. An important and impressive level of people's organisation was achieved at that moment.
- (2) More clear sectoral strategies across the region. A number of sectoral concerns were worked together through different plans of actions: women, workers, peasants, peace and human rights, natural resources, urban poor, indigenous people and minorities, democracy and development, students and youth, tourism, children and participatory culture.

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(3) The dimension of spirituality and culture was reassumed. A column of over 2 kilometres of people marched through the streets of Bangkok. It was like a call to creativity and colourful imagination. People walked to the "Monument of Democracy" where tribute was rendered to the victims of the struggles for democracy in Thailand. Everybody carried offerings of thanksgiving, which were received in an ecumenical act by more than 40 Buddhist monks. It was an offering in food to share with the poor.

(4) A lively dialogue, not exempt of tensions, took place between NGOs and peoples movements: specificities, complementarities and contradictions were raised. In this event it was made clear that NGOs should be at the service of people's movements and not the other way round.

1996: Sagarmatha Declaration: "People's Convergence: Shaping the Future". Sagarmatha is the name for the Everest Mountain. This Declaration came out after three years of intensive work in South Asia: Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Pakistan and India. I will later explain in detail this process and event.

Allow me to share some general assessments of the work of PP21 during the period of 1989 to the beginning of 1996:

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(1)Methodology: PP21 has developed a peculiar methodology:

- Each main event has been seen as the culmination of intensive work in the country or in the sub-region.
- Before the main events a number of Fora always take place in the country or in different places in the sub-region. These are pre-events centred around issues aiming to build regional linkages, to bring input to the main event and to develop a plan of action for the next years.
- The agenda of the different Fora aims to build regional work and to contribute to the analysis of the present situation based on local experiences. The local context is the entry point for the analysis, not ignoring regional and global realities.
- The main event consists of: celebrations, cultural activities, public events, lobbying, expressions of solidarity, reflections on the theme, a common declaration and future PP21 work.

(2)NGOs and people's movements relationships and interactions: This is an ongoing process still in the making, which has revealed the tensions and possibilities in these kinds of interactions.

(3)Global and local contexts: A space to interconnect local, regional and global realities. An attempt to respond in a creative way to the globalization patterns, while emphasizing the importance of local contexts. In this process we might find mixed feelings on how to

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reach this target. However, people are moving forward with commitment and determination.

(4)Alliances: The emphasis on building local platforms and mechanisms to empower people's participation and the promotion of transborder alliances.

(5)Weaknesses: Two major weaknesses: a) The perennial tension in people's movements between the need for efficient organizations and the claim to avoid structures. PP21 opted for a very light structure, almost non-existing, which reveals strengths and difficulties. b) The still weak presence of the Asian religious diversity in the midst of the processes, while religion is becoming an important factor in local realities.

### **B. The Kathmandu Event**

Since 1992, after the Bangkok process, PP21 decided to concentrate efforts and programmes in the South Asia countries. An intensive plan of actions and activities took place in all the countries of the region for the last three years. As examples of such programmes are:

— An advocacy campaign on Bhutan at two levels: the situation of refugees in Nepal and the human rights and democratic situation inside the country. The case of Bhutan has been raised successfully in the regional and international arena.

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- Important efforts to build national alliances between different actors in society. Efforts to promote mechanisms for the empowerment of people's movements, NGOs and religious groups in terms of participation and governance. In Bangladesh a number of activities took place during this period, mainly in order to support ongoing people's struggles. A platform of groups were launched. In Sri Lanka a platform composed by Sinhala, Tamil, Muslims, Christians and Buddhist, people's movements and voluntary organisations was brought together addressing two major concerns: ethnic tensions and the globalization process in the country. A similar platform of NGOs and people's movements was enabled in Nepal. Given the size of India, it is difficult to promote national platforms. However, a number of interactions on different issues are taking place. In Pakistan a number of groups and institutions came together in order to build cooperation and alliances.
- The process to Beijing was helpful in articulating women's perspective. The role of women in PP21 should be improved, but women's programme are already asking a difference. Women peasants were a focus in these activities, due to the active role played by this sector in Asian history.
- The linkages of economy and ecology has been developed in creative programmes, like the initiative around rivers in the region and the alternatives to dam construction. These initiatives were centred around three primary resources: land-water-forest. These programmes are trying to address local economic initiatives in relation with natural resources, value-systems and economic efficiency.

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- It is estimated that there are 80 million children working in South Asian countries. Programmes on child labour aimed at generating awareness, to lobby government authorities in relation with legislation, to evolve alternative strategies, and the need to introduce free, compulsory education in the region.
- Major debates, reflection and action were organised around the issues of: people's politics and its needs, goals and strategies; political empowerment and governance; human rights and people's rights; and the urgency to strengthen the space of civil society. The importance of promoting local mechanisms for the empowerment of people's movements is a very creative process in the region, i.e., the role of local governments.
- Conflict and violence have heavily affected most of the South Asian countries. Conflicts have reached a stage of undeclared and sometimes declared war between communities, religions and ethnic groups. This area of involvement merits more energy, resources and creativity. In this process it was suggested to assess the peace initiatives in the past and to listen and learn from experiences from other regions.
- Workers have been an active sector in this period. Eight Asian labour networks have been working together in a number of issues: developing workers' responses to transnational grip and control; the promotion of a Charter for the Safe Production of toys; projects on the garment and footwear industries; Free Trade Zones and the loss of human dignity.

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Workers have formed a network named "Asia Pacific Workers' Solidarity Link (APWSL).

- Regional economic integration has been an important issue for actions and research. The APEC, in particular, was an issue raised by the participants in PP21 and developed in various initiatives through the action of local and regional NGOs. Around the "Summits of the Seven" and the "World Bank Meetings actions and studies were conducted. The emphasis has been: analysis of globalization, the role of Asian economies, social and human and ecological concerns and the search for paradigms of life.

### **C. "Asia-Pacific People's Convergence: Shaping the Future"**

This was the theme of the process and main event of PP21 in 1996. As an expression of solidarity, Sri Lanka had been chosen as the venue for the main event. At the very last moment, due to accelerating unrest in the country the venue was shifted to Kathmandu in Nepal. In less than a month the Nepalese people and the PP21 organisers very successful rearranged plans for this meeting of 500 people. This is proof of PP21's capacity to mobilize people.

The main event, which brought together around 500 participants, took place from 8-10 March in Kathmandu, Nepal. There were also a number of other participants coming from networks in Africa, Latin America, West and East Europe and North America.



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This Assembly was a moment to share diversities, to celebrate identities while searching for interactions and interconnections. It was an affirmation of people's will to assume initiatives in finding solutions. It was a clear rejection to the dominant economic and political system of globalization, while reaffirming the struggles and the emergence of new visions, which are still at the embryo stage. It was a moment to celebrate life, to give testimony of the people's hope in daily life in different places. It was a moment of commitment to reconstruct a different world, to strengthen existing and create new alliances, to accompany local production and economies which act as the basis of life-support systems for a majority of people.

The date of the Assembly was fixed to coincide with Women's Day. Some important efforts were achieved: (a) Most of the main speakers during the Assembly were women. (b) An impressive public march was organised for that day in the streets of Kathmandu. (c) The issues of local women in Nepal were brought to public consideration at political and social levels.

Major aims of the Assembly were:

(1) Towards a People's Charter:

The Assembly considered a "People's Charter" more like a process than a document approved by an Assembly. Therefore, the "Sagarmatha Declaration" will be an educational tool for discussion with local groups, national alliances and regional NGOs. The aim is to facilitate a process of discussion and consultation in which the "people's convergence in shaping the future in the Asia-Pacific region will come from below.

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### **(2) Organisational patterns:**

What kind of organisation does a movement like PP21 require at this specific moment? Asian wisdom sees structures as processes and part of consultations and negotiations. At the same time, for the Asian people the issue of organisational efficiency is rather sensitive.

PP21 has moved beyond the initial inspiration of their founders. It has reached a moment of maturity which demands new patterns of organisation. The major trends right now could be identified as: One, the recognition of the communication and organisational capacity of regional NGOs. The Hong Kong based regional NGOs will be responsible for better coordination, communication and to improving organisational schemes. Two, people's and social movements in local contexts will remain the main stream of this network. Therefore, the Council of PP21 will be mainly composed of national coordinators, sub-regional representatives and sectoral participants. Third, the character of PP21 was reaffirmed as a space for encounters, cooperation and coordination, alliances building and the affirmation of strategies which respect identities, specificities and diversities.

### **(3) Alliance building:**

This vision of strengthening local, national and transborder alliances was reaffirmed. This approach is telling something important to us in the ecumenical moment, i.e., to perceive the ecumenical task in terms of alliance building and not only on institutional unity. Asia-Pacific people are inspiring us in a

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renewed vision to build transborder alliances in the face of the present situation of globalization.

### **ILO/OTHER REGIONAL NETWORKING INITIATIVES**

The following list will give an idea of the intensive and lively activity of regional experiences of social movements and NGO initiatives:

South Asia Initiative (SAI):

Alter-trade (RUA-NEGROS Banana Trade)

Mekong River People's Cooperation Programme:

Asia-Pacific workers Solidarity Links (APWSL)

EP2 Women and Workers Network:

Asia-Pacific Conference on East Timor (APCET)

Regional International Campaigns:

Toy Factory Workers, Industrial Accidents-Bhopal, Kasler, Clean Clothes Migrant Networks

Issue/sectoral networks and initiatives —

human rights, development environment, trade unions, women, migrants, youth and indigenous people:

NGO Task Force on World Bank, Bretton Woods Campaign,

Task Force on Asian Development Bank

National social movements:

Country to country linkages.

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### **III. PEOPLE'S AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN ASIA: CHALLENGES AND INSPIRATIONS**

There are those amongst us who believe that something new is emerging out of the experiences of people's and social movements. Perhaps the approach is naive but...perhaps not! Globalisation has not stopped people dreaming.

These new developments challenge and inspire us in the following directions:

#### **1. Globalization and alternatives for the future**

The implementation of the globalization model in South Asian countries has been described as an assault on livelihoods. This sub-region, the poorest in Asia, has survived at a minimum level thanks to a web of solidarity and communal social safety. This region is now exposed to changes in the name of globalization. The new policies of centralization, marginalization, privatization and efficiency are excluding millions of people from a place in society. This sub-region, with its huge population, will be one of the most dramatic examples of breaking down the livelihood of the people.

Globalization, it was affirmed, is unsustainable because of its hierarchical character. Globalization, as a system imposed from above, excludes a majority of people from the right to life. In the globalization rationale the destruction of people's livelihood and environment occurs in one and the same process.

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“The voices of protest should not be stolen”, but resistance is not enough. The newest move in Asia is the way they are combining the resistance to globalization with the attempts to search for countervailing practices in which values, spirituality, economic life, participation and wisdom are inter-connected. Two significant questions were addressed: What should be the defining characteristic of new models of civilization which are not only sustainable but also enhance human respect, social equity and human decency in relation to nature? What are the steps and processes through which these models can be realised?

The change in paradigm means that they are not working for development alternatives, but alternatives to development. Some “searching” terms were used: natural circularity or the Chinese word “xu luan”, i.e., production and reproduction which include nature. Main challenges: to define globalization in its intolerable nature and the inspiration to build alternatives which challenge the models of civilization which arose from the philosophy and praxis of the modern civilization. The challenge consists of transforming values, religions, traditions, governance, style of life, economic parameters, technologies and knowledge into another way of living. The endeavour to build a new kind of society here and now, even if imperfect and partially incomplete. The challenge is to bring together people and environment-oriented systems.

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### **2. Alliances of Hope and Transborder Solidarity**

Alliance building is oriented towards people's power which will confront and prevail over the powers of this unjust and unequal world. Building such power requires, according to them, working towards the forging of alliances of people's and social movements at grassroots, local, national, regional and global levels. Alliances based on a culture of friendship and partnership that transcends borders and sectoral and organisational concerns. It is a challenge to be open to other cultures and experiences in linking people and ideas; to support and contribute rather than merely expect support; to give meaning to language and communication between peoples; and to be open to initiatives and alternatives coming from all levels.

Some important alliances were highlighted: (1) networking of various alternative socio-economic projects. (2) Organizing linkages of communities affected by major transborder development projects. (3) Encouraging transborder initiatives to get people from conflicting situations together. (4) Organizing productive, intellectual interactions and systematically searching for new strategies, theories and spiritualities.

Transborder solidarity means the search for alliances across borders. The building of an international civil society with the capacity to ask for accountability to the global economic system and its institutions. It is the field of interactions between micro and global realities. I believe the time has come to provide space for interaction among relevant and

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meaningful national and regional networks in the search for alternative paradigms. The present value-system of globalization should be addressed from new life-value systems. This task demands courage, vision and commitment.

### **3. Economic Localization**

The engagement to put globalization in its ecological and social context. Where foreign investments are diverting local resources from the survival needs of local people to the limitless appetite of global markets, people are putting investment to the test of ecological and social accountability.

An increased demand to address with creativity local economic experiences. Numerous efforts have been made by women, peasants, fisherfolk, urban consumers, people's organizations and NGOs to create alternative ways of producing, trading, consuming and living. It was felt that the time has come to weave these efforts into eco-cycles based upon people's systems at the community, regional and even international levels. This task, they said, cannot be postponed to some other time.

These concerns presented the people with a major dilemma: How the micro alternative economic models described above can be developed into viable, sustained and self-energizing systems capable of countervailing the logic and practice of the globalization system? The answer to this question demands a process of networking through experiences and sharing of ideas. A courageous vision to set



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clear goals of energizing expanding experiences through interactions and systematization.

### **4. Local Governance**

As Vandana Shiva said: "We are witnessing the simultaneous growth of two forces: one of globalization, the other of localisation; one driven by global corporations, the other by local communities and grassroots movements and one moving power upwards, the other moving it downwards".

The state-centred pattern of political practices and representation is in crisis. In recent years, we have seen in Asia how grassroots communities, organised in autonomous social movements, are empowering themselves and are putting their problems into some order by themselves. Communities and social movements are beginning to change things.

"These efforts are redefining the concept of the political. The abode of political power is not only the domain of government and linked political institutions, but in the midst of everyday life relationships", as Muto Ichiyo affirmed. People's alliances linked in mutual accountability are the basis of new political governance. Mechanisms are being promoted at local level in order to find effective forms of participation and forms to make more accountable and transparent the state and the market economy. More civil society will demand more and different state.

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### **5. Celebration of Diversities and Searching for Interconnections**

Spirituality is story, memory, symbol, language, poetry and song. Spirituality is the capacity for resistance and the courage to construct new alternatives and paradigms. Spirituality is the energy which transforms relationships. A renewed spirituality in diversity is required to reaffirms our faith as foundation of hope, solidarity and dignity. This is something we need to learn from Asian experiences.

The diversity of the struggles, the plurality of the resistances, the hopes and aspirations were shared. Plurality and diversity are more important than homogeneity. There is a plurality of social agents who construct their demands upon particular points of view, none of whom can claim to represent the present complex reality.

In Nepal, notwithstanding diversities, there was an attempt to stress the real ecumenical character and vocation of alliance building. Today's main challenge is the creativity to interconnect people, ideas and actions across diversities. The capacity to discern where diversities interact. This is the real quest for the ecumenical movement: to promote interconnections across diversities, identities and single issue struggles. These interactions and interconnections have to do with the sustainability of our societies and communities.

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### **6. Gender in Asian Realities**

Let me list a few of the major contributions of women's participation:

- (a) "Gender perspectives are giving birth to what many term as Asian feminism which is rooted in positive aspects of Asian cultures" (Gender Working Paper). Asian women's struggles and alternative building activities are informed by positive values that people have achieved in the modern era.
- (b) Globalization, religious conservatism and fundamentalism, identity politics and militarization were identified as ominous issues that impact on women in Asia.
- (c) At the level of women's movements, there are attempts to contain the negative impact of religious practice and of fundamentalism through campaigns against specific manifestations. There is a demand to dispel the myth that religion today is merely a personal matter, consigned to the private domain. At the level of analysis, women have tried to establish a structural, systematic integration of religion with patriarchy, market economy and the state. At the level of action, however, women are often confounded by the pace that religion occupies in most women's life.

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(d) Women's participation in society is nurturing, with specific contributions, the interactions and inter-connections across diversities.

### **7. Asian Foundation**

A feeling of self-reliance is growing up among social movements in Asia. This spirit is nurtured by the awareness of economic capacities that exist in the region.

A group of persons are engaged in a process to establish an Asian Foundation to sustain people's and social movements in Asia, with the idea of attracting support in the region. A number of concerns are part of this proposal:

- How to deal with the insufficient policies and regulations that will increase through taxation or voluntary contributions to the funds for development, social work, humanitarian aid and people's concerns?
- How to properly utilise existing economic resources in the region?
- How to inspire support and contributions from the people?
- How to resolve a tension between a more entrepreneurial approach and a people's support in developing such a foundation?
- What learning process are required?
- How to respond in creative ways to micro-economic experiences?

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### **IV.CONCLUSION**

There are winds of change blowing through the people and the social movements in Asia, despite the many uncertainties. If we are not ready to interpret the daily lives of the people through "eyes of faith" we will not experience the gift of being "surprised by the Spirit". Let us remember what a Western thinker said "Today's utopia will be tomorrow's truth." (Victor Hugo)

Geneva, 10 May 1996

**SHAPING OUR FUTURE**

## **THE SAGARMATHA DECLARATION**

**SHAPING OUR FUTURE**

**ASIA PACIFIC PEOPLE'S  
CONVERGENCE**

Kathmandu, Nepal, 1996

**CELEBRATING DIVERSITY, CELEBRATING  
LIFE**

We are people from the Asia-Pacific region (along with friends from Africa, Latin and North America and Europe) from popular organisations, political movements, voluntary organisations and support groups active in the struggles of women, peasants, workers, youth and indigenous peoples on cultural pluralism, justice, ecology and democracy. We have come together in Kathmandu, Nepal in March 1996 for the Third People's Plan for the 21st Century (PP21) Convergence, and shared our experiences, dreams and plans at this critical juncture in our collective history.

We meet as a broad coalition of peoples and interests to continue a process of building an alliance of hope begun in 1989 in

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Minamata, Japan. There we critiqued the dominant model of development and declared the natural and universal right of people to "criticise, oppose or prevent the implementation of decisions affecting their lives, no matter where those decisions are made." In 1992, we met in Bangkok, Thailand, to renew our pledges and promises, reasserting our humanity in "destroying those unjust structures at family, community, national and international levels which dehumanise us and hold us in bondage to wealth and power." These two convergences highlighted our ongoing linkages and interactions in a multiplicity of ways.

As we share the diversity of our struggles and celebrate the plurality of our resistance, our hopes and our aspirations, we are strengthened. Our interactions with others from different sectors and concerns have added fresh perspectives to, and generated transformations of, our positions. We demonstrate our vibrancy and commitments in our continued pledge to constantly seek and work towards building a society of peace and justice for all.

While the dominant economic and political systems attempt to relegate our concerns as peripheral, we collectively reaffirm the centrality of our struggles and our visions. This centrality is rooted in our daily lives, in our living and in steering our ways through the chaotic currents stirred up in the dominant systems. This centrality is the multiplicity of our practices and responses in which lie imaginative alternatives to the dominant systems.

We will not, and need not, wait only for our elected representatives and political leaders to address and resolve the multifarious economic, political, ecological and cultural crises that we face. We will not, and need not, accept the disappearance of our forests, the dying of our rivers, the pollution of air, the degradation of our lands, the destruction of our livelihoods, and the oppression of state and non-state actors. We have come together to discuss our common experiences and exchange the alternatives that we practice and have developed. We are, in this



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process, strengthening an alliance of hope and self-confidence, as we take our lives and our dignity in our own hands.

We celebrate as women empowering ourselves everywhere in convergences locally, nationally and globally. We have demonstrated our courage and action in fighting for gender justice, equality, dignity and other human rights, and fighting against trafficking and all forms of overt and covert violence inflicted on women. We as women struggle along with men to liberate ourselves from all forces of domination, oppression and marginalization no matter who the perpetrators are. We strive to practise development alternatives to create life-centred relations and life-support systems based on the values of compassion, sharing, nurturing and caring both in our private and our public lives. These are opposite to the values of the dominant mode of modern development characterised by a militarized, self-centred, competitive, masculine mentality, by violence ingrained in our cultures and societies.

Dauntlessly, we as women have mobilised against the manipulations of politics and religion and have been empowered in the struggle to protect women's human rights. We celebrate our stands against extremism of all kinds, in all guises. We reaffirm our right to be free from fear, in the home and on the street. We resist increasing militarization that violates and prostitutes us. We protest against weapons of mass destruction such as mines and the testing of nuclear weapons which claim life from land and sea and sky. We pledge ourselves to continually say NO! to wars and conflicts that leave us in sorrow.

We gather strength as we struggle against poverty and poisoned environment that deprive our children of health and happy childhood. Our affection for the trees, mountains and rivers shines through in struggles against their destruction by colonial and corporate interests. We say NO! to the rationality that

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prescribes development only to destroy, order only to disrupt, control and efficiency only to dehumanize.

We celebrate as youth and children. We reaffirm our right to a decent livelihood and a space for developing our creativity. We refuse to conform to the dominant culture which attempts to homogenize us and entice us to wastefulness, selfishness and greed. We remain hopeful in the midst of unemployment. The cry of child workers resounds, compelling us to confront the misery and tragedy of all exploitative systems.

We honour our struggle as indigenous and colonised peoples for self rule, de-colonisation, and the reassertion of our cultures and identities. We celebrate our perseverance and struggle against large destructive development projects that dispossess and displace us. We continually confront the forces that make us refugees, and aid all efforts that let us go home voluntarily.

We struggle as traditional fishing communities in the face of unsustainable modern commercial fishing, intensive prawn cultivation, felling of mangrove forests and mining of corals. We renew our efforts against the polluting of coastal lands and lagoons, and the dumping of nuclear and industrial wastes.

We promote our many attempts as farmers to develop biologically diverse and ecologically sane agricultural systems as an alternative to the dominant thrust of multinational agribusiness to reorganise agriculture in the industrial mode — mass production of cash crops for export, standardisation of products, and vertical integration. We endeavour to strengthen and widen the practices of organic production through networks of producers.

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We take courage in our manifold struggles as workers to fight unemployment, low wages, deplorable working conditions, and violations of our right to organize. We further cross-border linkages as workers to confront transnational and national corporations. We extend our solidarity to victims and survivors of industrial disasters and hazards. Together, we reject the logic of the "free" market that drives for profits and benefits only a few.

We seek a society where surviving is not dependent on involuntary migration within or without borders, as we affirm our right to work and live where we choose. We demand our right to be protected from abuse and exploitation.

We encourage efforts to forge non-exploitative and democratic partnerships between producers and consumers, in spite of national and regional economic policies which privilege export over local needs, which privilege private accumulation over people's security.

We applaud our language of protest as writers and poets in condemning the present state of the world which legitimises coercion in the name of democracy. We struggle against forces that discriminate against religious and ethnic minorities, perpetuate gender, class, race and caste chauvinism, protect religious bigotry and extremism, and promote consumerism. We uphold all struggles for empowerment towards a new century based on solidarity, dignity and freedom.

We celebrate the creativity and resistance of our diverse cultural traditions, art, dance, theatre and music, and the diversity of languages and cultures despite a centralising communications system that attempts to homogenise and project a monocultural view of the world.

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We recommit our efforts for quality health care and education, in spite of moves to privatise or withdraw social programmes, and we energise ourselves in seeking alternatives.

We sustain our struggle to restore livelihoods despite the increasing polarisation of wealth and poverty which has doubled in the last three decades. We also support the continuing efforts to have the external debts of our countries written off.

As we celebrate, rejoice and draw strength from our actions, our struggles, our movements, we reaffirm our hope — hope across borders and languages, cultures and thoughts. Yet, we must also acknowledge our inherent weaknesses as movements, organisations and actors of social change. We must be consistently honest, humble and self-reflecting, and never allow ourselves to become unaccountable, non-transparent and aggressive. We must not be co-opted by national and international institutions and structures of power. We encourage others to join us, in the hope and belief that this is not a dream to be realised in a distant future, but one that is turning into reality here and now!

## **ENVISIONING THE POSSIBLE**

We recognise that it is only our continuous efforts in building our movements through active linking and resisting that can sustain and further our celebrations. Our efforts will become effective forces of intervention when our movements continue to shape and reshape our visions of the possible. It is from such a dynamic vision that we must assess, confront and transform the dominant political, economic, social and cultural systems.

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Here at the threshold of a new century, economic and political elites are envisioning and targeting our region as the centre of global economic growth. A hegemonic alliance of international trade and financial institutions, in league and supported by government technocrats, businessmen, military leaders, politicians and other elite groups, is re-configuring each of our societies.

Simultaneously, a remarkable range of popular activities is slowly coming into its own. What is increasingly reflected in this vast and diverse array of our experiences and struggles is the rejection of the rhetoric that laud our region as the centre of global economic growth. These voices stress the need to go beyond incremental reforms in the dominant economic and political systems. For us, "progress" is not in aggregate growth, in higher export earnings, in rising gross national product, nor in the multiplication of shopping arcades, hotels and golf courses.

"Progress" is not the squandering of vast resources on military expenditures at the expense of basic needs that create secure conditions for everyone to achieve a healthy productive life with dignity. "Progress" is not in losing control to increasingly centralised economic actors and processes.

For too long have we watched our forests, lands and waters being scarred by large dams and pipelines and toxic pollutants, by unsustainable farming and fishing practices, by the reckless and criminal extraction of natural resources to sustain private accumulation and unsustainable industrialism. For too long have we been displaced, dispossessed, enclosed, excluded, bonded, jailed, tortured and killed. For too long have we as women been forced into trafficking and prostitution. For too long have we as children wasted our childhood in excruciating and demeaning labour. For too long have we watched others, far removed from the sources of production, taking decisions that so fundamentally and adversely affect our lives. For too long have we witnessed

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efforts to divide our unity, our struggles and our links to nature. For too long has the mesmerising power of the consumerist dream held the hearts and minds of so many of us captive. For too long have our cultures and languages, our ways of knowing and being, been devalued, disrupted, corrupted and marginalised. For too long have religious and cultural intolerance, political extremism, racism and homophobia pervaded our communities and our lives.

In the name of humanism, the dominant form of modernization dehumanizes. In the name of its rationality (mostly through mindless and irrational quantification like GNP) and its claim to truth, it justifies inequality, exploitation and subjugation. We represent growing voices that are saying, Enough! Voices that celebrate collective envisioning of societies that are gender just, ecologically sustainable and politically democratic; societies that celebrate diversity and pluralism; societies where sustainable livelihoods, security and dignity are assured; societies which are responsible to the peaceful, just and ecologically secure future of our children.

Our vision projects the task of fundamentally remaking the dominant paradigm of civilisation characterised by the myth of linear development, unlimited GNP growth, progress based on the "conquest" of nature, primacy of production at the cost of replenishment and reproduction, male domination, cultural homogenisation and continued colonisation of people, identities, and nature. In our vision, different dimensions of life have to be linked in an organic and dynamic manner so that cycles of production, consumption and reproduction are coordinated with the cycles of nature.

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Our vision projects a society based on life-centred values — compassion, caring, nurturing and sharing — values that will be embraced by all, men and women alike, and will permeate social relations and introduce dialogic relationships between human communities and nature. Our vision projects a process of integration of productive activities with reproductive activities — our pursuit to eat, feed, bear, nurture, enjoy, mourn, to regenerate ourselves and the next generations in social relations — into a wholeness of life.

This process requires serious efforts, particularly on the part of men, for the dominant values consolidated through history assume that production is supreme and reproduction secondary, and that the endeavour to achieve mastery over one's fate is the pursuit of conquest of nature and other human beings through annihilating competition, destructive technologies, military actions and institutional violence in the name of government, politics, ethnicity, economics and religion. Our vision informed and enriched by our feminist perspectives will release us from the trappings of the "male"-centred logic of dualistic thinking that dichotomizes relations into two poles — body and mind, nature and man, public and private, traditional and modern, unpaid therefore worthless work and paid therefore valued work, as well as the gender dichotomy assimilating women to nature and men to civilization.

Our vision projects a democratic and participatory mode of governance and functioning that goes far beyond conventional representative democracy. Democratisation must be carried out in everyday relationships, in households between men and women as well as adults and children, at the community level as well as the national and global levels. The functioning of institutions and bureaucracies must also imbibe processes of participatory functioning. Community control of natural resources and plural systems of social organisation are important elements of our vision. The enriched concepts of human rights



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— indigenous peoples' rights, women's reproductive and social rights, and other collective rights, which represent the best legacies of the people's struggles, will be promoted and enhanced in this democratic process.

Our vision projects global democracy — transborder participatory democracy highlighted in the PP21 Minamata Declaration — to counter and to finally dismantle global power centres and also overcome the overarching problem of human society today — the division of the people of the world into the North and the South.

We shall work to build new relationships with each other — between men and women, between producers and consumers, between urban and rural, between North and South, between human beings and nature. These processes of democratisation, at all levels, will be exercised by alliances of people throughout the world — Alliances of Hope — which will be formed in dynamic interaction in the spirit of peace, tolerance, ecological sanity and peaceful coexistence. People's governance will be rooted in these alliances.

Sustainability, in our vision, means that global human socio-economic systems are reorganised on the principle that human activities are integrated with nature through eco-cycles, and not based on unilateral exploitation of nature. This calls for a fundamental cultural and value change. Asia-Pacific abounds in experiences and wisdom of indigenous peoples, women and farmers who have developed nature-friendly approaches and views of life. The people's wisdom points to an entirely different paradigm and norm of human society. Obviously we are not advocating going back to a pre-modern period. Such wisdom will be fully developed through integration with positive aspects of the legacy of modernity.

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We approach the burning issues of peace and security from people's perspectives. We refuse to be misguided by the doctrine of the national security state, or be trapped by ethnic or religious chauvinistic cries for the exclusion of others. We seek to establish people's security. It does not make a difference who violates our lives and kills us. Implicit in the call for peace is a call for an end to violence of all kinds, and especially an end to the use of violence to resolve conflicts. The increase in civil strife across our region — communal, religious, ethnic, sectarian — and inter-state violence have not only caused as much destruction and damage as full-scale wars; they have installed militarisation in our midst in such a way that tools of destruction are today an increasing feature of the landscape in our countries.

While struggling to make the state and other institutions of power accountable to the people, we empower ourselves to begin building alternative systems of production, circulation and consumption of goods and services under people's control, and encourage the gradual emergence of people-based economic, social and cultural systems. We shall work to build linkages for the circulation and development of people's knowledge and people's governance at all levels.

In resisting and building, we work for the empowerment of ourselves. Without resistance, we cannot build our alternatives; without linking, our resistance will not be sustainable. In building a new society with new relationships, we do not pretend that we already have the complete vision and the path — we have trails amidst hazy light. We strive to widen the trails and reduce the haze by reflecting on and critiquing our own complicity in the perpetuation of the dominant system, our own reproduction of hierarchical relationships, our own tacitness in the face of injustices, and our own fears and shames. By confronting ourselves, as well as our foes, resistance can be developed at all levels, from family to community, from intra group relationships to inter group relationships.

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### **COMMITTING OURSELVES, BUILDING LINKAGES**

Having outlined the celebrations of not only our struggles and visions, but also of the constructive work being done to forge new alternatives through grassroots practice, we assert, with undiminished hope and optimism and with fresh vitality, our commitments.

We commit ourselves to build and strengthen alliances within and across national boundaries. The basis of these alliances will be love, peace, mutual trust, and non-exploitative and transparent relationships. These alliances will not remain confined to mere expressions of solidarity, but will facilitate alternative social, economic and ecological relationships based on systems of dynamic, organic circularity.

We commit ourselves to build people to people alliances that will actively intervene in the existing institutions of power and decision making, at the local, national and global levels. Such empowered intervention will have as its goal the reorientation and making transparent and democratic the functioning of processes and institutions of power and decision-making. In particular, we commit ourselves to wage a ceaseless battle to ensure the transparency and democratization of international and regional trade and financial institutions whose functioning is devastating the lives of a majority of people.

We commit ourselves to strengthen and regenerate local production and economies which act as the basis of life-support systems of a majority of people. In order to achieve this, we commit ourselves to resist imposition of large-scale destructive projects (such as huge supermarkets at the cost of local shops, or large dams), and to protect and conserve natural resources through practices of sustainable use, to promote and strengthen the diversity of cultural and social practices, to strengthen empirically validated traditional wisdom in areas like health care

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and community health, artisanal technologies and agricultural practices, and above all, we commit ourselves to facilitate and restore the democratic control of resources, production and markets to the primary producers.

We commit ourselves to build an entirely new science/technology- society relationship that integrates traditional practices and wisdom with new knowledge in a manner that ensures decentralised, ecologically friendly, gender sensitive processes of production to fulfil needs rather than greed.

We commit ourselves to conserve biodiversity and protect indigenous people's and local community knowledge and people's intellectual property rights against onslaughts from foreign bioprospectors especially those associated with transnational corporations. It will be our endeavour to ensure that local species and related knowledge and practice remain community properties of associated people. Attempts to monopolise such knowledge by forces of greed and profit will be effectively challenged. Regeneration of local seed varieties, setting up of herbal gardens combined with practices that integrate agriculture, horticulture, floriculture, pisciculture, silviculture, poultry and animal husbandry will be one of our agendas for action.

We commit ourselves to work ceaselessly towards the empowerment of women so that women and men share equal responsibility for decision making and control not only at political and public levels, but in each household. Waging strategic battles against the forces of patriarchy in all its manifestations is our commitment. In particular, we commit ourselves to work towards rooting out all forms of violence against women and children, including trafficking. We are also committed to reorient processes of social functioning and discourse to enrich families,

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communities and societies with values of peace, love and cooperation.

We commit ourselves to the spreading resistance of workers all over Asia against super-exploitation, long working hours and hazardous working conditions — suffered particularly by young women workers from the countryside. Efforts are needed to redress the disruption of the countryside which is one main reason for the outflow of rural labour.

We commit ourselves to the resistance against arbitrary relocation of factories by multinationals and business interests pursuing quick returns. We pledge the fight for labour rights especially the right to organize autonomous labour unions and movements. We commit ourselves to promoting region-wide people's networks to build effective resistance to the multinationals.

We recognize the immediate concern of migrant workers and commit ourselves to find help and provide solace in an effective manner. At the same time, we commit ourselves to a process of building a migrant workers movement for the development of the means and spaces that can guarantee the taking back of control over the conditions of production, reproduction and consumption.

We commit ourselves to support the struggle of indigenous and colonised peoples for self rule and decolonisation. We celebrate our perseverance and struggle against large unsustainable development projects. We will continue to struggle against disposition and displacement.

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We commit ourselves to work with determination to eliminate sources of widespread violence that are inherent in religious intolerance, mindless militarisation and testing of nuclear bombs and weapons of mass destruction at enormous costs. We are committed to usher in an era of peace, cooperation and security for all peoples.

We commit ourselves to counter the very premise of affluence, consumption and consumerism that are the basis of Northern lifestyles as well as aspiration of minority populations in Southern countries. This will be attempted by organising critical interactions at the level of theory and practice, between social movements, activists and sensitive intellectuals and professionals to systematically search for new theories, philosophy, spirituality, strategies and alternative models, drawing on the enormous wisdom and practice in the East.

We commit ourselves to promote a transparent and democratic form of functioning among people's organisations, voluntary groups and NGOs in order to ensure that our functioning and behaviour remain immune from dangers of cooptation or inappropriate representation.

Our gathering here, at this place, is not the beginning nor is it the end. It is only a stop for refreshing, renewing and rejuvenating our journey for life and truth. As we pause here under this shade of inspiration, we pledge never to lose our sense of outrage against injustice.

Refreshed and rejuvenated, we commit ourselves to support and to learn from one another because we depend on one another and because we are different from one another. Diversity is our vitality. It is through maintaining and promoting our diversities that we can more organically link with one another laterally, converge in our efforts to resist subjugating forces, and build mutually enriching, plural relations. To maintain the vitality of all

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these, we commit ourselves to participate in the process of shaping and reshaping our visions of the possible, which is at the same time the process of learning from one another to articulate our problems and alternatives anew, allowing the micro and the immediate to be reframed in global contexts.

- \* Sagarmatha is the Nepalese name for Mount Everest. We originally planned to converge in Colombo, Sri Lanka, but due to circumstances beyond our control, an alternative venue was sought. In a true spirit of solidarity, encouragement and support, friends from Nepal offered to host the convergence. Though in Kathmandu, our hearts and prayers, concerns and good wishes are with the people of Sri Lanka and their quest for a just and peaceful resolution to the conflict.



## **SPEECHES FROM THE MAIN FORUM**

During the Main Forum of the Kathmandu Convergence on 5-10 March 1996, apart from group discussions to produce the Sagarmatha Declaration, speeches were made by the organizers, prominent leaders from Nepal, Sri Lanka and India, invited guests from Mexico, Ireland, South Africa and the Americas, and women leaders and child workers. Reproduced here are some of the speeches. The Nepalese Organizing Committee for the Kathmandu Convergence is still working on more transcriptions of the speeches and discussions. Those interested in the transcriptions can approach INSEC, P O Box 2726, Kathmandu, Nepal.

## **Raise Our Voices for a Better World**

**Sushil Pyakurel**

Respected Leaders Ganeshman Singhji and Manmohan Adhikariji, Distinguished Guests, Comrades of different peoples and liberation movements, friends who are fighting against social, economic, cultural and racial discrimination and disparity, activists and leaders who are fighting for gender equality and dear children who are fighting for their own rights:

I would like to extend my warm welcome to this Himalayan country which has a tradition of sharing of responsibilities, joys and sorrow of the friends. In fact, hosting of the PP21 events and main forum in Kathmandu is one of such sharings. Sri Lankan friends were making grand preparations for this forum but the situation did not permit them. We

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wanted to share the pain and the tasks of our Sri Lankan comrades and we hosted the main forum including a few other forums as we knew this is the forum of the people from different movements, countries and continents working for peace, good governance, democracy and social justice. We are here people from Bhutan who are fighting against the tyranny, people from Chitgaon Hill Tracts fighting for their identities, people from Zapatista Movement in Mexico, and people from East Timor. Among us there are also people from various social and political movements including national liberation movements and struggles for self-determination.

The convergence of these people and representatives of various movements here makes Kathmandu glorified in the sense that Kathmandu Convergence would direct our future actions creating peoples' agenda for the next century. We are in no mood to ask people any more after having their fate so uncertain, life so fragile and dignity threatened. This situation must come to a halt. It is the time to raise our voices: The next century is peoples' century. We certainly do not want a world like this. We should raise our voices for a better world.

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In Minamata, in Bangkok and in Kathmandu, we have met over the period of six years and discussed the present world and trying to bring people in the fore. We had seen enough business in the name of people, we have seen a lot of initiatives and we have seen their results too. People are still the neglected lot.

Since ages, people have been made the objects for experiments. The present world has intensified this. International capital, financial institutions (supposed to be for the reconstruction of the world), multi-lateral companies, and many governments experimented on the people. The politics is becoming more and more a tool to alienate the people. The result is that the security has been cut down leaving poor poorer, the aborigines and original inhabitants are losing their land and cultural identities, workers have been left in the lurches and the social, economic, political disparity and exploitation have raised to the extent of great dissatisfaction. The greatest victims of all our follies have been women and children of all societies.

In international level, there is a tremendous economic and social disparity between the North and South. The average North American and European consumer uses up directly and indirectly

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about 30 times as much of the world's food, energy and other resources as their counterpart in the third world. At the same time if we make a cursory glance over the state of the present world economic growth (imposed by the north) and its distribution patterns, it will be clear that the ultimate beneficiaries of such development activities are the ruling elites and other privileged people but not the common masses.

These have widened the gap between the rich and the poor. More than one billion human populations are estimated to be starvation and that poverty is increasing rapidly, particularly in the developing countries like Nepal. These poor people, who could not maintain their basic needs, are naturally forced to use common or private resources leading to the degradation of ecological balances.

Certainly we cannot stand a world like this. These are some of the causes which we will be dwelling on during the discussions here. We are discussing the problems and alternatives of the present models of economy, development and system of governance. This is the PP21 all about. I hope, and also sure, that we would move forward and come up with action agenda to tackle these problems and create a better world.

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We are happy to welcome to discuss and create a solidarity network around the globe. But we know, our preparation is not enough to the degree of expectation. We may have failed to do what we should have done. We had only a span of three weeks for preparations. However, we would like to hear your suggestions, if any, with all humility. We, the Nepalis, take guests as God. Atithi debo bhava. (Guests are the gods.)

Once again warm welcome and thank you for joining us!

## **Make Meaningful the Entrance to the 21st Century**

**Ganesh Man Singh**

We are now all at once at the threshold of the 21st century. In less than five years we will have entered into the new domain of the 21st century. This transition from one century to another will have been an important event for the whole humankind as the present world has been unified to a small place because of the advancement of science, technology and communication. This in fact bears out a great constructive meaning.

While observing the soon-out-going century, on the one hand, a historical achievement has been made on the questions of freedom, liberty and science. On the other hand, humanity has been mercilessly attacked over; this is a bitter human experience of human attitude. This world has reached the climax of freedom and intellectual achievement on the one hand. On the other hand, hunger, disease, illiteracy, backwardness and so forth are equally eminent. In some part of the world, poverty is so rampant that for its people arrangement of a food has been the ultimate ambition of their life. And the extremism of the freedom has given birth to untoward activities which has created another tension amongst the mankind.

On one hand a blind competition is taking pace to proliferate nuclear ammunitions that can destroy the world in seconds, on the other hand people are dying of impure drinking water. Despite our efforts to bring down such anti-human means and modes, they are coming in to the rise in another names, faces and forms. Types of exploitation amongst human have changed, the



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faces of just as well as unjust struggles have changed; bondage of slavery has taken a new form. Cruelty has put a new mask into its face. Imperialism and totalitarianism have taken another shape forwarding their claws in a new colour. Wrong attitudes that smirch the civilization, dilapidate human value have time and again challenged our conscience and consciousness. It is not so easy to do away with these ills.

Time has come for us to contemplate upon as to how to tour in the 21st century and why to tour. What I think is we have gained much scientific achievement in the 20th century. The prime challenge for the 21st century should therefore lie in how we take the achievement down to every people in the world. Until and unless these intellectual achievements, scientific gains and philosophical goods reach down to everyone in the world, no rays of freedom and equality gleam in the world. And therefore this achievement will not be truly meaningful. We should further be conscious not to lag behind in our moral achievement in the 21st century.

Therefore, internal development of mankind and human development should be the prime agenda for the 21st century. Sovereign democracy and human rights should be the oxygen which could lead the whole world along the road of peace and progress. Our plans and prospects should be directed to these ends. I call upon this gathering to work out ways for these. I hope the conclusion you reach will boost and support me.

Finally I would congratulate the PP21 program. I wish it may reach a concrete conclusion to make meaningful the entrance to the 21st century.

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**FREE FROM  
EXPLOITATION AND  
REPRESSION**

**Man Mohan Adhikari  
Chairman CPN (UML)**

First of all I would like to express my sincere thanks to the management committee of People's Plan for the Twenty First Century (PP 21) for giving me this opportunity to address this keynote speech and I would also like to express my feeling that this kind of timely interaction on behalf of the people is highly appreciated and commendable. I think such an assembly can create a right environment to understand the world in its realities.

Mr Chairperson, we are heading towards the 21st century and we have just lived in a complex world where we have gone through an unprecedented expansion of the technical power, improvement in transport and revolution in communication. This has been enhancing globalization concept not only on economic front but also on many facets of our lives. Above all, the media, specially the western, are propagating an exaggerated picture of the good life coming from the globalization and structural adjustment program. Naturally the world has seen tremendous progress on various walks of life. But, we think this is just one side of the coin. Because the new concepts have created many more complex contradictions on various aspects of our life.

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Consumption pattern and life style have been profoundly changed on the basis of unbridled consumption and swift dreams. Science and technology have been freely used for short term gain, neglecting and badly deteriorating ecology and environment. Social and ecological costs are certain to increase. Disregard of human rights has been frequent. All these facts reveal that economic globalization, structural adjustment and umbrella concept themselves cannot keep the widespread well-being for the whole of mankind.

In such a situation, we feel the interactions and discourses for the purpose to save our future are indispensable. This PP21 kind of intellectual gathering should influence reality. But I may make them aware that the non governmental organizations and their institutions must take into account that their activities are just part of the whole, not the whole at all.

Mr Chairperson, now on this right occasion, I take my pleasure to express a few words on our stands in contemporary issues. In the midst of the challenges, our party, Nepal Communist Party (United Marxist Leninist), firmly stands for a socialistic pattern of the society. Our party has rightly opted for multi-party democracy. To reach final goals of socialism, our party will struggle against any kind of imperialism, colonialism, dictatorship, and authoritarian tendencies in the world. Our party is firmly committed to the multiparty democracy, democratic rights of the people and establishing a socialist society by rule of law, where every individual will receive equal opportunity to develop his/her human potentials.

Our party protects the rights of the citizens to form the political party and different organizations, protects demonstrations and gatherings, and right to form organizations for professional and community welfare. Our party encourages self-governance, autonomy and decentralization for public welfare. Our party believes that human right is the basis of an advanced society and therefore, protects the fundamental human rights of all. In the

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meantime, our party has taken education as the fundamental rights of the citizens. Our party emphasizes on both formal and informal education programs extensively in order to make all the people literate. Our party is firm to remove all the discriminations regarding ethnicity, language, religions and culture. On top of all, our party on the basis of freedom and equality, stands for respected and dignified living standards free from any kind of exploitation and repression.

In concluding remarks, I would like to say that PP21 general assembly may find provocative, reasonable and useful thoughts for an emerging new civil society.

## **Making connections and Alliances of Hope**

Kamla Bhasin

On behalf of all the women in this PP21 General Assembly, I wish all of us Happy International Women's day. Starting our general Assembly on March 8 was not a coincidence but a conscious decision. We wanted women and feminist perspectives to be central in our deliberations during this PP21 and we have succeeded to some extent in doing so by inviting some strong women to speak in this Assembly and having gender concerns running through all our discussions.

We, the women in this Assembly, would like to greet you with a slogan and a song. Please join us.

On behalf of over 300 women, men and children who are here from different people's movements and NGOs in over fifty countries I would like to express our deep appreciation for the support and solidarity extended to the PP21 process taking place in South Asia by our Sri Lankan and Nepali friends. The fact that our friends in Nepal agreed to host so many and such large events in Nepal on such a short notice speaks volumes about their commitment to alliances between peoples' movements.

I would like to say to our Nepali friends that we are very happy to be with you on this very important occasion and day.

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We are happy to join hands with you in solidarity. We are happy to celebrate with you, your victory for democracy. Your struggles inspired us, your victory inspired us even more.

Let us strengthen democracy at all levels.

We want to pay our tribute to the hundreds of people who paid for democracy with their lives in Nepal. We wish pay tribute to the people of Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India fighting for peace, democracy, justice, gender justice and sustainability. The best tribute to them will be to carry on their mission till there is no dictatorship and no violation of human rights and no destructive development.

Friends, democracy is fundamental to justice, to equality, to sustainable societies. When we say democracy, we do not mean only representative democracy where people vote every 5 to six years to elect their rulers who take all decisions on behalf of the people. I believe we need grassroots level, participatory democracy in which people decide the fate of their communities, in which they take decisions about their resources. We need democracy in every organization and in every family.

If we have participatory democracy, no outsider can come and plunder our forests and seas, flood our markets with non-essential goods; no government and no bank can make dangerous dams against the wishes of local communities; no one can colonize East Timor; no dictator can stifle the voices and choices of people in Burma; no military can kill in Tiananmen; the US cannot have military bases in the Philippines; no nuclear testing can be done in the Pacific Islands; no dangerous wastes from the so-called developed countries can be dumped in the third World be it Mexico, Africa or India; no one can turn our children into child labour.

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If we have true grassroots democracy, no religious and political leaders can create in religious and other wars in India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka and Bangladesh and in many other countries.

Friends, we believe the unjust economic order at the global, national and local levels is at the root of militarization, is the cause of people's suppression, is the reason for dictatorship by our elite.

If a few countries want to have access to our resources and to our markets, if they want their weapons industry to flourish, if they want their boys and men to play war every few years, then they have to create war in Vietnam, and the Gulf, they have to intervene in Cuba and Nicaragua, they have to domesticate and plunder Mexico. Lost for profit and power does not allow democracy. Dictatorships of all kinds are unsustainable and should not be tolerated. The struggle for democracy is therefore also a struggle for a better economic order.

For us women, the struggle for democracy is also the struggle for women's dignity. We, women, know very well that dictators and their armies insult and rape us; we know that the other side of the Vietnam war was the brothels set up in Bangkok and Manila. The war is over but the war against women continues. It is the economic warriors from Japan and Germany who frequent these brothels, who want younger and younger girls. For us women, the struggle against patriarchy is linked to the struggle against militarization, dictatorship and unsustainable development.

Friends, true democracy and human rights have also to be respected within the family. Unfortunately, even the family is the site of human rights violations, of violations of democratic norms. Women are battered and raped within the family, they are forced into prostitution, they are forced to slog the whole day long.



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If we do not include women's concerns in human rights, then you cannot call them human rights; call them men's rights, but human rights. If we do not create and practice democracy at home, the roots of democracy will be weak. It is difficult to throw out dictatorships at the national levels but it is more difficult to throw out the dictator who sits in each one of us. Any one who has power can be a dictator: a husband can be a dictator, a father can be a dictator, a woman leader can be a dictator, a trade union leader can be a dictator, a student leader can be a dictator. Let us fight against all these dictators and create genuine democracy and genuine respect for each other at every level.

Let us create peace not just between countries and communities, but within every family. Let us declare every family to be a zone of peace.

Let us all nurture the woman in us.

On the occasion of International Women's Day, we women wish to rededicate ourselves to our fight against patriarchal privilege, our fight against patriarchal economies, politics, patriarchal families and religions, patriarchal laws and legal systems, patriarchal knowledge systems.

On this day, we invite all men to nurture the woman in them, the feminine in them, the mother in them.

On this day, we declare that aggressive, macho, insensitive men are not acceptable to us anymore. We want to relate with only those men who are truly gentle men. Friends, all of us know that women have been double victims of poverty, war, communal conflicts and so on. We have all the statistics on the subordination of women. But women are not just victims, women are also survivors.

Instead of describing darkness, let us talk of light of signs of hope. Let me tell you that as feminists, we women do not wish to be

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part of the mainstream which is MAN-stream and also unsustainable. We do not wish to assume positions of power in the present unjust system, because we know that if, instead of male cancer cells, we have female cancer cells, nothing will change. We wish to state that as feminists we are against all kinds of cancers which plague us today. Let us reaffirm feminine values.

Many of us feel women can play a special role to halt the process of destruction and violence we see all around us. I say this, because I feel a large number of women still retain seeds of regeneration. In the present scenario, women's so-called backwardness can be a boon, a blessing. They can offer solutions because they are 'backward', they are not 'integrated', not 'educated', because they have not 'progressed' too much on the wrong paths.

That what has been derisively called 'feminine' contains the key to our survival. What is feminine? Nurturing, caring, selflessness, being emotional, being like nature, creative, non-violent, non-linear, non-specialized, circular have been labelled feminine and therefore looked down upon, marginalized or crushed. Killing of the feminine is what has made our world today so inhuman. We need to reaffirm these feminine values.

Friends, I am not talking about women. I m talking of feminine principles and values. I am calling them feminine only because patriarchy has called them that, male philosophers, scientists have called them that. I am happy to call them human values, which they are. But today these human values are to be Now found more easily in women than in men - not because the female body has some special limbs or glands producing them, but because of historical and sociological reasons.

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Why do I think women are more capable of fighting the cancers plaguing our society? Well, first of all women are less responsible creating these cancers and that is a good enough qualification to begin with. But I go a little further. I believe women ARE more equipped to provide some breakthroughs and I say this for the following reasons.

My first reason is because they are at the religion bottom of all hierarchies, women know what harm inequalities can do, how it can maim, kill, destroy. Because they are at the bottom, if their energies are released they can shoot up. Like ordinary loaf of bread, they are capable of rising.

Women are the ones who have exposed all 'isms' which have left half of humanity out their purview.

Feminists are pleading against dualities like inside-outside, private-public, body-mind, nature-culture, subjective-objective, emotional-rational, -science. They are asking for ecological and integrated ways of thinking and being.

Women are the ones who have given us the potent slogan 'personal is the political'. They are the ones who are pleading to internalize struggles against all hierarchies. Women have been saying let us all begin with ourselves; let us all start fighting the patriarch, dictator, exploiter sitting in each one of us and we will see rays of light entering , forcing their way from all sides.

Women are more equipped because they create, feed and nurture with their own bodies. Because they give birth from their own blood and flesh, they speak and act passionately against violence, against war. We speak against war because wars are fought also on our bodies. No wonder women have led the peace movement everywhere.

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Women are more equipped because they have been and continue to be involved both with production and reproduction; , they have taken care of both economics and human beings.

Women are more equipped because they have little vested interest in the present economic and political system. They own few MNCs, control few media empires, head few states.

Women are more equipped to lead us out of the present ecological crisis, because through their personal experience and their history they are closer to nature and therefore they are more likely to protect nature. The very survival of billions of peasant families is intertwined with the survival of nature. No wonder women have also been in the forefront of the environment movements the world over and in South Asia. Amongst the women it is the working class women, the indigenous women and men who are more capable of showing us the way. We educated middle class women have lost the passion and lost our connections with nature. Many of us have become honorary men.

Women are more equipped because purity, goodness, nurturing, caring for others have been thrust upon them. At least for the past 2,000 years, they have more experience of practising these values. They have picked up the pieces after all wars, have healed after and during all killings, have forever cleaned the mess created by men.

While I say this, I do not for a moment forget or deny that women can also be dictators, power- or profit-hungry and so on; but so far, the number of such women is small.

Friends, the biggest threat to the 21st century is violence, violence of all kinds, rule by a small elite. PP21 is an alliance of people who are for peace and participatory democracy, for gender justice, for sustainable production and consumption, for decentralized decision-making for localization of power. It is an alliance of people against the plunder and rape of Mother Earth; it

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is an alliance of people against subordination and marginalization of the Third World, indigenous people, minorities and women. It is an alliance against homogenization. It is for the creation of human values like caring and nurturing, cooperation, love. It is alliance of and for hope.

This alliance of hope is based on the fact millions of people still live in harmony with nature, they still lead ecological lives, they still do not over-consume.

The hope is based on the fact that millions are struggling against destructive development be it in the Chiapas or in the Himalayas, in Minamata or in Bhopal; be it in Brazil or in Africa or in the Pacific. The hope comes from the fact that millions are fighting for genuine democracy be it in South Africa or in East Timor, be it in Burma or in the US

People are creating alternatives in health care, in agriculture, in trade.

The hope comes from the fact these struggles are converging, joining hands. There is globalization of people's struggles, there is multi-national cooperation.

The challenge we in PP21 face today is to develop strategies, plans and an organizational structure which match our hopes and aspirations. This challenge is to each one of us who considers herself/himself part of PP21. These details have to be worked out, shortcomings have to be removed.

Friends, let us all resolve once again that the next century must belong to the people, must belong to human values and the best human beings are capable of and let us dedicate our energies to making this hope a reality.

Like the flame of an ordinary lamp may we always strive to rise up and spread light around us.

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I would like to end with a slogan — a slogan we learnt from Pakistan and keep adapting. It is a slogan for freedom or '*azaadi*' as we call it in Urdu. Please join me.

We women want - AAZAADI.  
The workers want - AAZAADI.  
The peasants want - AAZAADI.  
From greed and plunder - AAZAADI.  
From nuclear blunder - AAZAADI.  
From exploitation - AAZAADI.  
From sexploitation - AAZAADI.  
From endless violence - AAZAADI.  
From helpless silence - AAZAADI.  
From mono-cultures - AAZAADI.  
From media cultures - AAZAADI.  
From patriarchy - AAZAADI.  
From all hierarchy - AAZAADI.  
Come say it loudly - AAZAADI.  
We love it madly - AAZAADI.  
We need it badly - AAZAADI.

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## **Let a Part of Your Heart be Zapatista**

**Cecilia Rodriguez**

I come from lands which are halfway around the world, and so for some days now as I have had the privilege to share your dialogue, your culture and the beauty of these surroundings, I have struggled to find the best way to bring the land I come from close to you. I resign myself to the tradition of my elders: I will tell you a story and hope that in that story you will find a mirror and when you see yourself you will also see the Zapatistas.

504 years ago there was once a land of 25 million people — people of corn. It was a most beautiful land and the people spoke many languages, and together farmed vast irrigated lands, achieved science, astronomy, medicine, architecture, engineering.

To this land came an enigmatic monstrosity called the conquerors, the powerful. They came from a land gripped by religious fanaticism, intolerance, absolute monarchy, patronage, patriarchy and the doctrine of racial purity. The Spanish came looking for gold and new kingdoms, and to this land which we will now call Mexico they brought sickness, war of annihilation which in 106 years had reduced the population of Mexico to one million. One million indigenous people were then left to slave for the powerful.

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And the women they raped produced children of mixed blood — 'bastard' children in the eyes of the Spanish — and these children of the conquest were called '*mestizos*'.

For 300 years, the powerful ruled through an authoritarian colonial system. But the blood of the people of corn ran in streams into the ground and in 1810, the ground erupted as the dark-skinned people fought against Spain and for the irreverent idea of independence.

But the arrogance of the powerful was not overcome. The rich ruled, and they put a French emperor in power, then allowed the United States to take half its land. In 1876, another dictator came to rule with the help of the United States. And the people of corn laboured, fought and died and industrialized a nation — all railroads leading North.

In 1910, when the earth was saturated with blood, the dark-skinned people rose in arms once again. They followed a man named Emiliano Zapata — a dark-skinned who said that it was better to die fighting on your feet than to live on your knees. Zapata said that those who work the land should own it. And the English, the Americans and the French who wanted the railroad, and the wealth which leaked from the pores of the earth were also sick, with the illness of arrogance. Together with the great landholders and the brutal generals, and the Church, they killed Zapata.

The land once again ran with the blood and for many years again, the people of corn toiled and fought and built and created — but the shame of a corrupt dictatorship never left their land.

In 1988 a new dictator came to rule and with him, all over the world a thick stench of arrogance arose. Carlos Salina de Cointari, educated at Harvard, raised in the vast wealth of Mexico, could not even see the people he was supposed to rule. He gave 75% of Mexico's exports to the United States. He



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indebted Mexico to the tune of \$165 billion. He mangled a constitution which had already had almost 500 changes made in the name of modernization. He privatized and cut subsidies to agriculture and made beggars out of farmers of Mexico. He murdered journalists, human rights workers, and even those closest to him who dared to oppose him. In 1990, he declared the spirit of Zapata dead.

And Carlos Salinas mocked the 90 million he ruled. But he was only one link in a chain which was strangling the world into oblivion which enslaved children, commodified women, poisoned the earth, land and water, and erased cultures. He made cynicism a code of ethics and religion out of hopelessness. Salinas was not alone, he has never been alone.

He symbolizes the only two ways of life offered: the powerful, sumptuous American dream pandered to by a media which made truth out of lies and deities out of material goods, and death by authoritarianism, misery, poverty and cruelty — a living death shared by the majority of the world's people.

On 1 January 1994, out of this living death out of the stillness of night, came a people without a face, a name and a future. The Zapatistas said to all of us: death is ours, we have nothing else and we choose to take it fighting. We say to the people of Mexico and the people of the earth that the shame of doing nothing is greater than the sweet terror that has fed us. We are an armed group, a group of outlaws and rebels. We try to recover old and worn words: democracy, liberty and justice. We refuse to do nothing, to despair.

With death make in our walk, and fire in our hearts, we set aside our guns for a time and we ask you for true words; we seek the words of peace, but not those which surrender the struggle for democracy, the struggle for freedom; we seek the words of peace, but not the words of pacifist complicity with injustice.

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This is the story of the people of corn, the people of Mexico.

Today, 504 years after that power invaded our lands, the powerful want to corner us in our Indian sorrow, despair, pain. We have heard the doublespeak of the powerful: where they say peace, they make war; where they say life, they give death; where they say respect, they decree degradation; where they say truth, only lies walk. The powerful want to us deaf to the laments of our brothers and sisters who are of a different colour and who walk the same sad journey as we do under the domination of arrogance.

We know that our oppression is not the fault of a skin colour or the curse of a foreign language. There are those who have white skin and a dark sorrow. Our struggle walks with these skins. There are those who have dark skins and a white arrogance. Against them is our fire. Our armed path of hope is not against the mixed blood. It is against the race of money. It is not against a skin colour, but against the colour of money, not against a foreign language, but against the language of money.

Today, as our sorrow turns to seek a place in your hearts, we ask only a little, that you no longer hold back your desire for that lost dignity. We only ask that a small part of your heart be Zapatista — that it never sell out, that it never surrender, that it resist; that you continue in your places and with your means, to struggle forever so that dignity and not poverty is the harvest of the earth. I respectfully ask you to stretch out your hands to the Zapatistas. Together we can build a new world — one in which dignity lives, and humanity is precious.

## **Share In The Warmth And Comfort Of The Spiritual Fire**

**Reeves Nahwooks  
Kairos USA**

*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the water (Genesis 1:1-2, NIV)*

*Then God called the dry ground "land" and the gathered waters he called "seas". And God saw that it was good. Then God said, "Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds." And it was so. The land produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good. (Genesis 1:10-12, NIV)*

One of our elders (wisdom keepers) said, "the spiritual heritage of native American Indian people is here; it has not been extinguished. I believe the spiritual fire still burns and am beckoning for America, indeed the world, to come closer, to listen, to learn, and share in its warmth and comfort." Words of Eddie Benton-Banai Ojibway. I agree that we are re-affirming our relationship and stewardship with our mother earth. Another wisdom keeper, called Seattle, described his perception of the

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relationship when he said, "Our dead never forget the beautiful world that gave them being. They still love its verdant valleys, its murmuring rivers, its magnificent mountains, sequestered vales and verdant-lined lakes and bays, and ever yearn in tender, fond affection over the lonely hearted living, and often return from the happy hunting grounds to visit, guide, console and comfort them" (Seattle, Indian Oratory. Balantine Books, New York, 1971).

We have over the years, known no boundaries for the land used and lived on. Then people came and began to make boundaries and claim ownership. We believed the Creator, the Great Spirit, provided for everyone's use. That has changed so drastically that land now has now become an asset which is protected by life. Native American Indian men and women have participated in wars to protect the land. Land is sacred and must be cared for.

Today, we have abused this sacred gift which is vital to our living. We have used up its productiveness and have not given it a chance to revive. We are continuing to build industrial parks, residences, businesses and have taken so much for our use from the land. In the process, we have created many other problems which we must deal with through research and technology. The land's most productive uses are fast disappearing and signs of abuse and pollution are rampant throughout the world.

On 3 March 1990, I had the opportunity to attend the conference on 'Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation' in Seoul, Korea. Many people tried to unite through statements of ecumenical support and made some resolutions to continue to work towards a better world. The conference statement concluded, "The destruction of the planet has approached an order of geological magnitude. The soil is eroded, 70 percent of the reefs where fish breeds are gone. The rivers are polluted from mine tailings and the forests reduced to bare ground. The world's people are wounded."

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Not much has changed since then except for a few more people making commitments to deal with these problems in small ways. We have many stories to share which attest to the conditions that continue to destroy our land and resources throughout the world. Over the years, the situation has become worse. The indigenous people of many countries are adversely affected.

We are now facing a worldwide crisis that each one here can testify to. We must develop a plan and implement it. We must engage others in dealing with this catastrophe. We must become involved in this crisis. It is a crisis of consumption. As we consume, we must put something back to replenish what we have taken out. We must have respect for the resources that serve us. We must also have respect for one another. We are hampered by racism, prejudice and other ills that are reflective of our dysfunctional society.

I believe we are in a position to make a difference in this time and this place. I hope we can mobilize support for one another as we deal with these problems. We are managers and we must accept responsibility of managing the resources that the Creator has provided. We must establish right relationship with God (or how we perceive God); we must then create a 'right' relationship with our fellow human beings, family and friends; we must also have a right relationship with nature. When have attained right relationships we will experience balance, harmony and justice in our lives? This is what I perceive as peace.

In our native American Indian philosophy, we believe all things are related. The kinship extends to everything that has being. Anything that happens to any part of creation, affects in some way all of creation and the Creator. We must be free to glorify and praise God in body and spirit. We must remove those things that keep us from living productive, purposeful lives with love flowing to all around us.

We have a challenge in the few years we live on this earth and what we do will affect our children and future generations.

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# **THE SRI LANKA GATHERING**

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### **PP21 Gathering in Sri Lanka**

Sri Lanka was chosen as the venue for the General Assembly of People's Plan for 21st Century on several considerations:

1. Sri Lanka was the first country in South Asia to adopt the full package of economic policies advocated by the World Bank and the other centres of global economic power, towards adjusting the economic and political structures integrating into the process of globalisation.
2. This process introduced in 1977 was carried out with near complete disregard of its disastrous impact on the lives of hundreds and thousands of ordinary, poor people, the working people in the rural agriculture, industries and services, plantations, coastal and inland fisheries, pushing our large numbers of families from their livelihoods creating hundreds of thousands of young people whose situation of uncertain future was made worse.
3. People's efforts in the form of protests, resistance and struggle during this long period of 17 years were carried out under very repressive conditions, with tremendous sacrifice, with thousands of workers losing jobs, tens and thousands of youth disappearing in the process of violent uprisings, suppression, and war, farmers and unemployed committing suicide. Sri Lanka finally became known throughout the world as one of

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the worst for its suppression of human rights, violence and insecurity, it has also become a country of extreme forms of poverty and socio-economic disparities, hungers and malnutrition, war, death, distraction and insecurity of life.

4. The change of government in 1994, achieved by the people, thus meant very large aspirations towards a change of direction in policies, for peace, democracy, economic justice, stability and security.

With this change Sri Lanka became a country that illustrated not only the overall destructive impact of the present development model, globalisation, structural adjustments etc., but also the degree of control that the World Power centres have established over the economic and political decisions. The declarations made by the new government, soon after assuming power, have on the one hand created new hopes among people for more democratic space, hoped for peace and a political solution to the ethnic conflict, while on the other hand a need to question fundamental principles of traditional political thought, the attitude of dependence on the level of political leadership and the state to resolve the crisis in development and accompanying political crisis.

In this situation the idea and the people's process of planning their own future acquire great relevance and meaning.

Thus, the suggestion to have the PP21 General Assembly in Sri Lanka was very welcome and timely. This would have provided a new opportunity for the People's movements in Sri Lanka to join hands with those in the Asia Pacific region and other regions in working out the collective experiences of the impact of the globalisation process and to develop broad perspectives in a strategy to take control over the economic development, political and socio-cultural processes for the future. People of Sri Lanka who had suffered nearly 18 years of war,



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destruction of life, suppression and terror have come to the bitter realisation that peace, ethnic harmony, justice and democracy cannot be reached merely by having them in the hands of controllers of state power or to the decisions of the parties in armed conflict, namely the State and the armed militants of the LTTE to reach settlements. The decisive and tremendous hopes that people of all ethnic communities so strongly and firmly expressed when they elected a new government into power with clear promises of a peaceful resolution, have been frustrated when the armed forces on either side decided to go back to armed conflict. The voices of the unarmed people have been completely silenced and the lives of hundreds of thousands of the people in the northern war areas, those in the border regions and even of those in the urban centres such as Colombo have been made more insecure than ever before.

The Sinhala and Tamil people who were beginning to trust each other in their united voice for peace and a resolution of the ethnic conflicts through devolution of power are being compelled by the parties in war to support and endorse their military efforts, with the State claiming to 'fight today for peace tomorrow' and the LTTE continuing their faith in a military solution since the Sinhala governments cannot be trusted. With the intensification of the conflict on either side the destruction of civilian life has become much larger. The Tamil people in Jaffna being displaced to the jungles in the eastern province (forced out by the LTTE from Jaffna and driven out of fear of State armed forces looking for their safety). The intensified attacks by the LTTE at the heart of Colombo, and with suspicions of similar incidents taking place in other areas necessitated closure of schools island wide.

The mistrust that is growing within the community among the Tamils, Sinhalese and the Muslims will have far reaching consequences on the ability of these communities to reestablish trust, and faith in living together in a just and peaceful society.

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There is a resurgence of hard extremist Sinhala racist positions. Amidst such opposition the government and groups working for peace are making efforts to gain acceptance to a political package for devolution of power and necessary Constitutional amendments.

This is another factor that emphasises that need for people to take greater control over the decisions that affect them. These very strong and crying conditions convinced all those associated with the PP21 process of the importance and the urgency of having the gathering of PP21 Asia Pacific Regional Assembly in Sri Lanka in March 1996.

Although the very same situation of political unrest and insecurity that called for the meeting to be held in Sri Lanka has made it necessary to shift the venue to Kathmandu, the importance of developing the process of people taking responsibility of planning their future remains as strong as ever before. Developing solidarity and collaboration in meeting the global forces of domination and destruction, working out solutions in terms of sustainable alternatives and strengthening the hopes and aspirations for peace have become even more urgent.

### **PP21 Preparatory Process in Sri Lanka**

In early 1995 nearly 40 NGOs and People's Organisations working with grassroots communities met and decided to undertake local preparatory work for the People's Plan for 21st Century towards the assembly.

For those engaged with organisations among Peasants, Plantations, industry, trade and services, women, youth and students and those in areas such as human rights, democracy, peace, environment and culture the preparation for PP21 assembly was in one way a logical continuation of the work they had been doing for several years to look at the socio-

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economic and political processes from a people's perspective, to resist and struggle against adverse effects of forces of global domination and to fight for alternatives. In another way the PP21 process gave this work a new perspective of working towards sustainable alternatives in people assuming greater control and of the need to develop a new vision of a people's alternative uniting the diverse sectors of the economy and of society in collaboration with the regional and global efforts to face the present challenges that have now acquired new global dimensions.

In order to do this, the Sri Lanka groups of NGOs and Pos associated with PP21 Process identified the following sectors and fields of work where People's Plans should be worked out.

1. Agriculture and Peasants
2. Industries, Services, Trade and related workers
3. Plantation sectors and workers
4. Fishing industry and fish workers in coastal and island fisheries
5. Women
6. Youth and Students
7. Children and those working on related issues
8. Issues related to human rights and Peace
9. Environment
10. Culture

The approach adopted initially was to set up People's Commissions in each of these areas to bring together People's Organisations, scholars and activists specialising in these sectors to identify

- a. Present situation and policy trends
- b. Impact and responses of the people
- c. Social forces that emerging in working for alternatives
- d. Plans and strategies in each of the sectors for alternatives and people's initiatives.

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It was attempted to introduce the People's Plan 21 Century process with its regional and global dimensions and perspectives to enable sectoral organisation to undertake dialogue and study towards working out the above aspects. The process envisaged preparation of Commission reports for wider discussion and participation. These reports were then to be placed in the regional context to be related to similar processes in other counties. This was meant to provide certain guidelines for the Regional PP21 Assembly to work towards a People's Charter and to serve as guidelines for follow-up strategies at national and regional level.

### **Limitations**

Due to the prevailing situation in Sri Lanka this process we envisaged could not be carried out in the same manner. Groups who committed themselves at the initial stages had to divert their attention to other urgent national issues. Hence the process could not be completed to the satisfaction of all participating organisations. Much needs to be done to obtain fuller participation, deeper study and wider dialogue as follow-up to PP21 Assembly in March 1996 in Kathmandu, Nepal.

### **National Meeting 24-25th February**

Nevertheless, considerable enthusiastic participation was obtained in all these areas enabling the Sri Lanka group to prepare working papers on the issues to be discussed by each of these sectors. These reports were adopted at the sectoral workshops with some corrections, amendments and additions, and finally presented to the plenary and accepted as the situation reports of respective sectors. The declaration adopted by the delegates at the end of the meeting can be considered as the syntheses of these sectoral papers and the ultimate results of the whole process.

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Mr. Sarath Fernando's speech was based on Walden Bellos paper on "free Market", NIC capitalism and sustainable development in East Asia". He emphasised that economic growth achieved by East Asian countries was not due to free or open market economic policies but because of strict state interventions and regulations. Social and environmental cost of this growth was also very high. Growth oriented development strategy in the South as well as North has made the planet earth unsuitable for all living species and two third of mankind unwanted.

Hence the 20th century cannot be considered as a century of development. That is why the 21st century should be planned in such a way that all people could be absorbed to the system as authors of their own destiny. The development model followed by Sri Lanka for the last 18 years was totally in accordance with the prescriptions of the power centres.

Policy recommendations by World Bank on peasant agriculture in last July say that paddy cultivation should be discouraged by the government because according to World Bank it is not profitable. This is only one aspect of globalisation. Liberalization of markets is nothing else but is how the power centres facilitate the free flow of capital all over the world. What we identified as development in the past was not development for the majority.

Ms. Nimalka Fernando in her address said that Minamata Gathering in 1989 was a great step forward towards an alternative. Minamata Declaration cried out for a new kind of life and people-friendly development.

Hence inevitably the development envisaged by Minamata was a development which goes against power centres of the world. This development makes people authors of their destiny while the dominant development makes them victims. Alternative development initiatives are becoming organic components of

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this new development model.

The main theme of the 2nd general assembly of PP21 held in Thailand in 1992 was democracy. The theme of the 3rd general assembly to be held in Kathmandu Nepal is going to be People's Convergence - Shaping Our Future.

Women have a very big role to play in shaping our future. We have to look into how globalisation affects our economy, our politics and our culture. We also should understand what is happening women in the globalization process. In Sri Lanka during the last regime three main development programmes were introduced, i.e. free trade zones, promoting tourism and export of labour to Middle East countries. In all these three programmes women are targeted for domicile labour. Women should not allow this system to exploit them like this. They should realize that this is not mere male domination. This is how international capital works. This is systemic and they have to fight the system. It is a challenge. If they don't take this challenge seriously, the world has no future.

Mr. Thirunawakarasu speaking in minority Tamil language said that in third world countries like ours there are no more sovereign states. All important decisions which affect these countries are taken by World Bank, IMF, WTO other power centres whose interests are counter to those of the majority in these countries. A majority of the people of these countries have no future at all. In most of these countries economic growth is at a very insignificant level. A very small minority benefits from this system. Despite the change of the governments the unjust system is continuing. The present President of Sri Lanka had categorically stated in Paris that her government was following the policies of the power centres such as World Bank and IMF. This government has already shown that it is prepared to suppress workers for the benefit of the business interests. We have to change this state of affairs.

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Dr. Prem John from India representing Asian Community Health Action Network (ACHAN) and PP21 South Asian Initiative said Sri Lanka or India is not an independent state. These countries are unable to make laws which are necessary for their citizens. Our parliaments are powerless. The agendas of our countries are prepared in Washington. What should be done by us in this critical moment? In the past we thought that our Institutions were powerful and cannot be broken by outsiders. However, now these institutions are being destroyed.

Power centres dominate these countries and peoples. This is what PP21 is talking of. We should create a mechanism through which we ourselves can decide matters which affect our lives. We have reached a cross road of our destiny. In the next century we should not live as slaves.

Mr. Abdus Sabur speaking on behalf of PP21 Coordinating Team and PP21 Secretariat said the situation in Sri Lanka was very similar to that of Bangladesh. Globalisation is a common enemy to these two countries and majority of the people in the world. We should get together and unite ourselves against this enemy. As long as we are divided, we cannot fight globalization or even our own autocratic governments. We should also unite our thinking and actions to enable us to be forceful in our fight against globalization. Fight for democracy in its true meaning is a fight against globalization.

Rev. Fr. Oscar Abhayarathna, Director of Prasansaramaya, said that it was for the first time in its history of 8-9 years that this venue being a meditation centre was made available for a programme of this nature. That was because the authorities of this centre took into consideration the importance and relevance of this programme for them. Since the present day world is being readjusted by a small group of powerful people there is an urgent need for the masses to make their own plans. Hence PP21 is a timely move which should be supported by all good hearted people. However we are doing all these things basing

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ourselves on ideologies which should be reconsidered.

All ideologies are imported from the West and they are intrinsically impotent to address the root causes of our problems. Don't we have an absolute foundation of profound thought which goes beyond the limits of ideologies? We should search for and discover this absolute foundation on which only we can build our future.

Communal disharmony is also a result of this decline of degradation of culture. However, only a small minority is responsible for the pathetic situations. The majority of the document on "Towards sustainable systems" prepared by Dr. C.K.M. Deheragoda was read out by Mr. Ranjith Perera.

Speakers were allowed to speak in Sinhala, Tamil or English for their convenience. Simultaneous translation facility had been provided for 50 Tamil speaking participants. Tamil and English speeches were translated on the stage openly for the majority of Sinhala speaking participants. In the sectoral workshops each group had their own translation arrangements.

### **General Findings**

The model of development that has been implemented with guidance of the World Bank and IMF over the past 50 years in Sri Lanka and in other developing countries have trapped these economies into a situation of debt bondage which enabled the world economic power centres to impose 'Structural adjustments' and political, social and cultural changes as part of the process of 'globalisation'.

This process envisaged to bring about greater control and restructuring of the global economy for the benefit of such power centres has not helped and is not likely to help Sri Lanka and its people to achieve any stable growth and development, it has only created greater disparities, instability and insecurity to



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a vast majority.

The overall impact described earlier in this paper demands a new vision and a political strategy in which the people victimized, impoverished, weakened, marginalised and rejected need to assume a central role in the decision making, planning and implementing in the development processes.

In working towards such a development and a political process it is necessary to identify, organise and mobilize the social forces that have the need and the potential to bring about changes.

We see the emergence of such forces in the key areas and sectors of Sri Lankan society addressing the major issues that are mentioned below. The important alternatives that are emerging in each of these sectors and the struggles that are in the formation have begun to express new signs of hope, which need to be strengthened and sustained with support and collaboration in the Asia Pacific region and globally.

Detailed analysis and alternative proposals in each of these sectors will be produced in separate reports for further discussion and follow-up action while only a few key points are given in this report.

Privatisation, loss of economic sovereignty and control over national resources, loss of livelihoods, food security, sustainability, social stability and security and rights of workers in all the sectors.

The government is now increasingly compelled to continue to expand the privatisation process merely to solve its financial problems, budget deficits and foreign debt. Attempts made to transfer public assets in the plantations, banking and insurance, electricity and telecommunications, land, irrigation, agricultural research and extension and in inland and deep seas fisheries have led to growing protests and resistance. There are active

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movements becoming visible comprising of those who will be adversely affected, or displaced from livelihoods. These movements can be identified in the following.

1. Trade Unions and other people's organisations in the plantation areas opposing privatisation.
2. Among the peasantry that covers more than 60% of the population, there are movements emerging to fight against the destructive impact of the WB/IMF structural adjustment which has led to breakdowns in small farmer agriculture, large indebtedness, loss of livelihoods, increasing and near complete domination of Agrobusiness TNCs in terms of control over technology production and marketing of inputs, removal of government services in credit, marketing, seed production, irrigation, extension services etc.
3. Fisheries' sector:  
The strategies of global control, privatisation and displacement of small scale fish workers in this sector are very similar to those carried out in other countries and those being done in agriculture and plantations.
4. Industrial sector:  
New joint fronts of Trade Unions have emerged to protect industries and services against privatisation.

The experiences of the export oriented industrialization efforts in these sectors during the last 18 years have been very different from the expectations when these policies were introduced. In spite of large government investments on infrastructure development, keeping down trade union actions to protect the rights of workers, crushing of trade unions and very large tax benefits granted to investors, the growth in this sector and in industrial exports have been far below

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expectations.

The present trend is to grant even bigger concessions to keep investors moving out and to attract new investments. In addition certain profit making ventures such as banking, insurance, electricity and telecommunications have been offered for privatisation to cover budget deficits and to meet government's financial problems.

### **5. Women and Gender:**

There have been a considerable growth and activity of Women's Organisations in Sri Lanka particularly during the last two decades. The key women's organisations and movements both in the urban industrial and rural sector came together and formed a Commission in preparation for PP21 processes in Sri Lanka. Thus, the potential of forming of a strong Women's Front in response to the prevailing situation of victimization, marginalization and discrimination against women exists.

The impacts of globalization, structural adjustments and market orientation in the economy which led to a large increase in poverty, hunger and malnutrition on the one hand and increased exploitation of women as "cheap labour", the main source of attraction for local and foreign investments, have worsened the situation of women in Sri Lankan society.

These processes have compelled women to leave their home environments, as migrant labour to Middle East or to Government factories in the FTZs. The situation could become much worse in the near future since further efforts to displace poor farmer communities from their rural agriculture in much bigger numbers are likely to continue.

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Women, mothers who suffered most in the suppressions of youth uprisings in 1971 and in 1988-90 in the Southern parts of Sri Lanka, having to witness their children, the youth being killed in large numbers have the greatest desire and potential to become a strong force to fight against the socio-political causes of such violence.

### **Environment**

Main environmental issues are as follow:

Forest cover of Sri Lanka has been reduced from 78% in 1889 to 20% in 1990. Climatic patterns have been changed causing less rain falls in some areas. Soil erosion is on the increase. Landslides are becoming a major environmental issue. Threats of extinction of some animal and plant species are on the increase. Use of pesticides for agricultural and domestic purposes and resultant problems are wider spread. Salitation is due to wrong irrigation and agricultural practices. Environmental risks are due to construction of large scale reservoirs. Sea erosion. Water pollution. Environmental pollution is due to poor waste disposal systems in urban and industrial areas. Air pollution. Occupational disease. Environmental issues are connected with destruction of environmentally sensitive areas.

### **Civil Society, Human Rights and Peace**

40 representatives from about 30 organisations participated in the working out of proposals and in the People's Assembly. There is a broad coalition of Human Rights Organisations that collaborate with other sectoral movements that are emerging.

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### **Suggestions towards the PP21 Process in the Future**

The Sri Lanka Group on PP21, since its formation has stressed on the importance of identifying the important and strong people's movements in the region and globally, that address the key issues emerging as a result of the destructive and suppressive model of Development i.e. "Globalisation" (understood as Global domination by Power Centres).

PP21's main thrust should be to facilitate such movements to link up and collaborate in the development of an alternative vision of sustainability and justice towards ensuring survival. This process together with other efforts emerging in other regions should lead to the development of a strategy towards making the 21st Century, a new era of People planning and deciding on their future.

### **Follow up Activities Suggested**

1. To publish the 10 sectoral reports and a synthesised and comprehensive report of the PP21 Sri Lanka Process in all three media.
2. To establish permanent people's commissions for 10 sectors and to look into the possibility of adding new sectors and up grade the contents of the present sectoral reports, continuously with the new findings of the commissions.
3. To organise periodical meetings of the participants of the February meeting with new comers at District Levels.
4. To provide partner organisations with the findings of commissions.
5. To assist and co-operate with partner organisations to build transborder alliances.
6. To organise a nationwide dialogue on the alternative development systems vis a vis the dominant paradigm.
7. In depth studies in the sectors identified.

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### **Sectoral Classification of Participant Organisations**

Present	25	Workers	14
Fisheries	12	Women	16
Environment	14	Human Rights	10
Plantations	8	Culture	6
Youth	5	Children	2
General	69		

Apart from above 20 NGOs, all other participant organizations can be considered as people's organizations. A few people's movements namely Movement for National Land and Agricultural Reforms, Movement for Peace and Harmony and Coalition of Human Rights Organizations actually participated in PP21 Sri Lanka process. Participation of women in February 24th and 25th meeting was more than 40%. 10 Buddhist Monks, 4 Christian Priests, 4 Nuns participated in the two-day programme. Numbers of intellectuals and scholars participated was about 35.

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# **THE SRI LANKA DECLARATION**

As those coming from the four corners of this country and from Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim communities who represent popular organisations, voluntary organisations and people's organisations that are active in the fields of agriculture, fishing industry, industry, trade and services, and that work with workers, peasants, plantation workers, women, youth and students, children, in areas including human rights, environment and culture, we make this statement with strong hope and a steadfast commitment to our victory over the economic, political, social and cultural crisis that is growing from day to day and which is destroying the lives of our people.

We believe that in confronting the huge challenges that we face today, the people are reaching a stage in which they are questioning the fundamental principles of traditional political thought in a very deep way. They are fast reaching the new perception that we cannot any longer stand by and wait for the national level political leadership and the state to resolve this crisis.

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If one considers the fact that the natural resources that are in the hands of the agricultural and fisher communities of Sri Lanka are among the richest in the world, it is clear that if decisions in these productive sectors are made according to the people's needs and in an intelligent fashion we would be able to attain a lasting and high level of development. However, matters are proceeding in quite another direction. The basis of rural agriculture is being rapidly eroded. In particular, the economy and agriculture of small peasants is rapidly being destabilized. The situation of the fisher communities is no different. In fact, we face the threat of fishing and aquatic resources moving out of the reach of fisher communities, and large scale destruction of key aquatic resources as well as mainland resources linked to these aquatic resources.

Plantation workers and workers in the industrial, trade and commercial sectors are surrounded by a series of unresolved questions with regard to their human rights as well as with regard to rights as workers. The national economy has been dealt a death blow by the privatization of the plantation sector and other state enterprises as well as by the exploitation of our produce by those who control the world market under the mechanisms of globalisation.

We cannot see any space for transformation of the tragic situation of under-privileged, silenced and marginalized sections of the population who have been pushed to a secondary status among the people of Sri Lanka. Whether they are the disabled, or minor cultural or ethnic groupings, their voices go unheard by the state and by society. Although movements to change the status of women which have also taken place internationally have had some impact on the Sri Lankan state, not only do we see no major changes in her situation because of unresolved problems within the sociopolitical structures as well as because of the dominant



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models of development but in fact we see the situation of working women worsening by the day.

When one looks at the situation of youth and students, the prevailing insecurity of their future, the closing off of avenues for social activism, the inability of the state to structure the system of education in a socially relevant and secure manner, have all created a number of grave difficulties for this segment of our population; their responses to these difficulties at times become a part of the problem rather than resolve it. Children, who are our future, are endangered by factors such as the war, social violence, displacement, insecurity, malnutrition and the scarcity of resources for education.

In the context in which our lives are thus endangered, we confront an environmental crisis which is unprecedented and which poses a threat to our very existence. Questions with regard to the intelligent use and conservation of our environment in a way that would have a lasting effect on our lives have been of concern since the colonial era. The main reason for this was that the colonial state, which established itself in a very centralized manner, systematically eroded the people's rights and capacity to take decisions with regard to production and the environment. Not only did the post-colonial nation state not change this situation, it further exacerbated it. Today, the destructive threat posed to our lives and to the environment because of the development process being carried out according to the gigantic plans of the centres of power of global capital is far more grave than it has ever been before.

At the same time, the murderous war that progresses from day to day due to the non-resolution of the ethnic question moves forward against the will of the broad mass of the people, with no end in sight and bringing untold misery to our society. Because

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of the socio-political dynamics created by the war itself, the space for bringing about a political solution is fast closing up.

One can see that the major factor underlying the grave situation outlined above, which can be seen as the collapse of civilization and a total destruction of popular life, is the need of world capital to restructure and control cultural, political and economic patterns worldwide. One can do this, going against the desires of the people and sacrificing their lives, only by implementing various ways and means of subjugating the lives and minds of the people. One such method is to destroy the identities of peoples and of individuals, and subordinate their minds. In order to do this, on the one hand, you see the destruction of cultural values and patterns which are based on human dignity and spirituality; on the other hand, you see the destruction of cultural diversity, which is the source of cultural renaissance and growth, and instead the spread of anticulturalism. The consequence is the emergence of a barbaric consumer society which becomes a battleground for broken identities and identities which are sometime problematic and sometime in conflict with one another. Beyond this capacity to control the minds of the people and in partnership with it lies the other tactic which is that of subjugating the people through repressive means. The repression of open expression of popular protest through any means, legal and extra-legal, direct and indirect, is a key feature of the nation state of today. The consequence of all these factors is that the human rights framework is violated in every place in society and in every possible way.

We said that there is a will fundamental change taking place in the political thinking of the people in the face of the challenges placed before society by the crises in the economic, social, political and cultural spheres that we have set out above. While the ineffective nature of the project of the nation state is by now clear to all of

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us, the aspirations of the people that were linked to this project have also collapsed entirely. We can see two key factors as being responsible for this situation.

One factor is that in the post-colonial era, what took place in Sri Lanka under the project of the nation state was not the development of a participatory political culture which showed maturity in our democratic political structures, but rather the establishment of an authoritarian political culture. A direct consequence of path thus chosen by the nation state was the alienation and marginalization of various segments of the population from the sphere of the state and deep polarization on ethnic lines as the state began to evolve and develop itself. Our society has been shattered because of this situation; in the past twenty five years, we have seen eruptions between the state and society as well as within the society itself. The national leadership has proved itself unable to direct the state in management of these destructive conflicts and clashes.

The other factor is that not only has the state and the national leadership has been completely incapable of protecting the people against the massive economic, political and cultural processes which are placing human civilization at a tremendous risk on a world scale and which are directed by the centres of power of global capital, but they have acted as mere agents and organizers of these centres of power, committed to implement these plans within Sri Lanka without any objections or negotiations.

Our task today is to guide society towards a total alternative which will incorporate principles which permit spiritual health and development of human persons, which respect human dignity and which take into consideration elements such as peace and democracy, social justice, protection of cultural diversity and sustainable development which have disappeared from the agenda of the state and politics today.

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At the same time, the murderous war that progresses from day to day due to the non-resolution of the ethnic question moves forward against the will of the broad mass of the people, with no end in sight and bringing untold misery to our society. Because

## **DISCUSSION PAPERS FOR THE "TOWARDS A PEOPLE'S CHARTER" WORKSHOP**

A workshop on "Towards a People's Charter" was held on 5-7 March 1996. Discussion papers were presented on the themes of Gender (Shipra Bose, Yayori Matsui, Ritu Menon, Asha Ramesh), Alternatives (Muto Ichiyo, Smitu Kothari), Globalization (Vandana Shiva and Walden Bello each authored one paper), and Networking (Aziz Choudry and Rex Varona each authored one paper). It was originally intended that the discussion papers could be circulated six weeks before the workshop to enable in-depth discussion during the workshop. Since most of the papers were only circulated during the workshop itself, the discussion was rather inadequate. The discussion papers were intended to raise issues for debate and discussion, and some issues were indeed controversial or provocative. Transcription of the comments and discussions is still being worked out. The Contact Person of the Workshop can be approached for the transcripts. The discussion papers are here reproduced to enable further discussion, and they do not represent the collective views of the Workshop participants.

## **GENDER AND ASIAN REALITIES**

**Shipra Bose  
Yayori Matsui  
Ritu Menon  
Asha Ramesh**

Twenty years after Nairobi and six months after Beijing, it is not necessary to reiterate the nature and details of women's subordinate status across the world. Scores of feminist analyses, surveys and testimonials on every aspect of their inequality, and now even the World Human Development Report, have amply demonstrated how endemic and entrenched discriminatory practices and policies are. Our attempt here is not to present yet another laundry list of what is wrong, but to highlight certain trends that, in our view, are exacerbating acknowledged inequalities.

The most critical of these is a growing conservatism that is at work everywhere, and especially in our region, that is evident in the resurgence of right-wing politics and the consolidation of right-wing economics. Simultaneous with the decline of the Left and the rise of religious fundamentalism and cultural nationalism, has been the shrinking of civil and secular space, and the promise of an illusory "democratisation" and "liberation" that the free market is said to encourage. In fact, right-wing economics and right-wing politics often work against women's democratic and secular rights and their access to resources and mobility, while at

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the same time reinforcing patriarchal attitudes, patriarchal practice — and patriarchal privilege.

This resurgent patriarchy and its impact on women, is particularly ominous in the three areas that this paper focuses on, for the region: Globalisation; Religious Conservatism and Identity Politics; and Militarisation.

Over the last decade or so, we have seen the escalating power of the media, the power of capital, the power of militaries, the power of religious fundamentalism. We have seen this power working not for progressive social change but for an articulation of conservative, often reactionary class and gender interests, that accentuate disparities and extend patriarchal control.

Along with all this, we see a sharp escalation of violence of all kinds, against women — aggravated sexual violence in the form of sex trafficking; economic violence as a consequence of new economic policies and structural adjustment programmes; direct communal violence in all of South Asia and pockets of Southeast Asia as a fall-out of politics of identity, cultural nationalism and ethnic chauvinism; often, the violence of “development” itself which has made for dispossession, dislocation, displacement; caste violence; alarming degrees of political violence; the violence and coercion of the market; actual increases in armed conflict — 80 percent of all conflicts today are within nations and almost all need military intervention — much greater violence and repression by all our States on our own populations; and, of course, the continuing violence of poverty and inequality. Indeed, one might say that domination of every kind entails violence, and that, for women, the perpetuation of patriarchal domination entails the violent subordination of women.

We will explore how this works in the three areas we have identified below.

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### **I. GLOBALISATION: INTO THE ERA OF GATT**

"We ask ourselves: What have we done to incur this foreign debt? Is it possible that our children have eaten too much? Is it possible that our children have studied in the best colleges? Or do they wear the best clothes? Have we improved our standard of living? Have our wages become so great? Together we say: No, we have not dressed any better. We do not have better medical assistance. Then to whom have the benefits gone? Why are we the ones who have to pay for this debt?"

A central element of structural adjustment policies is the renegotiation of the social contract. In most developing countries, the State has played a leading role in economic production and assumed primary responsibility for the social provisioning of basic needs. Today, however, with the emphasis on privatization the State is withdrawing from the socio-economic sphere through disinvestment in social services, fiscal cutbacks, removal of subsidies, and so on.

In the 1990s, the income differential between the poorest one billion people and the richest one billion is 150 times, and growing. Three decades ago, the differential was 75 times, or half the present rate. The economic policies which facilitated growth were also instrumental in speeding up the ecological crisis facing the world. There is thus a growing realisation world-wide that economic growth does not always equate global, or indeed, national progress.

Based on the classic 3-D prescription (Devaluation, Deregulation and Disinvestment) of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to restore any economy to health, the stabilisation and structural adjustment process has adversely affected women and children. Both the level of



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underemployment and poverty, especially among women and female-headed households, have probably increased since 1991.

During the 1980s, the effects of four decades of anti-poverty programmes and rural development schemes began to show results. Absolute and indeed relative poverty levels fell and small but significant improvements in living standards were noticed. A portion of these benefits also trickled down to women and female-headed households. There is a real fear that the new economic policies will reverse this trend. Although the full impact of SAPs has still to make itself felt, at least in India, the ILO report, *India: Employment, Poverty and Economic*

Policies predicts:

- Organised sector employment will stagnate or fall.
- Employment elasticity in agriculture is unlikely to be high.
- The dynamism in the rural non-agricultural sector visible in the 1980s will be missing in the 1990s.
- Employment conditions in the urban informal sector will worsen.
- Migration to urban centres will rise.
- There will be an increase in absolute and relative poverty.

Today around half a per cent of India's population, or four million people, exists on one meal a day throughout the year.

As a direct consequence of the SAP package of policy changes, there has been a squeeze on productive expenditure; capital expenditure has fallen in real terms; re-negotiation on labour codes is leading to an increase in child labour; there is an increasing feminisation of work particularly in export-oriented units. With the undermining of labour rights, casual, lower-scale employment is becoming more popular. Economic security is off the agenda.

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Economic policies have hit the poorest sections, especially women. Privatisation and the encouragement of export-oriented industrialisation have resulted in the development of extractive industries and the conversion of agricultural land forests into plantations, industrial estates, tourist resorts, and real estate subdivisions. While profits accrue to private ownership, in particular to the Trans National Corporations (TNCs), the responsibility for negative social and environmental consequences is disclaimed.

Women are restricted to low-skilled, low paid work. This reduces their opportunities for formal education and vocational training for upgrading their skills, with the result that they do not qualify for promotions, job up gradation and higher wages.

- They are marginalised by the existing trade union and cooperative movements.
- Their access to credit and economic incentives, and control over the means of production are severely reduced.
- They are excluded from the definition of economic structures and policies.

From any standpoint, the fundamental right to livelihood of all citizens, particularly women, must be recognised and protected. International financial institutions, government and industry must be accountable for the drop in living standards and the further marginalisation of women and children.

Labour rights, minimum wages and ESI benefits are non-negotiable. There should be a gender audit of policy-based lending at the international level. Simultaneously the performance of the State-led and market-driven reform process must be measured by the country's progress in improving the quality of life of the marginalised sections: women and children. The idea of progress must thus move beyond economic growth and emphasise the protection and enhancement of national wealth: human resources.

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Economic Growth — NICs, Near NICs, Aspiring NICs and Women "It is said that the 21st century will be the century of Asia. Japan has become a global economic power, the NIEs (Newly Industrialized Economies) — South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong — have achieved outstanding economic development; China has accelerating economic growth; and Mongolia is moving towards a market economy. The economic energy of East Asia is having an impact on the lives of the people of the world through the filling of the world market with the wealth and abundance of its products. The emergence of Asia is capturing great interest all over the world." East Asian Women's Declaration, East Asian Women's Forum, Japan, 1994.

In a post-Cold War era where all countries of the region are converging on a particular model of economic growth, it is important to identify the impact that developmental processes are generating on the lives of women in Asia and the Pacific as a whole. The impact may be characterised as — multi-sectoral — trans-national. Japan became an economic superpower only a few decades after the devastation of a lost war, because its rapid economic growth was achieved by reinforcing gender roles, that is, 'men work outside, women stay at home'. The Japanese management system, considered to be the key factor of economic success, rests on three pillars: life-long employment, seniority, and company union, but this system works mainly for male regular employees; women are excluded from it because, firstly, many women cannot continue to work when they have children, secondly, many of them work as part-timers, seasonal workers or subcontract workers. Accordingly, the income gap between men and women is bigger than most other developed countries; women earn only 50% of men.

Japan's economic development model was followed by the so-called four dragons: Taiwan, South Korea, Hong Kong and Singapore which are called NICS (Newly Industrialized Countries). Thailand, Malaysia and other South-east Asian countries are entering the stage of rapid economic growth and

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can be called near-NICS. Governments of South Asian countries are also adopting NICS model economic development policies, often under the label of New Economic Policy, like India. Former socialist countries are also opening up their economies to a free market economic system; they are China, Mongolia and Vietnam and Cambodia, called economies in transition. Some classify these two groups of countries, South Asia and transitional economies, as Aspiring NICS. Therefore, the NICS model which follows a growth-centred free market economic development strategy is spreading almost all over Asia, with the exception of north Korea.

This model of economic development has several common features. First of all, it was military governments which initiated this policy in many NICS. Taiwan was a top-runner of economic growth, in spite of its difficult position vis-a-vis mainland China. The Kuomintang rule was very brutal, imposing martial law for 38 years to kill, jail and torture numerous people and at the same time promote economic development by inviting foreign capital to export processing zones.

South Korea was also under a military dictatorship from the 70's, when it was supported militarily by US which backed South Korea during the Korean war against North Korea. Economic support to such dictatorial regimes came mainly from Japan which had colonized Korea for 36 years until the end of WWII. Huge economic aid and loans were provided by Japanese companies who invested and built their factories at export processing zones and other areas.

It is important to remember that the Korean movement against dictatorship and for democracy was stimulated, in the early stages, by women workers' struggle for their human rights, protesting inhuman working conditions. A number of female workers had to face imprisonment and even sexual torture. After the military regime collapsed in 1986 and some democratic space was secured, the labour movement exploded nationwide but men

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took over leadership; women were not actively involved any longer.

Singapore is now almost graduating from a developing country and about to join OECD, a club of developed countries. The small island country was under the repressive and paternalistic government of Prime Minister Lee Kwan Yu for many decades, and the political system is almost the same even now under his successor. Fundamental human rights such as freedom of expression, or press, of association are not guaranteed. For example, it is not allowed to form a citizens' group unless the government approves. Under such political oppression, people tend to pay attention only to economic development. Such economic development is sometimes called "development dictatorship" by political economists and it is common to many NICS, near NICS and aspiring NICS such as Indonesia and China. Malaysia, one of the Near NICS, is accelerating economic growth under the strong and authoritarian leadership of Prime Minister Mahathir. Thailand, heading the near NICs has claimed the attention of the world as a model of rapid economic growth. However, it is more a typical model of economic development accompanied by all kinds of negative impact from environmental disaster to sex trafficking. Environmental destruction and ecological crises almost seem to be a concomitant of the NICS model of economic growth. In Japan, rapid economic growth in the 60s was accompanied by 'kogai' (industrial pollution), symbolized by the tragic Minamata mercury poisoning, which claimed hundreds of lives and several thousand patients. Women were especially affected, because they gave birth to severely handicapped babies. This was why women took the lead in organising anti-pollution campaigns all over the country in the early 70s.

Similar environmental degradation was experienced by other NICs; Taiwan has faced chemical pollution since the mid-80s and women took action to protect the environment in various areas. In South Korea, since the late 80s, environmental pollution is

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evident in several industrial estates. Korean women's groups are concerned about such issues and recently, a Korean women's network for environment has been formed.

### **Women as migrant workers**

Rapid economic growth in the NICs, based on export-oriented industrialization has been achieved by exploiting young women as docile, cheap labour, especially by transnational companies at export processing zones and other industrial estates. In Malaysia, the largest number of employed women workers are TNC factory workers, most of whom come from rural communities.

In many NICs, occupational health hazards and accidents are serious issues for women workers; at the Asian Women's Tribunal held in Bangkok in 1994 by APWLD, two Thai women workers testified about problems: one was a textile worker who had suffered from 'cotton lung' for more than ten years, and the other was a labourer — carrying 60 kg objects damaged her back and she couldn't walk.

Sexual harassment is another common issue for women workers; the Committee of Asian Women Workers (CAW) based in Hong Kong is campaigning on this issue. Those women workers who protest this situation and try to unionize themselves are often harassed, even killed (an Indonesian woman who was active in the labour movement was found dead).

However, the vast number of women workers are not organized; most of them are part time, seasonal or casual workers with extremely low incomes or, even worse, working in informal sectors such as cultivating food, or as street vendors, cleaners, washers of clothes, or even as beggars.

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Those women who cannot get work at home have to go abroad to work. International migration is becoming a global problem, because its number is over 100 million, bigger than ever. Recent trends in labour migration in Asia are, firstly regionalization, that is the extent of migration within Asia surpassed that of those who migrate to the North. The receiving countries are Taiwan, Korea, Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia and Brunei, and the main sending countries are Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand and South Asia.

Secondly, feminization of migration has been noticed; Philippines is the largest sending country and recently the number of female migrant workers surpassed that of men. The main work for women in other countries is as domestic helpers and entertainers. They face not only economic exploitation such as under payment of salary but also all forms of sexual violence. Two recent cases of Filipino migrant women demonstrate grave violations of women's human rights. The first was the execution of a Filipino maid for alleged murder in Singapore and the other was a death sentence to a fifteen year old maid who stabbed her old employer right after she was raped by him, in a middle eastern country.

## **II. MILITARISATION**

Much of the world today lives in a state of neither war nor peace, but in some thing like a stage of siege. The absence of war does not necessarily mean the presence of peace — indeed in almost all the countries of S.Asia we see protracted conflicts, hovering on the brink of war and making for ever-present, high levels of violence in everyday life.

In 1993-94, 42 countries of the world were involved in 52 wars. Most of these — 80 per cent as mentioned earlier — have been civil wars, and 75 per cent of those killed in these wars have been civilians. And there have been millions of refugees. In 1994

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alone, 40 million people were displaced from their homes, and the numbers are rising.

Women within and outside the women's movement have for decades, demanded equality, development — and peace. Implicit in the call for peace is a call for an end to violence of all kinds, and especially an end to the use of violence to resolve conflict. The increase in civil strife across our region — communal, regional, ethnic, sectarian — and inter-state violence have not only caused as much destruction and damage as full-scale wars, they have installed militarisation in our midst in such a way that, today, tanks and machine guns are an ubiquitous feature of our urban and semi-urban landscape. A military mind-set, in time, defends the ideology of war, rationalises and justifies the use of violence to curb dissent and quell demands for justice. Militarisation extends the power of the State into civil society; feeds the military-industrial complex with its insatiable hunger for weapons; and eventually, brutalises social relations.

And in a most fundamental way, it is crucially linked to patriarchal attitudes. "War," as Veena Das, says, "is a contract between men. There are rules for conducting war, for declaring a state of war, for deciding when and for what a war is to be waged — and there are those who are not part of this contract, and they are primarily women."

Because they are not part of this contract but bear the burden of the costs of war — as mothers, wives, sisters, daughters of those who are killed, wounded, raped, tortured or held hostage — their opposition to war and militarisation is central to the agenda of the women's movement today. But this is not the only reason for women's sustained protest. As an increasing number of feminist analyses have shown, militarism and masculinity are interlinked, and political and public roles are reproduced in men's private lives. "Domestic violence, the most underwritten and least investigated of crimes," writes Anuradha Chenoy, "against the largest number of people (women) is a reflection of this



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phenomenon. The state as a legitimizer and enforcer of gender relations is complicit in reinforcing this relationship, because of its policy of non- intervention in domestic violence. And indirectly, through the promotion of sexist media images, patriarchal laws and institutionalised discrimination, it strengthens the culture of militarism."

The construction of stereotypes — men as idealised warriors, women as mothers of warriors — reinforces patriarchal control, and perpetuates the subordination and segregation of women.

In its most obvious manifestation, militarisation is the increasing use of military power by States to further their national interests, with the option of using military threats and war as an extension of politics. It implies the growing dominance of military over civilian institutions with a simultaneous decline in individual freedoms and democratic institutions. Militarisation is also the process whereby the military seeks political domination (Fn) In our region, a number of countries are, or have been, under direct military rule for long periods — Pakistan, Bangladesh, Burma, Thailand — and many others rely heavily on their armed forces for "peace" keeping operations, and to curb civil unrest. A notable, and alarming, feature of some military-ruled or dominated states has been their close proximity to fundamentalist religious groups — in S. Asia, especially this complex has resulted in a pernicious alliance of conservative interests that has seriously eroded political freedom.

Military expenditure in the developing countries has increased four-fold since 1960 and accounts for 20% of the world's defence expenditure. The Asian arms market is the second largest in the developing world. It accounted for 39 percent of all arms transfer agreements in the period 1991-94, up from 26.3 percent in 1987-90. The US is the biggest arms supplier, accounting for 43 percent of all arms transfer agreements with

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developing countries of the region, and for the most destabilising sales.

Mahbub ul Haq, author of the World Human Development Report, says that in S.Asia, India and Pakistan spend around \$20 billion a year on defence, in international prices. They bought twice as many arms from the global arms bazaar as Saudi Arabia, which is 25 times richer. Both countries have six times more soldiers than doctors, and spend one million dollars a day contesting the Siachen glacier.

Defence expenditure in all of S.Asia increased at the cost of social expenditure; the governments of the region spend 100 per cent more on their armed forces than on providing health or educational facilities for their citizens. Pakistan spends \$ 27 per person, per year, on defence, and only \$ 3 per person, per year, on welfare. India spends a paltry \$ 9 per person for welfare, and Bangladesh a mere \$ 2. By the 1970s India and Pakistan possessed technology to deliver missiles to attack each other in minutes, whereas women in all of S.Asia walked for hours each day to obtain the family's water requirement. And, despite severe food shortages, the countries of the region spent five times as much foreign exchange for the import of arms as for agricultural machinery.

East and S.E.Asia may not present exactly the same picture, but here, too, the overt and covert presence of the military has been more or less constant since World War II. Despite the end of the Cold War, territorial, regional or ethnic tensions and conflicts remain: in the Korean peninsula; between China and Taiwan, in East Timor, in Burma.

The most insidious presence, however, is that of U.S. military bases in Japan and the Philippines. Seventy five per cent of the total number of U.S. bases in Japan are in the tiny of Okinawa. Vast tracts of farmland were appropriated to build the bases, farming families were dispossessed and impoverished, and many women and young girls drawn into prostitution. Prostitution

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around US bases and the prolonged "Rest and Recreation" programme of the US armed forces during the Vietnam war, are responsible for much of the trafficking in women, in the region. The setting up of brothels, nightclubs, sex bars and so on to service U.S. marines and soldiers has led to the establishment of a multi-million dollar sex industry in Thailand, Japan and the Philippines in particular. Just as national governments have often used the military to forcibly exit people from their land in order to exploit it for export-oriented cultivation, so too, the military has directly supported the sex industry and the sexual exploitation of women. In the late 1980s the Thai military government entered into an agreement with the Burmese military regime to open the borders for trade, since when more than 50,000 Burmese women have been trafficked into Thai brothels. The Comfort Women of Korea are only the tip of this iceberg; and the 12 year old Okinawan schoolgirl, brutally gang-raped by three American G.I.s in 1995, only the most recent in a series of such rapes.

Globalisation and militarisation have worked hand-in-hand as far as trafficking in women is concerned. In East Asia, Japan, Taiwan and Korea are recipient countries. It is estimated that in Japan alone, about 150,000 women from neighbouring countries are working in the sex industry, 80 per cent of them from the Philippines and Thailand. They are traded as commodities, sold into prostitution (often at a price of four million yen) con fined, beaten and intimidated into submission.

Trafficking in women is on the increase in South Asia too, primarily of Nepali girls into India. Having acquired industry status, it is now the preserve of organised crime rings, such as the Yakuza of Japan, and other mafiosi. The expansion of a multinational sex industry and the commodification of young women is truly one of the most pernicious aspects of globalisation; and the larger the profits the greater the brutalisation of and violence against women.

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The general and increasing trend towards militarisation in many of our countries, manifests itself in several ways:

1. The State passes more and more legislation which is fundamentally anti-democratic; these laws are aimed at silencing dissent against unpopular regimes and at keeping the population under tight control; these laws violate all principles of human rights and civil liberties and are very often enacted in contravention of universally accepted conventions that define fundamental human rights.
2. The State also sets aside an increasingly large part of its budget for military expenditure; this leads to cuts in subsidies and welfare systems, which contribute to lowering the general standard of living.
3. The State also encroaches on lands used by people for community purposes by establishing military encampments, etc., thus depriving people of their traditional access to such places; devastation of natural resources, through for example, deforesting as a means of "flushing out terrorists".

The militarisation of our societies has drastic consequences for our people, and especially for women. In a militarised society violence soon becomes a way of life and a means of resolving any conflict. In such a situation violence against women both in domestic situation and at the hands of the uniformed "guardians of the State" increases.

## **III. RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISM & POLITICS OF IDENTITY**

"The Eighties in the South Asian region will be remembered for the tremendous growth of communal and ethnic violence, accompanied by the rise of religious fundamentalism. The general communalisation of society, the erection of barriers of

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hatred and vengeance between communities, the destruction of life and resources and the inability of governments in the region to find a solution reflects a deep-rooted crisis of nation-states in South Asia.

Communal violence and religious fundamentalism have very specific implications for women; for they are not just victims of violence but symbols of communal identities and relations between men and women. The issue of identity politics highlights the links between other struggles for change and feminism as a political movement."

In the last few years, developments at the national and regional levels have clearly established the political ascendancy of right-wing fundamentalist groups and their ability to mobilise around the issue of minority/majority or ethnic identities. The implication of the State in all these contests for power and contestations over definitions of cultural nationalism and secularism has called for a serious re-examination of the phenomenon of religious revivalism and its political agenda. What has also surfaced during this time is the militancy of right-wing women in all the countries of the region, and their successful incorporation into communal politics. For feminists and for the women's movement this is yet another disturbing dimension of the problem: how, in our work with women, and particularly at moments of acute communal or ethnic polarisation, do we understand women as protagonists of violent and disruptive communitarian politics, most recently witnessed in India with the destruction of the Babri mosque and its aftermath.

At the same time there is the recognition that women's multiple, and often overlapping, identities — of class, community, gender, religion, health caste — come into play diversely and at different times; and in direct interaction with wider political, economic and social forces. This factor has necessarily to be accommodated in our analyses, both in theory and on the ground.

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The concern with religion, then, expresses itself in several ways: directly, at the level of countering oppression in the name of religion and obstruction in the attempt to realise one's potential, economically, socially and individually; indirectly, at the level of trying to articulate and understand the experience of religion as a humanising island force. At another level, it is necessary for us to acknowledge that even within the framework of development, one is of ten working with women — and men — who are personally grappling with their own response to religion; who are in a genuine predicament when working from within religious or cultural traditions to effect social change, and for whom the adopting of "for or against" positions is a real dilemma, personally as well as in the course of their work. Perhaps most urgently, the concern is with the collusion of right-wing economics and fundamentalist, anti-secular and anti-democratic political practice and its impact on development — and consequently on women.

At a meeting in 1987 in Colombo, of women academics and activists from India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka the issue of women, religion and social change came in for considerable discussion. The context was our three countries, seen over the last decade or so, with a focus on the kind of social change taking place in all three, and in which religious and ethnic configurations often formed the critical core. Thus, rather than looking at social change as a progressive, radicalising force, we recognised that the change already under way in much of the subcontinent was retrogressive, often even fascist: that a significant degree of mobilisation had taken place by rekindling fundamentalist and chauvinist tendencies, and that, in the resulting turmoil, the position of women was under greater threat than ever before, susceptible to the most dangerous notions of what is appropriate and desirable.

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The project of Islamisation in Pakistan and Bangladesh and the zealous promotion of a national identity based on it; the crystallising of separatist demands around ethnic or minority claims in all three countries; the visible and vocal presence of fundamentalist conservatism that made itself felt in the Roop Kanwar and Shah Bano controversies in India, and the active propagation by or collusion of the State in all these, have effectively wrenched the issue of religion and identity out of the personal and private domains into the social and public. No matter what our individual allegiances might be in this regard, we are now all players in this play of identity politics.

At one level, obviously, a woman's concern with what is happening around her is the same as anyone else's and to the extent that religion impinges on all our lives in a palpable way, we must reckon with it. Second, as Fatima Mernissi has observed in the context of Muslim societies, "If we are to assess correctly women's prospects and future... we have to relinquish simplistic stereotypes that present fundamentalism as an expression of regressive medieval archaisms and read it, instead, as a political statement."

But, as importantly, we have to move beyond the conventional rejection of religion as "false consciousness", because we are often interacting with women for whom it is an article of faith, in spite of their experience of its oppression. And because we have found that it provides space for manoeuvre, that ironically, it may even liberate temporarily — long enough to raise consciousness and mobilise — that sometimes it can be its own worst enemy; and, finally because we ourselves are often in a predicament regarding our own responses.

Across the region, in general and specific terms, the forces of fundamentalism have resurrected new and old patriarchal attitudes. In some communities, women are being encouraged to enter politics and armed conflicts, in others they are told to return to secluded domesticity.

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Women everywhere have resisted, protested and refused to be bound within these confines. In Pakistan and Bangladesh, women's groups were the first to challenge the un-democratic imposition of Islamisation on their respective countries. Massive demonstrations were held against the promulgation of the Hudood Ordinance in Pakistan which clearly discriminates against women, and the Shariat Bill of 1991. In Bangladesh sustained opposition to declaring Islam the state religion came primarily and initially from women's organisations who have continued to fight it at every opportunity. The Women's Action Forum in Pakistan has passed a resolution condemning the Blasphemy Act of that country, and calling for the establishment of a secular State. Their campaigns have forced the issue of the impact of religious fundamentalism on women onto the national and political agendas, as a serious infringement of democratic and human rights.

In Sri Lanka, women were the first to offer solidarity to Tamils in the North and take a public stand on the issue of autonomy for them; they were also the first to organise, as the Mother's Front, against violence and atrocities as a result of military action. Women's groups have worked extensively and consistently with refugees and kept up their demand for a politically negotiated settlement of the Tamil question.

At the level of women's movement, our attempt has been to contain, as much as possible, the negative impact of religious practice and of fundamentalism on women, through campaigns against specific manifestations of both, with varying degrees of success. At the level of analysis, we have tried to establish the structural and systematic integration of religion with patriarchy, political economy and an increasingly powerful State in all our countries and the consequences of this on women's subordinate status. In other words, we have sought to dispel the myth that religion today is merely a personal matter, consigned to the private domain. At the level of action, however, we have often been confounded by the place that religion occupies in most



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women's lives, and their relationship to religious and cultural practices that they find liberating; by the protest potential of religion itself; by the fact that many radical struggles in the region have been spearheaded by the church, for example; by the additional fact that, for many women, religion provides a sorely needed public space in which they find release from oppressive domesticity; and finally, that religious or ethnic collectivities are still a very powerful affinity group with which many of us identify, from time to time and under various circumstances, either for strategic reasons, or otherwise.

### **IV. AN ALTERNATIVE FOR THE FUTURE**

It is a widely-shared view that the present economic growth model isn't acceptable to women. However, the search for an alternative economic system hasn't been successful yet; because it is very difficult to challenge the global forces that are promoting the current economic development formula.

There are, however, many grassroots women's groups in Asia which are already practising a sort of alternative activity in agriculture, trade, health, education, media or lifestyle. At the NGO Forum in Beijing, Asian Women's Workshop; Alternative in Action was attended by women from nearly ten countries. They shared their experiences and formed a network. Philippines: Women in Negros islands grow chemical-free bananas and Japanese consumers groups import them through alternative trade, which is operated on a people-to-people basis without the intervention of trading companies.

Thailand: Weaving for Alternatives is a network of 24 village women's weaving groups. Women use natural color from plants to dye, grow cotton and silk, and weave. Their cash income prevents their young daughters from being sold into prostitution.

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**Sri Lanka:** Women's Community Education Centre supports women of 95 villages to make bags and other daily needs items by themselves using local material so that they don't have to buy factory produced plastic goods, harmful to the environment. They are also a source of income for village women.

**Hong Kong:** Women's groups established contact with a poor village of southern China and support women of the village to cultivate lily bulbs. Hong Kong groups import and sell them as health food. Through such activities, village women in China were empowered and formed a credit union to improve their village life by themselves.

**Japan:** Since the 1970s, consumer movements began to question the wasteful economic system itself and women organized cooperatives with new visions such as consumer-producer linkage all over the country. The Seikatsu Club Cooperative is one of such cooperatives. Its quarter million members, all over the country, are trying to practise an alternative consumer life-style. Their activities are mainly in three areas: collective purchase of agricultural products directly from organic farmers inside and outside Japan; workers' collectives which women form for the purpose of doing small business by themselves instead of being employed by companies; and political participation by running for local elections to change community life.

**India:** Two very innovative experiments in educating and empowering the poorest among women have revolutionised not only their lives and their ability to organise, but have led to a redefinition of both the kind of education women need to empower them, and to the importance of an alternative feminist and activist intervention in this area. Village women in many parts of the country, who have been part of the Women's

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Development Programme and the Mahila Samakhya, have learnt to build village bunds, repair pumps, produce their own newspaper — and take on local power lords, in their fight against alcoholism, deforestation and sexual harassment, for example. It is important that all these alternative activities, no matter how small they are, empower women and improve gender relations in the family and community. It is hard to say how such micro level attempts can be linked to a structural change in economic systems and society. Nevertheless, it is meaningful for poor women to start such alternative action and it is important to further network such alternative groups all over Asia.

If, as we have tried to demonstrate, the combined forces of globalisation, militarisation and religious fundamentalism make for a reinforcing of patriarchal culture, how do we begin to conceptualise and put forward an alternative for the future from a gender perspective?

Critics of growth-oriented development and a free-market economy have argued persuasively for a paradigmatic shift in conceptualising an alternative. They suggest various combinations of decentralised, ecologically sustainable and politically democratic systems that will maintain the natural and human equilibrium of our civilisation. Some suggest a modified return to non-western civilisational values, religions, traditions, cultures, technologies, philosophies and knowledge, for another kind of development and, indeed, another way of living.

We endorse every such attempt and recognise the necessity of integrating perspectives and forging alliances. We are with other movements for peace, democratic rights, sustainable development, but it is our view that there can be no genuine alternative — no matter how ecologically sound or politically correct — without a gender-just society and an end to patriarchal privilege.

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Patriarchal privilege has remained intact in all the dominant discourses so far, including the socialist and Marxist. Despite several structural and systemic inequalities being addressed by alternatives to the dominant discourse, the question of how to do away with patriarchal privilege still confounds us. What do we do with institutions like the family and religion which are predicated on male primacy and privilege? What do we do about access to resources which is considered a male right? Can we actually reclaim non-Western traditions, values, ways of living without recouping their intrinsically patriarchal bias? Are we simply replacing an authoritarian patriarchy with a benign one, or working towards a true parity of men and women where neither dominates? In our alternative system, will we be able to respect what had been called the "production of life", regardless of who produces it?

The relinquishing of patriarchal privilege entails a radically altered mode of relating between the genders; but it also means remaking society in a fundamental way because it involves remaking relations between the two basic units of any society or community — men and women. It is this remaking which will then be reflected in a transformed law, religion, politics, economy, media, families. And in our blue-print of an alternative for the future.

Last but not least, we must examine the relationship between the growth-oriented development model and democracy and human rights from gender perspective. As stated in the East Asian Women's Declaration, Asia is emerging as a dominant economic power centre of the world because of the rapid economic growth spreading throughout the region including the giant China. It is even said that Asia as the new economic powerhouse may threaten the five centuries of western domination of the world. However, a serious concern of women in Asia is that the irregion's economic rise has not, and will not, guarantee enhancement of democracy, human rights and other positive

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values and rights, which even if originating in the West, have been, and are, fought for by women and people in general in this region. These positive values and rights do not automatically accompany economic growth primarily because the dominant development model implemented in Asia is none else than the western development model which is deeply rooted in gender inequality and exploitation of nature.

One of the challenges to PP21 from gender perspective, therefore, is to give birth to what may be termed Asian feminism which is rooted in positive aspects of Asian cultures, Asian women's struggles and alternative building activities and simultaneously informed by positive values people have achieved in the modern era. Our Asian feminism(s), in interaction with feminist achievements of our sisters in other regions, will help lay the basic principles and values of our alternative future. PP21 should provide an arena to discuss how we can create a new civilization different from the civilization of western origin which is based on the conquest of nature by men and of women by men.

# **TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE SYSTEMS**

**Muto Ichiyo  
Smitu Kothari**

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## **SHAPING OUR FUTURE**

### **I. GLOBALIZATION AND UNSUSTAINABILITY OF THE DOMINANT CIVILIZATIONAL SYSTEM**

#### **Unsustainability of the dominant system**

It is now more than evident that the dominant civilizational system is experiencing its death throes. Despite a rhetoric of triumphalism, socially, economically and ecologically, it has become unsustainable. In the last few years of this century, this system has managed to survive through what we would like to call a regime of globalization whose primary organizing principle is "free competition" in a "free market" and whose motto is "privatization." This regime is promoting a massive "globalization-from-above" process throughout the world attempting in the process to influence and incorporate a majority of the world's peoples and natural resources into its centralizing agenda.

The system is unsustainable because it continues to depend for its sustenance on the expansion of private accumulation based on almost limitless GNP-measured economic growth, which justifies and legitimates the intensive and extensive exploitation of natural resources and energy, ever expanding consumption, and the generation of uncontrollable amounts of wastes, all of which go far beyond the environmental capacities of our planet. We are inexorably and, in many cases irreversibly, destroying the very basis of the subsistence of humankind and other forms of life on our planet.

The destruction of the ecological basis of planetary life goes hand in hand with the destruction, direct and indirect, of diverse communities, cultures and knowledge systems. The regime of globalization not only fails to overcome, but reproduces in newer forms, the historical division of

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humanity into rich and poor, north and south, as well as gender-based discrimination. In fact, we witness a fresh wave of pauperization of the majority of the world population coupled with the concentration of wealth in the hands of a relatively small minority as well as the emergence of a large, predominantly material- and consumption-oriented urban middle class, especially in areas where sustained economic growth has taken place, like East and Southeast Asia and more recently, parts of South Asia. Not only are the adverse impacts of this economic development experienced more intensely by already vulnerable people, across the Asian region we have been witnessing the feminization of poverty--a process that reflects similar trends in other regions of the world. As the 1994 and 1996 UNDP reports reveal, income disparities (the polarization of wealth) in countries across the world, have doubled in the period between 1960-1990. The lower 20% have substantially reduced their already limited control over productive resources. Their aggregate incomes have also fallen in the same period.

In an overwhelming number of cases, the erosion and destruction of people's livelihoods and their natural endowments occurs simultaneously. The attempted massive evacuation of people from the Narmada valley in India, the naked onslaught on the Ogoni people in Nigeria in the interests of oil majors and the military junta, the forced migration under military and state coercion in Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, Thailand and Malaysia, the massive victimization of local fishing communities and the destruction of the natural cycles of regeneration of the diverse fish stock in the name of export promotion, the unprecedented onslaught on the Asian regions forests and the displacement and impoverishment of millions of forest dwellers from their sources of subsistence and identity--these are just a few prominent cases that have been exposed internationally in the past decade. In India, for instance,



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development projects displace over half a million people every year--most receive only minimal cash compensation.

These and other linked processes generate social, cultural and economic insecurities on an ever increasing scale engendering a vast new array of social tension and conflicts across the world. In the multifarious ways in which the dominant regime legitimates the accumulation of power and wealth, it contributes to the undermining of the moral basis of society. Witness the large number of women, even girl children, sold for prostitution, often across borders. Witness the large scale exploitation of the working child. Witness the slavery like conditions in manufacturing and service industries across the Asian region even in the centres of affluence. Witness the growing numbers of workers in the informal sector working in highly polluted, debilitating industries. Witness the growing under- and unemployed. Witness the brutalization of the mind that takes place by the increasing onslaught of senseless programming on television.

Simultaneously, the growing homogenization in culture, consumption patterns, and values, imposed by this regime is undermining or destroying cultural and biological diversity. Almost no part of the globe remains unaffected by these globalizing trends of cultural annihilation, ecological destruction, widespread social and economic insecurity and large-scale marginalisation of people. Instead of creating a peaceful world where diversity and pluralism are sources of civilizational wealth, this forced homogenization process we is giving rise to new kinds of people-to-people conflicts, often accentuating extremist and chauvinistic elements of dominant and minority cultures and identities.

Whilst globalization is adversely impacting on a majority of peoples, the forces of religious extremism, chauvinism and exclusion are strengthening themselves in societies across

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the region. Ironically, globalization has reinforced insecurities and undermined privileges in turn legitimating the influence of extremists who are redefining nationalism, selectively invoking or re-legitimizing religious ritual and asserting identities that are threatening minorities, women and other vulnerable populations. In many countries, the religious right is managing to establish a marriage of convenience with the forces of globalization creating in the process a vice like hold from above and below. Undoubtedly, progressive movements will have to politically address the simultaneous challenges of resurgent and reactionary nationalism as well as unaccountable and undemocratic processes of globalization.

**Global centers of power** These unsustainable processes are sustained by what we would like to call global power centers basically controlled by the North with selective and tactical alliances with elites in the industrializing world, centers which are not accountable to the overwhelming majority of the billions of people whose fate their decisions affect. Growing evidence also suggests a more organised effort among dominant economic and political actors to better coordinate the reconfiguring of national and global economies.

In a growing number of cases, these centers even exercise their power directly. It is no coincidence that during the political changes in Pakistan three years ago, the transition President was brought in from Washington, and was none other than Moeen Quereshi, till recently a senior Vice President of the World Bank (Quereshi is now one of those whose names are being considered for the post of Secretary-General of the UN). Similarly in India, the recent appointment of the new Finance Secretary, arguably the most powerful bureaucrat in the economic domain, was not only subject to approval by the Bank but was an individual who had worked for them as a senior economist for a

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substantial part of his professional career. The use of subtle and overt retaliatory tactics (like the use of Super 301 by the US) or the selective invocation of "human rights issues" as a means of forcing industrializing nations to "fall in line" are now a common occurrence.

The resulting policy prescriptions and structural changes that have been implemented (or are suggested) in countries as diverse as Papua New Guinea and Pakistan, have legitimated an extractive economy which is primarily geared (by the elites who control or acquiesce in the current patterns of world trade and provide fiscal incentives) to invest in export oriented extraction. In fact, for most parts of the Third World, there has been a declining control that local producers have on what they produce, how they produce it and at what price they can sell it in the market. There has been an elimination or decline in all forms of popular democratic control of the economy. Over the past decade, the general tendency has been that this control has slipped from the hands of national ruling elites. It can be argued that there is a progression in the loss of control from the local to the national and to the global on terms that the local rarely has any say in. The new rhetoric of competitive market ideology makes it abundantly clear that the economically vulnerable have only themselves to blame. At a meeting in late-1995 in New Delhi, the new World Trade Organization (WTO) chief, Mr. Renato Ruggiero, asserted that capital and resource flows ought not to be hampered by issues of labour and technology mobility.

The critical loss of control is also so graphically evident from the fact that a few financial managers now control the over \$1 trillion traded every day in global speculative capital that has become increasingly mobile across national boundaries. The executive director of the Bretton Woods Reform Organization in his report, 'Enough is Enough!' wrote that, "it has been estimated that at least six million children under

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five years of age have died each year since 1982 in Africa, Asia and Latin America because of the anti-people, even genocidal focus of IMF-World Bank structural adjustment programmes." Little or no attention has been paid to land distribution, to the recovery, regeneration and distribution of degraded lands or to structural changes that would generate a more equitable access to and control over resources. In fact, what has invariably been witnessed is giving the privileged greater access to land, water, subsidy, credit, and technology as well as to systems which provided people access to credit and other resources (public distribution systems, cooperatives, etc.). It would not be an exaggeration or a sweeping generalization to say that the rights and eco-cultural spaces of millions have been subordinated to the interests of corporate and industrial development.

### **Asia's miracle: an epicenter of globalization**

Where in this context is Asia-Pacific, specifically the East and Southeast subregion, situated? The East and Southeast Asian sub-region in the past decade has made unprecedented ascendancy in the global economic setting, with fabulous GNP growth taking hold of most countries including China, and it seems that the South Asian subcontinent is also being drawn into the GNP growth-oriented economic integration process. Viewed from above, the Asia-Pacific is undoubtedly transforming itself into the global center of capital accumulation, attracting more and more investment and expanding a wide variety of economic activities. With 60% of the world's population concentrated in a region rich in mineral and other resources, offering vast markets and market potential, and, last but not least, comprising of major state regimes including big powers like China, the Asia-Pacific region is projected to have the potential of dramatically shaping the world in the coming century. The Asia-Pacific region is clearly becoming a major focus of global economic and political contention.

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The United States is stepping afresh into this region eager not only to partake of, and benefit from, the Asian economic dynamic but also to prevent it from emerging as an auto-centric economic sphere. Having forced NAFTA on Canada and Mexico (and having contributed to the generation of elite aspirations in other Latin American countries to join the "preferred club") as a step toward institutionalization of its hemispheric dominance, the United States dreams of annexing the Asia-Pacific region as a vast free trade area under its aegis in order to complement its waning economic competence and to rival the nascent European Union. (We have been witness to the Union's unilateral opposition to the unjust and objectionable economic embargo of Cuba). The 1993 Seattle APEC summit was a major demonstration of the US will to push itself into the Asia-Pacific scene.

The European Union eyes this whole process with suspicion and irritation as Asia is as much a tough rival as a vast market in which its business has excellent opportunities. It should not be missed, however, that all this is occurring within the context of Asia's deeper commitment to the globalization process, and not away from it. This is a dual process and overall the process follows the same logic as the general globalization logic--free trade and free market where the strong prey on the weak. The relatively autonomous regional economic integration that has progressed over the past decades, and accelerated in the past few years, particularly in the Northeast and Southeast Asia, proceeded not in a vacuum but as an integral part of this globalization process in the sense that all these economies are oriented toward the global market and that TNCs--increasingly belonging to the region--along with governments, are the most powerful promoters of this process.

Unlike the NAFTA style formal institutional integration, regional economic integration in Asia has developed rather informally and organically across borders though formal

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regional arrangements like AFTA and APEC. This could very well be called a billiard model: Japan playing the pioneer role, transferring momentum to the Newly Industrializing Economies (NIEs), which in turn transfer momentum to ASEAN countries and overseas Chinese capital, all of which deliver a final push to China and now to Indochina. As it shifts from one group to another, the momentum multiplies with local supply of new energies. The chief actors in this integration are business interests supported and serviced by the state.

Business and governments among themselves decide on programmes like triangles of growth, ecologically suicidal large dam and energy projects, the construction of infrastructure that primarily benefits them, etc. while business interests are given relatively free reign and significant incentives to pursue their short-term, mid-term and long-term goals through the continued exploitation of labour and natural resources. There is little concern for those who are victimised in this process.

This integration involves complex pecking orders. Since Japan sees itself as part of "the North", it strives to shape the regional economy to its advantage while guarding its near monopolistic technological privileges, providing aid to promote its business and strategic interests while NIEs business operates throughout the area as well as the rest of the world callously exploiting local labour and resources. Increasingly, the ASEAN countries are following suit. In this uneven GNP-oriented development, hierarchical exploitative relationships have been introduced, the relative early comers exploiting the relative late-comers. There is a clear pattern in this "development." Where economies have grown rapidly, the myth of growth in GNP has succeeded to temporarily conceal the creation of social and cultural subordination as well as ecological pollution, disruption and degradation. In every country, rapid growth has produced

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expanding urban middle classes and a class of nouveau riche who uncritically embrace consumerism and the fetish for money and material goods. The media contributes to the propagation of consumer values which are fast capturing the imagination of a wide cross-section of the population, including those who are subjugated and impoverished by the same system. The injustices suffered by the vast number of marginalized people, particularly women and people in and from the countryside, as well as the depredations on the environment are concealed from the public eye or justified as the necessary cost of development and growth. This global/regional integration process often divides the people in mutual antipathy as they are brought together in a hierarchical division of labour.

From the eyes of the globalization regime, what matters is not the fate of the majority of the people, their livelihoods, and their life-sustaining environment. For growing powers like India and China, "middle classisation" of 20-30% of the population, which itself will be a staggering 5-600 million people, is enough to create new markets to absorb goods and services for thriving transborder businesses.

### **Poverty and unsustainability**

Neo-classical economics and radical political economy have provided significantly different explanations for poverty and underdevelopment in the Third World. However, they both view development as the key to the eradication of poverty. This belief runs wide and deep among development practitioners and analysts who despite an overwhelming body of evidence to the contrary, continue to believe that development and rapid economic growth are part of the solution, rather than a basic part of the problem. It is by now clear that poverty cannot be eradicated just by increasing production and gross national product.



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Here, let us take the case of Thailand because it is considered a success story in its achievement of extraordinary high economic growth--a model for others to emulate. Its northeast, known as Isan, with a population of 22 million, has witnessed rapid industrialization/development processes in the past decade. A few years ago, Thai officials were boasting of Thailand as being a newly agro-industrializing country (NAIC), and not one of the NICs which, they said, ignored agriculture in favor of manufacturing. Undoubtedly, agricultural exports contributed to Thailand's GNP growth with the government encouraging farmers to grow, among other export crops, cassava for the Netherlands and other European countries where it is used as cattle feed.

One of the authors visited this region of Thailand recently. Predominantly hilly, it has been ravaged by erosion as its forests have been systematically plundered by commercial interests. The local farmers eke out an increasingly fragile existence by growing cassava and other cash crops on the hill slopes whose exposed surfaces are being further eroded with every rainfall. Asked how much he was paid for the cassava he was growing, a local farmer replied 50 satan per kilogram. The price was one baht until two years ago, he said, but now Europe restricts cassava import on the ground that the nitrogen content of cassava overburdens the European environment.

Something is definitely wrong with all this. Fifty satan, or a half of one baht, is worth less than two US cents. Farmers work hard only to lose money, but they have to because they need the cash income to survive. Growing cassava compounds their debts which they will not be able to repay since the intensive cultivation of cassava on relatively barren slopes will, according to an organic agricultural expert, turn the land barren in five years. They will have to sell or abandon their land, and go to Bangkok in search of a subsistence wage. Abandoned land rapidly erodes and an



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area like Isan will experience a widening circle of impoverishment, deprivation, destruction of environment, and disintegration of rural communities. This reality is the underside of the "dynamic" process of world market-oriented agro-industrialization.

The case of Isan is but a tiny piece of the general picture which underscores the working of the deprivation process. The examples can be multiplied in each of our societies: eucalyptus plantations (disguised as reforestation) for Japanese paper mills, expanding potato cultivation in India for the production and export of potato chips, onion growing under contract farming systems for supply to Japan, the colonization of coastal areas to intensively breed shrimp, integrated broiler culture under the control of multinational corporations, development of tourism at the cost of the sustenance of local communities and environment--these are symbolic examples of the deprivation process at work, in the name of increasing exports and the GNP. Every people's group has similar stories to narrate--stories that powerfully illustrate the processes which generate poverty and ecological unsustainability in one and the same process. Poverty and unsustainability are thus both local and global interrelated issues. Undoubtedly therefore, the struggle against poverty and unsustainable development necessitates a multi-layered political struggle.

Since the deprivation disempowers the people, this is a struggle to empower the people (or facilitate their struggles to create their own spaces) to democratise the entire structure at all levels--local, national, and global. Only then can the dynamic of the deprivation process be countered and overcome. The deeply inculcated idea that poverty can be overcome by increasing GNP without changing the global power relations as well as internal power relations, as well as the delusion that the current type of development would become "sustainable" if only enough money was spent on

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containing pollution and conservation may apply only in the short term and to specific locations, but overall and in the long term, they are illusory. The processes of generating economic growth through industrialization and urbanization is clearly incompatible with the environmental sustainability of the planet.

In the context of poverty, hierarchical power relations will continue to produce and reproduce poverty as power centres shift to new positions of control justifying the sacrifices of weaker social groups in the name of development. Industrialization under this hierarchical order does not alter the order itself as the world power center shifts forward to a new position of command and a stronger monopoly of knowledge. Globally, and domestically in most countries, industrialization predominantly caters to the needs of this hierarchical structure. This system has not alleviated poverty but aggravated it.

Today, given the overwhelming evidence from all over the world, it would not be an exaggeration to say that the dominant patterns of economic development and cultural practice are incompatible with social justice and ecological sustainability and are contributing to the creation of global chaos and disorder. Given that the dominant system is so intrinsically and clearly unsustainable, everybody--the United Nations, World Bank, governments, and even transnational corporations--pays lip service to, and defends sustainable development--a concept that has increasingly been shorn of any real meaning. This cooptation of convenience fails to challenge the organizing principles of the globalization regime. Inevitably, most efforts to make the unsustainable sustainable are futile making it necessary to legitimate the dominant development process through a wide range of sops, palliatives and consumerist choices. The 1995 Social Summit document recommends "sustained growth and sustainable development" (reportedly after

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significant nudging by some Asian governments), a mockery of the very idea of sustainable development. We do not believe that lip service and palliatives will help deal with the root causes for the process that inevitably generates unsustainability. It is these foundations that should be more systematically and collectively addressed.

## **II. TOWARD A NEW PARADIGM**

### **Beyond Conventional strategies**

While it would be presumptuous in today's time to propose a new model or models, there is no doubt that bold steps have to be taken if the possibility of a just, ecologically sustainable world have to be realised. We face bold challenges. Having recognised that the globalization-from-above regime is incapable of ensuring egalitarian and sustainable societies, we face two significant questions:

- (1) What should be the defining characteristics of new civilizational models which are not only sustainable but also enhance human respect, social equity, and human decency in relation to nature?
- (2) What are the steps and processes through which these models can be realised?

In this context, it now seems clear that the conventional strategies for overcoming capitalism are not really relevant. Despite apparent initial successes in the 20th century (particularly those in former colonial and semi-colonial territories with the establishment of independent nation states), these strategies have largely failed to introduce a new political culture and new civilizational models that are a just and ecologically sane alternative to the modern project of rapid industrial development. For most countries, it has largely been a process of trying to catch-up with the

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industrialized world and its promise of power and affluence--that too based on an unquestioned unilinear development and militarization model.

The collapse of the socialist bloc is also an indication of its failure to catch up with this dominant model. The race which was aggravated by tragic, often brutal, consequences of state-bureaucratic control on their own people, brought about the general collapse of state socialism in the last decade of

this century. Where the party-state structure is maintained, the states switched to "free market socialism" which is hardly distinguishable (in its basic guiding principles) from free market capitalism. This realization leads us to a crucial question: how do we view the notion of progress and development? This is a difficult question to answer, but we must try to answer it. In answering, we base ourselves on what is available--conceptual and practical experiences that defy not only consequences of the dominant model but also its fundamental assumptions--many that have emanated from the wisdom, the experiences and the practice of democratic struggles the world over--struggles that are both addressing the local, national and global power structures and that represent the diverse efforts to establish a democratic polityrooted in the arenas of the local and extending to the global.

These countervailing consciousness and practices assert that rather than accepting development as an unquestionable truth, it is important to demonstrate that it is a product of a particular historical configuration of power relations where "underdevelopment" is not a natural fact but an imaginary geography created by the developed world. By essentialising as distinct categories of "developed" and "underdeveloped," industrialised countries have defined the underdeveloped in such a way that they can continue to control and manage

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their affairs as though they were the sole standard bearer of civilization.

What many of us argue therefore is that we are not working for development alternatives but alternatives to development, implying a significant paradigmatic change. We also recognise that "unmaking" development is not only an enormous and difficult task, but also a challenging and rewarding one--a task which more and more of us must take upon ourselves. The magnitude of the challenge and the need to envisage a long-term struggle is manifest in the fact that the dominant system has consolidated itself over 500 years of colonial and post-colonial control--of societies, cultures, minds, ecosystems and even of life itself.

### **Reconceptualising the State**

A crucial aspect of democratisation processes is the need to reconceptualise the state. We recognise that increasingly, in the context of the growing domination of global economic and political power centres, the state has limited choices to respond to the range of democratic urges and assertions within society let alone contribute in the promotion of egalitarian and ecologically sane alternatives.

As capital globalises and economic power centres make sweeping and binding decisions (like the formation of WTO), more states may (by default or simple inability) cease to be protectors of their own people. Privatization impels the state to give preference to private capitalist enterprises, with a declining capacity to support the widening of social control into the hands of primary producers and those who have been historically marginalised and disempowered.

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In other words, in many cases, especially where the IMF-World Bank imposes structural adjustment programmes, the state is abandoning major elements of its social responsibility. In fact, there seems to be a perverted redefinition of the state. Instead of the state being (supposedly) a supreme instrument to protect its own people, it now increasingly considers itself to be the agency ensuring participation in the globalization regime. This redefinition is often predicated on the largely untested assumption that the new infusions of economic activity to fuel growth which in turn would eventually benefit the people within its boundaries. What is witnessed in practice, however, is that not only is the trickle down assumption flawed, states have to inevitably use their coercive and cooptative machinery to routinely suppress human rights in an effort to facilitate domestic and global capital. For instance, the destruction of tropical forests together with the forced dislocation of indigenous communities living within them or large-scale displacement of peoples continue to be justified either as the state's "right to development" or in the "national interest."

It follows from this that any task for a democratic transformation must address itself to the global power structure itself as well as transformation of power relationships within the country concerned. Precisely because the state equates "national interest" to economic growth (to be increasingly achieved by integration into the globalization process), addressing national and global power structures must entail a fundamental critique of the dominant model of development.

That is why in the Minamata Declaration in 1989 we in PP21 called for the democratization of the global power structure through transborder participatory democracy exercised by interlinked alliances of people the world over. This call, of course, does not absolve the state of its accountability and

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responsibility to the people within its territory. When we gathered in the 1993 PP21 programme in Thailand, we expressed the inter-related levels of our struggle for democratization as "participatory democracy at the local, national, and global levels." This calls for a critical look at the traditional strategies of social change. Most state-centered solutions entail the notion that real changes can occur only after the state becomes "ours" or through the institution of state policies where any people's project (either in the form of social movements or alternative development efforts) is instrumentally viewed as integral to the ultimate seizure of the state by popular forces represented by their political parties or formations. This "state-centered" perspective effectively postpones the transformation of socio-economic and cultural relations until the day of decisive victory, the political revolution. This type of strategy, either revolutionary or social democratic, is no longer valid for two reasons.

Firstly, experience has shown that what comes into being is some form of centralised control, which, most often, runs counter to the expansion of people empowering themselves in increasingly autonomous and mutually supportive and accountable ways. Secondly, the globalization process with which most of these regimes align, undermines the basis of the sovereign state to exercise its ability to carry out policies that are largely in the interests of a majority of people living under its domain.

Yet, while there has been an erosion of the power and credibility of the state, it is important to realise that, in most of our societies, it is still an important actor and that in the lives of millions of people (mostly the discriminated and the powerless), it still matters. Undoubtedly, a democratic state is more responsive and accountable than a feudal, dictatorial or militaristic state. What then should be the way we need to migrant think and act in the context of the present character

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and pressures on our nation-states as well as of the regional and global alliances that they are increasingly becoming part of?

We argue that we must continue to struggle for a democratised state prepared to guarantee space for people's alliances and the emergence and development of relatively self-sufficient and autonomous societies. Towards facilitating the creation and strengthening of this space for these mutually accountable and democratic societies as well as for people's alliances, the state must actively assist in marginalizing impediments to their emergence and development. Some of these impediments are exploitative land and asset ownership systems, political repression on democratic people's movements, state excesses and human rights abuses, sexism that justifies violence against women, instigation of racial, communal, and other violence, unbridled powers of capitalist who utilise inhuman conditions for workers, particularly women and children. In fact, in many centres of people's mobilisation, groups and communities are realising that they cannot wait for changes in the existing system and for a democratic state to come into being. Through their actions and reflections, they have already begun the process of building and strengthening alternative socio-economic and cultural relationships rooted locally but necessarily in active interaction with the dominant systems. With this change of perspective, social movements, people's resistance and other forms of collective action, as well as "alternative development" endeavors are seen as real and existing efforts towards building a new kind of society here and now (even if imperfectly and partially), instead of a mere experiment for a major drama to be staged some day in the future.



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### **Integrating resisting, changing, and building**

This perspective gives us new ways of organising and building coalitions and alliances. The state-centred pattern of governance separated political struggle from "developmental work." In fact, a majority of NGOs follow this dichotomous existence. So, the struggle of peasants for land redistribution or for control over productive resources are seen at a different plane from pursuing organic agriculture and from digging wells to provide drinking water.

We increasingly witness and need to move towards strategies and practice that do not make these differences--we need to ensure that, as with movements all over the world, struggling is also building and building also implies an engagement in struggle. The strategy of providing drinking water then has to engage itself with the politics of land and water as well as with the issue of consumption and conservation. The struggle and building elements need to be seen as inseparable integrative aspects of a holistic political strategy. We witness numerous instances of the remarkable convergence of these two types of activities--the struggle which also builds and building that engages in struggle. This artificial separation was only made to look natural because of the conceptual dichotomy inherent in the state-centered strategy.

One of the authors is related to an ambitious regional alternative development plan called People's Agricultural Plan 21 (PAP21), conducted at the grassroots level in the island of Negros in the Philippines. Dominantly dependent on sugar-cane plantations, local sugar workers were struggling for decades against landowners and brutal military repression, seeking land reform as well as national democratization. Having secured some democratic space through struggle and some land through land occupation and

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assertion of control over commons, local communities set out to remake the entire monoculture-based economy (and the distorted and hierarchical social relationships) into an organic agriculture-based economy by strengthening linkages between small farmers, fishing communities, women, and the urban poor. Those engaged in political struggle are now developing organic farming, alternative trading, and community building. They have established links with cooperatives of consumers in Japan and direct cooperative to cooperative relationships across national boundaries have been established.

The dramatic mobilization of the National Fishworkers Federation in India is also a case in point. For the past twenty years, they have been at the forefront of protecting the rights of traditional fishing communities. These communities had evolved complex systems of fishing based on a remarkable knowledge of astronomy, climate and sea conditions such that there would be adequate replenishment of the fish stock. The advent of mechanised fishing and trawling as well as the recent attempts by the Indian government to sign joint ventures with Indian and foreign mechanised ships has impelled a remarkable movement that has spread along India's entire coastline. The NFF linked horizontally with support groups in India, with alliances like the National Alliance of People's Movements (of which it is a central member) and with solidarity groups all over the world. The non-violent militant agitations coupled with tactical negotiations with government representatives continue to contribute towards significantly protecting the rights of hundreds of thousands of traditional fisherfolk.

Another initiative that casts light on an alternative way of organizing and on the interrelatedness of building and changing is taking place in a remote mountain village in southern China. The women of the community, having organised themselves into an all-women cooperative credit

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union and engaged in people-to- people trade for income-generation, have also embarked on several collective projects to provide clean drinking water, conduct medical check-ups, manage an orchard, and run evening classes for women and a kindergarten for their kids. One of their endeavours is to nurture among members a renewed interest in collective projects borne out of their own needs and conducted in a spirit of mutuality, in the process of which they have to combat selfishness, suspicion and alienation that had characterised their interactions in the past. The women's understanding of the relations between gender and social power, and between gender and environmental destruction ("aggressive" males in the village tend to think solely in terms of acquiring material wealth, subordinating other considerations), as well as their empowerment in the family (such as against wife-beating) also emerge in this same process of women's economic empowerment and community building.

In the new perspective, resistance of communities against, for instance, a large dam project which threatens to displace them should be seen as a basic component of building an alternative society even if the communities are not, as yet, working towards establishing sustainable livelihoods. Government officials and many amongst them argue that their "sacrifice" is needed because the nation requires more electricity and water. The communities' refusal to comply and their adherence to their way of life and to priorities that are in their immediate and long term interests contribute to the debate on the need to reconsider the dominant energy and water intensive pattern of development. In the absence of a categorical refusal to move, there would have been little policy change. Between resisting and building are a broad arena of other activities which seek institutional changes. This is a vast area of activity by people's movements and other concerned groups directed toward respective governments, United Nations, and other inter-governmental,

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regional and international institutions. The activities range from lobbying, petitioning, campaigning, participation in elections to mass mobilization and public demonstrations. Institutional changes and changes in law and policy or, a change of the government itself, can be a step forward toward expanding the space for an alternative society if it is linked to, and substantiated by, the building of resistance and the building of alternatives. Without resistance, institutional changes will be confined to those that the establishment can comfortably absorb without affecting the basic premises of the industrialization/urbanisation/ globalization regime. Without building, institutional gains will be coopted by actors in the dominant systems. On the other hand, without institutional changes, resisting and building will stay vulnerable. It appears that the time is ripe for us to demolish our conceptual barriers that functionally separate the areas of people's activities which are originally integrated at the community level. We must encourage and participate in new forms of collective action and people's movements in which resisting, changing, and building are consciously integrated.

Beginning to build alternative societies and systems, and countering the seemingly monolithic and powerful globalization regime will require this type of people's movement. It seems obvious that when we talk about people's alliances of hope, we have in mind coalesced and empowered communities where building, resisting, and changing are one. Natural circularity-based society. We are at the right juncture today, given the experience of fifty years of post-colonial and post-second world war development and the growing democratic stirring all over the world, to place before you the concept of natural circularity and the critical need to restore and internalise its logic in human society. What do we mean by natural circularity, especially when we are talking of human civilization? It stems from the recognition that human beings as living beings are part of nature dependent ultimately on the natural regeneration and

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circulation of resources which are integral to the life systems on this planet. Plants utilise solar energy, capture carbon from the air and suck nutrition from the soil. Animals eat their leaves and fruits and return excrement to the soil. Eventually, they also die and return to the soil. So do the plants themselves. Microbes and bacteria process dead life into nutrients and the cycle of life is sustained. Similar drama is played out in more complex ways in ecosystems all over the planet. Sustainability means something as simple and as profound as human society integrated with this circularity of life systems. And as living beings, humans cannot be free from this circularity. Not only individuals but civilizations themselves cannot sustain themselves if they disrespect or destroy this circularity. If a particular society temporarily succeeds in neglecting or cynically disregarding natural circularity, it is shifting the consequences to other societies and to future generations, threatening the very sustainability of life on the planet.

Circularity celebrates the cyclical and rejects the unilinear. This conception of circularity should not be misunderstood as stagnation. On the contrary, it should be seen as a defence of diversity animated by the dynamic processes of generation and regeneration of life, where human society, as an integral part of the planetary life system enhancing its civilizational potential. It celebrates the creation and recreation of new relationships within itself as well as with the natural world in ways which enable it to live in symbiosis with nature. This remaking of human society should not be considered as a necessity imposed on us by the environmental crisis. Rather, it is a process of our society liberating itself from the strain of limitless linear development and overcoming domination, oppression, exploitation, patriarchy, and arrogance much of which are embedded in the dominant model itself. The natural circularity-based civilization is thus a civilization informed by, and at once critiquing, our legacies of knowledge, philosophy, religion and technology including the achievements of modern development. It should go hand

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in hand with the creation of new human wisdom. The possibilities of building a proactive engagement with circularity is special to the human species and human civilization where we consciously orient and reorient ourselves towards a natural circularity-based civilization. The modern paradigm of development and progress used its knowledge of Nature to "conquer", manipulate and exploit it making us apathetic or oblivious to both the roots of our being and our role on this fragile planet.

Reorganizing society and economy and our own lives on the basis of natural circularity involves a veritable paradigm shift which takes us beyond the now widely accepted sustainable development model which attempts to make the unsustainable sustainable without questioning the philosophy and praxis of the developmental system which itself produces unsustainability.

Let us take one example to show what change the natural circularity model brings into our approach. Under the linear development model, the debt crisis of the Third World would be overcome if debts are repaid. Yet, if we take a look at the reality of consumption distribution, the North, with 20% of the world population, consumes 70% of its energy, 75% of its metals, 85% of its wood and 60% of its food. This reflects a near monopoly of the world's resources by a privileged minority with little consideration of the natural circularity of natural resources, and the deep structural injustices that this maldistribution entails. Even within the present developmental system, this reality underscores the impossibility of a majority of the world achieving the lifestyles that the North enjoys.

Now, structural adjustment programmes prescribed to address the debt crisis compel indebted countries to re-orient production to expand export most often at the expense of meeting domestic needs. Even if a balance is restored in

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meeting the debt servicing schedules or clearing the debt (at the sacrifice of the livelihoods of millions of people), this success will only compound the imbalances in consumption since an export led thrust will continue to further disrupt and distort the global circularity of resources. Inevitably, what results is the depletion of natural resources and soil fertility, an increase in pollution and environmental degradation and the marginalisation of most who depend on these resources for their subsistence. Additionally, even the environment in the North will be adversely affected by the piling up of wastes. From the perspective natural circularity on a global scale, we need to work towards a global dynamic equilibrium--an equilibrium that is almost completely neglected by the present patterns of achieving economic growth. This confronts us with the major challenge of regulating global economic activity in the interest of ecological sustainability as well as economic equity among and between people and nations.

A question that is often posed to us is: on what basis, in today's world, can we talk about restoration of natural circularity? To respond, we need to go back to our inheritances and endowments. The communities of the Asia-Pacific region abound in a staggering wealth of cultures, religions, traditions, technologies, philosophies, and knowledge systems which project world views and views of nature that encapsulate and conceptualise at various levels the organic and cyclic relationships of human society with nature. They are full of elements that counter and invalidate the linear, utilitarian approach of modern industrialism. For instance, we witness the influence of Buddhist philosophy in the organic agriculture movement in Thailand. The Gandhian tradition inspires numerous alternative building efforts in India and other South Asian countries. One of the elements of the 1989 PP21 programme in Japan, was the indigenous people's conference in Hokkaido which in turn inspired the whole programme with



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what the indigenous people's groups coming from different settings called spirituality--the shared attitude of belonging to, and reciprocity with, the earth.

Though the importance of this ethic is beyond the scope of this essay, must acknowledge that we have collectively inherited numerous knowledge systems, ethical frames and practices, which, if creatively adapted can contribute to the process of overcoming the destructive linear development model. These are the alternatives in practice and many activists engaged in popularising them protest against the debate on alternatives which, at one level, excludes (even insults) those who belong to a "vernacular tradition" and, at another, considers these systems and practices , "regressive," "technologically backward," or just "irrelevant." A circularity-based perspective can learn a great deal from the wisdom of our traditions. It needs emphasising that the defence of our rich heritage does not imply an uncritical acceptance of oppressive and discriminatory practices within these systems. This is why we have stressed the importance of adaptation. We need to sustain a continuous debate on what comprises the baby and what the bathwater. For instance, the complex knowledge systems of traditional fishworkers, must be nurtured and strengthened but if there are community practices among them that legitimate discrimination, these will have to be creatively challenged so that the community reforms them.

Within the ethic of circularity, we also need to move from property rights to living rights. In most parts of the world, the struggle for a comprehensively rethought pattern of economic development based on this ethic is crucial. Contrary to existing law and policy, all peoples have a basic right to a place in society and on the earth with access to the life-sustaining resources required to create a secure and fulfilling life for themselves. Only the dominant development paradigm as well as structures of domination and oppression



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have devalued and marginalised them, and their significance and value can be restored in the evolution of a circularity-based civilization.

### **Gender and circularity**

The paradigm of circularity will remake not only human relations with nature but also social relations between human beings. Gender relations are the most relevant case in point. Experiences all over the world suggest that there is a correlation between the intensification of Nature's exploitation and the subjugation of women by men. For millennia, women have evolved a greater stake in the productivity and sustainability of the resource base that was the basis of their livelihoods and their societies. With the "conquest" of Nature and the emergence of modern agriculture, industrialization and the growth of cities, there was a progressive devaluation of Nature and an intensification of its adverse impacts on women.

Production and conquest were increasingly privileged as industrialization banished from the public arena the whole process of human reproduction as though the cyclical reproduction of humans in the form of reproduction of their daily life as well as generational alteration were only instrumental to production. In the privileging of maximum efficiency, maximum productivity and maximum profits, industrialism thus devalued the reproductive side of human life. Consequently, women's work was pushed into "shadow" or "invisible" work. A natural circularity-based civilization will correct this distorted attitude which denigrates reproduction and will integrate production and reproduction into a holistic conception of life. Natural circularity will thus inevitably be informed by values rooted in human reproductive activities as they are actively placed at the center of society. This requires far-reaching and radical cultural and relational changes in our societies,

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eradicating the roots of patriarchy, and inevitably requiring a transformation in the basic assumptions of the industrial civilization.

Toward this, the challenge will be to abolish the gender-based division of work between paid and unpaid work, making the invisible visible and fully restoring the value of what was hitherto consigned to the "shadows." A concerted effort in our communities and societies will have to enhance women's reproductive health/rights and recognise and respect their human rights, and their rights as full, equal human beings. Women are political actors with a central role to play in not only holding dominant systems accountable but in the realisation of a circularity-based society.

The women's movement as a struggle against patriarchy of all forms and other forces of domination has become a very important force in the forging of an alternative civilizing process. Being relegated to the margins and subjected to various socio-cultural, economic and political relations of subjugation, the experience of women, particularly women in the "South" represents a powerful critique of the present "order".

Thus, the feminist critique is increasingly a critique of the discourse of "progress." But this critique of "progress" is not a regressive manoeuvre which romanticises tradition. We are clear that "tradition" is used to control people at two levels. On the one hand, tradition, however oppressive it may be toward women, is upheld as an "authority" to be honoured, within which collective identity is said to be rooted, and without which living would be senseless leading to a feeling of disorientation and loss. On the other, what is traditional has to be delegitimised, if not despised, because it is unscientific, irrational and superstitious. A radical critique would accordingly move in two directions.

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On the one hand, it would uncover the authoritative ground of tradition as an instrument to control and regulate people's lives through a technology of control that orders people and things within a hierarchical social order according to a polarised thinking that sees things in terms of relations of opposites, with one of the poles being prioritised. Such a way of thinking creates a powerful tool for the control of the population by those occupying positions at the top of the hierarchy, far removed from the reality of the grassroots. Through various social, cultural and economic institutions which legitimate the mechanisms of production, reproduction and consumption, the daily existence of the population is regulated. The colonizing effects of this process are disabling, since most centralised forms of control and governance rarely respect the inter-relationships between people, their communities and their life-support systems.

On the other hand, a feminist perspective recognises that "the traditional" marginalised by the dominant patterns of "development" is at the same time a critique of these patterns. What are marginalised in the forward march of "progress" include women's knowledges and experiences, local knowledges and cultures of rural communities, and traditional knowledges and cultures of minorities. Many of these knowledges and experiences sustain intimate relationships with the circularity of nature, with human existence adapting to natural cycles, thus also offering resistance to the present world order which coupled with increasingly centralising economic controls, extracts time and labour from the human bodies at the expense of the life-support systems of the millions of people and of the planet as a whole. In order to reopen spaces for alternative modes of knowing so as to make ground for a paradigm shift, most current knowledge production has to be challenged. The division between research and practice has to be dissolved with most research becoming a political

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commitment as an integral part of the process of change. By restoring the circular relationship between research and action in a participatory mode that seeks to understand people's lives as they live them, what is being promoted are alternative modes of knowing.

### **Nexus with nature**

The notion of circularity takes us further to the centrality of agriculture and other primary production pursuits--on the land, in the waters and in the forests as this is the nexus between any human society and nature where in the final analysis circularity is rooted. A society based on circularity must at its centre have a biomass and fish-based economy--it is here that inescapably we are in an integral interaction with nature--an interaction that can sustain itself only within the ethic and practice of circularity. First and foremost, that is where food comes from. Food basically cannot be, and should not be, produced like industrial products. We must acknowledge today that industrialism in its present form is not only unsustainable but that it cannot provide adequate livelihood for all the inhabitants of the planet. The food crisis and food security are thus powerful themes as we step into the new century. Only the principles of circularity, justice, human rights, and democracy can guarantee sustainable livelihoods. This lends urgency to the task of reversing ecological degradation, of recovering and regenerating the capacities and capabilities of sustainable natural systems. The history of industrialization, particularly in the third world, has been a history of subjugation of agriculture by the manufacturing industry and of the countryside by burgeoning urban centers. This has also been a process of ever increasing marginalization, and thus impoverishment, of peasants, fisherfolk, and forest dwellers. It is obvious that the acute urban conflicts plaguing most countries in Asia have some of their roots in the impoverishment, subjugation, and marginalization of rural

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communities. Globally, the marginalization of agriculture and the peripheralization of the peasantry has caused a phenomenal growth in the number of migrant workers (within and across national boundaries) and a massive population inflow into big cities where a majority of them eke out their living as "the urban poor." It is the contention of this essay that if in the post-colonial period, rural communities in the third world had been sustainably enriched, the acute poverty that plagues the bulk of the world population today would have been largely evaded.

But what do we mean by "sustainably enriched"? Growing evidence from a wide variety of countries suggests that the "Green Revolution" approach, namely the so-called modern agriculture dependent on fossil fuels--chemical fertilizer, pesticides, herbicides--and ever increasing demands on surface and ground water is unsustainable. Traditional agriculture can produce one calorie of food with less than one calorie (in most cases 1/2) of input, while "industrial" agriculture requires almost 10 calories for every calorie of output. Moreover, industrialization of agriculture through mono-cropping and contract farming means, wherever it is carried out, means new subjugation of farmers to giant agribusiness and loss of the direct producers' control on what they grow, and in many cases increasing indebtedness of farmers. No longer can our societies afford the luxury of measuring the contribution of the agricultural sector to GNP or to maintaining national security levels of food with little thought to the fact that this short term contribution is virtually consigning countries into a spiral of degraded lands, polluted and depleted aquifers and an expanding displaced population that is disaffected, in most cases indebted and insecure.

It is imperative that we also resist the processes by which agriculture itself is being rapidly reorganised in the industrial mode--hybridization, mass production, standardization of

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products, and vertical integration--all increasingly controlled by agribusiness.

### **Are there ways to reverse this trend?**

Let us go back to northeast Thailand whose environmental destruction and farmers' impoverishment we referred to earlier. As you drive through the dismal reddish landscape of Chayapun province, you suddenly see a forest and thicket emerge in the midst of dry, cassava-planted fields. It is a forest-farm developed by Mr. Prasert, well known as a "man who made a forest." He is a man of forty. Formerly, he grew cassava and corn by "modern methods" and got heavily indebted. He had to go to Bangkok to earn to repay the debts. But ten years ago, he came back to his farm with his wife, and began to do a different type of farming on the same barren field as his neighbors'. He set up a hut in the three hectare farm and began to plant a large variety of trees. Banana and fruit trees were planted in rows, and under the shade of those trees beans and vegetables were grown. He also planted lemon grass, cut it when it was grown and laid the leaves to cover the soil, and after the soil became rich with manure, he sowed rice seeds. The best rice yield he has achieved is 250 kilograms per rai (0.156 hectare). The farm is like an oasis in the desert. Stepping into his forest, the soil felt like a thick, damp carpet. The trees bear a variety of fruit around the year, which Mr. Prasert sells to some merchants as well as through his own small store on the roadside. His daughter, who returned from the town, helps her mother in managing this small business. The rice he gets from this forest farm is enough for his family, and he has now no debt to repay. He buys no fertilizer, no chemicals. The family certainly is not very rich in monetary terms. But they are by no means poor. They know how they can stay out of debt. On a bench by a new fish pond he dug recently, Mr. Prasert stretched himself on his back, and said he was happy surrounded by the trees he had planted. On asking him

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where he had got the knowledge about this type of farming, he replied it was the wisdom of Isan farmers that came through his father who had told him that if he wanted to have a farm, the first step was to plant trees. Mr. Prasert and his family have certainly cut the roots of the vicious cycle of unsustainable "development." They have demonstrated that even in the harsh and demanding environment of Isan, both poverty and unsustainability can be simultaneously overcome. This is not an isolated case. In that part of Thailand, there are networks of circularity-based organic and natural farmers, many based in the Buddhist view of nature, conducting mutual exchange of experience, training each other, and developing nature-friendly technologies.

Asia abounds in experiences of this kind---in almost every field of human endeavor. We can argue that these are scattered, and local practices which are not only difficult to aggregate but do not politically impinge on the dominant system. In fact, what is important, given our recognition of the disempowering and unsustainability of the current developmental regimes, is to celebrate and propagate stories like Mr. Prasert's which underline the profound importance for the need to restore a world based on circularity. Wherever possible, creative efforts must be linked so that those who base their practice on the philosophical and holistic values of agriculture, nature, and life become the foundation for the future society.

## **III. THE CHALLENGES FOR PP21**

What we face is obviously an enormously difficult and challenging task. Given the deeply entrenched and pervasive influence of the dominant pattern of economic development and given the web of institutions that have been built to propagate and legitimise this model, the task of reversing and transforming and creating parallel discourses and

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activities is a profound challenge. PP21 is one initiative that will continue to face this challenge by working together with, and as part of, communities and individuals across the world who are already thinking and acting collectively to meet this challenge, and to facilitate the formation of what we have called an "alliance of hope". It is in joining and strengthening them and expanding the legitimacy of their activities that the next phase of PP21's work must focus on.

This leads to numerous questions which are not answered yet and which we need to pool our strength and resources to answer. Here are a random few: what do we do with the upward growth of cities whose very existence is the legitimization of the colonisation of the countryside? How do we resolve the acute urban problems that every country faces? How can individual efforts towards building sustainable societies be integrated to become circularity-based socio-economic systems? How can the major divide between the so-called North and so-called South be overcome in the process of forming transborder alliances and building alternative systems? How do we control consumption without threatening the freedom to choose? How do we restrict technologies and corporate intrusions (domestic and transnational) that threaten sustainability? How can women's rights be enhanced within codified social structures that may practice sustainability? How can the often murderous and violent inter-ethnic conflicts be resolved ensuring fairness to both parties? What will be the nature of institutions and relationships between communities living in different yet linked ecological zones? These questions can be multiplied but are indicative of the range of debates and actions that have to be pursued in working towards a preferred world. Out of these questions, let us pick up a few for discussion.



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How can micro alternative models based on natural circularity be developed into viable, sustained, and ever synergizing systems capable of countervailing the logic and practice of the dominant system of globalization? These processes, as experience shows, necessitate networking through which experiences and ideas are exchanged and shared. But in view of what we have outlined as our collective tasks, we need more than that: a vision and practice towards alternative systems sustaining individuals and communities on a stable basis. This requires the organization of articulated relationships within a local socio/economy, between a local socio/economies and external economies, between rural and urban communities, and between communities in the "southern" settings and those in the "northern" settings.

Out of the numerous efforts being done in this direction let us cite a few cases just to make the points of argument clear. We have already introduced the example of the interaction and collaboration since 1986 between farmers and farm workers communities in the Negros Island in the Philippines, on the one hand, and Japanese solidarity groups and consumer cooperatives on the other. This collaboration has developed into ambitious plans of Negros grassroots communities and popular movements to turn the sugar-monoculture plantation economy of the island into a people-centered economy of self-reliance, organic, and integrated agriculture equipped with a local industrial base and people's financial facilities. This is called the People's Agricultural Plan 21 (PAP21).

Initially, a people's trade channel was created between Negros farmers and Japanese consumer cooperatives. Six hundred banana growing small farmers' families formed an autonomous association, and together with organisations of the urban poor and other people's associations in both countries, they set up alternative trading companies to

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deliver chemical-free bananas to Japanese consumer cooperatives whose aggregate membership is close to one million. The import quantity so far only represents 0.2% of Japan's total banana imports but this "business" embodies an alliance between significantly large people's groups of the two countries based on mutual support. The Japanese cooperatives are not NGOs set up for development work overseas. For decades, they have been working to create alternative, ecologically sound systems within Japan through empowerment of consumers and Japanese organic farmers and other small producers. On the other hand, the Negros farmers were struggling to survive in the face of both grave processes of militarisation and a highly exploitative economic and social environment. In 1988, they met and entered into partnership. Interestingly, the Negros banana price was set three times higher than the market price of multinational plantation bananas from another Filipino island, Mindanao. This has helped the banana growing communities to have enough surplus to develop a comprehensive system of organic agriculture in their areas.

The Negros banana represents a powerful message of hope linking northern communities with southern communities. In India, tribal communities in central and north-eastern areas are asserting their primacy and control over not only the natural resource base that sustains them but also the industrial and mining activity that takes place in their midst. The Alliance for Tribal Self-Rule has recently published its second declaration where they lay out this democratization-from-below perspective. In a recent struggle in the Chattisgarh area of the state of Madhya Pradesh, tribal communities, after a year long agitation outside a proposed Larsen and Tubro factory, were able to establish partial control over the factory and change what it produces. In the Kalahandi district of Orissa, over 50 villages have successfully challenged governments and corporations wanting to take over their lands and forests and are on the verge of

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completing a comprehensive exercise towards achieving relative self-sufficiency in a mutually interdependent way.

In many countries, particularly Japan and South Korea, sustained linkages between organic farmers in the countryside and ecologically oriented organised urban consumers have been developed on a significant scale. In Japan, consumer cooperatives born out of the radical student movement in the 1970s organised workable systems encouraging rebirth of organic agriculture in the countryside, and some of them like the Seikatsu Club successfully stepped into local green politics. Aside from cooperatives, there are other forms as well, like Korea's Hansallim movement which directly integrates organic farmers and urban consumers into "life community" movement based on new holistic views of life and lifestyle. In Thailand, emphasis is laid on linkages between urban poor and poor rural communities. Urban poor communities in Bangkok invested in the establishment of a rice mill in the Northeast through which local farmers supply inexpensive rice to urban poor. In all these, strengthening local economies is the basis of alternative system building. What these examples highlight is that smaller local producers must get precedence over larger producers and tradespeople and a vast diversity of local enterprises must be nurtured so that local economies (most labour intensive and based on low or renewable energy) can be strengthened. It is important to restore and strengthen the local market, thereby celebrating the local. This seems to be the only means of achieving several goals at the same time: strengthening local economies, protecting and conserving natural resources, promoting a diversity of cultural and social practices, strengthening indigenous traditions of community health and health care, restoring control to the primary producer, recreating the value of being connected to a "place", etc.

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Effectively, shifting subsidies to the support of smaller-scale diverse agriculture and smaller-scale enterprises would promote diverse economies and conserve a wide range of resources. In fact, throughout the Asia-Pacific, communities and NGOs are proving their capability to create and run alternative systems in a wide range of activities. The alliances of traditional health practitioners or alternative credit systems (like the Grameen bank or the SEWA bank) or networks of peasants nurturing and sharing traditional seeds are the better known instances of the immense wealth of initiatives that exist in the region. While the examples of "collapses" are widespread, these experiences of hope can be increasingly cited from all over the Third World--experiences and experiments that represent the potential and possibility of local communities (often linked with other communities and support groups) in urban and rural areas to develop relatively autonomous, alternative systems of creating sustainable livelihoods.

There are obvious problems that have to be overcome if these hopeful efforts have to be expanded towards a circularity-based future. There are other crucial questions which need to be raised here: how can these initiatives avoid the fate of becoming supplemental to the dominant system? How can they avoid replicating the endemic problems of established enterprises in their effort to survive in competition with them? How can they avoid being coopted when they become better known? These issues require our serious and concrete intervention noting that we are at a very nascent stage in the wider realisation of a circularity based future--a stage that has to contend with an almost overwhelming and pervasive domination of the dominant realities. Ambitious as it is, we need to set a clear common goal of creating vibrant, and ever expanding systems through interactions among communities, groups and individuals working towards resisting, changing and building the diverse sources of hope.

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### **Industry, labour, and technology**

There is another crucial question of a slightly different nature that also needs to be addressed: where does the long history and crucial gains of the workers' movement fit into all this? How can it contribute to the building of alternative systems? This is undoubtedly a difficult question. As global and regional integration proceeds throughout Asia in the form of rapid industrialization, labour issues call for our concerted intervention. While freedom of union activities is practically absent or poorly guaranteed in most countries, superexploitation, long-working hours, sweatshops, child-labour, harsh treatment of women workers, lack of workplace safety, official and private harassment and assault prevail. The PP21 Workers' Forum has been active in providing detailed accounts of the Asian-Pacific workers' conditions, but we are sure that, given the growing importance of labour in the industrialization process and given the terrible conditions the workers are subjected to, the advent of a powerful labour movement is already due in Asia. The global/regional economic integration process promoted by business counts on, and takes full advantage of the heterogeneity of this region. Among the countries of the region, politics are varied, GNP per capita and wage gaps are astoundingly large, and protective legislation and policy are widely different. Transnational corporations and other businesses working across borders are exploiting this situation by optimally positioning their factories, shops, and service posts, with emphasis on cheap labour here, taking advantage of environment there, and relying on the repressive regime in yet another country, so they can maximize production and profits. Workers are thus divided and made to compete. This situation calls for the need for an Asian workers' charter and a strategy to ensure its adoption by all the governments of the region.

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All this seems clear. The establishment of labour rights and improvement of immediate working conditions are the urgent tasks of the Asian workers movement, and these tasks call for struggle for democratization of the countries concerned. But how can the labour movement more actively go into "building"? What is being increasingly discussed (particularly in PP21) is the building of a "social labour movement" (like for instance the Chattisgarh Mines Shramik Sangh in India) which thinks and acts beyond the conventional economic issues of working conditions, labour rights, and wages and which actively participates in community building together with other social movements. In the rapid industrialization process that most Asian regimes are pursuing, the critical issues of workers rights are of workers in the rural, agricultural and the informal sectors. With the torrential inflow of casual, temporary, and other workers into cities, and given the almost "unlimited supply of labour" in countries like China, it is impossible to extend organised sector rights to them. Also, given the recent trends towards capital intensive technologies and growing instances of retrenchment, it seems imperative that the labour movement intensify the definition of a new approach--a vision and a strategy which addresses the broader issues of rural and urban inequity, oppression and displacement. This inevitably means an engagement with a more comprehensive understanding of the present patterns of economic development and the roots of persisting powerlessness. An exemplary example along this line is the above-mentioned Chattisgarh movement in which the workers' unions are playing a crucial role in addressing some of these issues, addressing a wide range of social, economic and political issues and extending active support to a variety of popular struggles in different parts of the country.

Again, however, this wider social engagement rarely questions what the workers produce through the labour. We think that the very content of industrialization, mining and

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capital intensive production--in fact a wide range of productive activities have to be radically rethought from the point of view of building a sustainable civilization. This is unlikely to occur easily. While the empowerment of sustainable agriculture and rural populations will gradually change the power relations between the urban and rural in favor of the latter, the reorganization of urban society in harmony with natural circularity will also have to be increasingly placed on the agenda.

In this process, the urban workers' movement will face the need to see beyond the fulfillment of workers' immediate demands and step forward to reorient productive activities toward socially useful and ecologically sound production. But this is still largely a vision with experiences substantiating it limited to pioneering cases of workers' self-managed factories and innovative social organising in a few countries around the world. A connected contentious issue is the one of technology. What is appropriate? Who decides? What are liberative technologies? Is Gandhi's *Talisman* which urges us to ensure that the "last person" benefits from human intervention, the pertinent guiding value to make these decisions? How will the present systems of industrial activity be reconfigured? What will be the alternatives for generations of skilled and semi-skilled workers in the natural circularity-based society that is being envisaged? What about the enormously sophisticated capital intensive or large-scale centres of production which produce technologies and products that are widely beneficial? These are just a few indicative questions that are part of a necessary, wide and sustained debate on labour and technology.

### **Political struggle in a new context**

We have said earlier that the struggle for sustainable livelihoods and life support systems is a political struggle for



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democracy at all levels through people's empowerment and for a new paradigm of development. What is the nature of this political struggle? To reiterate, the state-centered pattern of political practice and political representation is in crisis, even though it may seem to be the only means of participation for citizens within national boundaries. This crisis is partly because the old models are faltering or have failed and partly because new situations have emerged forcing changes, and also because popular movements in the past two decades (only if partially) have uncovered their new potentialities. In fact, new flesh is growing underneath the scabs that still cover the body, reflecting new possibilities, new perspectives, and new styles of collective action that indicate to us some of the features of the new paradigm. In the past two decades or so, we have witnessed grassroots communities organised in autonomous social movements empowering themselves and resolving problems for themselves, without postponing solutions until the state becomes "theirs" and without depending on seizure-of-state oriented political parties. In other words, individuals, communities and social movements are beginning to change towards seeking wider transformation without postponing solutions to some future date.

These initiatives have taken numerous forms: village communities developing integrated organic farming in the process restoring primacy to the principal producers and defining local structures of democratic governance; alliances that transcend geographical and identity boundaries; workers' cooperatives creating jobs for themselves, consumer cooperatives having permanent links with rural and urban producer groups; alternative people-to-people trade; people's banks and credit associations, and numerous other forms of "economic projects"; networks of traditional medicine practitioners, herbal nurseries and healers; transborder networks which address a wide range of ecological, social, economic and political issues; etc. These



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efforts are redefining the concept of the political. The abode of political power is not only the domain of government and linked political institutions but in the midst of everyday life relationships--an ethic that the feminist motto "the personal is political" brought home so powerfully. Empowerment, a fashionable catchword, is actually being manifested in the struggles which seek and lead to the reorganization of power relationships in everyday life. It is in this new understanding of politics, through which empowered people and communities are already changing (howsoever slowly and often against overwhelming odds) the existing economic, ecological and political relations. In that sense, they are contributing to the strengthening of the foundations of an alternative society.

Movements are increasingly realising that while transforming local power relationships is crucial, the wider fabric of injustice, oppression and unsustainability also needs to be addressed. Local struggles are thus linking nationally and globally, women are linking horizontally and vertically into a complex web of rediscovery, reform and transformation and global economic and political institutions are feeling the collective pressure of citizens groups like never before. Also, as never before, more and more people in struggle are speaking about and acting to change their social realities and to join the wider political task of building an alternative society. The whole endeavour is highly political in a sense that alternative relations mean the redistribution of power at all levels and in all aspects of life.

The political, thus redefined, is enriched, liberated from the monopoly of political professionals and returned to the communities where the debate on democratisation is transforming the community itself. These are major convulsions that we are witnessing--convulsions that are at the tip of what needs to be multiplied. Every society and every local dynamic will define its own unique strategies but

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there is no denying the assertion of values that are underlying the spirit of change—justice, sustainability, democracy, peace and, slowly, natural circularity. More and more people will be able to not only improve their livelihood but also to generate surpluses that can form the basis for widening empowerment. This can effectively be called a production and circularity-based politics.

We all recognise that the potential of people's self-empowerment in political, economic, ecological, and cultural efforts should be nurtured and strengthened. Can these initiatives, struggles, insights and practices be more self-consciously (and in terms that are collectively evolved), integrated into a more united process of alternative society-building informed by the ethic of natural circularity? This essay has articulated the growing realisation that only this can directly address the tasks of easing and eventually eliminating poverty and recovering sustainability. This process cannot be completed under the dominant system of global capitalism, implying that while creative ways of keeping and expanding political spaces will have to be sustained, the dominant system will have to be confronted, delegitimised, resisted and repelled. The growing sophistication of national and global elites to coopt dissent and channelise it into programmes and institutions that effectively undermine the political challenge will have to be exposed. The more the embryo of alternative society grows and consolidates convincing the people of its viability, the greater will be its capacity to overcome obstacles which will be placed in its way.

Here, the question of security has to be addressed from a new perspective. Many of the societies of the region are still criminally wasting precious resources to internally and externally militarise themselves. In the South Asian region, almost all countries now spend more on defense than on education and health combined. More importantly, the issue

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of security needs to be overhauled. National security can only be achieved as an aggregate of the diverse streams of people's security which itself is so critically dependent on the health and sustainability of the natural system. In Rio in 1992, the NGO Treaty on Militarism, the Environment and Development pointed out that, "security cannot be achieved unless justice prevails and unless economic, political, legal and social systems are radically transformed." Since the region is so ecologically and culturally interdependent, national security also needs to be seen in the larger context of regional security.

### **People's governance and alliances**

One of the most crucial challenges ahead of us relates to the issue of democratic governance from the community level through the domestic up to the global level. At the nation-state level, the challenge is to deepen systems of democratic governance (as well as socially responsible and ecologically viable development) within and between countries, to reduce the power and influence of bureaucracies, to improve public and service delivery systems, etc. But these tasks of internal democratisation must go hand in hand with the democratisation of the institutions of global governance, particularly the international and regional financial institutions. One emerging phenomenon with regard to global governance is the emergence in the past decade of the so-called NGOs as a new actor in international politics, especially with regard to the Bretton Woods system and in the arena of events sponsored by the United Nations--programmes ranging from the Rio to Vienna (human rights), Cairo (population), Copenhagen (social development) and Beijing (women).

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Three factors seem to be at work to carve out a space for NGO intervention in the process of international politics: 1. Most governments and the UN bureaucracy had to acknowledge the compelling urgency of the issues involved, 2. Growing democratisation of societies which released countervailing pressures from the base of societies which some NGOs, acting on behalf of communities and movements attempted to represent, and, 3. The need among powerful international institutions sustain their overall hegemony and influence by coopting NGOs with funds, committees, palliatives and the selective adoption of NGO-coined phrases.

The complex interplay of the three factors has produced a new hegemonic arena (in the Gramscian sense) which, by and large, offered an initial venue of intervention in the global decision making process. The mobilization and presence of tens of thousands of women from the grassroots of their societies as well as of prestigious international NGOs in Beijing was a forceful expression of women all over the world asserting themselves on such a scale for the first time in history. It should not be mistakenly assumed, however, that what has emerged in this context is people's global governance.

Nor does this mean global people's representation. The coopting thrust on the part of the global powers attempts to be to provide a special space for privileged NGOs and to absorb them into the official discourse which has been rhetorically modified to satisfy them. This works as a subtle inducement to sever NGOs from the serious efforts and struggles at the grassroots which are working to transform the stark realities from below. NGOs need to become more actively accountable to the base of their own societies and to strengthen partnerships with the people and their communities in struggle in order to emancipate themselves from the danger of cooptation and avoid becoming self-

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appointed spokespersons for the people whose mandate they rarely enjoy.

This does not mean that we should withdraw from this area activity. On the contrary, people's interventions at the global level, through NGOs and directly by representatives of people's movements, should be strengthened. We are still to evolve viable forms of global self-governance of the people suited to a society we are eager to build. In the meantime, we need to work at two levels--building alliances of empowered people as the basis of intervention in global decision-making processes, and, on the other hand, using all the existing venues to influence, and intervene in, the existing institutions of power and decision-making. Significant energies must be committed to ensuring the accountability, codes of conduct (and democratisation) of national and transnational corporate capital as well as working towards a regime of fair trade that not only makes primary producers a central part of planning but it also bring producers and consumers closer together within networks of alternative trade. We should also consider more focussed and targeted public hearings on the economic, social and cultural impacts of international financial organisations and other actors that are violating the wider realisation of the circularity ethic. In the absence of this two-pronged strategy, the large scale social victimization and exclusion, economic and social polarization (within and between countries) as well as the perpetration of thoroughly undemocratic institutions of national and global governance will continue.

At the nation-state level, in the past decade, a wide range of initiatives are already asserting broad programmes of self-governance. In India, for instance, many recent social movements cite the need to extend the constitutional commitment to further self-governance beyond the present Panchayati Raj system to the Gram Sabha--the village

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council. They seek the vesting of the management of all resources, including the forest, with the community, where the state would only mediate in the context of predatory external forces. Elsewhere, historically subjugated communities are asserting their political presence like never before and while cynical efforts are also underway to coopt these assertions and this political self-confidence, the fact that the dialogue on justice, democracy and dignity is being broad-based is itself a significant step forward. Also, social movements have provided powerful forums for the expression of hitherto subjugated nations, cultures and peoples. Many of these collectivities have, in the context of widespread unrest, chaos and spaces of anarchy governed neither by the market nor by the state, attempted to provide a sense of security and identity. Often, they have asserted relative autonomy and self-governance by seizing control over local resources and demanded not of just land distribution, economic and cultural rights, but democratic reform of the political and economic system itself.

Many of these movements and the alliances that are being forged are not seeking a 'greener' and environmentally sound habitat within the current capitalist system. In India, the National Alliance of People's Movements, for instance, argues that ecological problems are inherent in the social relations of production and the mode of capitalist development and therefore there is an urgent need for radically restructuring the social relations of production and that this can be achieved by not only seeking alternative ecological principles but also alternative social relations, both among humans of different gender, castes, classes and ethnicities and between humans and nature. Movements based on an ecological ethic are, however, only a part of the larger political challenge that can address the existing power relations. Many, concerned that millions have to suffer the humiliation of seeing their ways and their seeking being despised in their own country, are also working towards

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establishing a conceptual framework where plural ways and aspirations seem viable in the present, so that they do not feel compelled or tempted to indulge in demeaning imitations of the western world. Of course, every society and every specific situation will have to define its own priorities. In military dominated or semi-authoritarian societies or locales, for example, strategies will somewhat differ from situations that permit greater democratic activity.

Ever extending people's alliances linked in mutual accountability are the basis of new people's governance. Mutual accountability and participatory democracy can only survive in a situation where the authoritarian systems of government as well as the power of transnational (including media) and national capital is reined in and limited. Within the ethic of circularity, no one should be permitted to monopolise, consume or personally benefit beyond a need-based livelihood. We need to move from property rights to living rights. These are the elements that can ensure the widening of political and economic rights.

At the community level, the community has to be redefined to be more democratic and sensitive to gender and ethnic issues. In many areas, the diverse range of local institutions of representation and mediation which have been marginalised or consciously destroyed will have to be renewed in a more democratic and participatory manner. The Gram Sabha in India which more democratically represents the whole village is one example that can also counter the severe limitations of formal representative democracy. New alliances within and across national and ecological boundaries will have to be forged. These horizontal linkages will not be merely for exchange of experience and solidarity, but to work towards economic and ecological relationships that produce relatively autonomous but not closed local economies (societies) linked to consumer organizations, urban production



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systems, people-managed commercial channels and financial facilities, and so on, based on systems of organic circularity.

Given the growth in the internationalization of the economy through transnational corporations and numerous other agents, people's alliances will have to extend beyond national borders involving popular allies in the core countries of the capitalist world system. The struggle in the Narmada valley in India and the transborder alliances that it contributed to is a dramatic case in point. It should be noted here that the societies of core countries are not monolithic. Poverty and unsustainability also plague them in the wake of increasing third worldization of their societies, exodus of capital, unemployment, environmental degradation, disempowerment by consumer culture, disillusionment, and the loss of what a meaningful life should comprise itself of.

The struggle for sustainability and eradication of poverty is then a global political struggle that will involve alliances between communities and movements of the core, semi-peripheral and peripheral countries to bring about democratization of the global power center and global power redistribution and to create sustainable and democratic transborder systems and relations. The empowerment of the people in the so-called South, allied with partners in the so-called North, will force a change in the situation in the North gradually undermining the world power centre's monopoly power.

For popular movements of core countries, this collaboration will lead to the wider realisation that the very premise of affluence on which their societies are resting should be remade to ensure global sustainability and eliminate global inequity and injustice. All this implies a fundamental remaking of Northern societies. While this will involve radical change in the life-style, consumption patterns, and values, and call for critical evaluation of the past and present



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behaviour of their countries against other peoples--Japanese aggression of neighboring Asia and Western colonization of the Third World--this should also be a liberating and challenging experience once the realization spreads that they have much to contribute to the global as well as local reshaping of society for economic and ecological sustainability. In Europe as a whole, major exercises are already underway involving hundreds of groups, institutes and communities to define the transition from the present to more sustainable societies. In the campaign against NAFTA, a large number of unionised US workers encountered their Mexican counterparts for the first time as their brothers and sisters and entered into partnership relations. Various networks of community, farmers', workers,' and women's groups in Japan working on their own issues are linked up with groups in neighboring Asian countries resisting imposition of Japan-financed vicious projects.

What must not be neglected is the need to take a critical look at one's own country, from the viewpoint of others, particularly those others who are in a lower position of the global hierarchy and victimised and exploited by those at a higher notch. This is a key to the formation of alliances of hope which cut across the core/semi-periphery/ periphery trichotomy. Conversely, joining others in such an alliance will release our minds from the cage of country-specific interests. This is in fact the moral basis of the formation of alliances of hope across borders. And there are emerging new situations which make this realization inevitable--large numbers of migrant workers moving from one country to another or capital moving freely from one country to another causing worker dismissals here and superexploitation there.

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### **Conclusion: Tasks for PP21**

An essay like this cannot be comprehensive and exhaustive. Much that is important has been left out, addressed in passing or raised as a generalisation. Yet, there are complex challenges and tasks that the analysis and cases presented above pose for all of us. We do realise that the task before us is, to say the least, and to say the obvious, truly massive. In addition to the numerous possibilities implicit in the discussion above, we present a few additional tasks for our consideration. After wide discussion, if they are accepted, we need to consider whether task forces (with full accountability to ourselves and those in struggle) should be set up together with a general coordinating mechanism for the whole PP21 process.

The main task of PP21 is facilitating the formation and strengthening people's alliances and people's alternative systems. It is important to note here that the experience of the past few decades of struggle has underscored the point that social change must remain with the people who are directly affected by undemocratic and unsustainable systems. Only this can prevent the possibility of cooptation by a political/ bureaucratic elite or a radical vanguard. From this point of view, PP21 efforts must continue to focus on facilitating horizontal grassroots-level alliances across borders (sectoral, gender, national and other borders) in numerous creative and imaginative forms. This means that we must go beyond alliances of NGOs amongst themselves, on the one hand, and beyond vertical integration of grassroots work by NGOs, on the other. This task can be fulfilled through various initiatives.

Already, connected with the PP21 process, there are some exemplary initiatives that have been taken in this direction: the Pakistan-India People-to-People Dialogue which partly originated in the PP21 South Initiative conference (1993,

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Madras) and which has brought together hundreds of people from both sides laying the basis for people's solidarity to contribute towards politically overcoming the antagonism between both states; the Negros Gathering for Linking Alternatives (1995) which brought together grassroots alternative development activists into a process of mutual discovery and learning; the Rivers Commission initiative which has been trying to seek transborder people's solutions to the problems of the Ganga River; the efforts to define a people-oriented structural adjustment programme or alternative economic policies which address the wide range of justice, democracy and control over resources issues. Numerous such initiatives are being taken by issue-based, sectoral, and other groups all over our region.

The tasks of PP21 partners are to further stimulate such efforts and play a facilitating and catalytic role towards the building of ecologically sustainable and people-oriented systems. PP21 initiatives are required particularly in several priority areas, which may include: 1. Networking of various alternative socio-economic initiatives for mutual learning through exchange of ideas, experiences and technical and organizational skills; 2. Organising linkages of communities affected by major transborder "development" projects such as the Mekong River project, to counter the devastating effects of such projects and to develop people's alternatives, and, 3. Encouraging transborder initiatives to get people from conflicting situations together on the basis of the idea of people's security.

Another important area of PP21 activities is the organisation of intellectual interaction among representatives of social movements of this region and beyond. This would be to systematically learn from the diversity of strategies, theories, philosophies, spiritualities, and alternative models drawing on experiences and resources of activists and intellectuals related organically with people's movements. Our alliance

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building work, in fact, requires intense intellectual work.. Task forces can be set up to promote this process, stimulating fresh and bold thinking among people's movements about where we are and where we need to go. Already, reflecting newly emerging realities, various new ideas are being proposed and practiced.

While a strengthening of civil society approach has been adopted by many NGOs, Asian values are being promoted by influential thinkers as a counter to corrosive and corrupting "western values." But we do not, as yet, have a real forum where fundamental issues involving the problematic of modernity are seriously and constructively discussed. PP21, by its very orientation, is in a position to facilitate dynamic intellectual and conceptual interactions drawing upon the strengths of its partners.

The tasks do seem overwhelming. Given the power of national economic, political and military elites, the entrenched "cultures of violence and oppression" in so many societies, the rise of fundamentalist and chauvinist tendencies and forces, the global economic institutions and processes, the almost complete absence of democratic values in their functioning, the scale of acquiescence among a section of each nations' political and economic elite, the easier option is to engage either in localised constructive activity (a local space of "sanity") or in mostly ineffectual negotiation with those currently in power. Yet, as Albert Camus suggests in *The Plague*, in the face of what seems overwhelming, it is imperative that the moral and political challenge is not overlooked. It is also imperative that, in the words of Corrine Kumar D'Souza of India and in the spirit of PP21, "we listen to the voices of those who do not share the power (of the powerful), to see (human rights) violations through the eyes of the victims--the victims of development, of progress, of technical fixes, through the eyes of those who have been denied privileges and power in the system;

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through the eyes of those whose cultures have been ransacked and whose peoples have been ruined, through the eyes of those on the margins, the fringes, the edges, through the eyes of the South in the South, of the South in the North, through the eyes of women. Because they will tell us a very different story, and the world needs another story.”

This discussion paper was written with the cooperation of Urvashi Butalia, Lau Kin-chi, Harsh Sethi and Hui Shiu-Lun (Raymond) who participated in preliminary discussions and/or contributed parts of the text. The co-authors thank them in the PP21 spirit.

## **Democracy in the Age of Globalisation**

**Vandana Shiva**

We are witnessing the simultaneous growth of two forces — one of globalisation, the other of localisation, one driven by global corporations, the other by local communities grassroots movements, one moving power upwards, the other moving it downwards.

The new economic policy of 1991 is an example of the tendency towards globalisation. This policy was the result of the World Bank —IMF- dictated Structural Adjustment programme. The process of globalisation accelerated with the completion of the Uruguay Round of GATT and the establishment of the World Trade Organisation.

The Constitution Amendment relating to Panchayati Raj and the grassroots movements for democratic control over the resources necessary for survival are an example of the tendency towards localisation.

### **The Community, the State, the Corporation**

Globalisation has rendered the relationship between the community, the state, and the corporation totally fluid or, to use Marc Nerfin's more colourful categories, the relationship between the citizen, the prince and the merchant.

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The appeal of globalisation is usually based on the idea that it implies less red tape, less centralisation and less bureaucratic control. It is celebrated because it implies the erosion of the power of the state.

Globalisation does mean “less government” for regulation of business and commerce. But less government for commerce and corporations can go hand in hand with more government in the lives of people. As globalisation allows increasing transfer of the resources from the public domain—either under the control of communities, or that of the state—discontent and dissent necessarily increase, leading to law and order problems. In such a situation, even a minimalist state restricted only to policing and law and order will become enormously large and all-pervasive, devouring much of the wealth of society and intruding into every aspect of citizens’ lives.

Most of the ideological projection of globalisation has focused on the new relationship of the prince and the merchant, the state and the corporation, the government and market. The state has been stepping back more and more from the regulation of commerce and capital. Reflecting this ideology of deregulation, our Finance Minister Manmohan Singh had recently stated that. “Power should move to the Boardroom” i.e., from the state to the corporations.<sup>1</sup> However, the shift from the rule of the nation-state to that of the corporations does not imply more power to the people. If anything, it implies less power in the hands of people both because corporations, especially transnational corporations, are more powerful than governments and also because they are less accountable than governments to democratic control.

In recent years, the economic and political power of transnational corporations has been increasing dramatically. Transnational corporations are dictating the globalisation agenda. They control one third of the world’s wealth. Global

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production by TNCs exceeds world trade. Trade within firms, rather than between them, takes a growing proportion of world commerce.

In terms of size, corporations dwarf countries. In 1980, the sales of each of the top ten multinationals were over US\$ 28bn, more than the GDP of eighty-seven countries. Since then, there has been a proliferation of small states and fracturing of larger ones, while corporations have expanded exponentially. This has probably made the competition even more unequal. Exxon's sales in 1980 were larger than the GDP of ninety-six countries, well ahead of Austria, Denmark and Norway.<sup>ii</sup> The order has changed over the decade, with Exxon losing out a little to finish between Indonesia and South Africa, and Austria gaining some ground.<sup>iii</sup> A report by the Conference Board of New York shows that if General Motors were a country, it would be the world's twentieth largest economy. Ford comes in just behind Denmark, and IBM behind Thailand. The point that the Conference Board makes is that there are more TNCs in the top hundred and fewer countries (47 to 53) among them in the 1990 list, with only 39 to 61 in 1980.

*Barnet and Muller have stated:*

The men who run the global corporations are the first in history with the organisation, technology, money, and ideology to make a credible try at managing the world as an integrated economic unit. What they are demanding in essence is the right to transcend the nation-state, and in the process, transform it.<sup>iv</sup>

The erosion of the power of the nation-state from outside and above leads to a concentration of power in the hands of corporations. It does not devolve power to the people. It does not move power downwards into the hands of communities. If fact, it takes power away from the local level, and transforms institutions of the state from being protectors of the health and



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rights or people to protectors of the property and profits of corporations. This creates an inverted state, a state more committed to the protection of foreign investment and less to the protection of the citizens of the country. The inversion of the state is well exemplified in a recently announced proposal that foreign security experts would train Indian police to protect the "life and property of foreign investors"<sup>v</sup>.

Another example is the recent decision of the government to lower the health standards for and raise the permissible level of MSG(Mono Sodium Glutamate) in order not to allow people's health concerns to interfere with the expansion of fast food chains like KFC. MSG has been found to be causing severe health problems such as asthma.<sup>vi</sup>

Globalisation as the expansion of the economic space controlled by corporations, therefore, runs into conflict with the democratic space for citizens to determine and influence the conditions for their health and well-being.

The expansion of corporate control is often made to appear as the expansion of the democratic space for citizens on the basis of "consumer choice". However, choice within a predetermined set up of options of corporate rule is not freedom because it involves the surrender of the right to determine the context of living and the values that govern society. The apparent widening of individual consumer choice for the elite in matters of automobiles and junk foods is based on the shrinking of the rights of communities to control their local natural resources and a shrinking of social choice through democratic public process.

Globalisation is creating more freedom for corporations. But this is not translating into more freedom for citizens. Deregulation of commerce is not the same as reduced interference by the state in the lives of citizens. The end of the

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“licence raj” might imply more freedom for corporations to invest freely. But it also heralds the beginning of a “patent raj” in which governments are forced to play a new role of interfering in the lives of citizens—small producers, the farmers and craftsmen—to protect what big corporations have claimed as their “intellectual property”—seeds and medicinal plants.

### **The Concentration of Ownership of Natural Resources**

#### *Biodiversity*

Biodiversity, land and water are the three vital resources that the majority of our people depend on for their livelihood and survival.

“Intellectual property rights” are emerging as an important mechanism for taking away the living resources and biodiversity from the people and converting them into corporate monopolies. Seeds, medicinal plants, neem plant-based pesticides, which have been the basis of people’s livelihood in agriculture and health care, are being appropriated through new patent regimes enforce through GATT.

These companies have pushed for intellectual property protection in GATT “to prevent extensive losses to worldwide industry due to inadequate and ineffective national protection of intellectual property”. The Third World has been repeatedly accused of “piracy” by the industrialised countries. In a 1986 survey, US companies stated that they lose US\$ 23.8 billion due to inadequate and ineffective patent protection. The US pharmaceutical industry claims that it has lost US\$2,545 million. They do not assess how much the Third World loses due to their claiming Third World bio-resources and Third World knowledge as their “intellectual property” as in the case of neem patents, and patents on micro organisms, plant-based medicines and seeds. As the team at RAFI(the Rural Advancement

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Foundation International) has shown if the contribution of Third World bio-diversity and the innovation of peasants and tribals is taken into account, the roles in the piracy are dramatically reversed. The US is then found to owe US \$202 million in royalties for agriculture and US\$5,097 million for pharmaceuticals to Third World countries.

Ironically, it is the companies that accuse the Third World of piracy and have created TRIPs to stop it are the ones are themselves engaged in large-scale piracy of the biological wealth and intellectual heritage from the Third World. Thus, Pfizer, Bristol Myrick, which are on the Intellectual Property Committee charged with the responsibility for initiating and successfully introducing IPRs into GATT, have patents on bio-materials collected from the Third World without any permission of payment of royalties to the original owners of the biological material.

Similarly, WR Grace and other corporations have taken patents on neem bio-pesticide. Agracetus, a subsidiary of Grace, has claimed monopoly rights on rice soybean and cotton. Patents have become a means for corporations to establish monopoly control on food crops.

In response, people are putting forward alternatives to IPRs, especially in the area of Biodiversity, an important one being the collective Intellectual Rights Movement started on Independence Day, 15th August 1993, by the Karnataka Rajya Ryota Sangha, the Research Foundation and the Third World Network. Collective intellectual rights are aimed at protecting people's rights to their biological resources, including seeds and medicinal plants, and protecting the integrity of their collective heritage.

Challenges to patents based on Indian knowledge have also been filed in the US and European Patent Offices.<sup>viii</sup> While the transnational corporations might have succeeded in getting a

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TRIPs Agreement in the final text of the Uruguay Round, they cannot be at all sure of forcing unethical and unjust IPR systems on people. Movements against patents on life are growing everywhere, and in India, the "Seed Satyagraha", the movement to conserve indigenous seeds and to protect farmers' rights to seeds in response to TRIPs, is spreading and gaining strength.

### **Land**

Land and water, too, are being appropriated. Land reform laws which had attempted to undo concentration of land ownership under zamindari are themselves being undone. These changes are part of the structural adjustment programme. One of the major targets of the World Bank agricultural reforms is the abrogation of land ceiling laws. Land ceiling was a mechanism to prevent the continuation or emergence of monopolies in land ownership of the kind that the country had faced as the zamindari system in colonial India.

Under the Permanent Settlement of 1793, the British made zamindars the proprietors of the estates, subject to a permanent fixed payment to the government. The revenue of the government was fixed at about ten-elevenths of what the zamindars received as rent from the ryots: the remaining one-eleventh was left as the share of the zamindar. As years passed, the landlord became more and more a rent-receiver, living on the proceeds of others' labours and investing no resources on the land.

*As the Uttar Pradesh Zamindari Abolition Committee reports:*

Millions of people were, by these settlements, deprived of rights that they had enjoyed for well over two thousand years; hereditary cultivating proprietors of land were turned into rack-rented tenants-at-will, and conditions were thus created that led to continuous social discord and economic deterioration and the

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decay of agriculture.

The growth of a class of non-productive rent receivers was accompanied by the dispossession of impoverished peasants with small holdings. As land increased in value, the number of land transfers rapidly increased. The expropriation of peasants posed a political danger and the Land Alienation Act of Punjab was passed in 1900, which sought to restrict the sale of agricultural land and its sale to non-agriculturists.

Free trade in land leads to monopolies in land and dispossesses small producers of their land rights. The situation in the US where only 2.4% of the population survives as farmers is proof of this failure of the market to protect land rights of producers.

In 1776, nine out of ten Americans worked in agriculture. In 1929, there were seven million farmers in the US and over thirty-five million farm residents. Since the 1950s, the number of farms has diminished from six million to under two million today, with only 2.4% of the US population on farms.

Almost half of US farmland today is owned by non-farmers. Very large industrial farms dominate agriculture in the US. These superfarms have very negative environmental impacts, from draining aquifers to poisoning the soil and to compacting the soil with heavy equipment and reducing biodiversity through monocultures. It is projected that by the year 2000, just one percent of the farms will produce half of the nation's food. Huge grain dealers are subsidised by the government to purchase their commodities at substantially less than farmers' cost of production. This cheap grain has driven off many Third World farmers from their land and contributed to food-insecurity.

The model of large corporate farms is now being introduced in India.

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Today, under trade liberalisation, states are told to change land ceiling laws in order to allow the corporate sector to acquire vast tracts of land. Peasants are thus losing their right to land. The government has already given agri-business the go-ahead for contract farming, which means that the farmer has to sell the produce to the corporation at a price determined exclusively by corporate and trade monopolies and not by farmers.

The removal of limits on ownership of land is detrimental to both justice and sustainability. Only small farmers can use land sustainably, replenishing the organic fertility of their soil with internal inputs. Only small farms can provide food security to millions of rural people.

The recent amendment of the Karnataka Land Reforms Act (1961) is aimed at undoing the land reforms in the state. Land ceiling has been removed for aquaculture in the Uttara Kannad and Dakshina Kannad districts. Horticulture, floriculture and agro-based industries have also been exempted from the ceiling laws.

### **Water**

The World Bank Policy Paper recommends the creation of 'markets in tradable water rights'. It is argued that rights to the delivery of water can be freely bought and sold, farmers with new crops or in new areas will be able to obtain water provided they are willing to pay more than its value to existing users, and established users will take account of its sale value in deciding what and how much to produce.

This institution of tradable water rights is a guarantee for diverting water from small farmers to large corporate superfarms. Tradable water rights will lead to water monopolies. In the logic of the market, tradable rights have a tendency to be sold to the highest bidder and hence lead to

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water-power linked concentration of wealth. It will also lead to over-exploitation and misuse of water, since those who deplete water resources do not have to suffer the consequences of water scarcity as they can always buy water rights from other farmers and other regions. Besides aggravating the already severe ecological crisis in water resources, tradable water rights will destroy the social fabric of rural communities and create discord and disintegration. The social breakdown in Somalia can be traced, in part, to the privatisation of water rights according to the World Bank policy. Tradable water rights are based on the assumption that no ecological or social limits should be placed on water use. Such use without limits leads to abuse. The World Bank proposals on tradable water rights are a [prescription for social and ecological disaster.

The World Bank policies on the privatisation of water are already being implemented. For example, in the new Agricultural Policy of Karnataka, the section on reforms of irrigation sector talks of a shift from "top-down to bottom-up" approach. The privatisation and tradable water approach is definitely a bottom-up policy and not in the sense of democratic control. It is bottom up since it moves the control over water resources upwards from small and marginal farmers to large corporations and agribusiness interests who can buy the 'water users associations' and establish monopoly control on water. This has already happened in Sri Lanka, where export corporations have purchased shares from farmers, thus leading to displacement of farmers from agricultural activities and their livelihoods.

**Corporate Control or Community Control of Natural Resources:**

**Which way points to a Sustainable Future?**

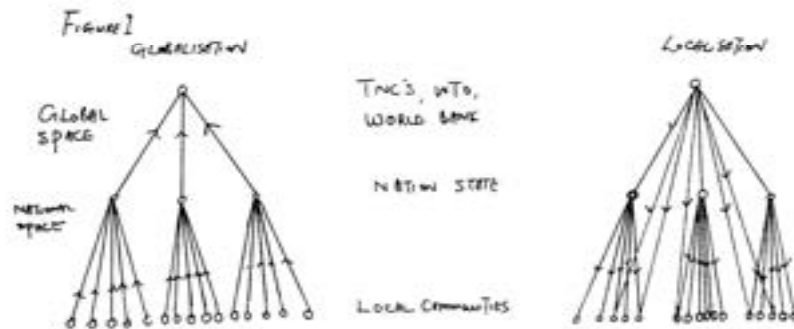
The major democratic issue emerging in India is the right to survival of the large number of poor people who derive their

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livelihood from natural resources—land, water and biodiversity. In each sector, a major conflict is emerging between corporate control and community control natural resources.

People's movements are demanding that power should not be concentrated in institutions of the centralised nation-states but should be distributed throughout society and should be dispersed through a multiplicity of institutions, with more power at the local level, controlled by local communities and their institutions. However, while the TNC-driven globalisation agenda requires that power moves from centralised control of nation-states to even more centralised control of global corporations and global institutions like WTO, the World Bank and IMF, the people's democratically-driven agenda is for greater localisation, both political and economic. Political localisation implies more decisions being transferred to the local space. Economic localisation implies that whatever can be produced locally should be part of the local economy so that both livelihoods and the environment are protected.

Figure 1 schematically illustrates the movement of political and economic power from the local and national space to the global space in globalisation, and the dispersal and devolution of political and economic power from the global space to the local national space.





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### **People's Response**

While the international financial and trade organisations coerce and push the government into a blind and indiscriminate experiment with globalisation, the Indian people are responding with a new politics of "localisation". They are engaging in enlightened response to put globalisation in its ecological and social context. In region after region, where foreign investment is diverting local resources from survival needs of local people to the limitless appetite of global markets, people are putting investment to the test of ecological and social accountability. They are also redefining the principles of governance on the basis of decentralised democracy. the rule of the World Bank and WTO has implied rule by super-state institutions serving the one-sided interest of commerce and beyond the democratic control of people. As the state withdraws from environmental and social regulation in the "free-trade" era, local communities are getting organised to regulate commercial activity by asserting their environmental rights to natural resources—land, water and biodiversity—and their democratic rights to decide how these resources are used.

They are redefining democracy in terms of people's decisions in their everyday lives. They are redefining the nation in terms of people, not in terms of the centralised state.

This trend towards localisation has, in fact, been born along with the trend towards globalisation. If globalisation is the corporate-driven agenda for corporate control, localisation is the countervailing citizens' agenda for protecting the environment and people's survival and people's livelihood. In the absence of regulation by national governments, citizens are creating a new politics for introducing ecological limits and social responsibility in this process of globalisation. The ecological and democratic response of localisation has an inbuilt environmental component of the control and ownership of local

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resources, a decision-making component about the utilisation of these resources and an economic component to resist the destruction of local economies by the global economy and international trade.

### **Localisation is not Autarchy**

Localisation does not imply autarchy or insularity. It involves subjecting the logic of globalisation to the test of sustainability, democracy and justice in each concrete instance of foreign investment. It also involves reclaiming the state to protect people's interests and not allow it to be reduced to being a mere instrument for foreign investors, even while returning to people the power and authority the state had usurped from them. No society can live without governance or government. The issue is not whether nation-states should exist or disappear to whether there should be more or less of state. The real issue of our times is how to reinvent the state and make it different from the centralised, bureaucratic and controlling state that had taken away the functions and roles of civil society. It would be an error to imagine that protection for the environment and for the weaker members of the society can be provided by leaving environmental decisions and decisions on distribution of goods and services to unregulated and non-accountable market forces. Social regulation of the market requires a social policy and this is not the same as individual consumer choice. The contest between the transnational corporations, the force behind globalisation, and the citizens and local communities, the force behind localisation, spins off into a contest over what kind of state will regulate corporations while creating and enhancing freedom for citizens. Freedom from want, from hunger and homelessness and the denial of basic needs, is the most fundamental freedom without which there can be no other freedom. How this freedom will be ensured by a deepening of democracy, strengthening of civil society, and the creation of a different kind of a state is the project of democracy in our times.

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### **People's Protectionism**

Movements for localisation are giving rise to a new people's protectionism which is different from the old protectionism in the sense that power and authority to make environmental and economic decisions move from centralised states to structures of self governance at the local level, and citizens and community organisations decide which roles and functions the state should have. It is also different from corporate protectionism in which all institutions of society—the courts, police, government departments—are distorted to protect the interests of transnational corporations, sacrificing the interests of citizens, small producers and small traders.

The largest corporations of the world have found new investment opportunities in India since 1991 under a combination of strong arm tactics of the Super 301 clause of the US Trade Act, the IMF/World Bank pressures for liberalisation and the Uruguay Round GATT which have combined to shape the government's new economic policies that put the interests and rights of foreign investors above the interests and rights of the citizens of India. But now, in each sector, the biggest multinational corporation has been forced to recognise that it is the clearance from citizens, not just from the government, that is necessary for democratic functioning.

Whether it is Cargill and Grace in Karnataka, Du pont in Goa, or KFC in Delhi and Bangalore, the entry of TNCs, which threaten people's livelihood, resources and health, is questioned by local communities and grassroots struggles. Local communities are raising a common voice: "We will decide the pattern of investment and development. We will determine the ownership and use of our natural resources". As this message resonates in village after village, from one investment site to another, a new environmental philosophy based on democratic

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decentralisation of control over natural resources is emerging. The pressure of the people is forcing the government to remember its role as protector of the public interest and the country's natural and cultural heritage not merely the interests of foreign investors. The tendency towards localisation and deepening of democracy is aimed at taming the excesses of globalisation, including the political excesses of deregulation.

The pattern that seems to be emerging is for environmental governance beyond the centralising state and super-state systems, which work unidirectionally for the corporate interests. Localisation is emerging as an antidote to globalisation and to unrestrained commercial greed.

The challenge before us is to build on these movements for localisation to bring substance into Panchayati Raj by establishing community control over natural resources and over the economy. It is this search for democracy in the age of globalisation towards which we must all strive, for which we must struggle, in diverse ways, at multiple levels.

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<sup>1</sup>The Hindu, 1 October, 1995.

<sup>2</sup>Conference Board of New York Report, 1992.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Richard J. Barnet and Ronald E. Muller, *Global Reach: The Power of the Multinational Corporation* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974).

<sup>5</sup>Indian Express, 25 August, 1995.

<sup>6</sup>Dr. George Schwartz "In Bad Taste: The MSG Syndrome".

<sup>7</sup>Historic Legal Challenge on IPRs Laws, 14 September, 1995. Dossier published by Research Foundation for Science, Technology and Natural Resource Policy, 1995.

## **The Free Market, NIC Capitalism, and Sustainable Development in East Asia**

**Walden Bello**

The explosive economic growth in the Asia-Pacific region continues to fixate the attention of economic policy makers 'corporate leaders' and academic thinkers throughout the world. For the US economic and political establishment, East Asia has moved from being a partner in the Cold War to being a competitor for global economic hegemony. In Europe, there is much worry in government and corporate circles about the contrast between what is fashionably termed "Eurosclerosis" and East Asian dynamism. In much of the South, "Asian capitalism" has replaced socialism as the new paradigm of development. And to many of those countries moving from traditional forms of socialist economic organization, the formula of NIC capitalism is being presented by World Bank economists as the elixir that will transform them into growing, dynamic economies.

Within the region itself, "fast track capitalism" has been accompanied by a regionwide consensus celebrating East Asian economic growth. This consensus is a powerful, persuasive, and ideologically hegemonic alliance of government technocrats, private interests, and establishment intellectuals. Today, this consensus stresses three points:

- that much of East and Southeast Asia has left or is leaving the Third World;

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- that high-speed growth will mark the region far into the 21st century; and
- that East Asia will increasingly be the “driver” of the world economy as the US and European economies continue to be marked by weak or low growth.

In short, it is the Asia-Pacific’s turn to be at the center of the world stage.

But while there is a consensus on the celebration of high-speed growth and its desirability, there is intense debate on the causes of this growth and related to this, on the policies to be followed to sustain it. Moreover, while the consensus is hegemonic, it is not total, for other voices are now questioning both the impact and the direction of high-speed growth.

### **The Free Market Explanation**

Within establishment circles, two competing schools have emerged to explain the so-called “East Asian Miracle.” One sees Asian growth as the flowering of free market policies. The other attributes it to a combination of neo-mercantilism, protectionism, and government activism that one can appropriately term “state-assisted capitalism”.

The free market model of East Asian development is espoused by orthodox economists such as those connected with the World Bank, International Monetary Fund(IMF), and the “Eminent Persons’ Group” identified with the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) initiative. In their view, the market was the central mechanism of rapid growth in Japan and the NICs in the past, and freeing market forces even more fully from government

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controls is the key to even more dynamic growth in the future.

Currently, the free market/free trade approach has been institutionalized in World Bank and IMF-imposed structural adjustment programs (SAPs) which promote radical deregulation, sweeping privatization, trade and investment liberalization, export-oriented trade and investment strategies, containment of wages, and cutting back government expenditures. Purportedly inspired by the East Asian experience, SAPs have been generalized over the last decade to sub-Saharan Africa, North Africa, Latin America, South Asia, and the socialist or formerly socialist economies of Indochina.

### **State-Assisted Capitalism**

The problem with this model, say its critics, is that hardly any of the fast-growing countries of the region achieved "NIChood" by following the free market formula, except possibly Hong Kong and Singapore, which are really dependent urban economies masquerading as national economies. Dissatisfaction with both the explanatory power and prescriptive thrust of the free-market school has spawned a perspective on East Asian growth that goes in the opposite direction, to claim that state intervention in the bigger NICs (newly industrializing countries), meaning South Korea and Taiwan, has been the central factor in the take-off of these economies. Specifically, development was produced by a strategy consisting of:

- strategic economic planning managed by government, exemplified in some countries by 5 to 10 year plans;

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- government targeting of specific industries for development and generous subsidization of private enterprises to support the targeted industries;
- building strategic economic depth by moving in a planned fashion from the development of consumer goods industries to intermediate goods and capital goods enterprises;
- reserving the domestic market for local entrepreneurs by maintaining tight restrictions on imports and foreign investments;
- adopting a mercantilist trade strategy consisting of limiting the entry of foreign imports into the domestic market while aggressively winning and dominating export markets, resulting in a growing trade surplus; and
- bold, Keynesian-style manipulation of macroeconomic mechanisms like deficit spending, loose credit policies, massive foreign borrowing, and strict undervaluation of the currency relative to hard currencies in order to keep exports competitive in world markets.

The mix of these policies, of course, differed from economy to economy, and in some economies some elements of these formula were not even implemented; Taiwan, for instance, did not engage in massive foreign borrowing but resorted to the massive dollar reserves it had built up from exports. However, the main thrust of economic policy in all the key NICs was government leadership of the economic process via activist, interventionist policies that disciplined the private sector and controlled the market. To borrow economist Alice Amsden's phrase in her classic study of Korean



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industrialization, "not only has Korea not gotten relative prices right, it has deliberately gotten them wrong."

True, market mechanisms operated, but they were deliberately distorted and much inefficiency was tolerated in the short-term to build up strategic economic depth. For instance, Korean technocrats deliberately violated the classical free-market principle of consumer sovereignty--"Give the consumer the best product at the lowest price"--for the larger strategic goal of strengthening national economic sovereignty. Thus, if the price of Korean-made computers in the domestic market was three to four times that in export markets, this was in order to allow local conglomerates and monopolies to recoup the losses they incurred in battling the formidable Japanese in highly competitive export markets.

To take another example, in contrast to the neoclassical dictum that macroeconomic stability is a key condition of growth, proponents of state-assisted capitalism see imbalance as a necessary feature of development. And they point to the fact that the heavy and chemical industry drive in Korea in the 1970's may have provoked a lot of short-term dislocations and triggered inflation, but it also laid the basis for Korea's successful push to export capital-intensive, high-tech products like microchips and cars in the 1980's.

Perhaps there is no greater testimony to the profoundly anti-liberal and closed character of Korea, regarded in many quarters as the most successful of the NICs, than US Trade Representative Mickey Kantor's description of Korea as "one of the toughest markets in the

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world" for US exporters, as well as a "particularly difficult market in which to invest."

### **Southeast Asian Growth: A Product of Liberal Economic Policies?**

But what about the Southeast Asian "stars" of the last decade, specifically Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia? Are their high rates of growth not due to their adoption of liberal economic policies? The problem with this contention is that it is based on a gross exaggeration of some aspects of economic policymaking in the so-called "Near NICs" in the last decade.

#### **Thailand**

Let us take Thailand, first of all. Of all the large economies of Southeast Asia, Thailand is perhaps the closest to market-dominated economy. Key sections of the Thai economy are certainly export-oriented, but is the economy as a whole an open and export-oriented one along the lines espoused by the proponents of structural adjustment and liberalization?

The best answer is provided by the World Bank in a recent study which claims:

The tariff structure in Thailand has tended to give higher nominal protection to finished goods than to inputs. The 1974-80 period was characterized by high and variable nominal rates of protection, increased use of non-tariff barriers, price controls, and domestic content requirements. In the 1980's several changes were introduced into the tariff regime, including the introduction of special taxes and surcharges. These changes were introduced primarily because of revenue considerations and have left the protection structure practically intact.

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The only significant reforms are the setting of the maximum tariff at 60 per cent and the reduction of the dispersion of effective interest rates.

The latter reforms, the Bank report continues, have had little impact in reorienting the economy. Despite the fact that Thailand was said to have undergone World Bank-guided structural adjustment in the mid-1980's, there was no change in effective protection rates between the mid and late 1980's. "Hence," concludes the Bank, "Thailand's trade regime remains basically inward-oriented and has not been adequately reformed to ensure greater competitiveness by domestic industry nor to reduce the built-in anti-export bias.

This is an understatement. Thailand's trade policy actually became more protectionist in the mid and late eighties as Thai technocrats sought to move the country onto a second stage of import substitution. In the auto industry, for instance, domestic content regulations were intensified, with the government requiring that engines for locally assembled pick-up trucks and motorcycles be assembled in the country after 1989.

Yet the mid to the late eighties was precisely the period when Thailand began to register the 8-12 per cent growth rates that dazzled the world. Indeed, the World Bank's negative comments on Thailand's protectionist trade regime come across as doctrinaire quibbling if one considers that—despite this structure or perhaps because of it—Thailand registered the world's highest average growth rate — some 10 per cent — in the last decade. Moreover, it is probably true, as some claim, that Thailand's protectionist structure actually encouraged the massive foreign investment

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inflow that helped trigger the high rate of growth as multinationals sought to take advantage of a protected domestic market that could only be exploited by placing production facilities right within the country.

### **Malaysia**

What about Malaysia? It is true that some privatization and deregulation favoring private interests took place in the late 1980's, but it would be a mistake to overestimate the impact of these policies or to see them as the wave of the future. As of 1990, only 100 of Malaysia's 800 state firms which had been set up to lead the heavy industry drive in the late 1970's and early 1980's, had been sold to private interests.

Indeed, the most successful Malaysian enterprise of the last decade was a state-directed joint venture between a state firm and a foreign automobile multinational, Mitsubishi, which produced the Proton Saga. Yet its development exemplified all the so-called "sins" of state intervention that neoclassical economists have warned about. One was discriminatory treatment, in the form of tax exemptions for the Saga and tariff hides for other cars assembled in Malaysia, with the result that by the mid-1980's the Saga's price was about M\$4000 less than its competitors. Another transgression of neoclassical economics was strategic industrial targetting, the idea being that by producing a car with some 4000 to 5000 components, the Saga would have tremendous backward and forward linkages for the economy. A third, related offense was forced local sourcing of components to encourage the growth of local supplier industries, a practice that was also adopted by Bhailand and

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one that, incidentally, has been banned under the GATT and WTO.

And the results? Well, the Saga now controls 2/3 of the market and turns a profit. Initially, there was much substance to criticism that Mitsubishi was transferring only outdated technology to Malaysia, but apparently they are now only transferring some advanced elements under pressure. And local sourcing? In the mid-1990's it is said that 80 per cent of the Saga is now sourced locally. Of course, it is probably true that many components are produced by component suppliers migrating from Japan and being passed off as "local content." However, Malaysian state firms involved are known to very strict about local firms in fact being components are still produced in Japan, many accessories like headlamps, alternators, tires, trim, wheel rims are now produced by local assemblers, and Proton Corporation has reportedly moved toward local production of some engine and transmission parts.

This is not to say that the Saga did not have its share of problems. On balance, however, the Proton Saga exemplified the intelligent use of state leadership in economic development, and provides a good case study of how to use multinationals for national objectives. Indeed, the aim of the Saga's prime mover, Prime Minister Mahatir, is apparently to use foreign investment not so much to replace state firms but to increase the efficiency of state firms via joint ventures and to also get them to acquire technology in the process. How successful he will be remains to be seen.

Indonesia

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Let us move on to Indonesia. Here again, as in the case of Thailand and Malaysia, the claim is made that it is liberalization that has produced the 6-8 per cent growth rates of the last decade. Now it is true that some liberalization has taken place, for instance the devaluation of the currency, cuts in subsidies for basic food items and fuel, more liberal rules for foreign investors, some reductions in tariffs and elimination of some quantitative import restrictions, and some banking deregulation.

What is interesting, however, is how limited these moves have been.

Despite some liberalization, effective protection rates for many key industries remain very high.

Foreign investment, while encouraged, continues to be subject to many restrictions. For instance, many strategic sectors are still closed to 100 per cent foreign ownership, \$250,000 is the minimum foreign investment that can be allowed; and the ruling remains in effect that after 15 years, wholly foreign-owned ventures must divest themselves of a certain share of ownership in favour of local capital. Despite some reforms enacted in 1994, the US Trade Representative's Office complains that "national treatment (or equal rights with local investors) is still generally not granted to majority foreign-held enterprises, and the government imposes performance requirements on some foreign producers... In practice... investment applications, even in meeting all legal requirements, can be delayed or not approved with little or no explanation.

Hardly any of the big state enterprises have passed to the private sector. State enterprises contribute

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about 30 per cent of the nation's GDP and close to 40 per cent non-agricultural GDP. Government production accounts for 50 per cent of the GDP of the mining sector, 24 per cent of manufacturing GDP, 65 per cent of banking and finance, and 50 per cent of transport and communications. When one combines this fact of the state's undisputed control of macroeconomic policy (in the sense that there is no organized countervailing power from the private sector) and of the massive aid resources coming in, the state continued to be a very important driver of the Indonesian economy.

Indeed, there has been a resurgence in the last few years of regulation in finance and industry as well as continuing concentration of significant resources on the development of strategic capital intensive industrial projects that the World Bank has been very critical of, in much the same way it was critical of South Korea's POSCO Steel Plant and Mahathir's Proton Saga. Among these ventures are the Palapa nationwide telecommunications system, which has two orbiting satellites and 50 earth stations, the Krakatau Integrated Steel Complex, a floating fertilizer plant, and a shipbuilding complex that turns out products ranging from hydrofoil patrol boats to oil tankers.

The fact is that state-oriented economic nationalism continues to be a strong force within the Indonesian government. It is a misconception to think that just because the Suharto government came to power with an anti-communist program that it has also been largely free-market-oriented. Rather what we have seen is that free marketeers and protectionist nationalists have been equally ensconced in government and have fought for influence over the last few decades. In fact, it is

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said that economic nationalists with a program of creating via import substitution a heavy industrial nucleus around which to build the economy now have the upper hand. The most prominent representative of this statist and protectionist current is Technology Minister B.J.Habibie, whose pet industry is the IPTN aircraft corporation that recently hit the headlines by sending up the N-250, Indonesia's first homemade aircraft. Even western skeptics were impressed with the test flight of this 70-seat medium-range turboprop. But the Airbus Company and Boeing are not likely to be pleased, for the N-250 is merely a prelude to the N-2130, a jet aircraft that will compete with the European Airbus Company and Boeing for the lucrative Asian airline business.

On this last point, one can only agree with US economist Robert Wade when he says that" ( T ) here is reason to worry whether the World Bank's refusal to countenance selective industrial policies for industries with high entry barriers reflects an underlying willingness to help developing countries enter industries that are already well established in the West, especially when Western plants have excess capacity...Given the governance structure of the World Bank, it is not difficult to understand why...

### **Philippines**

The experience of the Northeast Asian and Southeast Asian NICs contrasts with that of the Philippines, which, until recently, was known as the "sick man of Asia." The Philippines is probably Asia's most structurally adjusted economy, having been the recipient of over 15 IMF and World Bank loans supporting structural adjustment since 1980.



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In the first phase, which unfolded in the early 1980's, a major tariff reform and liberalization program was put in place that brought down the average rate of protection for agricultural and manufacturing products by a third or more. The liberalization program also required that import restrictions be lifted on some 3000 items over a six-year period, and approximately two-thirds of the changes had been made before the combination of economic crisis and political crisis forced a suspension of the trade liberalization program in the mid-eighties.

The second phase of structural adjustment consisted of severe cuts in government expenditures, currency devaluation, and the institutionalization of the payment of the Philippines' \$26 billion foreign debt as the priority of national economic policy. In this phase, emergency structural adjustment and stabilization loans were made by the IMF and the World Bank in exchange for implementing draconian measures, and these loans were immediately turned around as payments for interest on commercial loans falling due.

When these measures were mixed with the global economic downturn of the mid-eighties, the impact of the liberalization program, and the political crisis marking the last days of the Marcos dictatorship, the result was a decade-long economic recession from which the country only snapped, and weakly at that, in 1994. Adjustment in the Philippines exhibited dynamics very similar to Africa and Latin America: to borrow the words of Rudiger Dornbusch, the economy fell "into a hole," or was stuck in a low-level trap, in which low investment increased unemployment, reduced

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social spending, reduced consumption, and low output interacted to create a vicious cycle of stagnation and decline, rather than a virtuous circle of growth, rising employment, and rising investment, as originally envisaged by World Bank theory.

It might be noted here that the impact of the recession on both society and the environment was severe. By the late 1980's, some 70 per cent of the population was estimated to be living under the poverty line. And, according to a World Resources Institute study, structural adjustment "created so much unemployment that migration patterns changed drastically. The large migration flows to Manila ( the capital ) declined and most migrants could turn only to open access forests, watersheds, and artisanal fisheries. Thus the major environmental effect of the economic crisis was overexploitation of these vulnerable resources.

Despite the negative impact of the adjustment and liberalization program, the Philippines initiated the third phase the program in the early 1990's, the centerpiece being the reduction of tariffs to an upper limit of five per cent and the elimination of all quantitative restrictions. This program was synchronized by Philippine authorities with the country's tariff reduction commitments under the general Agreements on Tariffs and Trade ( GATT ) , the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation ( APEC ) , and the ASEAN Free Trade Area ( AFTA ) . Liberalization has been, furthermore, been part of a larger program of free-market reforms that includes deregulation, a foreign investment law that eases most restrictions on the foreign capital's freedom of movement, and

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sweeping privatization. There is currently a frenzy of privatization that has sold off the valuable real estate owned by the government as well as the most profitable government-run firms, like the Petron Oil Company.

In a remarkable instance of historical misreading, Filipino technocrats, who are now probably the most doctrinaire free-marketeers in Southeast Asia, see liberalization as having been principal factor behind its neighbors' high growth rates and see its radical replication in the Philippines as the key to the success of the forced-march toward NICdom by the year 2000.

### **Lessons So Far**

Let us pause at this point and sum up some of the salient lessons we derive from a study of the Northeast Asian and Southeast Asian NICs on the questions of growth, structural adjustment, and state intervention.

First of all, the notion that rapid growth in the NICs was produced by free trade and free market policies is a myth cooked up in the recesses of 1818 H St. NW in Washington, D.C., that is in World Bank headquarters. You probably will get closer to the truth if you travel a couple of blocks up to 17th St and Pennsylvania Avenue NW, to the US Trade Representative's Office, which regularly attacks some of these economies as among the most pervaded by state intervention.

Second, protectionist and interventionist policies were not a barrier to rapid growth and may, in fact, have positively contributed to growth in Korea, Taiwan, Malaysia, Thailand, and Indonesia.

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Third, where doctrinaire free market and structural adjustment policies have been implemented seriously, as in the Philippines, Mexico, and most of Latin America and Africa, the result has been not only increased inequality and poverty but also low or no growth. Despite the fact that structural adjustment has been applied to some 70 Third World countries, there are very few success stories, if any. Latin America, which is perhaps the most structurally adjusted continent, grew by zero per cent in 1995.

Fourth, in the successful NICs, short-term efficiency in production was subordinated to the ambition of building up strategic industrial capacity or, as economists would put it, to developing dynamic as opposed to static comparative advantage in selected capital and technology-intensive industries in order to make their countries less subject to the vagaries of world trade and investment flows and more able to stand up as actors rather as passive pawns in the world economy. This is the exact opposite of the attitude in technocratic circles in the Philippines, which would have government sit back, relax, and let corporate monopolies and international market forces determine your role and insertion in the world economy.

A fifth lesson might be added to these three, and it is that a restrictive investment policy and protectionist trade regime is not a bar to foreign investors. Despite all the tough restrictions on foreign investment entry into the domestic market imposed by government to protect local private enterprises, the NICs and near NICs have become foreign investment havens. In the five year period 1988-93, for instance, the Japanese pushed \$2.2

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billion into jTaiwan, \$6.0 billion in Indonesia, \$4.2 billion into Malaysia and \$5331 into Thailand. In contrast, the Philippines, which has liberalized its foreign investment code several times, attracted only \$1.1 billion during the same perioc. The idea that the key to inviting significant quantities of foreign investment is by looseningup and giving foreign investors the store--lock, stock, and barrel--is a myth, and a dangerous one.

### **Japanese Investment and Growth in Southeast Asia**

This discussion of foreign investment leads to our next point, which is that in terms of accounting for the growth of the Southeast Asian economies in lthe last decade, the explanation lies not with internal free-market reforms but with capital inflows that were largely unexpected. If you compare Africa, Latin America, and the Philippines, all of which stagnated in the 1980's, with most of the Southeast Asia during the same period, what becomes clear is that the former were subjected to a capital boycott owing to the Third World debt crisis, resulting in a highly nigrative net transfer of financial resources, whereas Southeast Asia recived a massive infusion of foreign capital in the form of Japanese investment. This movement of Japanese capital was not sparked by attractive investment conditions but by the Plaza Accord of 1985, which was a desperate effort by the US to reduce its trade deficit with Japan by sharply raising the value of the yen relative to the dollar, hoping in this way to dampen the American consumers' enthusiasm for Japanese products.

The agreement did little to relieve America's trade deficit, but it did provoke a massive migration of

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Japanese manufacturers seeking to lower their production costs to cheap labor sites in East and Southeast Asia. In the period 1988 to 1993, some \$60 billion worth of Japanese investment swirled through the region in one of the most massive and swiftest movements of capital to the developing world in recent history. It also triggered an ancillary flow of capital from Taiwan and the older NICs that were also seeking cheap production sites. This inflow reversed the recession in which Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand were mired in the mid-1980's and served as their launching pad for a decade of impressive growth. 1980's. It might be instructive to note, for instance, that Japanese investment approvals by Thailand's Board of Investments in 1987 alone exceeded the cumulative Japanese investment in the preceding 20 years. You pour that much into a country, and you're likely to have significant growth, whatever so-called statist distortions you may have in your economic structure.

### **Integration cum Subordination**

This centrality of Japanese investment to Southeast Asia's growth brings us to the other side of the East Asian economic miracle. While growth in East Asia and Southeast Asia has been impressive, it does not represent the development of autonomous economies but what might be called integration cum subordination of the region's economies to the Japanese economy. This becomes evident once we go beyond the figures to examine the structures that emerged from this movement of capital. By the end of the period, Japanese conglomerates had created an impressive array of complementary manufacturing facilities producing components for the same products in different parts of the region.

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Toyota, for instance, produces gasoline engines and stamped parts in Indonesia, steering links and electrical equipment in Malaysia, transmissions in the Philippines, and diesel engines, stamped parts, and electrical equipment in Thailand.

This "horizontal integration" of the region via component specialization by subsidiaries of the same conglomerate was accompanied by "vertical integration," whereby the big electronic and car assemblers were followed to their new southeast Asian sites by the smaller companies that supplied them with parts and components. A third phase of this Japanese-sponsored "industrial deepening" may be about to begin, with the relocation of the heavy and chemical industries that provide steel and petrochemical inputs to both the big manufacturers and their suppliers. This process of corporate driven-horizontal and vertical integration has resulted over the last decade, not in the creation of a regional economy with plural centers but in the regionalization of the Japanese economy. In the words of Hisahiko Okazaki, Japan's former ambassador to Thailand, "Japan is creating an exclusive Japanese market in which Asia-Pacific nations are incorporated into the so-called keiretsu ( financial/industrial bloc ) system." The essential relationship between Japan and Southeast Asia that is evolving is one of trading what he describes as "captive imports," such as products from plants in which the Japanese firms have invested," in return for "captive exports, such as necessary equipment and materials"

The region's dependency on Japan is captured by two critical indicators:

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First, almost every country is now running multibillion dollar trade deficits with Japan, as they import high value-added Japanese machinery, technology, and industrial components while they export to Japan low-value-added raw materials, agricultural goods, semi-processed goods, and assembled manufacturing products.

Second, in spite of the major efforts to achieve technological deepening mentioned above, technological dependency on Japan remains severe. When 90 per cent of the components of a Korean laptop computer and almost 100 per cent of semiconductor manufacturing equipment in Taiwan comes from Japan, can we say that these tiger economies have ceased to be labor-intensive assembly points for Japanese components using Japanese technology?

This de facto trading and investment bloc has been created without formal free trade agreements. As one US Congressional Research Service report noted, discussion on whether a Japanese-dominated regional bloc will emerge in response to NAFTA (North American Free Trade Area) and the European Union, "is somewhat immaterial because a de facto trading bloc is already emerging. It is arising out of economic necessity, and barring draconian barriers, will continue to grow regardless of whether or not free trade among the various economies develops." It concluded, with admiration tinged with envy, "Japan's business executives do not need free trade to operate."

Let us pause here briefly and explore some implications of this emerging regional structure for Burma and Indochina. If Thailand has become an economic satellite of Japan, whose investment and



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demand provides serves as a key engine of Thai economic growth, then can it not said that with increasingly tight economic and infrastructural ties Thailand, the countries of Indochina and Burma, with their vast natural resources coveted by economic interests in increasingly resource-poor Thailand, are confronted with the threat of becoming the satellite of a satellite economy?

### **APEC: An Instrument of US Economic Policy**

Let us leave this as a question and return to the broader regional picture . It is the emergence of this *ce facto* Japanese trading and investment bloc that accounts for the strong US push to create the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation ( APEC ) Free Trade Area. The Japanese integration via investment has to use the words of Paula Stern, a key Clinton administration economic adviser, "made it more difficult to increase a US business presence on the ground" Indeed, cumulative Japanese investment in the Asia-Pacific region now outstrips US investment by an enormous margin, with the former coming to \$93 billion and the latter to \$61 billion. Moreover, with intra-Asian trade now accounting for over 50 per cent of East Asia's total trade, the Japan-led "intra-Asian integration" is reducing the importance of the US market to East Asia, and with it US political leverage.

By institutionalizing investment rules based on national treatment ( or parity rights for local and foreign investors ) and trans-Pacific free trade, APEC, in the view of American policymakers, would create a system of rules that would redound to the advantage of American corporations and hobble Japanese and Asian enterprises that depend greatly on different forms of government support

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in production and government-imposed protectionist mechanisms in trade. Perhaps the most succinct expression of this strategic purpose assigned to APEC by Washington was made by Joan Spero, US Undersecretary of State for Economic, Business, and Agricultural Affairs, before a US Congress subcommittee last July: "APEC ...has a customer. APEC is not for governments. It is for business. Through APEC, we aim to get governments out of the way, opening the way for business to do business. It is our goal to make APEC the most user friendly forum in the world."

In sum, APEC has become a key instrument to reverse the process of America's marginalization from Asia and ensure that the sputtering US economy remains hitched to the East Asian locomotive that is expected to pull along the world economy in the first decades of the 21st century.

### **The Sustainable Development Critique**

The contrasts between the free market and NIC approaches should not be exaggerated. In fact, while regional elites have battled to define the direction of Asia-Pacific development along free-market lines or along the lines of state-assisted capitalism, many NGO's, people's movements, and progressive academics have, over the last few years, evolved a powerful critique of both approaches. If I have dwelt at some length on the differences, it has merely been to show that economic growth has been associated with state assisted capitalism rather than free market economics. It is not to signify approval of the NIC model of development, of which I am deeply critical.

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The essence of the emerging critique is that despite some very real differences, the free-market model and the Asian capitalist or NIC model have more to unite them than divide them:

- Both the free-market and NIC models fetishize economic growth as the be-all and end-all of development.
- Both intrinsically generate and perpetuate social inequality even as, in the case of the Asian capitalist mode., rapid growth takes place. Indeed, high growth rates are necessary to allow a rise in absolute incomes without having to undertake redistribution of wealth. This conjunction of a rise in absolute income and worsening income distribution has characterized Korea, Taiwan, Singapore and Thailand in the last 20 years.
- Both models — again intrinsically — are ecologically destructive and unsustainable. In the case of the market approach, there is a rundown of natural capital since ecological costs are typically not factored into the real costs of production. And in the case of NIC capitalism, there has been a deliberate sacrifice of the environment to attract local and foreign capital in order to deliver high-speed growth. Indeed, the prospect of zero investment in pollution control is one of the two cornerstones of the NIC model, the other being cheap labor. In the NICs, market and state, in fact, act in a complementary fashion to create an accelerated plunder of the environment. In Taiwan, the policy of decentralized industrialization decreed by the KMT government pushed small and medium industries to settle helter-skelter

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throughout the country, beside residences and the nearest waterways, in the process decentralizing pollution and converting the island into an ecological wasteland. In Thailand, market, private interests, and state policy have created the convergence of two ecological catastrophes; massive deforestation and massive water pollution.

- Both strategies have detrimental effects on agricultural communities, with both market signals and state policy channelling capital and personnel from agriculture to industry and promoting terms of trade adverse to agriculture. In Korea and Taiwan, agriculture is on its last legs, while in Thailand and the Philippines, it is entering into severe crisis.
- Both approaches have very destructive effects on communities: in the case of market approach, because of the dissolving effect of unchecked market forces on communal and community bonds; in the case of the NIC model of state-assisted capitalism, through the deliberate breaking up and resettling of organic communities that stand in the way of state-managed development projects. In Thailand, the Philippines, Indonesia, and Malaysia, the story is depressingly similar: big dam schemes imposed from the center, uprooting and resettlement of communities, particularly indigenous communities, and the gradual erosion and silent destruction of resettled communities. In the minds of local people, development has become synonymous with Chico, Narmada, Kcdung Embo, and Pak Mun.

### **Negative Paradigms**

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It is time to tell the other, devastating side to the miracle economies in Asia, which is making many people — and not just social critics — evaluate them in a new light.

### **The Tragedy of Korean Agriculture**

Let us take Korea, specifically the agricultural sector in Korea.

Korean agriculture is on its last legs, with only about 15 per cent of the work force now engaged in this enterprise, and it is expected that the opening of the rice market demanded by the GATT Uruguay Round will bring about the final "disintegration of the rice farming household," as one government report has it.

But the crisis of agriculture in Korea is not so much a result of external forces demanding market openings, though US pressure does have a role to play. But these corporate forces have merely delivered the coup de grace. Neither is the crisis of agriculture the result of the workings of the natural laws of economics. Rather, the tragedy we are seeing is the result of economic policies that have consistently subordinated agriculture to the interests of the export manufacturing sector over the last 30 years.

And one asks: Is not the loss of food security a future of almost total dependence on food imports from the US, Canada, and Australia? Is not the loss of rural communities not only a severe loss in economic terms but also in terms of cultural identity? Is not agrarian society part of what defines Korean culture, and with the loss of the countryside, is not a central defining element — a core of Korean identity — about to vanish?

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### **The Taiwanese Debacle**

Let us move to Taiwan.

Taiwan, many Taiwanese will tell you, is an economic miracle and an ecological wasteland. The indices of ecological devastation are breathtaking. The lower reaches of practically all of the island's 44 rivers are biologically dead. Cancer, an environmental disease, has become the leading cause of death. Asthma cases have quadrupled in one decade, leading academics and environmentalists in the Taiwan 2000 Report tell us that even with just half of Taiwan's growth rate in the 1980's, Taiwan will still face ecological collapse by the year 2000.

We have indeed become prosperous, many Taiwanese will frankly admit to you, but we have become prosperous and rich by destroying the ecology of the island. Now it is high time to migrate to Vancouver, Canada, or Sydney, Australia, because the island has become unlivable. And this is not an exaggeration, for the statistics show that the migration rates from industrialized Taiwan have in fact increased from that of pre-NIC Taiwan.

### **Thailand: Industrial Culture in Crisis**

Let us turn to Thailand.

This country, which only a few years ago was proclaimed as an example to the Third World during the 1991 World Bank-IMF conference in Bangkok, has become instead an exemplar of the unsustainable character of the high-speed growth model among many NGOs concerned with development.

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- Bangkok booms, but the gap in average income between rural people and urban people widens each year. Thailand's growth indeed benefits largely the 15 per cent of the population concentrated in the Bangkok metropolitan region.
- Bangkok prospers but the Northeast of the country stagnates, with a significant part of the latter's population converted into cheap labor for the industrial sector of the capital region. Many Northeastern villages are said to now be made up largely of grandchildren and grandparents who are sustained by remittances from the middle generation that is for all intents and purposes resident in Bangkok.
- Bangkok grows rapidly, but this growth is fueled by the rundown of natural capital, with the area of the country covered by forests down to less than 20 per cent, from 60 per cent in the 1950's. Rapid growth has led as well to what many call Thai "resource imperialism," with Thai entrepreneurs now leading the plunder of the timber resources of Burma, Laos, and Cambodia.
- Bangkok's industrial growth is impressive, but air and water pollution are out of control, with the lower reaches of the mighty Chao Phraya River now considered "biologically dead" and the Gulf of Thailand believed to be in a state of irreversible crisis. So serious is the pollution problem that government planners are seeking to decentralize it under the guise of decentralizing industry!
- Bangkok is indeed a great, vibrant city, but unplanned growth has brought it to a standstill, so that planners are now thinking of setting up a

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new politico-administrative capital at some distance from the Bangkok metropolitan area.

### **Toward an Alternative Development Strategy**

Dissatisfaction with both the free market and NIC models is increasingly becoming vocal, especially among NGOs and people's organizations. East Asian NGOs have often been criticized as being long on critique and short on prescription. This has, however, changed in the last few years. Though their ways of expressing them may vary, NGOs throughout the region are beginning to articulate a similar set of core ideas that, for want of a better term, come under the rubric of "sustainable development."

—In opposition to the blind play of market forces in the free-market approach and to state fiat in the NIC model, the centerpiece of economic decision-making. The thrust of sustainable development is to go beyond invisible and interventionist hands, while not denying that market and state can play an important but subsidiary role in the allocation of resources. For development to be sustainable, the fundamental economic mechanism would have to be democratic and transparent decision-making on key issues of production, exchange, and distribution by local and national communities.

—In contrast to the impersonal control by the "invisible hand" of the market and the hierarchical and centralizing thrust of decision-making in the NIC model, the sustainable development model would decentralize economic decision-making and management to communities, regions, or ecological zones, and make national planning a bottom-up process.



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—In opposition to the premium put on economic growth by the free market and NIC models, the sustainable development model de-emphasizes growth in favor of equity, the quality of life, and ecological harmony.

—Whereas both the free market and NIC models are heavily biased toward urban-based industry, sustainable development would make agriculture and the reinvigoration of rural society the centerpiece of development process.

—Whereas in both the free market and NIC models, the pursuit of profitability dictates the adoption of capital-intensive high technology in industry and chemical-intensive technology in agriculture, the sustainable development approach would try to reverse what it considers uncontrolled technological change at the expense of the people, favoring the development of labor-intensive appropriate technology for industry and organic, chemical-free agro-technology.

—Whereas in the free market model, the private sector calls the shots and in the NIC model, the state-big business partnership has a "duopoly" over political and economic decision-making, the sustainable development approach would organize the popular sector, represented by NGOs, as the third pillar of the political and economic system — as a balance to state and business in the short term, but with the perspective of making it the dominant force in the triad in the long term.

—Finally, in contrast to a property system based on the division between private and public ownership in both the free market and NIC models, the sustainable development approach supports the

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recognition, institutionalization, and expansion of the realm of the "commons", or community or ancestral property that cannot be disposed of by market transaction or state fiat.

Initiatives at the community and national level that are based on these principles are already taking place, with some success. The regional implications of this model are still being fully thought out, but some ideas are already emerging in NGO consultations such as the People's Forum in 1991 and the People's Plan 21 in 1992, both of which were held in Bangkok. One thing is clear to its proponents, however: a regional program of sustainable development is a must, for both the transnational capital whose interests are served by the free market approach and Asian capital operate with perspectives and plans that are regional in scope.

This vision of an alternative economic future is very different from both the American free trade paradigm or the NIC model. Articulating this alternative future is, more than ever, a necessity, for while the rampant consumerism that comes with high-speed growth continues to dazzle many in Asia, there is a growing feeling that a process that is accompanied by the decline of agriculture, increasing inequality, and uncontrolled ecological degradation is a recipe for an unlivable future.

Governments and people in the formerly or presently socialist countries that want to be NICs would do well to ponder carefully the consequences of fast track capitalism and ask themselves: Is this a model worth reproducing?

## **Thoughts on Network-Building**

**Aziz Choudry, GATT Watchdog**

There is nothing particularly new about the neoliberal top-down models of development currently being imposed on peoples in the South and North alike. SAPs, trade liberalisation through GATT, NAFTA, and APEC, or market reforms like Reaganomics (USA) Thatcherism (UK) or Rogernomics/Ruthanasia (Aotearoa/New Zealand) are late 20th century manifestations of a process that has been going on for at least 500 years — colonialism.

One of globalisation's effects is to erode communities at their base, to redefine people as merely economic isolates in competition with each other for even scarcer services and chances to make a livelihood than before. To turn into a commodity everything — and everyone, with a market value. And because the globalisation process entails removing national barriers to trade and investment, struggles at the grassroots cannot afford to ignore the impact of global power dynamics on the issues that they are involved in fighting for on a daily basis. For this reason, making connections with similar groups and peoples fighting on are parallel fronts elsewhere can be useful for analysis, mutual support, working out strategies of resistance, and planning alternatives. Although it appears we live in a rapidly-changing world, nonetheless, successful network-building and maintaining involves a lot of "back to basics" work.

The emancipatory potential of the vision and struggles of indigenous peoples, women, and peasants, for example, has strong lessons for many peoples in the industrial North, who are discovering that, their power elites having for so long asserted their societies' supposed supremacy in every aspect over the rest of the world, their lifestyles are unsustainable and come at

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the expense of untold injustice and oppression both within their borders and internationally. It is not coincidental that land-based peoples such as indigenous peoples and peasant farmers have seen the dangers of trade liberalisation measures and the market long before many others — and have responded by planning and acting accordingly.

While globalisation and the spread of transnational corporate control have, through its devastating effects on lives and jobs in both North and South at anyone time, the potential to unite peoples in solidarity with each other, the dangers of divide and rule tactics which emerge from this process, wearing different masks, need to be watched for. A policy or strategy used against people in one society in February may well be used by some other government or institution elsewhere in April. The mainstream media works to deny the common processes at work which are dispossessing people, destroying their livelihoods, living standards, environment and rights. Governments and business are only too happy to encourage people to divert their energies into jingoistic nationalism, hatred and communalism. These practices need to be exposed so that they can be seen for what they are. That is why building and expanding networks — locally and internationally — and maintaining dialogue is crucial.

Building and sustaining basic, genuine grassroots movements and tackling the root causes of injustice are the only ways to counter the process of globalisation. The "joining the dots" at both a local and international level is a vital part of this. But there are more ways than one to build networks. Need to be imaginative, creative, proactive, and accountable in forging networks sustaining existing ones and expanding within countries to link up people who very often are excluded from them because of the assumptions that sometimes get made about access to means of communications faxes, E-mail etc., or who don't have the resources to send members to international meetings? This cannot happen without a time and energy commitment. Sufficient energy must be injected into sustaining and expanding existing networks and not just multiplying them for the sake of it when other groups and networks are already actively working on the issues.

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Different matters for consideration arise in networks which are formed only on specific single issue-based, short-medium term foci and on broader and longer-term time frames. For example, action alert type networks which only kick into gear for an emergency or a call for immediate national/international pressure on some issue. These can be really effective in mobilising action. On the other hand there needs to be increased and ongoing commitment to exchange information, analysis and experience with a view to taking action, building a greater understanding about what's going on for the long term and creating alternatives.

While the Internet has its uses, advances in communications technology also have the potential to damage peoples' movements. I think there are real dangers that technology brings — both in terms of increasing the marginalisation of the already marginalised, excluding the voices of those who do not have access to it, and being caught in a situation where one is to some extent at least driven by the changes in technology rather than the need to make genuine people-to-people links at the grassroots. I do not think that pressures on small underresourced activist organisations to "enter cyberspace" will be helpful. And if it becomes an increasingly important way to communicate among those that do have access to the E-mail, then it is vital that others who do not have access do not get pushed to one side. Care must be taken to ensure that this does not occur. Or, that it becomes just another way of keeping dissent off the street, as life-and-death issues get reduced down to a flow of words on a computer monitor.

"The setting up and expansion of global information highways will offer a forum not only to people who want to use it for education and enlightenment, but also all shades of fundamentalists. These highways will not necessarily bring the misery of many Third World regions closer to the industrial countries, but possibly rather strengthen the tendency to process all world events as entertainment. The California Dream Men and reality TV point the way. The latter leads from a critical dealing with reality to a visualisation that is as tasteless as it is irresponsible," writes Prof. Lothar Brock, University of Frankfurt am Main, Germany.

If the Internet leads to a "commodification of dissent" and peoples' struggles for justice of this sort, what purpose will it

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serve for peoples' movements? There certainly needs to be some discussion about the uses of and limitations of the Internet in building networks of solidarity and mutual cooperation.

Another issue relating to effective networking is the need to ensure that networks do not become stagnant and lose their dynamism, preaching only to the converted, and hinging on and listening to only a few key individuals. Sometimes networks and umbrella organisations serve to mirror the way in which the establishment marginalises some groups, pays lipservice to fundamental issues, or tries to sweep them under the carpet, imposes visions and models of development, and claims the right to speak for the wider populace. Sometimes, in attempts to set up alternative networks, the hierarchies and gatekeeping mechanisms of the "establishment" are just duplicated within those networks (especially when it comes to information-sharing, access to funding allocation and sharing of networks). What is so progressive about people and structures which are supposedly "on the same side" which control the pursestrings, ride the NGO gravy train and conference trail for all it is worth, and are rarely on hand for grass-roots action?! If networks not accountable to, and not representative of people at the grassroots, not people-centred, they cannot succeed.

If fundamental issues and concerns like gender oppression or indigenous sovereignty are watered, glossed over, or omitted altogether for fear of alienating some organisations, how effective then can that network be for bringing about open dialogue and facilitating real social change?

It is also important to identify ways to combat the danger of networks stagnating over time and becoming dependent on big meetings etc. And while people exchange and face to face meetings can be important and useful ways of linking up struggles and networks and sharing etc, they are of little use if nothing happens in between by way of ongoing work and action on the issues around which those involved in a particular network are focussed upon.

Often ad hoc, relatively informal networks are just as useful as formalised lists and structured networks. That is, provided that the information, analysis and solidarity which arises from this is shared. But networks work best if relationships are valued and a corresponding amount of time and energy is put into them.

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Another issue relates to the willingness of people to resource and facilitate dialogue between contacts that they may have, but which may not be appropriate networks for oneself to participate in at the same level e.g. putting indigenous/women's/gay/lesbian activists working for justice for their communities in touch with each other, or linking up contacts in regional or sectoral movements. Effective networking entails a readiness to resource other groups working on different struggles both within their own communities and with their international links.

Some of the transborder solidarity efforts that have been born in resistance to NAFTA, linking Canadian, Mexican and US workers at a time that they are being forced to view each other as enemies have proved valuable in countering the populist and divisive utterances of many politicians and businesspeople. Similarly regional moves to link up workers in different countries who work in the same sectors or work for the same TNC are an exciting and valuable way of transnationalising solidarity links. Linking global issues with seemingly parochial ones is vital both in terms of identifying a local tangible issue which provides an immediate focus for action, but in building analyses and strategies which are relevant to both the local situation and the global picture.

The development of alternative media outlets at a number of different levels relates directly to the question of networks. It is a way of reaching out to new people while retaining control over the content and message of the information transmitted. It is a way of linking up issues so that they can be seen as inter-related, and in the making, it is a way of becoming increasingly familiar with information analysis and strategies on important issues. Newsletters and other written publications are one way of doing this. Radio programmes and other media are also useful for people who are not likely to read material. Such media also have the spinoffs of linking up issues within a format, down linking groups, ideas, and broadening struggles. Building alternative media can move us beyond only "preaching to the converted". Coupled with the need to transnationalise information, analysis and strategies comes the responsibility to disseminate the info locally in as "jargon-free" a way as possible. Once again, regular news bulletins or radio broadcasts are useful ways of doing this.

Effective networking can use the politics of international embarrassment to discredit governments, companies, etc.



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Being able to monitor the utterances of politicians or business executives overseas on some issue and relay it back home can be a powerful tool in delegitimising an oppressive power elite.

Gender is a major dynamic in networking. Even in many "progressive" organisations, it is often women who sustain the essentials of administration, nurturing and building networks and being strongly linked in to their local communities in ways that don't get to "count" in the scheme of things. All too often, men get to take the credit for the work, men who end up on the international conference trail and yet none of this would be possible without the unseen, undervalued hard slog of women.

There are also many thorny questions about who we network with and on what terms. Specific dynamics are created in relationships involving funding. Do we make strategic alliances with individuals, organisations or political parties which operate within a system which we otherwise deplore? How and under what circumstances? How do funding relationships affect genuine solidarity networking? Does being a source of finance preclude genuine dialogue? There are also an increasing number of government-backed and created "NGOs" on the scene. What is the price of working with such organisations? How to prevent issues from being usurped or undermined by such organisations? Since they do not often flaunt their true colours it is important to expose these groups and show them up for what they are.



## **Reflections on Regional Networking and PP21**

**Rex Varona**

This is a reflection paper on recent experiences on Asian regional networking. The intentions of this paper are to objectively critique our networking experiences; catalyse the process of mature, principled and objective reflection; and help build consensus about (1) where we are, (2) our strengths and weaknesses, (3) our obstacles, challenges and opportunities.

The discussion revolves around PP21 because it is our common, collective, and particular attempt at regional networking. PP21 is an excellent case example because it is a real experience, and it is perhaps one of the most ambitious initiatives at Asian regional networking.

Many points in this paper are not new. Indeed, a lot of documents, minutes, papers and proposals have been forwarded, a few named below:

1. "Thoughts on Network-Building" (Aziz Choudry, 15 February 1996)
2. "Some Ideas about the Guideline for PP21 as an Alliance Building Process" (Muto Ichiyo, 4 May 1994)
3. "Proposal for Consideration on the workable PP21 Dynamic" (Boonthan Verawongse, 4 May 1994)
4. "Looking Forward to PP21 Challenges and Thrusts" (Israel Batista, 28 November 1993)

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### **5. PP21 minutes, proceedings, publications**

The first part of this paper presents some general reflections about Asian regional networking (need, level of appreciation, observations, initiatives) from a regional NGO perspective. The second part focuses on PP21 as our common, ongoing experience in regional networking. The concluding section presents rough ideas, a manner of "thinking aloud", about regional networking directions and options.

HK-based regional NGOs have given varied, helpful comments and suggestions, many of which are incorporated in this paper. This paper however does not represent the collective position of these groups. The responsibility for errors in fact and analysis are mine. And I gladly stand corrected for any and all of these.

### **I. Reflections about Asian regional networking**

Following are some observations and main points about regional networking in the past three years, 1993-1996.

#### *1) Specific characteristics of Asia have constrained the development of a regional people's movement*

It is significant how Asian regional networking and the building of a regional people's movement is still an aspiration in Asia (including PP21). PP21 itself identifies the "forging of alliances of people's movements" (i.e. "Alliance of Hope" as is one of its key objectives. (*Rajchadamnoen Pledge, December 1992*)

Whereas Europe and the Americas (especially Latin America) have had long histories of strong continental or regional social movements (e.g. strong enough to topple governments and affect regional geo-politics), such kind of people's solidarity has yet to materialise in Asia.

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Asia has many limiting factors, including its geographical and cultural features. The other regions are whole land masses; Asia is a scattering of islands. The linguistic, cultural, religious differences in Asia are very diverse, so much so that flows of information, people-to-people communication and interactions have been very limited. As a result, national social movements in Asia have tended to be insular and country-centric in outlook, priorities and agenda.

### *2) There is growing appreciation of need and importance of Asian regional solidarity*

Asian civil society *does* have a strong recognition of the need and importance of regional networking. For decades, and more so in the recent past, regional solidarity has been a constant advocacy.

I will not dwell too much on the need and appreciation of "people-to-people solidarity" because this need is long recognised and articulated within and among countries in the region and the world. Volumes have been written on this (*see for instance, documents from all the UN summits, previous PP21 meetings, NGO fora on APEC, etc.*). The PP21 publications, and the paper submitted by Aziz for this meeting are good references.

Let me just highlight the greater significance of regional networking in the face of the collapse of the East Bloc, the triumph of global capital (international financial institutions and multinational corporations), and today, the break-neck rush towards NIC-hood and Asia regional integration.

The last NGO Forum on APEC (Kyoto, November 1995) clearly illustrates how deeply the development community in Asia — NGOs primarily — realise the urgent and critical need of a "people's front" to push sustainable people's alternatives against global capital, free market, and similar anti-people forces causing gender, worker and farmer oppression and environmental disasters.

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It is significant how in the gathering of a broad range of NGOs involved in environmental, women's, workers' and indigenous peoples' issues as well as in human rights and church, coming from Asia and Pacific rim countries (including Pacific, Latin and North America), a very strong, unequivocal consensus was achieved in a matter of days. That forum, the resolutions, and the "1885 APEC NGO Declaration" that resulted from it are solid manifestations of a higher degree of appreciation of the need for regional people's solidarity and sustainable people's alternatives.

The APEC forum is the most recent example. Prior events, including the 1989 and 1992 PP21 meetings, and civil society initiatives related with the UN summits, have reflected the same urgent and deep recognition of regional people's solidarity.

### *3) But the growing convergence on regional solidarity is still largely at the level of NGOs*

No doubt, the various regional and international gatherings, campaigns, activities and initiatives have built a deeper appreciation of regional networking. However, this growing and broadening convergence is by no means grassroots-based, or what I term "organic".

The convergence is still largely in the ranks of the NGOs, especially the bigger, regional, and international ones. The people "at the base", including their organisations, seem not to be involved, much less integrated, in the whole process.

The most telling indicator of this is the fact that until today, regional solidarity remains a secondary agenda (if at all) of country groups and social movements. Local problems, national concerns, rights and welfare, and "rice and fish" issues are still the mainstream and priority agendas of trade unions and people's movements in Asia.

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### *4) Problem of NGO "grounding" is greatly amplified at the regional level*

Typical are these questions whenever a joint initiative is planned or undertaken at the regional level:

- \* Where are the "people" and grassroots groups in this?
- \* What mandate do we have to initiate regional processes on behalf of the people?
- \* How do we continue to undertake activities when the grassroots groups have dropped off?

The regional NGOs are particularly sensitive about this issue. This is a recognition of the fact that most regional NGOs don't's have a mass base nor a representative mandate. The anchor that connects the NGOs to the grassroots groups and the "people" is always in danger of overstretching or breaking whenever the NGOs surge ahead. (In Marxist language, this is the classic "left error" of "commandism".)

At the regional level, this problem is greatly amplified, since most NGOs do not have a membership base. NGOs do not have to deal with day-to-day problems of members, representative processes. Moving up the regional ladder, NGOs become more detached from the grassroots base. Therefore, coupled with better professional skills and material resources, NGO processes are synthesised faster.

The logical effect is for grassroots and NGO processes to become asynchronous in terms of pacing, conceptual level, scope of concern.

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### *5) People's organisations and grassroots groups progressively fall out of regional processes*

We have witnessed this in many of the regional processes. Through the years, the tendency of regional initiatives and processes have been towards "more and more NGO, less and less PO". This phenomenon worsens the problem of regional initiatives becoming "people-less" processes.

This is clearly illustrated in PP21 six years after it was initiated. The NGOs (especially the big, regional ones) continue to dominate the process.

An honest evaluation is needed here. On one hand, we need to examine ourselves (NGOs) why we tend to dominate such processes. On the other, we need to see why grassroots groups find it hard to identify with, prioritise and sustain their participation in regional processes.

One reason, as discussed above, is the tendency of NGO and PO processes to become asynchronous. At one level, the problem exacerbated when regional NGOs do not make ANDD proportionate contributions in resources, manpower, time or support to grassroots organising and education work. Relative to the demands of the regional processes that they undertake, regional NGOs have not proportionately either done or supported grassroots organising, education, base-building. These tasks are normally left to local groups. Meanwhile, NGOs tend to interact with each other, and therefore "preach to the converted".

### *6) Meanwhile, outside of regional NGO and PP21 processes, regional solidarity initiatives by grassroots groups is budding.*

Although the main agenda of the trade union and peasant movements in Asia remain country-oriented and focussed on basic rights and welfare issues, there is a growing initiative among the trade union, migrants, women, peasants, indigenous peoples, and

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youth groups to reach out and form regional solidarity networks. They have become more and more "outward looking" (instead of country-centred) in their solidarity work espec specially in the past 2 years.

For instance, national trade union centres in the Philippines, South Korea and Nepal have made regional solidarity and cross-border links a major agenda of their trade union movements. Individual trade unions and women workers groups in Sri Lanka have teamed up with Hong Kong and Korean counterparts to launch cross-border campaigns. Likewise, peasant groups have increasingly been more active on food security and related cross-border networking and actions. *La Via Campesina (The Peasants' Way)* is an example of this.

These regional linkages are still at their initial stages, and require persistent and consistent nurturing to grow and take roots.

Regional processes like PP21 have played a minimal role in these grassroots initiatives and processes aimed at building greater regional people's solidarity.

If PP21 has not been integral and essential to regional solidarity and the building of people's consensus/alternatives, then we need to ask why?

If grassroots groups can motor and energise these processes themselves, and if *other* regional processes already support them, then what is the specific role of large regional initiatives like PP21?

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### **II. Reflections on PP21**

I raise the questions above in the context of PP21's own declarations about its "spirit" and "process". Based on the 1989 Minamata Declaration (MD) and the 1992 Rajchadamnoen Pledge (RP), PP21 defines itself as an "Alliance of Hope", with the following *operational essence*:

- \*alliance building towards ... global people's power which will confront and prevail over the powers of this unjust and unequal world(RP)
- \*alliance based on people-to-people contacts, initiatives and participation of peoples and their organisations (RP)
- \*transborder political action, support and solidarity campaigns (MD)
- \*minimum facilitating mechanisms(RP)
- \*unique process, spirit

#### *PP21-initiated processes and activities*

PP21 Workers Forum/TNC Task Force/"BARN" project  
South Asia Initiative (SAI)  
Alter-trade (RUA-Negros banana trade)  
International Trade Union Conference, Nepal, December 1994  
Mekong River people's cooperation program

#### *Other regional networking initiatives*

Asia-Pacific Worker Solidarity Links (APWSL)  
APEC NGO Fora, APEC Labour Rights Monitor (ALARM)  
EPZ women and workers network  
Asian Charter on Human Rights  
Asia-Pacific Conference on East Timor (APCET)  
Regional/international campaigns: Toy, Industrial Accidents  
/Bhopal, Kader, Clean Clothes



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UN Summits: Vienna (human rights), Cairo (population), Rio de Janeiro (environment), Copenhagen (social development), Beijing (women)

Migrants network(Migrant Forum in Asia)

Internet, information revolution and telecommunications ... Interdoc/SEAFDA

NGO Task Force on WB, ADB ... Breton Woods campaign

Asian Network on Debt and Development ()

Issue/Sectoral networks and initiatives: human rights, development agriculture, food security, environment, trade unions, women, migrants, youth, indigenous peoples

National social movements

Country-to-country linkages (e.g. Nepal-Korea workers)

It is immediately apparent that there are many dynamic and responsive activities going on around the region outside of the "PP21 process". In many of these other processes, groups who have participated in PP21 meetings may also be involved. But as a body, PP21 has not significantly contributed to these processes.

This coincided, unfortunately, with many of the fundamental agenda — and consensus-building regional and global events: UN summits, Breton Woods 50th anniversary, APEC.

It was also during these years when many ground-based initiatives (Kader, Toy, Industrial Accidents, Food Security, Asian Charter on Human Rights) asserted themselves and crossed state boundaries to reach out to counterpart groups in other Asian countries.

It appeared that PP21 was spending its energy grappling with questions about organisation, relations, power, process, operations, use of funds. Consequently, PP21 was overtaken by important events which shaped regional and international people's agendas and consensuses. Sometimes key issues which PP21 rightly identified e.g. East Timor, APEC were carried out nonetheless by other groups.

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What happened? What was wrong with the “process”? Why did it fail at the crucial moments? Was it simply bogged down by operational problems? Or were the operational problems precisely the manifestations of its inherent problems, thus making it impossible to be effective and responsive?

### *PP21 Inherent Problems*

I believe PP21's operational problems are inevitable, and will continue to bog it down, until PP21 resolves basic questions about its nature and role as a regional process. The following summaries may better illustrate the inherent problems of PP21:

#### *1) No popular regional consensus on the nature and role of PP21*

After six years, a clear, definite regional consensus about what PP21 really is has failed to crystallise especially among many groups active in PP21.

One thing PP21 has is *vision* in general, abstract terms. It knows *what* it wants to do, but it is unclear about its *nature and role* as a regional body/process. It has not resolved *how* to work for its vision, what *form* it will assume, how it will *function and operate*. It has not resolved what constitutes its “body politic”, and how the groups within it relate, function, interact; how individuals, PO's, NGO's movements and innumerable formations work together so that the net process and synthesis is a “people's process” and a “people's plan”.

It has not defined its *mission*: its role in the region; its relationship with other regional processes; its unique contribution/function in the whole regional people's process; its place in the whole scheme of things.

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Some may counter that doing the above are precisely what we are trying to avoid, because those are the “traditional way” of doing things, and that we are trying to create a “new or unique PP21 process”. But what is “traditional” about defining roles, objectives, forms?

### *2)It has not resolved the basic question of who constitute it.*

Another problem is the uncertainty of representation at PP21 meetings. We know who attend them; but what are they? What is their role, power, commitment to PP21 and its processes? What can be expected of them? What commitments can PP21 mobilise and depend upon?

This unresolved issue begs the question of representation, mandates, decision-making, power, accountability, transparency. Who decides what? How powerful and accountable is PP21 or its component bodies, especially in the ambiguous nature of the Coordinating Team, Co-Convenors, Secretariat?

### *3)No coherence of spirit and body*

In stark contrast to the vision and name, PP21 is nebulous in form. As demonstrated over the past six years, there does not seem to be any harmony between its vision/agenda, and its form/organisation. PP21's all-embracing, over-arching agenda, process and spirit, requires a dynamic, comprehensive, solid platform.

There seems to be an absence of “people” and a body that backs up its postulations about “people's power” and “people's process”. This lack of consistency and coherence between body and spirit has contributed much to PP21's inertia.

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### *4) Fixation with the "unique PP21 process"*

We have often explained away these uncertainties by invoking the uniqueness of the PP21 process. But without knowing who we are, how can we distinguish "our process"? We now seem to claim virtually any process as our own. At the same time, we can always escape criticism for not doing enough by laying claim to other groups' initiatives.

Therefore we need to reflect and resolve:

- a. The necessity of creating a "new" process. If we want a "new process" this should ideally evolve out of *current* processes, not one we prescribe on the spot *and at the same time* use as basis/platform for action. By making an imagined "new process" as our reference, PP21's process is bound to be arbitrary and self-illusory.
- b. Can a regional organisation actually create or initiate a people's process? If people's processes continue and PP21 has, for example, been detached from these, what "people's processes" are being talked about? People are supposed to create the "people's process" not regional initiatives.
- c. How can we become integrated into grassroots processes, especially for agenda-building?
- d. How do we identify and evaluate PP21's processes and initiatives? What are our terms of reference and parameters?
- e. With what must we be concerned about: process/organisation or patterns of relation? If we maintain gender-sensitive, participatory, collegial, plural, empowering and grassroots-based interaction and relationships, normal processes and forms of organisation become acceptable. We should not be preoccupied with finding "new" processes and "new" systems of organisation.

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### *5) Laying claim to processes/initiatives in the region*

Piggy-backing on other groups' activities is not an issue if we significantly contribute to these activities. Laying claim to them is another matter. Laying claim is not only a moral issue; it is a practical and political one as well. How can we energise and catalyse people's processes if we just stamp our name, without really contributing? Are we not being as actually exploitative and demeaning as those we rally against?

### *6) Identification of Asian PO's and NGO's with PP21 as the "Asian people's process"*

Given that PP21's self-declaration is to "forge alliances of people's movements" and "help build global people's power", are people's movements and groups identifying with PP21? Do they see and use it as the locus, process, vehicle, or even at least, as common forum on Asian people's alternatives and initiatives? Is PP21 in the collective memory of the national people's movements and grassroots groups in Asia?

There seems to be no regional identification with PP21 as platform for Asian people's initiatives. This may explain why PP21 failed to integrate in the agenda/consensus-building processes in the region all through these years.

Active participation helped by PP21 as a body in, for example, the UN summits, the APEC fora, regional sectoral initiatives of cross-border campaigns has been lacking. We must address the process of building up consensus.

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### *7) Costs*

Considering all of the above, one basic conclusion can be made about PP21: it is a triennial event to celebrate, share and talk. This is similar to the other regional and international gatherings. While there may be needed for this, the process should not be overstated (e.g. as a “people’s alliance building people’s power”).

We have to consider our investments in PP21 in terms of people, time, energy, resources/funds. We need to justify the costs and ask how much of these inputs to translate into people’s organisations, alternatives, processes, plans and programmes.

## **III. Challenges and Options**

### *Perspectives and Directions for Regional Networking*

We don’t need to look far and wide for perspectives and guiding philosophies for regional networking. Principles of gender consciousness, grassroots participation, empowerment, pluralism, transparency, democracy, mutual respect, operating in regional/global context, roles of NGOs and Pos, and even the use of modern technology, are long discussed and popularised, especially among regional groups.

It is important to stress that there are a strong awareness and consensus about these principles and perspectives among the regional NGOs. After decades of people’s processes and struggles, the Asian peoples and development groups have achieved qualitative gains and progress in advancing progressive, pro-people and pluralist consciousness.

How these principles are internalised and put into practice is the real issue that we must address.

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Existing forms of organisation and processes *do* allow and facilitate the vibrant and dynamic exercise of pro-people patterns of relationships and processes. Perhaps, we can start as an ordinary network with clearly defined partners, policy-making bodies, coordinating secretariats. And let our interactions and relations be guided by pro-people principles mentioned above.

There are multitudes of processes, initiatives and dynamics in the region which are real, and from which we can learn. It is impossible (and dangerous) to categorise and document all these civil society and regional initiatives. To facilitate discussion, following are roughly some types of organisational forms and processes in the region:

- \*Regional organisations with formal, representative mandates (with varying "structural tightness") — e.g. Asia Alliance of YMCA, Christian Conference of Asia, Asian Students Association, International Trade Secretariats (ITS's), International Confederation of Free Trade Unions
- \*Project-based, NGO-PO partnerships — e.g. RUA-Negros project, re-entry programme of Asian Migrant Centre
- \*"Remote" and Internet-based networking, with occasional regional meetings — e.g. Internet groups/networks, Interdoc
- \*Issue/sectoral-based NGO-PO network, with institutional coordination — e.g. Asian Network on Debt and Development, Migrants Forum in Asia, EPZ women and workers network
- \*International solidarity meetings (e.g. KMU - Philippines; GEFONT - Nepal; KCTU - South Korea)
- \*"Action alert" networks — especially on human rights, migrants, women
- \*"Cross-border" campaigns — e.g. toy, garments, industrial accidents, social clause, health and safety, environmental, AIDS/HIV campaigns

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- \*Formal "regional council" type of organisations — usually found in regional NGOs, church-related organisations, e.g. Asian Regional Exchange for New Alternatives, Committee for Asian Women, Asia Monitor Resource Centre
- \*Event-oriented regional gatherings — e.g. NGO/PO parallel initiatives and campaigns on UN summits, APEC, ADB, WB, etc.
- \*Bilateral (country-to-country) exchanges and linkages — e.g. between NICs and Southeast Asia, between South Asia and Southeast Asia; "adopt-an-organisier" programmes; "sister/brother organisation" programmes
- \*Internships, training, "study visits", integration programmes, reflection tours
- \*Industry-wide/company-wide linkages — e.g. electronics industry, garments, shoe
- \*Subregional networking — e.g. South Asia Initiative

Given all these forms, processes and initiatives, the challenge to any regional group is to "find its place in the sun". But if we are to find our distinct role or niche in the region, and if we have to create and invest in a regional process, we have to do this based on the unique contribution we can make to forward the regional people's process. Otherwise, we will only become superfluous.

### *Strategic Needs in Regional Networking*

The PP21 declarations (1989, 1992) have explicitly discussed the strategic issues, needs and options in the region. They are worth repeating:

To build an "Alliance of Hope" towards ... global people's power which will confront and prevail over the powers of this unjust and unequal world (RP);  
alliance based on people-to-people contacts, initiatives and participation of peoples and their organisations (RP);  
Transborder political action, support and solidarity campaigns (MD);



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These are the historical fruits of the efforts of hundreds of groups involved in PP21. These reflect the collective wisdom of the development community in Asia.

Using this as a starting point, we have to build a regional people's movement which can exert and wield this power. Such people's movement will only be respected if it can create regional geopolitical impact and can rattle the rafters of government, military and corporate power in Asia.

There is a flux of initiatives in Asia. But we cannot remain in a state of flux forever, especially as global capital and corporate power are fast taking over our lives. If we want to build a regional people's movement, we have to bring this flux into a more cohesive form. We have to forge a form of cooperation which is stronger and more coherent than we have today.

PP21 can then use this as its reference in defining its role in the region, in determining how it contributes in building this regional people's movement, and in working to forge the alliance of people's movements.

### *Challenges for PP21*

1) If we want to be true to our declarations, we have to renew and re-energise PP21 to be (at) the heart of the regional people's movement:

by supporting, encouraging and pushing initiatives from the ground;

by championing, sustaining and promoting strategic projects/initiatives

by being more pro-active, and not simply ride on the tide of events

by being at the heart of civil society processes in the region

by becoming the seed of a regional people's movement "which can confront corporate and state powers"

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by being in the hands of, and run by, people's organisations and representatives.

In this case, PP21 needs to be more cohesive. Commitments need to be more institutionalised. People's representation and participation need to be the highest priority. This is because a people's movement needs to mobilise large numbers of people, if it wants to be respected as a regional people's movement.

2) If the above is not our intention, PP21 should stop the "people's power" rhetoric. In such a case we have to:

Be clear to ourselves and the whole region that we are not "the people's process", only one of the initiatives contributing to the regional process (need to delete such references in our declarations and statements);

Resolve that PP21 is an NGO regional initiative supporting grassroots processes, not itself the grassroots process;

Tidy up our organisational operations by starting with existing forms of organisation (not some idealised "new process"), and being guided by common pro-people principles in our relations and operation;

resolve and clarify the nature of our "body politic" and define systems of representation, decision-making, accountabilities and commitments;

Make our distinct and unique contribution by supporting and helping build people's alternatives, projects, agendas. Such agendas should be initiated by grassroots groups themselves, while we provide regional support, channels, promotion.

### *Conclusion*

If PP21 will become true to its declaration and transform itself into a real Asian people's movement, it is rightly filling-in an urgent need in the region. The NGOs should offer themselves to help realise this transformation and facilitate grassroots groups taking control and

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building PP21 as a people's movement capable of confronting state and corporate power.

If PP21 wants to remain a regional NGO network supporting grassroots initiative, it can best fill-in the need of strengthening and building up grassroots projects and "people's alternatives". Most of these initiatives are still at the "micro" (individual/organisation) level. There is a great need to build them up into community, and if possible, "macro" alternatives. If PP21 plans to devote itself to this, it should consolidate its organisation so that it can back-up and support such people's alternatives (e.g. by providing financial support, skills education, regional channels, linkages, projection, etc.)

In any of the above, PP21 has to be guided by common pro-people principles. It should not fear structures and organisations. In fact, it is essential to have an organisation that corresponds to out defined needs and objectives. The form of organisation becomes a secondary issue for as long as it is guided by pro-people patterns of relationship.

Experience has also shown us that if we want to be effective as a body, component groups have to have specific stakes/agendas in the organisation. Correspondingly, PP21 has to clarify its body politic, and their commitments.

The train is a simple analogy. If we want to have an "Asian train" which will carry and propel our visions, agendas and issues forward, we have to form one. Then we have to make sure that it runs. Forces from outside can't push an idle train or can't push it so far, so long. The train has to self-powered and self-propelled. Outside assistance can help make it faster and more efficient. But it must be able to run by itself.

If PP21 wants to contribute significantly to the whole trip, it can't just hitch-hike or watch on the sidelines. It can't simply stand by the tracks and exclaim, "That's PP21!", as the train passes by. It has to

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be the engine car of the train. Or one of its coaches. Or be on the train, at least.

We know that the people don't have the luxury of time. As the saying goes, "with us, without us, in spite of us, the struggle will move on". Anti-people forces and processes are also not passive. They are neither unthinking. There are no textbooks or laboratories for people's alternatives, only experiences and lessons from our own initiatives. Therefore, we have to dare, experiment, and learn in the process. We have to do it with the people, with no time to waste.

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## **REPORTS AND DECLARATIONS OF PRE-FORA**

International fora prior to the PF21 Main Forum were held in early March 1996. Reproduced here are summary reports and declarations of the fora.

## **International Fora Prior to the PP21 Main Forum**

**a. Workshop on 'Towards a People's Charter' (5-7 March)**

**Venue:** Kathmandu, Nepal  
**Contact Person:** Mr. Sushil Pyakurel  
Informal Sector Service Center  
(INSEC)  
Tel. (977 1) 270 770 Fax. (977  
1) 226 820, 270 551

PP21 Interim Secretariat  
c/o Asian Cultural Forum on  
Development (ACFOD)  
P.O. Box 26, Bungthonglang, Bangkok  
10242, Thailand  
Tel. (662) 377 9357, 370 2701 Fax.  
(662) 374 0464, 731 2216  
Email: boonthan@mozart.inet.co.th

**b. Forum on Tolerance and Peace (4-5 March)**

**Venue:** Karachi, Pakistan  
**Contact Person:** Mr. Karamat Ali/Mr. B. M. Kutty  
PILER  
P.O. Box 8032  
Karachi 75400, Pakistan  
Tel./Fax. (92 21) 455 7009, 454 8115

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### **c. Forum on Natural Resources: Relationship and Management (1-5 March)**

**Venue:** Calcutta, India  
**Contact Person:** Mr. Biplab Halim  
IMSE, 244 Jodhpur Park, (2nd Floor)  
Calcutta 700068, India  
Tel. (91 33) 473 2740, 477 9047 Fax.  
(91 33) 473 0236

### **d. Asian Women Peasants' Conference (4-7 March)**

**Venue:** Kathmandu, Nepal  
**Contact Person:** Ms. Elizabeth Wong  
Rural Reconstruction Nepal  
c/o INSEC  
Fax. (977 1) 226 820, 270 551

### **e. Forum on Civil Society, Human Rights and Good Governance (3-5 March)**

**Venue:** Kathmandu, Nepal  
**Contact Person:** Mr. Sushil Pyakurel  
Informal Sector Service  
Center(ACFOD)  
P.O. Box 2726, Kathmandu, Nepal  
Tel. (977 1) 270 770 Fax. (977  
1) 226 820, 270 551

Mr. Boonthan T. Verawongse  
Asian Cultural Forum on  
Development(ACFOD)  
P.O. Box 26, BungthonglangBangkok  
10242, Thailand  
Tel. (66 2) 377 9357, 370 2701 Fax.(66  
2) 374 0464, 370 1202  
Email: boonthan@mozart.inet.co.th

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**f. International Writers' Convention (1-4 March)**

**Venue:** Dhaka, Bangladesh  
**Contact Person:** Mr. Mohiuddin Ahmed  
Nabodhara, 59 North Road,  
Dhanmondi, Dhaka, Bangladesh  
Tel. (880 2) 329 125 Fax. (880 ) 281  
3014

**g. Forum — People's Health in People's Hand (2-6 March)**

**Venue:** Madras, India  
**Contact Person:** Dr. Prem Chandran John  
Asian Community Health Action  
Networks (ACHAN)  
702-B Shivalaya,  
16 C-in-C Road, Madras 600 105, India  
Tel. (91 44) 491 0368 Fax. (91 44) 827  
0424

**h. Workers' Forum (1-7 March)**

**Venue:** Kathmandu, Nepal  
**Contact Person:** Mr. Robert Reid  
APWSL  
c/o P.O. Box 26, Bungthonglang,  
Bangkok 10242, Thailand  
Tel. (66 2) 377 9357, 370 2701 Fax. (66  
2) 374 0464  
  
Mr. Bishnu Rimal  
GEFONT  
Tel. (977 1) 411 880 Fax. (977 1) 420  
547, 226 820, 270 551



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- i. Asian Small Fisherfolk Consultation (1-4 March)

**Venue:** Chilaw, Sri Lanka

**Contact Person:** South Asia Network For Small  
Fisherfolk Development(SANFED)c/o  
Small Fisherfolk Federation  
Kurunegala Road, Chilaw, Sri Lanka  
Tel./Fax. (94 16) 63 360

- j. South Asia Child Workers' Freedom (1-7 March) from  
Calcutta to Kathmandu

**Contact Person:** Mr. Kailash Satyarthi  
South Asian Coalition on Child  
Servitude (SACCS)  
74, Aravali Apartments  
DDA, Kalkaji, New Delhi 110019, India  
Tel. (91 11) 621 0807 Fax. (91 11) 642  
0029

Mr. Gauri Pradhan  
Child Workers in Nepal Concerned  
Group (CWIN)  
c/o INSEC  
Tel. (977 1) 270 770 Fax. (977 1) 226  
820, 270 551

## **Forum on Tolerance & Peace**

**Karachi, Pakistan, 4-5 March 1996**

### **REPORT**

#### **Introduction**

The Forum on Tolerance and Peace held at Karachi on 4-5 March 1996 was one of the several forums on different issues held in various South Asian countries in preparation for the General Assembly of PP21 originally scheduled to be held at Colombo and later shifted to Kathmandu. The Forum was intended to concentrate on the problems facing Pakistan and the region on the eve of the 21st century, strictly from the people's angle, and of course also to suggest the approach to their solution. These problems include, in particular, the issues of ethnic, communal and political violence and intolerance and the pre-requisites for peace.

#### **The Plan**

It was proposed to organise a public forum with around 100 participants from different parts of Pakistan. South-Asian participation was to depend on the availability of visas and finances. Papers were to be presented from at least India, Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka besides Pakistan.

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The proposed main theme was to look at:

1. The role of the state in South Asian countries in promoting and sustaining religious, communal and ethnic intolerance & strife. In this context a comprehensive analysis of the economic, social, cultural and political policies was proposed to be presented.

It was proposed to focus on specific case studies, wherever possible, of state's direct involvement in promotion of intolerance.

Case-studies and analyses from different South Asian countries were intended to facilitate a comparative analysis and common plan of action for people in the region.

2. The modes and forms of intervention by communalist forces within the civil society and the possible linkages between such forces at the inter-regional level. Such identification would help people of the region to effectively expose these retrogressive forces and devise strategies to counter them.

### **Participants**

80 representatives of different walks of life and professions participated, including social and cultural activists, human rights and women activists, academics, researchers, lawyers & doctors, media personnel, religious leaders, businessmen — from Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Austria, Hungary, Northern Ireland, South Africa, Japan, Cambodia and Malaysia.

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### **Proceedings**

The first day of the Forum attempted to identify and highlight the causes and consequences of different forms of intolerance in Pakistan and South Asia, through presentation of papers on key related elements and subsequent discussions. The second day attempted to highlight issues related to peace and the threats to peace in South Asia, through presentation of papers on related aspects and subsequent discussions. A Declaration was also drafted which was agreed upon in a final plenary session of the Forum on the second day.

### **Key Issues presented**

Papers were presented on the following related aspects of the key issue of Tolerance & Peace.

1. ***Religious intolerance and fundamental human rights of women*** - Ms. Nafisa Shah.
2. ***Religious Intolerance and fundamental human rights of minorities*** - Father Arnold Heredia.
3. ***Ethno- cultural factors in the rise of intolerance in Pakistan in general and Sindh in particular*** - Mr. Abdullah J. Memon.
4. ***Intolerance based on ethno-cultural factors in South Asia*** - Prof. Iqbal Ahmed Khan.
5. ***Political Intolerance*** - Dr. Mehdi Hasan
6. ***Psychological impact of intolerance and violence on different sections of people*** - Dr. S. Haroon Ahmed.

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7. ***State of society and politics, and the threats to peace that are implicit in the inter-state relations in South Asia:***  
(a) *Pakistan* - Dr. Tariq Banuri  
(b) *South Asia* - Mr. E.M. Kutty
8. ***Bangladesh: Towards tolerance & Peace*** - Mr. Abu Sayeed Khan.
9. ***Social preconditions for the maintenance of peace in the Subcontinent*** - Mr. M.H. Askari.
10. ***Beyond geo-economics: A people's Agenda for an EU-Asia Relationship - Conflicts in Ireland and Boania***- Ms. Caitriona Ruane.
11. ***Philosophical basis of maintaining 'peace within and peace without'*** - M.B. Naqvi.

Participants from South Africa, Sri Lanka, Japan, Malaysia, Cambodia, Austria and Hungary also made useful contributions to the discussions. South African delegate Fr. Wesley mabuza and the Sri Lankan delegates effectively highlighted the problems and related aspects of the issues of tolerance & peace in the context of their specific historical and contemporary domestic and regional conditions.

The papers and discussions dealt with different aspects of the situation obtaining in Pakistan and the South Asian region. Following is a brief synopsis of the papers presented and the subsequent discussions.

Pakistan faces many problems. Some of these it shares with the rest of the third world and many with other countries of South Asia. There are however several issues that have become especially grave or aggravated by the peculiar demographic and ethnic composition of this country.

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A beginning has necessarily to be made with the technological backwardness of our society and the various systematic failures through the ages that have resulted in both technological backwardness and many of its manifestations, which are quite familiar. Only label-headings are required for the purpose. The most visible problem begins with poverty that results in widespread hunger, illiteracy and bad health resulting from lack of any health care. Illiteracy also promotes uncontrolled rates of reproduction that intensify all the manifestations of poverty and technological backwardness. This is one set of problems that are common to all or most Third World and South Asian countries.

Another major set of problems, again common to Third World and South Asia, concerns the environment. The type of development that has taken place has led to serious environmental degradation and pollution in the air, on the surface and in the water systems including lakes and seas around. A significant consequence of this is acid rain and damage to many marine and river species. Some species of birds and mammals are also threatened with extinction because of the population pressure and uncontrolled hunting.

Common to all the problems special to Pakistan is the failures of the last 47 years. In parallel with it are the consequences of the haphazard economic development, with questionable objectives and methodology, including the harvest we are reaping in the shape of high inflation and increasing economic miseries further intensified by the IMF - recommended policy package. It would be necessary to devote greater attention to economic mismanagement resulting from the militarisation of economy as a result of bad politics and a misconceived Kashmir policy. That may hold the keys to many economic as well as political failures, especially the inability to contain the political assertions by ever smaller ethnicities.

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In terms of general ideas, the problem that is particularly acute is the use and misuse of religious rhetoric. This is generally indulged in by power elites to promote their objective of staying in power indefinitely and to promote interests of all the vested interests that support them, including their foreign patrons and local collaborators.

Based on extreme intolerance, this religious rhetoric is virtually destroying civil society and democratic dispensation. Undue emphasis on one or other particular religion/faction leads to uncontrollable divisive tendencies that in turn lead to utter frustration of the political hopes of keeping the state united. Afghanistan is an abject lesson.

The present conditions of Pakistan manifest the inability of the ruling elite to employ Islam for unifying or productive purposes. Our political system is unable to accommodate and defang the movements of regional nationalisms with secessionist undertones as well as to accommodate other ethnic assertions while religious and other minorities as well as women remain vulnerable and frequently are persecuted. Human rights observance in the country is atrociously bad.

All these problems have been aggravated because of the failure of the intelligentsia of Pakistan to find requisite systems and solutions through democratic methodology and in accordance with liberal and humanistic values. The unity and integrity of the state is threatened in much the same way as Afghanistan exemplifies in a more aggravated shape.

### **Karachi Declaration**

#### **Towards Tolerance and Peace, 5-6 March 1996**

1. The subject of tolerance was thoroughly discussed. There was consensus over how intolerance arises in this region. The main force is religious beliefs that somehow

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are taken to mean that others' opinions are wrong or bad. Religious intolerance has steadily grown in most of South Asia over recent years and has led to multiple communal and political polarisations in the region. To a large extent, communal prejudice feeds into international differences and results in ordinary inter-state disputes becoming emotionally charged, with disastrous consequences.

2. The evil potential of religious intolerance was brought out by many participants. It was shown that it results, through association of ideas and habits of thought, into intolerance of not only differing political opinions but also of ethnic, religious, linguistic and other minorities. Oppression of, or discrimination against, minorities is a fact of life throughout the region.
3. There was consensus over how to fight the menace of religious and other kinds of intolerance. The only means available is through promoting enlightenment. In other words, collecting and disseminating facts on all the controversial subjects. Verifiable facts are the only means through which to fight prejudices, myths and suppositions of all kinds. Promotion of rationalism, scientific outlook and enlightenment requires a sustained movement by competent professionals and the broad-minded. In promoting such a movement, care has to be taken that positive elements from the religious and other traditions are mobilised.
4. The second and more substantive solution is the actual provision of rights to the people at the grass roots level without discrimination of religion, race, language or gender. Preservation of all ethnic linguistic, cultural and religious opinions and diversities is important, provided that certain formerly entrenched minorities, in certain



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circumstances, may not impinge on or preempt the rights of the majority.

5. One of the important reasons for the deprivation and grievances is the misuse of power by Governments. A strong In need was felt for creating an effective mechanism for monitoring the Governments' policies and their actual results in the shape of violations of human rights. All such cases need to be recorded and publicised, for which purpose the cooperation of all like-minded individuals and NGOs is to be enlisted.
6. The Governments of the regions have to be persuaded to repeal laws such as Hudood Ordinance and Blasphemy Law of Pakistan, Vested Property Act of Bangladesh and similar pieces of legislation, which discriminate against minorities, women and marginalised sections of society.
7. The Governments have also to be persuaded through a popular movement not to pursue policies that may result in military tensions and war. The most significant contribution towards policies of peace will be made by forcing the Governments to accord the highest priority to economic development as would involve the people in the processes of formulating and executing plans. The criteria for projects should be the contribution they make to the actual improvement in the living standards of the people.
8. There was also consensus that formulation of projects should keep its negative impact on environment, in sharp focus. Each project should, as far as feasible, protect nature's ecological cycles while promoting economic growth and social development.

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9. A subject that came up repeatedly was the operation of market forces at the international level which is resulting in social tensions, growing indebtedness and deepening of poverty at local levels and strengthening of international capital into new imperialisms.
10. Emphasis was also placed on gender issues. Women in the region contributing to social activities and development, are suffering from the denial of the basic human rights, and hundreds of thousands of women in this area (region) of the world are placed in jail because of discriminatory laws.
11. Social evils like dowry system or selling of women, and polygamy in this region should be discouraged.
12. The abuse of women and the suffering that goes with it can no longer be tolerated in any sphere of life.
13. The participants strongly insisted that in the movement for alternative society, especially, full participation of women at all levels be ensured.

## **Forum on Natural Resources: Relationship and Management**

**Calcutta, India, 2-5 March 1996**

### **REPORT**

The International Conference on Natural Resources: Relationship and Management was organised by IMSE at Calcutta as a part of the PP21 process between 2-5 March, 1996. It was attended by participants from Bangladesh, Laos, Nepal, Cambodia, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Japan, UK, The Netherlands, USA, Chile and India.

The three main natural resources for sustaining human beings viz land, water and forest and the need for their symbiotic relationship and management were critically assessed and discussed in the context of experiences of the participating countries. The following recommendations were made by the participants at the end of the consultation:

1. To reverse the trend in all the countries of rapidly displacing the people from their control over the natural resources resulting in their accelerated depletion. As this rapid depletion is being further accentuated by globalised market forces increasingly using these natural resources for commercial exploitation for rapid capital

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accumulation, there will have to be a search for an alternative development model to save both nature and the people.

2. The alternative to the above eco-destructive and covertly accelerating development model will have to base itself on empowering directly the people to shape their own destiny in a perfectly symbiotic relationship with a nature of which human kind is an integral part..
3. This empowering of the people will have to be centred round re-establishing and extending further the traditional collective control by the people on natural resources by implementing, among other, through land reform enabling the actual tillers alone to own and operate the land eventually under voluntary cooperative management.
4. The production process in the alternative development model will be based on full employment and self-reliance for production of goods and services in an eco-sustainable way for satisfying the basic needs of the people, and certainly not for satisfying the vulgar consumerism greed of a tiny minority, which is at the root of the present eco-destructive, poverty inducing development model these countries are pursuing now.
5. Following from the present pattern of a socio-economic-cum-political domination a tiny minority in these countries, the entire decision making process, including planning operates from the top primarily to serve the interest of this tiny minority. This pattern will have to be tuned over for initiating the alternative development model which will have to be based primarily on planning from below by directly the people themselves in their own habitat and work places.

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6. This planning directly the people need to be seen simultaneously as what must be initiated now for conscientising the people. The later can help concretising the dream of the people as to what is possible in the future society and what small part of it can be implemented now, in addition, by this peoples' planning process will equip the people both to choose only such immediate steps which can take them nearer their future goal, and also to usher in and manage the new society in a confident, self-reliant way once it is born.
7. Such an involvement by of the people themselves to shape the destinies of their own countries can be decisive step to solve all the problems, which appear to be knotty now, affecting the neighbouring countries such as relating to sharing of Ganga or Mekong water etc.
8. To firmly stand by, and learn from, all the peoples' struggles in these countries, being waged with varying degrees of success, against eviction and repression, for preserving natural resources and democratic rights, for land, employment and living wage. These are the struggles which are laying the objective foundation for ... to the new eco-sustaining and humane society empowering the people at the grassroots to shape their own destinies as an integral part of sustaining nature.

## **Asian Women Peasant Conference**

**Kathmandu, Nepal, 4-7 March**

### **REPORT**

The Asian Women Peasant Conference was held at Staff College, Jawalakhel, beginning Monday 4th of March until 7th of March.

This was the first time that such an event was held in Kathmandu, bringing together representatives of women peasant activists, rural NGO representatives and support organisations from all over Asia, including women from Vietnam, Philippines, Cambodia, Indonesia, Thailand, Pakistan, Japan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and India. From Nepal, there were 15 participants all together. The Conference was hosted by Rural Reconstruction Nepal.

The theme of the conference, "Political empowerment of Women Peasants and Sustainable Development", brought out issues of discussion on globalisation and poverty, the devastating impact of structural adjustment programme prescribed by the World Bank and IMF, patriarchal traditions, the rise of religious fanaticism, ethnic and arm conflicts that have brought sufferings to the women in Asia.

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The Asian Women Peasant Conference was part of the 1996 programme of the People's Plan for the 21st Century (PP21). PP21 is an international people's programme launched in Japan in 1989, followed by another large scale programme in Thailand in 1992. A number of other programmes were simultaneously held in Kathmandu in the form of fora and workshops. The main agenda of PP21 is civil society, good governance, sustainable development, gender and development, participatory development and human development.

The Conference finished with the participants joining together with Nepalese women activists in Kathmandu for the International Women's Day Rally on March 8.

For more information regarding the Asian Women Peasant Conference, contact Ms Elizabeth Wong at Rural Reconstruction Nepal on 415418 (tel) or 418296 (fax); for more information on all programmes of PP21, contact Mr. Ganga Subedi at the PP21 Host Secretariat on 416487 (tel).

### **"Women's rights are Human Rights Human Rights are Women's Rights"**

The Asian Women Peasant Conference of PP21 started on 4th March at Staff College, Jawalakhel. Over 60 participants from 13 countries — Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, India, Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, Japan and Bhutanees refugees in Nepal attended the session. The Conference was hosted by Rural Reconstruction Nepal (RRN) in cooperation with the PP21 Secretariat and the Asian Cultural Forum on Development (ACFOD).

The Conference was opened by chief guest, Ms. Sahana Pradhan, chairperson of the All Nepal Women's Association. Ms. Pradhan highlighted the role of Nepalese women who played a very significant part in the democratic movement in Nepal.

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Furthermore, Ms. Pradhan gave an overview of the situation of Nepalese women, highlighting the social, cultural, legal and economic discrimination faced by them and said conclusively that women peasants have to converge in solidarity beyond boundaries to counter such problems. She also stressed that, "Women's Rights are Human Rights, Human Rights are Women's Rights".

Ms Asta Laxmi Shakya, the General Secretary of All Nepal Women's Association welcomed all participants to the conference. Then Ms Dulcy De Silva from Sri Lanka and Ms Vin Young from Cambodia gave an overview of the South Asian and South East Asian peasant women respectively, stressing on the commonalities of problem issues and concerns shared and faced by women in their respective regions.

At the afternoon session, the conference expressed their views on three issues of concern: on the lack of women's participation in decision making; on the lack of women's access and control over primary resources; and the issue of food security and women. All the different countries' situation was examined and once more, the identification of commonalities faced by peasant women all over were expressed by the participants.

Tomorrow, the conference participants will be in an exposure programme to Banepa and Bungmati, to observe and familiarise with the everyday lives of rural women in Nepal.

## **WOMEN PEASANT'S DECLARATION**

*We the 60 participants, comprising women peasants and solidarity partners from 13 countries, attending the Asian Women Peasant Forum from the 4 March to 7 March 1996, of the General Assembly of the people's Plan for the 21st Century in Kathmandu, Nepal, poverty, injustice and encroaching globalisation confronting women peasants, and women working as agricultural workers, fisherfolk, forest workers,*



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*indigenous women, women working with animal husbandry, small scale enterprise and the informal sector (henceforth, collectively referred to as "women peasant(s)"). We forcefully endorse for action this Declaration:*

**1. We recognise the following realities confronting women peasants:**

- \* a lack of access to and participation in decision making roles;
- \* systematic male dominance and lack of gender awareness, together with discrimination and disparity, throughout all aspects of individual, family community, political, legal, economic, cultural and social life;
- \* a pervasive lack of awareness and visibility of the role and contributions of women to agriculture and recognition of their labour within the family and society;
- \* semi-feudal exploitation;
- \* encroaching globalisation, adversely controlling the pricing of crops and other commodities, disrupting and destroying local communities, economics, environments and food security;
- \* a pervasive lack of access to and control over primary resources such as land, water, forests, seeds;
- \* a lack of empowerment and access to leadership, in all aspects of society, including political, social, decisional, health services, labour union, and other social institutions;
- \* pervasive poverty and landlessness, further marginalising women and forcing them into dependency;
- \* confronting the threat of total seed control by multinational corporations;
- \* denial of trade union rights of agricultural workers, including unequal wages government or constitutional guarantees and policies for gender equity and other services established but never carried out or enforced;

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- media exploitation of women together with harassment, violence, rape and the trafficking of women;
- oppressive social beliefs and practices such as polygamy, child labour and marriages, persistent superstitious practices and taboos, female infanticide and the dowry system;
- pervasive disregard for basic human rights oppression by religious and fundamentalist factionalism;
- chronic exposure to toxic chemical - and non-sustainable - agricultural inputs;
- confronting high technology and chemicals which are used to exploit coastal resources (e.g. aquaculture) and destroy coastal ecological and economic systems;
- confronting the break-up of the family unit and the community, caused by factors such as migration.

### **2. We hold forth a vision:**

- of justice, freedom, dignity, equality, and equity for women peasants in all spheres of life: political, cultural, social, economic, educational, legal, private;
- of peace, and mutual respect and harmony among peoples of different gender, race, religion, ethnic groups, cultures and political persuasions
- of sustainable agriculture which respects indigenous knowledge systems, towards a sustainable society;
- of empowered women peasants realising their full potential as individuals, as members of women's organisations, and as leaders at the local, national, regional and international levels;
- of a democratic, decentralised society, based on full local democratic participation, as opposed to globalisation.

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### **3. We see some beginnings and opportunities:**

- \* a growing and empowering number of peasants' organisations and agricultural workers' organisations;
- \* a growing and empowering number of women's organisations: peoples' organisations, NGOs and government;
- \* increasing networking and solidarity with local and international NGOS, peasants' organisations, women's organisations and labour groups at local, national, regional and international levels;
- \* within the region, there exists a rich reservoir of women's indigenous knowledge to be tapped;
- \* increasing awareness of, sensitivity to and politicisation — among scattered sectors — of issues related to gender;
- \* some access to (increasing in some countries) education for girls and women, including literacy training, formal, non-formal and vocational;
- \* improvements in peasants maternal and child health, such as in family planning;
- \* rural peoples' banks started in some countries are offering new possibilities of independence and economic security for women;
- \* education of women in some countries is breaking down gender barriers by enabling them to enter non-traditional professions such as the postal service, police and bus conductors;
- \* through the exercise of electoral rights, blocks of women voters can influence the policies of candidates, and by mechanisms of recall, hold elected officials accountable for performance: mass rallies and advocacy can exert similar pressures.

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### **4. We advocate the following strategies:**

- to build networks and alliances of women peasants in order to:
  - bring groups together to share grassroots experiences and indigenous knowledge by providing study tours and exchanges;
  - promote communication and information sharing, through the use of new communications media (e.g. fax, E-mail), as well as newsletters and publications;
  - collect and document examples of successful local initiatives;
- to build up/strengthen women peasants' movements, starting with local organisations, moving to united clusters of groups, and linking with and/or farming federations at the national, regional and international levels;
- through national and international solidarity networks, to pressure for the dissolution –or at least, local accountability – of international financial institutions such as the World Bank and IMF, and the disbandment of trading blocks promoting the global trading agenda of trans-national corporations, such as the World Trade Organisation;
- to advocate and demand:
  - more active participation and leadership representation of women peasants in elected offices, political parties, mass and religious organisations, labour unions (e.g. farmers', fisherfolk unions);
  - to lobby for and demand women in decision-making positions to protect and expand the rights of women;
  - the recognition and compensation of women for their significant contribution to the farming/agricultural sector, as well as their labour contribution to the family and community;

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—that all issues, policies, plans and activities be examined from a gender perspective;

—legal reform and action in such areas as equal pay for equal work, the just enforcement of labour laws, inheritance and land ownership laws, and adequate social security systems;

—the end of infanticide and the dowry system, oppressive social beliefs and conventions such as polygamy, child labour and marriages, and persistent superstitious practices and taboos;

- \* to document, publish/disseminate and promote traditional indigenous agricultural and herbal knowledge, as well as promote local initiatives and gender respecting locally appropriate technology;
- \* to demand training and education for women which can help to make their skills recognised and their products and/or services marketable and ensure their independent economic security;
- \* to organise and advocate for the preservation of positive indigenous values and cultures, as part of the development of a participatory democratic system, which emphasizes localization and decentralization (vs globalisation), in the economic, social and political sectors.

### **5. Taking action:**

- \* to establish a committee of women peasants in the Asian region (Asian Women Peasants' Committee) as a starting point to develop and coordinate a regional network to promote the cause and interests of women peasants. Pending the establishment of such a committee, the Women Peasants' Department of the AH Nepal Peasants' Association (address: PO Box 7049, Madan Nagar, Balkhu, Kathmandu, Nepal), has agreed to act as a communications secretariat for the working group on establishing the committee;

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- \* to establish an information/communication system including newsletters, publications and electronic communication, ensuring the two-way flow of information and feedback between the grassroots members and regional members;
- \* to establish national networks of women peasants, especially in countries where such networks do not exist;
- \* to document and disseminate examples of successful women peasant experiences and initiatives, and of existing indigenous agricultural and herbal knowledge;
- \* to organise and observe an annual "Women Peasants' Day " throughout Asia (at a date to be determined by the Asian Women Peasants' Committee), in which the situation, the strengths and contributions, and the demands of women peasants would be brought to the attention of all;
- \* to propose to political parties to set and increase quotas for women candidates in all elected and non-elected positions, from local to national levels;
- \* to encourage international organisations and international NGOs to support women peasants in development programmes such as credit, income generation, vocational and skill training, and literacy programmes in order to enhance their status;
- \* to encourage women NGOs in each country to exert influence in government women's organisations and institutions;
- \* to establish a hotline and initiate a signature campaign (to be decided by the Asian Women Peasants' Committee).

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**Forum on Civil Society, Human Rights and Good Governances**

**Kathmandu, Nepal, 3-5 March 1996**

**REPORT**

The PP21 Forum on Civil Society, Human Rights and Good Governances met on 3-5 March 1996. Participated by more than 150 participants from over 30 countries Asia Pacific region and other continents. The session included detail discussions on:

1. Understanding civil society and relating it to good governances and human rights.
2. Urgent issues and concerns which dealt with the specific violation of human rights in Bhutan resulting in a massive refugee diaspora, militarisation in Kashmir and Chittagong Hill Tracts, genocide in East Timor, civil conflicts in Burma, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Bangladesh and in other places in this troubled region where low intensity conflict are being waged on ordinary peoples.
3. Existing mechanism and the response to these issues.
4. Specific suggestions and responses for NGOs and peoples' movements to the above issues.

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The PP21 Forum on Civil Society, Human Rights and Good Governances emphasized the need to strengthen Civil Society as a step toward the protection and realization of human rights. Towards this end, there is a critical need for democratizing the state, political parties, and markets, making them more accountable and transparent.

These challenges become even more important in the context of the increasing role of unfettered global capital which is seeking to centralize economic power on the one hand, and penetrate national and local economies on the other.

The participants felt that political and economic power had to be devolved to ensure people's control over productive processes.

To realize this governance need to be redefined with emphasis on the democratization of of institution from local/community level extending upwards to include participation of hitherto excluded marginalized communities.

**Participants at the forum outlined the following impediments to human rights which in turn curb the growth of civil society:**

1. Undemocratic and elites systems of governments which restrict or eliminate political space in civil society, and the domination of the national security perspectives.
2. Military intrusion into civil space often backed by legislative power.
3. The decline of democratic institutions.
4. International (including the Bretton Woods Institutions) and regional support to regimes which violate human rights, as well as the selective condoning of human rights violation.
5. Unequal access to and control over economics and environmental resources both within and between states.



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6. Disempowerment and marginalization of large sections of society, especially women, minority communities, indigenous and tribal peoples, and displaced peoples and refugees.
7. State and global control and state censorship of the media. And the media's insensitivity towards marginalized peoples and human rights violations.
8. Lack of awareness of rights among the population at large, reinforced by the perpetuation of illiteracy.
9. Sectarian, communal and chauvinist role of non-state actors.
10. Multiple threats to cultural and biological diversity and threats to political and economic pluralism.

**Given this context, the participants felt the need for the following people's initiatives to promote Democracy, Good Governance, and Human Rights:**

1. To bridge the gap between human rights NGOs and peoples.
2. To promote South-South and North-South Dialogue and to promote transborder dialogue.
3. To enhance gender equity in the struggle for social, cultural, economic and political rights.
4. To widen recognition of the importance of placing social, cultural and economic rights at par with civil and political rights.
5. To increase participation of people from the Asia Pacific region and the rest of the Third World at various UN fora. To monitor the WTO, World Bank, IMF, and to enable all international decisions taken at national parliaments.
6. To widen the awareness of the inter-connectedness of rights.

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**Specific strategies for NGOs/Peoples Movements activism were suggested by the forum. These include:**

1. Protests, demonstrations, and reclaiming by peoples of their natural resources.
2. Publicity campaigns to influence decision makers, states and markets and to increase local, regional and international visibility.
3. Campaigns for widening the awareness of people's rights. To enhance local mechanism of alliance building to enable exchange of common experiences and research.
4. Building local, regional and international alliances, coalitions and networks of people organizations.
5. Making the electronic and print media more democratic and transparent and initiating independent peoples media and channels.
6. To strengthen human rights education for all parts of our society, and to strengthen educational work in order to facilitate people's participation in decision making.

## **RESOLUTIONS AND APPEALS**

### **Bhutanese refugees**

1. The participants were requested to take the recommendations made at the Forum on the issue of Bhutanese refugees in order to pressurize their respective governments.
2. Requested participants coming from donor countries to monitor aid to ensure that it will not violate human rights of Bhutanese people.
3. Invited the participants of the forum to visit a Bhutanese refugees camp in Nepal and to hold a press conference in Kathmandu in order to sensitize the governments concerned on the issue.

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4. Made a special appeal to support Bhutanese refugees in organizing peace marches for their repatriation to their homeland.
5. Solicited donations for support to Bhutanese refugees.

### **East Timor:**

An East Timor representative:

1. made an appeal to join the ongoing action programmes in the Asia Pacific region including a meeting to be held in Kuala Lumpur.
2. called for more attention over the issue especially in South Asia. To gain support, they would send representatives from East Timor to visit South Asian countries.

### **Bangladesh:**

A representative from Bangladesh:

1. requested support for human rights activists as well as people facing repression.
2. called for the monitoring of the on-going human rights violations in their countries.
3. appealed for increased international solidarity.

### **Chittagong Hill Tracts:**

A representative from CHT:

1. invited the participants of the forum to attend the forthcoming Bangkok meeting on CHT in October 1996.
2. suggested that some links be made between the Bangkok meeting on CHT and the Kuala Lumpur meeting on East Timor.

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### **Pakistan:**

A request was made to express concerns and solidarity to people in Karachi and to condemn any military action by the government.

### **Mexico (Zapatista):**

An appeal was made for solidarity. An invitation was given to the forum participants to visit the continent and to attend a proposed meeting in Tokyo.

### **Kashmir:**

A participant of the forum made an appeal to give the opportunity to Kashmir people to work together for their self-determination.

### **Burmese refugees:**

An appeal was made to pay continuous attention to human rights violations committed by the SLORC regime.

A specific request was made to UNHCR to give due consideration and support to Burmese refugees.  
All participants were requested to pressurize their governments not to harass refugees in their countries.

### **Sri Lanka:**

A call was made for finding a political solution to the ethnic conflict and to call upon both the LTTE and the government to enter into negotiation.

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# **International Writers' Convention**

**Dhaka, Bangladesh, 1-3 March 1996**

## **REPORT**

Presently, there are attempts to link people's struggles and movements for cohesion, understanding, solidarity and empowerment. The PP21 (People's Plan for the 21st Century) is one such process which has emerged as a global movement since its inception in Minamata (Japan) in August 1989.

As a part of the PP21 process, an International Writers' Convention was organized in Dhaka, Bangladesh, on 1-3 March 1996. The Convention brought together persons involved in different fields of literature from various corners of Asia. The main purpose of the Convention was to interact in order to define a common perspective in the era of massive globalization and social discord.

## **Convention Theme**

Writers are perceived as Vanguards of social progress. They sketch the lives of the people, their livelihood, their aspirations and their struggles. While doing this, they are often subject to harassment, torture and other atrocious acts by the State and coercive institutions. Writers, though they come from different

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segments of the population, perhaps belong to an identifiable entity in as much as they represent the conscience of the society. The writers, in the ultimate analysis, think for the people, speak for the oppressed and write for the humanity. They strive to erect bridges between peoples and social movements across the political boundaries.

The world is fragmented. The people, that is, the toiling masses, the grass-roots communities, the freedom-fighters, the youth, victims of gender discrimination, all re endeavouring to come closer. The process of convergence is obstructed by divisive forces of the State as well as global hegemonic forces.

The present world has transcended beyond communities and States. It is now being splintered and reorganized into economic and political blocks under the ordain of the global forces of the market forces. Entities and phenomena like EU, ASEAN, SAARC, APEC, NAFTA, SAPTA, etc., are becoming more real and monstrous. Freedom and autonomy at the level of individual and community are withering away.

The collapse of the bi-polar world has changed the scenario to a significant extent. People's struggles for livelihood, autonomy and dignity, which used to derive some strength from inner contradictions of the multi-polar world, is expected to assume new identity in form and content. The forces of peace and progress which had hitherto been augmented by contending and antagonistic nature of the world order have now been slowed down. The quest for equity and social justice which used to glean its life-blood from the ideals of socialism is believed to be functionally over.

Have the conditions of existence of the people changed? No, they have not. Coercive forces have continued their hegemony unabated and, in some respects, have tightened their grip. Communities are systematically being persecuted through ethnic cleansing. Progressive ideas in general and women in particular

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are increasingly being victimized by religious bigotry and fundamentalism. The plight of the dalits and other oppressed groups is still continuing by the cruel forces of caste chauvinism. Struggle for people's self-determination is being quelled in the name of national security.

On the other hand, ethnic strife has intensified. Majority chauvinism in the form of discrimination, persecution and ethnic cleansing is now taking a heavy toll. Bosnia, Jaffna, Kashmir, Karachi, Chittagong Hill Tracts, East Timor and many other parts of the planet are now burning.

In this situation, how would one act in the intellectual domain? The pertinent question is, will there be any shift in the catalytic role of writers at this juncture? More particularly, how would the writers intervene and contribute, not as an exogenous entity, but as a part of the people's process?

### **Participants**

The Convention was attended by more than 100 writers, academicians and social activists including participants from outside Bangladesh. Guest participants were drawn from across the Asian region. Among them were poets, novelists, play writers, journalists and proponents of alternative paradigms having involvement with and commitment to various social movements. Participants were selected in consultation with concerned individuals, organizations and solidarity networks. The organizers were in touch with several such groups for quite a long period.

A scheduled field exposure trip was cancelled in view of the prevailing political situation. Participants visited Bangla Academy Book fair and talked to participants of the Young Writers' Project of the Academy. A reception was held for the visitors by the Academy authority.

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### **Convention Structure**

The Convention did not take the form of a formal seminar, and hence, no rigid structure was followed. However, in order to make the event conclusive, few thematic sessions were planned, so that some important issues could be addressed in a comprehensive manner. At the end of the Convention, a declaration was adopted which included a common perspective of the participant writers. A forum of Asian writers with a modest action agenda was constituted at the Convention.

The main organizers of the Convention were Nabodhara, a small organic group of writers-cum-social activists, and Alternative Media, a citizens' group involved in information and communication alternatives.

### **RESOLUTIONS**

1. To hold similar events on a regular basis.
2. Proceedings and resolutions of these events should be communicated to groups in different countries and efforts should be made to involve other writers, journalists and film-makers in this process.
3. To publish a regular newsletter.
4. Efforts should be made to publish anthologies of works of writers of the region.
5. There should be channels to provide opportunities for individual writers or groups to travel, meet and interact other decisions.
6. The participants decided to form an Asian Writers' Forum. The interim secretariat of the Forum will be in Dhaka with Mr. Mohiuddin Ahmad as the coordinator.
7. The Forum will be more broad-based. The next Convention of Asian writers will be held within a year at a suitable venue. Vietnam and the Philippines (where



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the people will be commemorating the 100th anniversary of the Philippine Revolution in 1996 - 1998) have been suggested as possible venues.

8. The Convention adopted the Dhaka Declaration which reiterated the role of writers in people's struggles for empowerment and social progress.

### **Dhaka Declaration**

The world is fragmented. The people, that is, the toiling masses, the grassroots communities, the freedom-fighters, the youth, the vulnerable minorities, victims of gender discrimination, all are striving for survival, dignity and empowerment. The process of convergence is obstructed by organized groups of intermediaries, divisive forces of the State and global hegemonic forces. These are manifested in the chauvinistic and reactionary ideas propagated by dominant groups. Struggle of the people for livelihood, autonomy and dignity is being quelled in the name of national security.

Particular mention may be made of communal and ethnic strife which has escalated in different parts of the world more than any other period in contemporary history. South Asia has been a hot-bed of communal tension and violence for many years. This has not only threatened the delicate political balance in the region, but also made millions vulnerable. During the last fifty years, more than twenty million people have been displaced from their economic and social base against their will.

On the other hand, ethnic strife has intensified. Majority chauvinism in the form of discrimination, persecution and ethnic cleansing is now taking a heavy toll.

In this situation, how would one act in the intellectual domain? The pertinent question is, will there be any shift in the catalytic role of writers at this juncture? More particularly, how would the

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writers intervene and contribute, not as an exogenous entity, but as a part of the people's process?

Writers are in the vanguard of social progress. They sketch the lives of the people, their livelihood, their aspirations and their struggles. While doing this, they are often subject to harassment, torture and other atrocious acts by the State and coercive institutions. Though writers come from different segments of the population, they belong to an identifiable entity in as much as they represent the conscience of the society. The writers, in the ultimate analysis, think for the people, speak for the oppressed and write for the humanity. They strive to erect bridges between peoples and social movements across the political boundaries.

We, the participants of the International Writers' Convention held in Dhaka in March 1996, declare that the writers who have converged here from different corners of the world are an integral part of the people. We reject the present state of the world which legitimizes coercion in the name of democracy, discriminates against religious and ethnic minorities, perpetuates gender and caste chauvinism, protects religious bigotry and fundamentalism, and promotes consumerism. We support and uphold all struggles of the people for empowerment. We want to create a new world free from narrow domestic walls. We welcome a twenty first century based on fraternity, dignity and freedom.

***SHAPING OUR FUTURE***

**Forum on Health  
Entitled “Beyond 2000  
A.D.: People’s Health  
in People’s Hand”**

**Madras, India, 1-5 March 1996**

**DECLARATION**

The 20th century is drawing to a close and WHO’s proclamation of “Health for All: By the year 2000 AD.” will be a reality for the people of Europe and North America. Perhaps China, the countries of South East Asia, the middle East, Central Asia and select countries of Latin America may reach this goal by the year 2025 AD.

But for the rest of the world, it is only going to be an “Illusion”. More than one-third of our people are half-starved. Several others work and survive in the most hazardous atmosphere and survive in abysmal living conditions. For them even the semblance of good health is a distant dream. The suffering of millions of others goes beyond the Infant Mortality Rate, the Maternal Mortality rate and related statistics.

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The government's responses to these challenges have been disappointing preoccupied as it is with either the sterilisation program or immunisation program. The general socioeconomic political salvation of the people and country is going to dogs-with some section of people thriving at the cost of human misery.

It is high time for us to submit our responses and arm ourselves rather than choose to be ignorant of this rising challenges. The voluntary sector is ushered or crucial responsibilities!

We, the NGO Health workers of India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Nepal, Indonesia and Japan, participating in the Workshop "Beyond 2000AD." The Role of NGOs in the Health Care of the Poor held at Madras during March 1-5 1996, expressed our anguish and deep concern about the deteriorating health situation in Asia. This deterioration is manifested in the sharp increase in gastro-enteral diseases and tuberculosis the re-emergence of malaria with more virulent strains, the pervasiveness of bronchitis and lung problems and allergies, and the outbreaks of newer and newer viruses. Added to these are the health problems resulting from increasing addiction to tobacco, alcohol drugs and neurotic: poverty-induced prostitution including child prostitution: migration from the villages to the city slum, breakdowns of family life and the possibilities of faster rates of spread of AIDS in Asian countries.

We recognise that behind this deterioration in health situation lies the Western model of development based on nature-conquering technology which has resulted in a chain of adverse consequences such as increasing impoverishment, malnutrition and

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marginalisation of the poor; the fast-growing levels of pollution of water and air from the chemicalisation of agriculture; vehicular emission; toxic effluent from industries; poison-loading of foodstuffs and accumulation of toxins on the soils.

We also recognise that the hugely expensive and disastrous model of development plus the century old control by the industrial nations over the international trade mechanisms termed the natural rich resource countries of the South into economically poor and financially indebted countries and that this had given further opportunity to the G-7 countries to impose draconian Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP) on the poorer nations which have set in a process of net transfer of resources on a much more massive scale from the countries of the South to the business houses of the North. The effect of this draining of resources on the people's health has been compounded by cutbacks in government subsidies on food and expenditure on health and education as per the IMF conditionalities, leading inexorably to progressive deterioration of health.

We further recognise that the SAP and the consequential pro-MNC liberalisation has induced a process whereby the national policies have been subdivided into neglecting the nutritional needs of the people to give primacy to the requirements of the international master and to elite oriented market demands within the nations. The switch to cash crops from subsistence crops and to commercial shrimp farming at the cost of polycultural fish farming and by permanently salinizing the agricultural lands for short-term earnings of foreign exchange are among blatant examples of this trend. Simultaneously the multinational companies in food

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business are ensuring indigenous food enterprises to promote the culture of junk foods and cola drinks, thus undermining people's health. This reversal of nutritional order, this programme of sapping people's health and the creeping destruction of the perennial base of agriculture are the instruments of a distorted form of globalization in which wealth accumulates in the hands of the corporate bodies of the G-7 countries and to a lesser extent in the hands of their collaboration in the south and hunger, diseases and death engulf the people of the globe including the poor within the rich nations.

We further reiterate:

1. It is our firm belief that all actions at the community level lead to or should lead to Health - healthy lives being the ultimate aim of humankind. Therefore "Health" should be understood as a state of well being of the community, not the individual, where its various components, i.e. physical mental, social, economic and political are equal and in harmony thus, giving rise to holistically integral, integrated and therefore healthy communities.
2. It is important that the above approach is based on our belief in the ordinary, poor and the oppressed people as they are, their knowledge systems, skills-based and capacity to "own" and manage their problems.
3. That the women as a whole in the countries of the South and particularly the women of the poorer sections and the indigenous peoples (advices) have been the

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hardest hits and are with the gravest problems of health and threats to human dignity.

4. That the children and the youth of the countries of the South are being lured to consumerism habits, and a culture of sex craze and violence is being promoted through west modelled big screen films and telefilms, and that drug trafficking, arms peddling under the umbrella of commercial culture, causing unprecedented health hazards to the whole of the southern people.

We also take note that many NGO's are succumbing to the lures of international fund given to be exploited as consults for alien business interest; anti-people policies and their game of using the southern people as guinea pigs.

Further we feel sorry that the WHO failed to give the Alma Ata declaration the priority it deserved and the concept of primary Health Care (PHC), with grassroots people having the major say, was allowed to fade away by puffing resources into specially implemented programmes which were to be connected by medical establishments.

We are deeply distressed that the G-7 countries are seeking to impose on the world a more inequitable socioeconomic order through the medium of the World Bank - IMF- WTO combine, pushing aside and marginalising UN bodies like UNESCO, UNCTAD, UNDP, UNEP, UN intellectual Project Rights Organisation and the Second committee or the UN General Assembly. We consider this a gross violation of the Charter of the United Nations.

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We therefore, call upon the people, the governments, fellow NGOs of all countries of the South and the poorer people within the industrial nations.

1. To reject outright the nature conquering philosophy and technologies which are Eco-destructive everywhere and are the most suitable for the tropical countries.
2. To reject the theory that expansion of and reliance on market forces is the basis of property and to promote instead cooperative living. Resistance to commercial pulls which leave the poor in the neighbourhood unfed, unclothed and uncared for is a condition for building a just society and a moral order.
3. To develop all streams of medical science — Ayurveda, Homeopathy, Allopathy, Unani, Sissaha, Acupuncture, Yoga and Naturopathy and to volunteer help to the people needing health care.
4. To resist the invasion, through the Internet and other electronic and print media of, satellite communication system of values alien to indigenous cultures.
5. To give greater attention to the health Care of the women, children and the divasis (indigenous people) in view of their greater vulnerabilities and in consideration of the fact that the women and the adivasis have traditionally been the possessors of superior knowledge preserving the ecosystem.



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As positive measures, we call upon the peoples government and the NGOs:

1. To promote a style of simple living in organic relationship with nature and voluntary limitations of wants, consistent with the requirements of radiant health.
2. To practice conservation ethics so that the natural resources such as water, timber and minerals can be saved from depletion and preserved for the enjoyment of prosperity over millions to come.
3. To launch a vigorous drive for reforestation in view of the facts that the survival of humans and all other oxygen-dependent forms of life depend on the forest cover and that the forests are the common regulation of the state of health of the soil, water and the atmosphere.
4. Given the fact that in most parts of South Asia, there exists a rich health tradition, it is important for NGOs to understand, document and nurture this tradition so that they can be revived and people's dependency on the alien health is reduced.
5. To widen the nutrition base and diversity food consumption patterns.
6. To restore the link between forest and agriculture, between land use and animal farming.
7. To halt the process of genetic erosion in the name of HYV cultivation and the

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coming threats of genetic manipulation and to restore genetic diversity of indigenous cash crops, species, vegetable species, tree species, cattle species, oil seed species etc.

8. To practice the integration of agri-horti-flori-pisci-sylvi culture and poultry farming and animalhusbandry for maximising the total food basket.
9. To improve the organic matter status of the soils by bio-fertilizers and to promote the culture of frugal irrigation as against the flood irrigation in the interest of both soils as water conservation.
10. To resist the spread of polluting industries in rural areas in the name of development of backward region and to promote instead agro-processing industries of various kinds be keeping, solar cooker manufacture, small engineering, ayurvedic medicine production at decentralised levels.
11. To promote herbal gardens and herbaria and to prevent their over exploitation as well as biopiracy by international commercial interests to take community patent rights again.
12. To implement vigorously the "the polluter has to bear fully the depilation costs" principle so that mega-industries with exponential pollution potential cannot find a place.
13. To promote vigorously the installation of biogas plants and solar cookers and to take initiatives in both their creation/manu-

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facture and repair services to save commercial energy, prevent pollution and to give a chance for the forests to grow.

14. To promote the concept of co-generation technology for the fullest utilisation of mineral resources and to prevent pollution.
15. To stimulate recycling of broken glasses, used tinned cans, used paper etc. and to promote among the people the culture of separating at the source the different types of household wastes.

We also call upon the NGOs.

1. To launch programmes for building awareness among the communities about sanitation, personal hygiene, community rights and individual rights. This awareness building should be extended to all states of the society and all levels of organisations.
2. To perform the role of advocacy to governments and the international basis on behalf of the poorer people.
3. To activate existing laws and to mobilise public support for revision of laws where necessary.
4. To provide legal aid for the poor and to create public sanction for new legislation for the welfare of the weaker sections of the society (e.g. abolition of bonded labour).

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5. To ensure universal literacy in its truest sense of all adult men and women and to provide free primary education to all children through the cooperative efforts of government agencies and NGOs.
6. To provide low-cost sanitation system and conversion of waste-into-wealth system in households where biogens plants cannot be installed immediately.
7. To enlist the cooperation of community leaders and influential religions leaders to promote communitarian and ethnic harmony and a climate of goodwill and love.
8. To promote people to people solidarity to stop arms race.

## **Conclusion**

To be able to do this effectively on the other hand, we need to strengthen NGOs capacity to facilitate people's processes. This means, briefly, (I) making NGO leaders and workers "informed" and knowledgeable, (II) taking a long hard look at our systems and structures to assess their appropriateness in achieving change, (III) "re-vision" and "remission" ourselves and our organisations for the task at hand. This would also mean building coalitions of the sensitised in each country, in building transborder alliances of the concerned and playing an advocacy role among fellow-believers in the first instance and later among resource agencies, bilateral agencies and the government.

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# **Workers' Forum**

**Kathmandu, Nepal, 3-7 March 1996**

## **REPORT**

The Workers' Forum of the Peoples' Plan 21st Century was held from 3 to 7 March in Nepal. It was the third Workers' Forum, following the first in Japan in 1989 and the second in Thailand in 1992.

Over 70 participants from 16 countries and 7 regional labour networks attended the 1996 Workers' Forum.

## **Background**

PP21 (People's Plan for the 21st Century) is a programme initiated in August 1989 in Japan. Around 30-40 events were organised in various parts of Japan to show that we, the people, have to strive to make the next century *our* century.

A few months before the 1989 PP21 programme, the Japanese Prime Minister announced that the coming millennium would be the 'Pacific Century' or the 'Japanese Century'. PP21 wanted to counter this and work to make the 21st century a 'People's Century', not the century for the capitalists and corporations. PP21 wants to counter the power of anti-people institutions

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(Transnational Corporations, International Monetary Fund, World Bank, etc).

The "Workers' Forum" was one of the events/programmes held under PP21. Japanese labour organiser Ben Watanabe who is present today was one of the key organisers of the forum. This was the beginning of the PP21 Workers' Forum. Peasants, women, indigenous peoples, consumers and other groups also had their own fora/programmes as part of PP21.

In 1989 all the PP21 events in Japan converged in Minamata, where the main PP21 forum was held. The choice for Minamata was symbolic because it was here where the Chisso factory caused mercury poisoning in the harbour. This initially affected fish and animals, then the people, causing deaths, disease, and birth defects. The PP21 assembly adopted the 'Minamata Declaration'. This declaration became the basis for PP21.

The second PP21 meeting and the second Workers' Forum were held in Bangkok, Thailand in 1992. At the Bangkok meeting, PP21 decided to hold meetings every 3 years henceforth, but they would not be as big as the first two PP21 assemblies. It wanted to avoid creating a sort of an "NGO Olympics" every 3 years.

According to the Minamata Declaration, the idea and the vision of PP21 is to try to build people's movements, not only in our countries, but especially across borders. The Transnational Corporations (TNCs) and International Financial Institutions (IFIs) are operating across borders. Therefore, if we want to confront them effectively, we, the people (workers, women, etc.) have also become transnational. The only way we can challenge these international powers is to become international ourselves. This does not mean forgetting or downgrading local and national struggles, movements and initiatives. In fact, this should be strengthened because these will be the foundations of our cross-border solidarity

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In Japan (1989), approximately 500,000 people participated in various PP21-related events. These included the 'green festival' in Fukuoka which drew hundreds of thousands of people. Almost 1,000 people attended the PP21 meeting in Minamata. In Bangkok (1992), around 600 people attended the PP21 meeting.

The International Trade Conference held in December 1994, was an initiative that came from the PP21 conference in Bangkok in 1992. The conference was to be of a different type from PP21 and APWSL. This conference was intended to discuss how to better organise workers, and create independent democratic trade unions. The participants were officially representing their unions at the conference.

The discussions covered how to combat the Structural Adjustment Programmes and privatisation, and how the unions could better organise themselves. There were 63 participants from 38 trade union centers from Asia as well as Europe.

As is apparent from the Kathmandu Declaration, the issues are similar to those being discussed at this PP21 meeting. The Declaration states that the capitalists are now organised on a global scale. With this global organisation, many of the rights struggled for in each nation have been swept aside with the process of globalisation and structural adjustment.

Trade unionism must try to organise the unorganised sectors, including child and bonded labour to try to eradicate these problems.

The 1994 Kathmandu meeting did not want to establish another international trade union center but an informal network, which could bring the independent and pro-worker unions into the network. (90% of those present did not belong to any international trade union centre). GEFONT was appointed as secretariat.

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### **PP21 WORKERS FORUM 1996**

The PP21 Workers Forum was held in Kathmandu, Nepal from 3 to 7 March 1996. The Workers Forum had been moved at short notice from its original venue of Colombo, Sri Lanka due to the recent political developments in that country.

The Forum expressed its highest appreciation to GEFONT, the General Federation of Nepalese Trade Unions, for extending their all out support and assistance for the holding of the Workers Forum at a time of their own organisation's busy schedule of preparing for their Second Congress. The support and assistance of GEFONT helped to make the PP21 Workers Forum a success.

The Forum considered the impact of privatisation, liberalisation, globalisation, and the new economic policies and their impact on workers and workers rights in the region. More specifically the conference focused on the changing role of transnational corporations (TNCs) which sees them now integrating trade, capital and production having far reaching implications for workers in their workplaces and communities. The Forum reviewed some of the current activities of participating groups, in particular the campaigns on free trade zones, garment, footwear and toy industries. The Forum also shared experiences of workers organising themselves at a grass roots level.

The Forum unanimously rejected the new economic policies which are being imposed by the global elite through the G7, World Bank-IMF and the World Trade Organisation and emphasised the need for workers and worker organisations to intensify the struggle against the impact of this "new world order" and the changing role of the TNCs.

The Forum acknowledged the need to continue with previous campaigns that have begun to develop international, cross-border actions of workers, i.e. garment, footwear and toy industries. Participants expressed the need to improve communications both



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amongst the participating organisations as well as between the grass root workers and discussed the means of improving communications.

The worker participants emphasised the need to continue worker exchanges between countries and particular industries.

In regard to child labour the Forum decided to ensure that trade unions were much more active in taking up child labour issues. The Forum itself was able to greet and join the child labour march from Calcutta that arrived in Kathmandu on 6 March.

Regarding migrant labour, the Forum emphasised the need to focus not only on migrant workers in the receiving country but also the reasons for the migration from the home country. It again emphasised the need for trade unions and women's organisations to be much more active in taking up the issues of migrant workers and reducing the antagonism between migrants and other local workers. It also expressed its concern at the exploitation and abuse of migrant sex workers and decided to press for legislation in each country to redress this problem.

The Forum discussed the reasons for the lack of participation of women in trade union activities and leadership roles and the means of overcoming the obstacles. The participants emphasised the need to pay greater attention to organising women in the unorganised sector.

The Forum discussed the concept and value of codes of conduct for transnational corporations (TNCs) and it expressed the need to examine the issues in greater detail. It was emphasised that the code of conduct cannot itself be effective unless we strengthen the workers organisations first. We need to link the code of conduct with other issues like consumer issues.

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The question of Social Clauses in International Trade Agreements was discussed. Many of the participants at the Forum outrightly rejected the concept of the Social Clause, seeing it as simply another mechanism of the richer countries to dominate the "south" and which would have a negative impact on workers in the poorer countries. Other participants reported that although their trade union leaders had accepted the Social Clause there had been little or no discussion on it within the trade unions themselves. The participants in the forum called for much more education and discussion on the issue of the Social Clause.

In the context of South Asia Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA) the Forum supported the promotion of a South Asia Workers Charter. The formulation and implementation must involve trade unions, labour organisations and workers at all stages of the process.

Following the parallel workshop on Trade and Worker's Human Rights at the time of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Leaders meeting in Osaka, Japan in November 1995, the Forum endorsed its decision to establish the worker rights monitoring network, ALARM (APEC Labour Rights Monitor).

The Kathmandu Declaration of the International Trade Union Conference held in Nepal in December 1994 was also endorsed. It was seen by Forum participants as a guide for our future work. The Forum in particular endorsed the Declaration's emphasis on the need to strengthen independent, democratic and pro-worker unions.

The Forum sends its solidarity and best wishes to the Second Congress of GEFONT that will take place from 16-19 March 1996.

In the last years of the 20th century, the rights of workers and workers organisations have been further attacked and weakened. The participants committed themselves to carry on the struggle

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and strive to make the 21st century a more just and equitable century for workers.

**WORKERS OF ALL COUNTRIES UNITE!!!**

## **Asian Small Fisherfolk Consultation**

**Chilaw, Sri Lanka, 1-4 March 1996**

### **REPORT**

#### **Focus**

Throughout the ages, fisheries have helped to feed people the world over and have been a mainstay of human settlements in the coastal areas of all regions.

At present, the total world catch ( including aquaculture ) is some 102 million tones a year, of which some 72 million tones go to direct human consumption. Fish continues to provide over 20 percent of the protein supply. In addition, some 30 million tones of fish are used as animal feed in the form of fish meal which is bought at raw fish prices. Fisheries are also an important source of foreign exchange for developing countries, which provide almost 45 percent of the value of the world fish trade. In 1992 the net surplus of developing countries' exports over imports exceeded that of coffee, tea or rubber.

People all over the world would tend to believe that fish are assumed to be an infinite resource. But today the fish nets come almost empty every day. Fish are being killed faster than they can reproduce and all commercial fisheries are depleted due to over

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exploitation. The decline of fish production threatens some 13 million fishers all over the world.

In this context, the fisherfolk who are worried about their extraction have to join hands with NGOs', Scientists, Attorneys, Journalists, Students, Conservationists and other suffering people to bring about a new ethic based on a healthy ecosystem to prevent depletion of fish stocks and a sustainable conservation plan suitable to the culture, values and tradition of the Small Fisherfolk. There should be a Universal Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries.

The women in Fisheries should have more stake in sharing the fishery resource to enhance a quality of life in the family and society so as to live a life of dignity and respect.

### **Objectives**

- 1.To rediscover the responsible role of Small Fisherfolk for sustainable use of marine and inland fishery resources and environment.
- 2.To highlight the global threats to the aquatic ecosystems.
- 3.To lobby for new fishery policies to reduce increasing pressure on marine and inland resource and empower the bargaining capacity of the small fisherfolk to struggle against globalization and privatization.
- 4.To analyse past failures and draw up a socioeconomic plan to save small fisherfolk from extinction.
- 5.To work out an Action Agenda for Twenty first century and converge an alliance of hope with all marginalized communities to stand together for justice, human rights and holistic development.

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### **RESOLUTIONS**

We, the delegates representing Bangladesh, P Maldives, Taiwan, Sri Lanka and India, after four days of deliberations, declare that we will be united together to raise our voices and struggle against all anti-peoples policies that endanger the lives of millions of fisherfolk in Asia and form an Asian fisherfolk Forum to demand greater recognition and rights of small fisherfolk to secure a just livelihood in the 21st century.

We, therefore, call upon all Governments and other International Financial Institutions not to deprive the fisherfolk of Asia of their traditional fishing grounds and resources in the name of Globalization and Privatization but accept a responsible approach to fisheries practised by small fisherfolk for thousands of years.

We oppose vehemently the destruction of fishing ecosystems such as felling of mangrove forests, mining corals, polluting coastal lands and lagoons with shrimp farming, dumping of nuclear and industrial wastes in seas, lakes, rivers and estuaries and building defence, installations and tourist hotels thereby evicting thousands of subsistence fisherfolk and other marginalised communities.

We regret to learn with great concern that modern commercial fishing with all its sophistication has fished out the infinite resources in the water body and fish are being killed faster than they can reproduce and very little attempts is being made to replenish fishery resources by the Governments all over the world.

Therefore, we are deeply concerned about 200 million fishers all over the world whose lives are threatened with the dire consequences. We strongly urge scientist, biologists, academicians, fishery experts, environmentalist, NGOs and other UN bodies to search for alternative approach the fishery resource

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management with sustainable use of living marine and inland fishing.

We urge the Governments of South Asia to adopt, pursue and strictly implement policy against deep sea fishing and stop harassment and human right abuse such as illegal detention in foreign prison cells of migrant workers. We also condemn the whims of ship captains who offer poor wages and unsafe working conditions and victimize workers against any attempt of unionizing. We are deeply concerned about 40,000 Filipino foreign workers in Taiwanese vessels who are made to sign bogus contracts. We strongly plead for the need to sustain the families of migrant workers during their long absence due to imprisonment of their husbands.

We raise our voices against destructive activities of factory trawlers which zig-zag the potential fishing grounds with the auto pilot and use sonar screens and joy sticks to catch the entire school of fish stock through purseiner nets.

We condemn the export oriented fishery policies supplying high value fish, shrimp and crabs to luxury markets in Japan, Korea, US and Europe thereby denying basic protein food to the South Asians. If fishing is to continue to provide food and livelihood to world's poorest people, a new approach has to be adopted by all those who are interested in the survival of subsistence fisherfolk.

In order to control straddling and migratory fish stocks crossing country borders and restrict unregulated fishing with the excessive fleet sizes, the United Nations Law of the seas should be properly enforced in each country. Therefore we demand for National and Regional consultations to educate fisherfolk leaders and Government officials of the implications of the marine fishery laws and enforce the same to stop illegal fishing and poaching.

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We also urge that the small fisherfolk who are left to lurch in the unorganized sector in most of the south Asian countries are socially and politically empowered through labour unions and federations so as to increase their bargaining power and solidarity between each other.

Fisherfolk women have become vulnerable in most of the South Asian countries that result in impoverishment, dowry deaths, divorces, child abuse, prostitution and violence of all sorts, Fisherwomen who play major roles in pre harvesting and post harvesting fisheries should be offered proper education, functional literacy, self employment skills, fishery resource management etc. to enhance their living standards so that they can live with equal rights, dignity and respect.

We demand for the protection of traditional rights of the fisherfolk such as "Sasi" in Indonesia "Thalavu" in Pulicat Lake in India so as to enable the fisherfolk to retain their cultural values, ensure food security and collective fishing rights and responsibilities.

Finally we pledge to join ranks with all other sections of toiling people of South Asia, human right activities, NGOs and conservationists and forge alliances and linkages with people movements for self determination to break the dominance of free market forces and oppressive State power. This is a proof of our confidence to alter the course of history which inturn strengthens our power to self govern ourselves within our pluralistic Asian context with different religions, races, cultures and values to integrate as one force to forge a common humanity for the 21st century.



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# **South Asian Child Workers' Freedom March**

**Calcutta to Kathmandu, 1 -7 March 1996**

## **Kathmandu Declaration**

1. With the call of "End Child Labour and Child Servitude", the South Asian "Mukti Yatra" (Freedom March from Calcutta to Kathmandu) and South Asian Forum on Child Labour was concluded today, 7th March 1996 in Kathmandu, Nepal.

On the eve of the main forum of the People's Plan for the 21st Century (PP21), the Mukti Yatra launched a rally in Kathmandu, in which representatives from more than 50 countries, including those of the SAARC region participated. This programme was jointly organised by CWIN, SACCS and ACFOD, with the co-operation of more than 20 different Nepali organisations working in the field of child rights and human rights. The co-organizers of this programme were CARNWG, CHILD NGOs Federation, CPC, NCO, DCD, CDS, PAM, BIKALPA, CWS, Bal Chetana Samuha, CRWN, CVICT, INSEC, FORHUR, INHURED, WOREC, and the National Labour Academy.

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2.Despite many laws and regulations, child labour and child servitude is an alarming problem in South Asia. Over 80 million children in this region are working in the most difficult circumstances and are the victims of social injustice and crimes. Many of these children are also the victims of illegal trafficking and selling, commercial sexual exploitation, child labour, debt bondage, child marriage, child abuse, neglect and wars. We would like to call upon all the governments, NGOs and social movements to launch a massive movement to free all children from conditions of servitude.

3.Child labour is a consequence of the existing exploitative socio-economic and political structure, Slavery and exploitation like child labour, bonded labour, serfdom and many other forms of servitude have long been prohibited by laws, constitution and conventions in the South Asian region. However, a majority of the children in this region are not free from such exploitation and oppression and the rights of these children have been continuously threatened. The governments in this region have given too much attention to their power games and not given enough attention and to the protection and promotion of the rights of the child, Examples have proved that the governments in this region are very good at making commitments and very bad at ful-filling them.

4. With lots of movements and actions at the people's level, child labour and the rights of the child have been a powerful international agenda today. This agenda has been supported and ratified by most of the countries in the world, including the governments of the SAARC region. However, they have not yet translated their commitment into action to eliminate child labour and child servitude in their countries.

We call upon all governments of the SAARC region to bring concrete plans of action through mobilising people's forces to combat child labour and child servitude in this region. At the same time, we would expect them to liaise with the concerned

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organisations that have long been involved in protecting the rights of the child in the respective SAARC countries in drawing up these plans of action and measure to enforce them.

5. Many people think that social problem like child labour is caused by poverty. In fact, poverty is the result of unfair economic distribution, social injustice and cultural stigma, and lack of people centred development programmes. When viewed as such, poverty, then, can be seen more as an excuse for, than the cause of, child labour exploitation.

6. Millions of children are forced to work in the most difficult circumstances and violations of their rights to survival, protection and development are an every day reality. Their fundamental rights to education, protection from harm, protection from exploitation and oppression are denied by the concerned governments.

We urge all the governments of the SAARC region to respect the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the ILO Convention on Child Labour, and the Minimum Age Convention (which most of these governments have ratified) and work accordingly to eliminate child labour exploitation.

7. As the result of the growing social movements, the elimination of child labour and child servitude have become an international agenda today. However, it has to be concertized through clear plans of action. For this, responsible international organisations like ILO, UNICEF, UNESCO and other INGOs working for the elimination of child labour should keep in the mind that child labour is the consequence of exploitative socio-economic conditions and political apathy.

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8. The problem of child labour is closely inter-linked with national development planning of the country. For years, our development planning in the South Asian region failed to properly address the problem of child labour and we are forced to accept child labour as the natural phenomenon of the country's reality.

If we are really committed in action to eliminate child labour exploitation, we must eradicate the roots of the problem, which are social injustice, unfair distribution of wealth, patronisation of politics and lack of people's participation in development.

Development is a process for the socio-economic and political well being of every person in the society. Real development is not possible without people's participation and people centred programmes which ensure the sustainability in practice. Furthermore, no national development planning will be complete and adequate if it does not address the needs of children.

We call on all SAARC governments to encourage people's participation in the decision-making process of the national development task.

9. Education is a right, not a privilege. However, a majority of our children are deprived of their fundamental rights and they are forced to live and work in the most difficult circumstances. "Free Education" and "Compulsory Education" have become dream-selling schemes for the governments of South Asia. In reality, they have provided neither sufficient nor adequate educational facilities for the children, whom we regard as the successor of the 21st century. The growing consumerism due to globalisation is resulting diversion of essential resources from basic needs and primary education. Hence, we call upon all the governments of South Asia that the right to education of every child must be ensured as it is the most effective tool to combat child labour.

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10. We call upon all people's movements to give priority to the emancipation of children from slavery and to strengthen the movement for the rights of the child. NO people's movement that excludes rights of the child issues can make any difference in social change. For this, we urge all justice loving people to unite and fight for the rights of the children in South Asia and elsewhere in the world.

Children are the source of hope and inspiration. Childhood is a fundamental right of every child in this world. Without protecting childhood rights we cannot ensure the future of the world.

Last but not least, we, the organisers of the South Asian Child Workers Mukti Yatra and Child Workers' Forum, would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to all the people, especially the children, for their warm welcome and solidarity to the programme organised against child servitude in South Asia.

## **THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

The General Assembly of PP21 Partners was held on 11 March 1996. In the Assembly, some major decisions were made.

1. Recognizing operational deficiencies and limitations of the coordinating mechanisms that were put in place at the 1992 Bangkok evaluation meeting, the General Assembly discussed possible alternatives. It was agreed that more effective mechanisms of coordination were urgently needed thus a multi-tier structure for PP21 coordination was approved:
  - A. **PP21 Council** composed of (a) 2 members each from the following sub-regions/areas: South Asia, Southeast Asia, East Asia and the Pacific region; (b) 1 members each from the following sectors: workers, peasants, women, indigenous people, youth/students, fisherfolk, children, urban poor, plantation workers, artists; (c) members of the former PP21 Coordinating Team.
  - B. A **Coordinating Committee** to be appointed by the PP21 Council.
  - C. A **Secretariat** with full-time staff.

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2. It was decided that the PP21 Council and the Coordinating Team will have as its members organizations and not individual persons. Organizations that are not on the PP21 Council are also eligible to be appointed to the Coordinating Committee.
3. Another decision was to set up task forces to initiate and coordinate efforts in the following areas: people's politics, gender politics, human rights politics, cultural politics, environmental politics, alternatives and health.
4. A committee was appointed in order to constitute the PP21 Council. It was then in the process of liaising with various organizations that are coordinating the selection of respective sectoral and sub-regional coordinators to the PP21 Council which is expected to hold its first meeting in mid August, 1996, in Bangkok, Thailand.

The sectoral and sub-regional representation in the PP21 Council will no doubt help strengthen the PP21 strategy of building trans-sectoral and trans-border alliances. But such alliances can only be built on partnership and shared visions and goals. And it requires more organizations that subscribe to PP21 ideals to join forces.

5. The Assembly reiterated that PP21 partnership is open to all organizations that identify themselves with the perspectives and goals as contained in the three PP21 statements: the Minamata Declaration (1989), the Rajchadamnoen Pledge (1992) and the Sagarmatha Declaration (1996). PP21 partnership does not in any way seek to change the specific character of an organization. On the contrary, it can provide a platform for collective action that will enhance the effectiveness of the partner organization at the service of the people of Asia.

## **Interim Guidelines for Alliance Building Process**

*(These interim guidelines were approved at the Extended Meeting of the Regional Coordination Team held in Bangkok during 3-5 May 1994 and were circulated in August 1994. The Guidelines may be updated in future General Meetings.)*

As PP21 is a new and unique process, there is no precedent that we can readily follow as to how it should be organizationally managed in harmony with its spirit. On the one hand, we do not want to create another bureaucratic umbrella organization, and on the other hand, we must be accountable to the people we work with. We therefore need to search for new appropriate organizational ways and forms to facilitate the PP21 processes. This is possible by our mode and form of work as we go ahead in our alliance building work. In this light, a PP21 interim guideline reflecting our experiences since 1989 has been agreed upon, laying minimum rules governing relationships among the participating groups and setting minimum procedures for decision making and program implementation. This self-regulation among the PP21 Partnership Groups is part of our "Alliance of Hope" building work, and as such is a challenge that we are willing to take.



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### **People's Alliance**

PP21 is a long-term process to foster the emergence of an Alliance of Hope among the people. An Alliance of Hope ultimately means "global people's power which will confront and prevail over the powers of this unjust and unequal world" as the Rajchadamnoen Pledge states. "Building such power requires us to work towards the forging of alliances of people's movement at the grassroots, local, national, regional and global levels". The relationship between these two aspects should not be missed. Collaboration among people's organizations and NGOs is essential in facilitating this long-term goal. But it is not a goal in itself. Collaboration among organizations should be consciously made instrumental to the formation of empowered alliances of the people themselves.

### **PP21 Partners**

Regional, national and other organizations willing to promote this alliance building process in the spirit of PP21 (Minamata Declaration and Rajchadamnoen Pledge) may become PP21 partners. Such partners shall share the collective responsibility to promote the process and disseminate the spirit of PP21. All partners must have a commitment to the PP21 process, agree to cooperate with other partners and contribute a minimum subscription. They should define their respective contributions in terms of activities and resources in accordance with their areas of preference, capacities, and means available.

### **Inter-Partner Relationships**

Partners from diverse cultures, religions, social and historical backgrounds shall endeavour to foster the spirit of collaboration and mutual respect through productive interactions. Diversity is a major asset of PP21. Friendly and open mutual criticism in light

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of the spirit of PP21 should be considered to be one of such interactions.

### **Specific Programs and Actions**

PP21 emphasis is on sustained, cumulative alliance building processes. Transborder actions and programs are promoted and sustained basically through partner initiatives (preferably joint initiatives) at all levels on global, regional, sub-regional, local, sectoral, and trans-sectoral issues. It is hoped that these are called PP21 actions and programs if they are consciously conducted in the spirit of PP21. The partners initiating and conducting each program and action shall be held accountable for the program and action concerned to the PP21 partner groups as the whole. This does away with a centralized, top-down style of work which is incompatible with the PP21 spirit of horizontal coalitions. The follow-up of the PP21 action program adopted in Thailand in December 1992 as well as action on issues should be conducted in this manner. It is hoped that these actions and programs are supported by people-oriented intellectual and cultural activities enriching and informing them. The program holders should keep other partners informed of the progress and results of their programs or actions so that all partners are aware of what is happening in the composite PP21 processes and can relate to these programs and action.

### **Large Scale Events**

To interrelate the complex PP21 processes, to make PP21 visible to the participants, as well as the public, and thus to inspire the whole process, major regional or international events involving large scale mobilization may be required at appropriate times. (The 1989 Japanese and 1992 Thai programs are cases in point though they should not be considered to be the models for future mobilization). Such events should be carefully designed and

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decision on them should be taken through due processes to create partner consensus.

### **Coordination**

Given such multiple initiatives and programs, coordination is essential only to shield PP21 from fragmentation. But it means more than that. Functionally, coordination means:

- i) Inter-relating various programs and actions by ensuring the flow of information and by helping clarify problem linkages in order to facilitate movement linkages.
- ii) Ensuring partner participation in PP21 decision making processes.
- iii) Facilitating the resolution of conflict.
- iv) Crystallizing views of the Partners on PP21's focus and matters involving the whole of PP21.
- v) Keeping PP21's accountability to the people.

Coordination is thus understood to be an organic democracy implemented to regulate relationship among PP21 partners.

### **Bodies for Coordination**

Coordination therefore means functions to be performed by all PP21 partners, and not just by a regional coordinating team. The areas of such multi-layered coordination are:

- a) General Meeting of Partners: for decision concerning the general direction of PP21, major events and programs and other serious matters concerning the whole PP21 process. Such meetings should be held every three years.
- b) National Coordinating Team: may be established in those countries where national partner groups wish to coordinate themselves in such a way.

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- c) Sectoral Coordinating Team: may be formed by partner groups in a particular sector wishing to coordinate their work.
- d) Program Coordinating Team: may be formed by partner groups wishing to coordinate their activities around a particular program or project. These groups are also called the project holders.
- e) Inter-program, inter-regional, inter-subregional, international program, and inter-group consultations: may be held as required to help form PP21 consensus.
- f) The Regional Coordinating Team: shall be appointed by the General Meeting and shall reflect gender, sector and sub-regional balance. The RCT has the special responsibility to perform day-to-day coordinating functions. It is mandated to take and implement decision concerning coordination, to work for the implementation of the decisions of the General Meetings of Partners and decisions of the past major events, to conduct multi-lateral consultations with partners on new plans and actions proposed by partners as general PP21 programs, to present PP21 externally when PP21 is required to do so. (This representation, however, is not exclusive: partners can also represent PP21 on such occasions). The RCT may propose new ideas and plans to partners for implementation but cannot by itself implement new programs or projects involving the whole of the PP21 process.
- g) Extended Regional Coordinating Team Meetings: On matters requiring a broad agreement of partners, such as new projects, the RCT shall call an extended meeting of itself to which PP21 program holders, National Coordinating Teams and other groups relevant to the subject shall be invited. The results of such meetings shall be communicated to all Partners.

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- h) Secretariat: The secretariat shall work closely with RCT members and other Partners and shall undertake the day to day coordination work. This includes:
  - i) day to day communication and other office work;
  - ii) collecting information about and monitoring of PP21 and related activities;
  - iii) maintaining close and frequent communication with RCT members and feeding information to Partners through a newsletter and by other more speedy means (letters, fax and e-mail);
  - iv) regularly reporting its own activities to the RCT, other Coordination Teams and Partners;
  - v) keeping the PP21 RCT accounts.

### **Newsletter**

The PP21 newsletter should contain an activity information part and a part stimulating intellectual endeavour (theoretical, analytical, cultural, philosophical including religious) to help create a new paradigm of social change. A small editorial committee shall be appointed to edit the second part and shall work closely with the secretariat in the production of the newsletter.

### **Finances**

The cost for the PP21 regional coordinating functions should be met by a PP21 fund raised for that purpose. National and sectoral coordination and individual PP21 programs run by groups of partners should be independently financed. The RCT and Secretariat shall assist such fund raising when requested and shall be informed of the funding plans of individual programs. The program holder shall take the responsibility for the financial side of their programs. Maximum efforts shall be made to raise the necessary funds from regional, national and local sources.

## **The Minamata Declaration (1989)**

The slogan at the beginning of the 20th century was progress. The cry at the end of the 20th century is survival. The call for the next century is hope. Impelled by that hope for the future and with a keen sense of urgency, we began our concluding gathering of the People's Plan for the 21st Century in Minamata.

It is significant that we met in Minamata, a place which symbolizes to all of us development at its most murderous. As it did to the people of Bhopal and Chernobyl, a giant organization with advanced science, technology and production techniques condemned the people of Minamata to fear, sickness and death, and their beautiful bay to irreparable damage. These three disasters - Minamata, Bhopal, and Chernobyl - can be taken as benchmarks of our time. At Minamata, the industry of a capitalist country poisoned its own citizens. At Bhopal, a US multinational corporation poisoned people of the South. At Chernobyl, a socialist government spilled radiation out over its land and people and beyond its borders to the whole world. There is no need here to repeat the long and mounting list of eco-catastrophes. These three tell the story: there is no place to hide.

But these are not the only symbols of the disaster that 'progress' has been. For the indigenous people, disaster came with confiscation and exploitation of their lands and resources, and destruction and disruption of their way of life.

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For women, development has meant disempowerment of all kinds. They have been marginalized and subordinated by religions, male science and knowledge, and male maldevelopment. The billion dollar pornography and sex industry has reduced them to mere commodities. At the same time, they continue to be subordinated within their own homes.

For the poor of the Third World, development has meant less and less control over their own resources and lives. Their struggle to survive has become more difficult, their existence has become precarious. There has indeed been progress and development, but only for the few. The rest are paying for this development by sacrificing their lives, cultures, values.

Development and progress have been disastrous because they are based on an obsession with materialistic acquisition. Profit and power have emerged as the gods of this development. The assumption behind this development has been that man is supreme, that he can use and misuse Nature as he wishes. Development has been a project to conquer nature, rather than to live in harmony with it.

Development has meant increasing centralization of power. The more the word 'democracy' has been used, the less has been its practice. For indigenous people and for minorities, democracy has meant the rule of the powerful, a very small elite. Both development and democracy have become dirty words for the oppressed because, in reality, they have come to mean impoverishment and disempowerment.

Decisions are made by fewer and fewer. Economic decisions are made by big conglomerates, political decisions by the powerful in our national capitals, or in the capitals of the big powers; the film and television industry decide what entertainment is and who our heroes are. Governments decide how many children we will have. Some governments force us to have abortions, while others forbid it. Some even decide our religion.

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Human beings become less powerful, less autonomous, less creative, less human. Small communities and even small and poor nations become less autonomous. They are subordinated by world markets, World Bank policies, the power games of world powers.

The gap between rich and poor, North and South, has been increasing. In the last two decades, more wealth and resource have been extracted from the Third World than in the entire previous century. The coming decades are likely to witness more rapid accumulation, concentration and centralization of power in the North. Debt payments, profits, royalties, capital flight, deterioration of the terms of trade are among the mechanisms of imperialist exploitation. This unjust, vulgar and ugly development has also created a South in the North, with the terrible living conditions of indigenous people, racial minorities, migrant workers, and the unemployed.

The 20th century has brought us more, and more murderous wars than at any other time in history. The technology of killing has advanced beyond the wildest imaginations of any previous era. The state, which was supposed to be our great protector, has turned out to be the greatest killer, killing not only foreigners in wars, but also killing its own citizens in unprecedented numbers. The 20th century has perpetuated and intensified the practices of genocide, ethnocide, ecocide and femicide. These practices have occurred in the name of what we have called 'autonomous progress' and 'development'.

All these force us to ask: is here not something profoundly wrong with our understanding of historical progress? Is there not something profoundly wrong with our picture of what to fight for? Is there not something profoundly wrong with our image of where to place our hopes?

'Janakashaba', a word in the Minamata dialect, became familiar to all PP21 participants. Jankashabe means 'a world standing not like this'. It is a beautiful word. At Minamata rallies a new song, 'Janakashaba ba hosikayo' (we want Janakashaba), was sung.



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The Minamata Gathering has shown us that global conditions today have placed the people of the world on a common ground with a common fate for the first time in history. If we want to survive, live together in dignity and in mutual respect of our diversity without violating each other's autonomy and right to self-determination, we need Janakashaba wherever we are.

At this gathering, we talked about our aspirations for Janakashaba. Our hope is not an empty one. It is not a mirage. It is born in the midst of injustices, vices and corruption which make us cry and at times make us despair. We discussed the hope which inspires us to fight injustices as well as social, human and ecological decay. We asked ourselves whether there is a basis for such hope.

Life and nature itself is being defiled, not only human beings. Now, the sky, oceans, mountains, rivers, forests, plants, animals and all other living beings are in crisis, their very existence threatened.

We clearly hear the voices of those closest to nature. We have realized that we must fight not only to restore the sanctity of human life, but of all life.

We were born into a world divided into hostile groups. If we want to survive collectively, then these divisions must be overcome. We have met in Minamata and found in each other the will to overcome the structures that divide us.

Here, then is our assertion: the 21st Century must not be built by these forces of degraded development, but by the forces resisting it. Only then is there hope, not otherwise.

This is precisely what is being acted out before our eyes today by millions of people in the Asia-Pacific region. They do not accept what has been foisted on them as their fate, they are ready to take the leap, and they are taking it. We witness wave after wave of people's movements, emerging, spreading, defying state boundaries, complementing one another, and sharing an increased sense of

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urgency fostered by new networks of communication. The major struggles of the Korean, Philippine, and Burmese people have shown explosive power. Recently, we have witnessed the rise of a new democratization movement of the Chinese people.

The recent experience of glasnost has reaffirmed the continuing universal relevance of participatory democracy, undermined the basis for traditional anti-communism and delegitimised the ideology of the Cold War, thus creating new conditions conducive to people's struggles. However, perestroika may well prioritize economic competitiveness at the expense of support for people's struggles for justice and democracy.

Be that as it may, the changes in the socialist countries provide the opportunity for new alliances with our brothers and sisters in the socialist countries for overcoming the East-West division and for working to establish genuine democratic power worldwide.

In these big countries and in smaller ones, in every region, town, and village, the people are on the move. And they are aware of each other as never before, looking after each other, communicating, joining in unprecedented ways. All of this is new. It is the main force defining our situation and the main reason for this gathering. Janakashaba is the spirit of the people in our time. This is why we do not hesitate, despite everything this century has brought us, to declare that the 21st century will be the century of hope.

There is another reason for hope. The present system has to undermine itself by creating its own contradictions: growth against nature, militarism against the need for collective security, uniformity against cultural diversity, alienation against human dignity, mindless consumerism against humankind aspiring to regain lost values, meaning and spirituality.

The economy has pushed itself to such absurd limits that more and more people are feeling alienated and lost. All over the world,

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simultaneously, more and more people are searching for different ways of living in harmony with one another and nature.

These contradictions are pushing forward new historical subjects from amongst the victims of the global catastrophe, i.e. indigenous peoples, women, the unemployed and the self-employed in the so-called informal sector. Alienated youth without much future and the concerned intelligentsia are also joining the historical struggles of the masses - peasants, workers, the urban poor. The mushrooming of people's movements is giving rise to the hope that we can create a society where everyone can live with dignity.

New conditions support these aspirations. We have the knowledge and the technology. We also have the grassroots organizations, people's spirituality and values, reaffirmed, rediscovered and newly created in the struggle for survival in the face of the collective suicide imposed by the present pattern of development.

The simultaneous emergence of this global phenomenon has its own commonalities: common interests, common values and common threats organically linking all oppressed people and exploited groups in the world. A new logic is emerging against the logic of growth, transnational companies and elites power. This is the true 'logic of the majority'. The 'majority' here does not mean the majority as measured in polls and elections, but the global majority, the most oppressed. It means that they must have the prerogative, and this requires a new set of priorities based on human values and in harmony with nature, culture, gender, indigenous people and other ethnic groups.

A new internationalism is being born out of these local, national, regional popular struggles confronting common enemies. These new movements are growing up within the context of a peculiar contradiction involving the role of the state. Our region is the being organized by transnational capital, which is bringing together far-flung and heterogeneous areas and peoples into an integrated, hierarchical division of labour, in which peasants, workers,

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indigenous peoples and women are subordinated. States are vigorously promoting this, as the agencies which mediate the entry of transnational capital within their national boundaries. At the same time, transnationalization of the economy undermines the basis of the state. This places its claim to sovereignty and its pretense as protector into question, thus weakening its legitimacy, and creating new opportunities for people to intervene. The state seeks to protect itself through intensification of repression and violence, as we see today in many countries, or, as in the case of Japan, intensification of the attempt to implant statist ideology into the minds of the people.

In this same process, the engine of development has overheated in Japan and is running wildly out of control, producing a saturation economy. Japanese work intensely in heavily managed situations in which they are virtually powerless. The Japanese economy does not empower its citizens, but rather seeks to make them powerless and fragmented. And, it has also reproduced within its boundaries a 'North' and a 'South'. The 'South' includes millions of poorly paid women part-timers, contract workers, day labourers, and increasingly guest workers, from South and Southeast Asia as well as farmers who are rapidly being marginalized.

One of the words which has been stolen from the people and corrupted is the word 'democracy'. Originally, Democracy meant the autonomy, the self-determination, the empowerment of the people. To many people in the Third World, however, it has come to be the label for a facade of 'civilian government', disguising state terror and repression in a ploy to claim legitimacy for the state to serve the interests of the powerful. For indigenous peoples and other minorities, democracy has been the ideology of 'majority rule' that has been defined them as 'minorities' who could be legitimately ignored.

On the other hand, democracy is something millions of people in the Asia-Pacific region are fighting and dying for. We need to retrieve it to serve the people's struggle. We must begin with the premise that the state, and the institutions that it pretends constitute 'democracy',

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cannot be relied upon to bring us peace, justice, a secure and dignified life, or an end to ecological destruction. Only the people's movements themselves, independent and, can do this. And here we emphasize that we are talking about a democracy that honours the human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous peoples and other minorities.

At the same time, democracy can no longer be achieved within the limits of the state. Today, the lives of millions of people are being controlled, shattered, deformed and destroyed by decisions made outside their communities, even outside their countries. These decisions are made by foreign governments, by transnational corporations, by agencies such as the IMF, the World Bank and big power summits.

Hence, we declare that all people, especially the oppressed people, have a natural and universal right to criticize, oppose or prevent the implementation of decisions affecting their lives, no matter where those decisions are made. We declare that this right, as a people's right, is more fundamental than any artificial law or institution established by the state. We declare that this right means the right of the people to cross all borders, national and social, to carry their struggle to the exact sources of power seeking to dominate or destroy them. We need to make clear that this right must never be interpreted as justifying the actions of the powerful crossing borders to oppress, exploit and dispossess the people. On the contrary, we are asserting that the people have a right to counter these interventions which are going on all the time.

We recognize that the struggles of subjugated peoples for self-determination, independence, and to establish their own governments, or of people to change or improve their governments, are crucial. At the same time, we believe that, in the long-term, it is the transborder political actions of the people, marginalizing states and countering the power of international capital, that will produce the 21st century that we hope for.

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We have no illusion about the present condition of the peoples of the Asia-Pacific region. The ruling powers maintain themselves by dividing the people and encouraging hostility among them. The rulers not only seek to rule us, but also to manage our mutual relations, depriving us of our right to do this for ourselves. This we must reject and overcome. Transborder political action, support and solidarity campaigns across borders will gradually develop a new 'people', that transcends existing divisions, especially between people living in the North and South.

This is not utopian: the actions we describe are actually going on all over the Asia-Pacific region, and all over the world. What we assert is that these transborder actions are not merely the proper responses of the people to desperate situations. Taken together, they amount to people collectively making their own 21st century.

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# **The Rajchadamnoen Pledge (1992)**

### **Preamble**

We, over 500 Thai and foreign participants of the People's Plan for the 21st Century meeting in Bangkok between December 6-10 1992, represent people's movements and networks, national, regional and international NGOs and solidarity groups from 46 countries from all regions and continents. We have come together to reiterate and renew our commitment to build transborder alliances of peoples in struggle, solidarity and hope. We gather in the spirit that we pledged ourselves to in the Minamata Declaration (1989) which marked the birth of PP21.

Since Minamata, people-to-people alliances and processes at the local, national, regional and cross-continental levels have been realised across boundaries and cultures. Significant milestones in this process have been the forging of relations with the indigenous, black and people's resistance movements in the Americas and the establishment of a group in Central America.

We have met as women, as workers, as peasants, as youth and students, as indigenous peoples, as urban poor, and as activists and advocates of peace and human rights, participatory democracy, ecologically-sound grassroots destructive tourism-related (or resort) development. The encounters and experiences, the ideas and action plans that emerged from these sectoral and multi-sectoral activities held in various parts of Thailand culminated in the main Forum in Bangkok, where we shared our experiences of life and struggles in various forms -- through poems, songs, dances, dramas, and visual exhibits.

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### **PP21: From Minamata To Bangkok: Renewing the Alliance of Hope**

PP21 is taking place in Thailand in the midst of momentous global and national changes which challenge the very basis of our existence.

The Soviet Union has collapsed. The international capitalist system has become more dominant. There is unprecedented global concentration of power with the United States and its allies in the Group of 7 exercising a virtual monopoly over political institutions, economic resource, military power, information and technological products and processes. Institutions such as the IMF, the World Bank, GATT and the Asian Development Bank work together to enforce the dominance of multinational corporations in the name of the free market, totally irresponsible to the basic needs and survival of the marginalised in society. The United Nations, particularly the Security Council, has become a tool of US foreign policy as demonstrated in the Gulf War and in subsequent events.

Integral to this system of global domination is a whole pattern of national control and domination expressing itself in different facets of life. Most governments in the region are armed to the teeth with wide-ranging powers that are stifling the growth of civil society. Democracy has become a system of symbols and rituals shorn of substance. The fundamental civil and political rights of our people continue to be denied. This denial of rights is perhaps most blatant in societies under military rule, but is equally, if not more, destructive in societies where authoritarianism parades with a human mask.

There is mass poverty and blatant exploitation of labour and of the environment. Marginalisation of women continues unabated, and violence against them is on the increase. Elites in many countries in Asia-Pacific emphasize the perpetuation of power and the pursuit of profits at the expense of the basic needs and fundamental rights of the people. The fatal grip of international capital and export-oriented industrialization on our countries, which have been propped



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up as "economic miracles" (NICs), in itself brings further misery and destitution to the poor.

But we have no reason to despair. We know that unjust structures whether at community, national, or international levels must crumble and collapse. They cannot last. Our confidence is not born of naivete. Our faith in the just future of humanity is not the product of some utopian dream. In the last three years since Minamata, we have seen our struggles grow and develop.

Seven months ago, unarmed people waged a battle against guns and tanks to establish democracy. The people in this country became visible on the streets of the city and in the towns in the countryside. As they challenged state power the people once again demonstrated the power of non-violent popular struggle. Through blood and tears they displayed their moral courage and in the process they reasserted their inherent dignity and recovered the power that is their own.

While this was perhaps the most dramatic portrayal of people's power in the region since Minamata, we have experienced ongoing struggles of women against violence and domination; indigenous peoples for their survival and preservation of their cultural and ethnic identity and harmonious relations between nature and humanity; peasants for their land; workers for more just and human working conditions; urban poor for the right to shelter; youth and students for a just and democratic society; local and indigenous communities against mass and luxury tourism; and people against unsustainable development paradigms and programmes.

Furthermore, democratic struggles were successfully waged in 1990 in Bangladesh and Nepal against authoritarianism and military rule. The ongoing protracted struggle of the Burmese people against the military junta cries out for justice and international support. In the Philippines, the rejection of the RP-US Military Bases Treaty on September 16, 1991, has removed a major threat to peace in the Asia-Pacific region.

Each of these is a witness to the awakening of people's consciousness; a stir in our hearts in response to the injustices and

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the inequalities of the existing order. Each struggle demonstrates the ability of people to determine their own destiny. This is proof of our confidence in our capacity to alter the course of history, which in turn strengthens that confidence.

The significance of these struggles within the Asia-Pacific reality is that they emphasise a profound commitment to life. It is a commitment that has great meaning since Asia is the continent that has given birth to the world's major spiritual and moral tradition. At the same time these struggles also point out the relevance and significance to the traditions, cultures and values of the indigenous people of the Asia Pacific region. Central to these traditions is a vision of life and the living inspired by justice, love and compassion. Harnessing what is essential in them demands reinterpretation of the traditions. It is this re-interpretation which has a resonance in the struggles of the poor and the oppressed to reassert their humanity.

Reasserting our humanity means destroying those unjust structures at family, community, national and international levels which dehumanise us and hold us in bondage to wealth and power. This demands a concerted effort on our part to create participatory democracy and foster genuine development. It demands strengthening of grassroots initiatives and networks, building alliances of people's organisations. It demands transborder linkages at the regional and international levels in support of people's struggles to create an ecologically sustainable, equitable and gender-just society.

### **Alliance Building**

Alliance building is oriented towards the long-term goals of the PP21 Alliance of Hope, namely, global people's power which will confront and prevail over the powers of this unjust and unequal world. Building such power requires us to work towards the forging of alliances of people's movements at the grassroots, local, national, regional and global levels.

This alliance is based on people-to-people contacts rooted in a culture of friendship and partnership that transcends borders and

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sectoral and organisational concerns. This demands of us an attitude to learn from each other's struggles and strengthen the relationships and alliances already underway in our own societies. We are challenged to be open to other cultures and experiences in our efforts to link not just ideas but persons; to support and contribute rather than merely expect support; to give meaning to language and communication between peoples; and to be open to initiatives and alternatives coming from all levels.

PP21 is based on the initiatives and participation of peoples and their organizations. This is the essence of our alliance-building, wherein we encourage and endorse the concrete agenda on which people's actions are based.

We, as participants of PP21 Thailand 1992, endorse the proposals and action plans adopted by the participants in the various sectoral and thematic forums that preceded the Main Forum, as an integral part of PP21 Thailand 1992. At the same time, we have adopted for ourselves the following:

### **Information Exchange and Dissemination**

We need to know more about the things happening to and around us. We must keep abreast of the fast-changing realities, trends and tendencies in all their dimensions, for many reasons. For one, information is increasingly being denied to us, and there is a deliberate tendency to block our access to information. For another, there are dominating processes at work in our localities, societies and regions which can only be fought against in a transborder manner. Furthermore, we need to learn from and build on each other's knowledge, experiences and struggles. All these bring us closer together and point the way towards concerted collaborative action to mutually reinforce our respective struggles.

Information dissemination is not to be seen merely as a process of mechanical transfer, given the complexity of issues that have direct and far-reaching impact on the lives of the people. Ideas emerge from people and we need to be conscious not to impose our own ideas on them. Moreover, we also need to ensure that the ideas and

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analysis do not remain trapped in academic language. Proper communication strategies need to be implemented so that concerned sectors can utilise their own information base as well obtain such analysis and information in easy, people-oriented language for purposes of action.

During the Main Forum participants expressed the need for information exchange and dissemination on a wide and diverse range of issues. These included, among others:

- the impact of bio-technology on agricultural cash crops, drugs and pharmaceuticals, and the implications for the vast majorities of people in the region;
- an inventory of NGOs in the region, and their respective skills, resources and areas of concern;
- the sex trade and industry;
- aid, trade, debt and structural adjustment;
- environmental issues directly related to development and sustainability

### **Lobbying, Advocacy and Solidarity Action**

The demand for accountability of multinational corporations and governments to serve the needs and promote the fundamental rights of people was also constantly expressed. Among the issues that need solidarity action are: the demand for the right of free association, protection and promotion of human rights, and the right to self-determination.

### **South-South, South-North Alliance Building**

We need to build transborder sectoral and inter-sectoral alliances from the village to the international levels. Already some processes and initiatives are underway. One such exchange involves fisherfolk in southern Thailand and northern Malaysia. Another ongoing transborder initiative is being undertaken by a task force for the survival of Asian agriculture, farmers and peasants. Participants from among students and youth have pledged to link up with

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farmers and indigenous peoples. Trading links on equitable terms have been forged and are being further developed between consumers in the north (e.g. Japan) and producers in the South (e.g. Sugar workers in Negros, Philippines).

At the Main Forum we learned of many transborder actions and events being organised by groups from different countries which cover various themes and concerns. Among these initiatives that repeatedly found mention are:

- Strengthening mutual support networks for shelter, rescue, legal assistance, counselling, reintegration, etc., for women, particularly Thai women, who fall victim to the international flesh trade (in Japan, etc.) As well as the trade in migrant female labour.
- Women forging alliances across gender, sectoral, cultural and national lines, to strongly condemn, on 25 November 1993, the violence perpetuated against women.
- The mobilization of national and international support for the tribal and indigenous peoples to mark 1993 as the Year of Indigenous Peoples.

International Treaties and Declarations asserting the rights of indigenous people should be translated into the indigenous languages and made available in an easily understandable form.

### **Intercultural Alliance Building**

We must build alliances based on liberative cultures to respect and enrich our diversities amidst growing tendencies towards ethnic chauvinism, communalism and racism.

### **PP 21 Follow-up and Facilitation Work Continuing Mechanisms**

We need to reinforce and strengthen the people's organisations' leading role and participation at the local, national and inter-sectoral levels, in collaboration with regional groups and alliances. On the regional level a minimum facilitating mechanism to ensure the

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follow-up of the PP21 process is proposed. Regional consultations must be held to decide upon the form and flow of future PP21 events. Some specific proposals include, among others:

- the preparation and dissemination of a directory of participants (including personal profiles) in the Thai PP21 events; and
- translation into local languages of the Thai PP21 materials (it has been suggested that participants themselves undertake this task).

As we pledge our commitment, we are aware that we are creating power - it is a power that is not based on relying on the powerful, but in our capacity to do things despite the existing oppressive structures; a power that is based on our determination to create and maintain our own spaces of action, in our confidence and ability to learn and to build reliable relations and alliances towards the 21st Century.



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