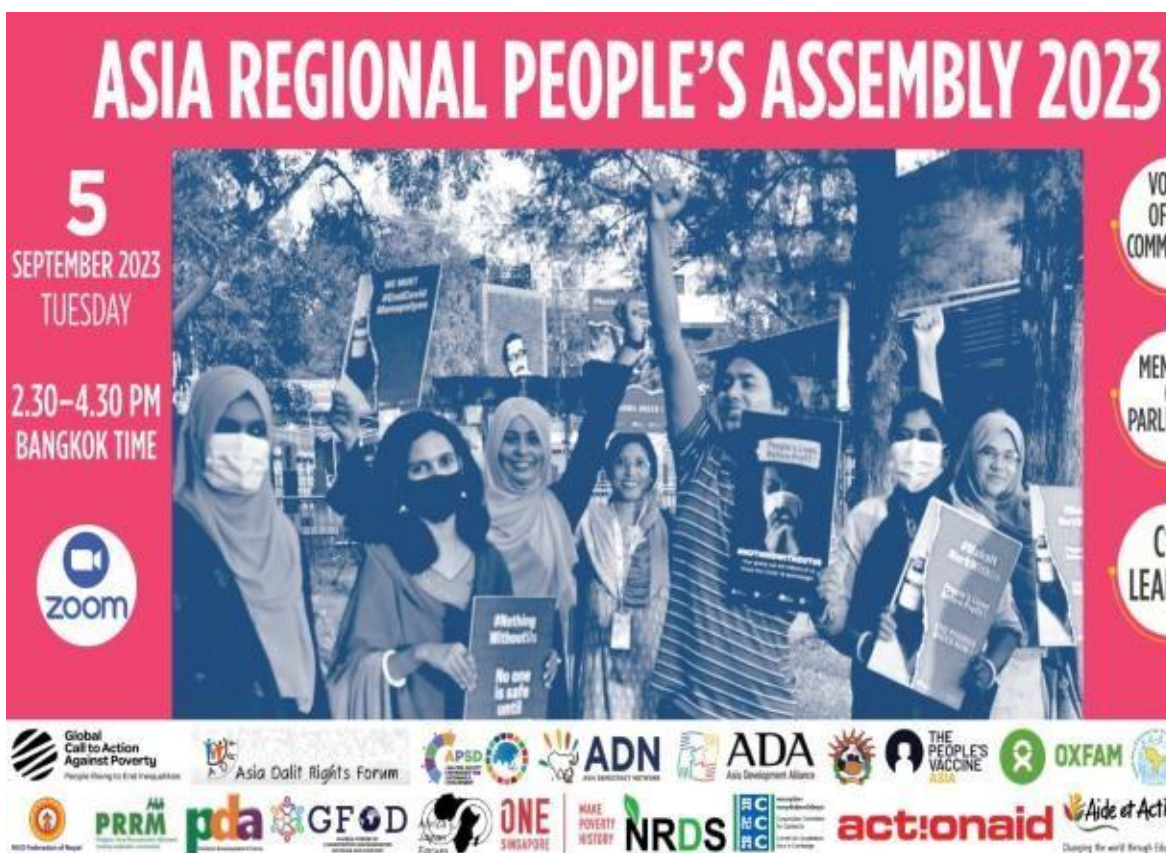


PEOPLE'S DECLARATION

Asia Regional People's Assembly 2023



This declaration has been adopted by all the 21 Organising Partners of the Asia People's Assembly 2023, which was held online on September 5, 2023. Over 100 community members, CSO leaders, elected representatives, politicians and members from UN organisations participated in the Assembly. The declaration was used as input in the Global People's Assembly 2023 at the SDG Mid-Point in September 2023.

Introduction:

The COVID-19 pandemic, despite being declared over by the World Health Organization (WHO), continues to have a tremendous impact on the lives and well-being of people across the globe. The remaining challenges and struggles are most likely ongoing in low-and middle-income countries, and more significantly among the most vulnerable groups of the population. All of this is connected to a

number of issues that predate the pandemic and have been worsened by it. These include the ongoing struggle for the right to health and the achievement of Universal Health Coverage (UHC), the ongoing food crisis situation, the denial of space for democracy, civic space, and human rights, and the climate crisis.

Duty bearers across the globe have shown fragility while dealing with COVID-19 from various angles, especially when it comes to marginalized and vulnerable groups. Many people face challenges that are still not being heard by their own governments, and the impact of the pandemic continues to affect their lives and well-being. Numerous gatherings and assemblies have occurred in Asia in the weeks and months before at community and national levels and were used for this declaration. This involved civil society organisations, technical partners, and discriminated groups. These events continue to underscore the challenges faced by vulnerable people. While individuals are dealing with the direct challenges and impacts of the pandemic, many governments are also facing a debt crisis that has led them to take austerity measures, cutting spending on social protection, health, and education. Instead of implementing austerity measures, there should be a focus on the right to public services and fully functional social protection. Elderly people, persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, ethnic minorities, communities discriminated against by work and descent, migrants, women, transgender people, and children are all suffering in multiple ways.

In recent years the role of human rights activists, civil society, and the media has been significantly diminished. The human rights of the most marginalized groups, including indigenous communities, Dalits, CDWD (Communities discriminated by work and descent), persons with disabilities, women, and girls, have been systematically violated without accountability.

The issues, concerns and demands have been developed on four areas:

1. Right to health and Universal Health Coverage
2. Food, hunger, poverty and inequality, and Universal Social Protection Floors
3. Democracy, civic space and human rights
4. Climate justice and Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR)

THEME1: Right to health and Universal Health Coverage (UHC)

Issues and concerns:

The right to health issues persists as an ongoing struggle of the vulnerable and marginalised groups. Health resilience has been significantly compromised due to several factors, including the impact of climate change, biodiversity loss, and environmental pollution. The privatization and low investment in public health services in the region have further exacerbated the issue. Additionally, challenges like an ageing population and obesity and non-communicable diseases (NCDs) have strained healthcare systems. The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed a substantial access gap for vaccines, therapeutics, and diagnostics (VTDs) between the global north and south. This disparity is, in part, attributable to the northern monopoly on technology and know-how within the existing intellectual property rights (IPR) protection framework.

Demands:

- Adopt public funded Universal Health Coverage (UHC) with special focus on leaving no one behind
- Advocate for governments to uphold and advance the people's right to health and healthcare as a fundamental entitlement
- Adoption of national-level budgets and healthcare plans that encompass all segments of the population.
- Advocate for equitable access to vaccines, therapeutics, and diagnostics in the era of pandemics through the WHO's Pandemic Treaty Negotiation
- Call for amendments to the International Health Regulations (IHR) to enhance global health security
- Ensure technology transfer and manufacturing capacity development in each region
- Seek changes in global trade rules to combat technology monopolization in the Global North
- Implement simple and inclusive financial mechanisms for the most vulnerable
- Recognize and address social determinants of health at the local and provincial levels
- Implement programs to strengthen resistance to antimicrobial diseases
- Establish clear policies to combat obesity and non-communicable diseases, with prevention as a corner stone
- Build more healthcare facilities, increase healthcare professionals, and ensure sufficient supplies of medicines and medical equipment
- Strengthen community-based systems by increasing public investments in primary healthcare through improving human, physical infrastructure, medical equipment, facilities
- Promote transparency and include civil society voices in the decision-making processes related to the financing and governance of global pandemic preparedness, prevention, and response (PPPR). This involves institutions like the Financial Intermediary Fund at the World Bank and negotiations for a pandemic treaty at the World Health Organization.
- Prioritize primary healthcare by increasing access, improving quality, and strengthening the workforce
- Invest in healthcare quality improvement, including developing standards, ensuring adherence, and providing training
- Invest in health information systems to enhance healthcare delivery and data management

THEME 2: Food, hunger, poverty and inequality, and Universal Social Protection Floors

Issues and concerns:

Millions in Asia still suffer from hunger and malnutrition, exacerbated by the recent increase in poverty and food insecurity, especially among marginalized communities during the pandemic. It is crucial to ensure the right to food by broadening its definition to include nutrition and access, recognizing farmers' rights to land and food, and addressing issues with food trade that undermine people's rights. Inequality is a major concern, particularly for marginalized groups, who struggle to access opportunities and

resources. The COVID-19 crisis hit coastal vulnerable communities like fishermen hard, leaving them without government assistance, as movement restrictions prevented them from earning a daily wage. Climate change further compounds these issues in rural communities, causing food and job shortages due to natural disasters. The exclusion of women and sexual minorities from politics and governance violates fundamental human rights. There are significant inequalities in social protection coverage within and across countries in Asia and the Pacific. Gaps in coverage also disproportionately affect women and men with unstable or irregular employment and incomes such as the self-employed, informal economy workers as well as migrant workers and their families. Agricultural and domestic workers and their families are especially hard hit. While the Sustainable Development Goals aim to reduce inequality, combat climate change, and strengthen labour rights, focusing solely on economic growth, export-oriented models, and trade liberalization may be counter-productive and exacerbate poverty and greenhouse gas emissions. All this is accompanying by an alarming change in a rise of “Security State” and a decline of a “Welfare State” in multiple countries in Asia.

Demands:

- Adopt a Universal Social Protection Floors (USP) majorly through public funding
- Broaden the definition of food to include nutrition and access
- Recognize the rights of farmers to land and food and institutional credit
- Governments and agencies must allocate resources at the rural/local level, not just nationally
- Ensure that Sustainable Development Goals and policies prioritize and benefit vulnerable rural communities
- Avail adequate public resources to address poverty, hunger, unemployment, and loss of livelihood
- Implement agrarian reforms and support food sovereignty
- Assert community rights over land and natural resources
- Stop land grabbing, illegal and acquisitions and ensure community consent for resource diversion to corporations
- Involve local communities in ecological planning for the sustainable use of land, water, and resources
- Promote meaningful engagement of women in positions of power and governance roles to reduce inequalities, shed a light on unseen issues, and enhance peace and dignity.
- Ensure minimum living wages and job security across Asia.
- Ensure safe, orderly, and regular migration with full respect for human rights.
- Provide migrants with citizenship rights, regardless of migration status.
- Explore various means of resource generation, such as imposing higher degree progressive wealth taxes.
- Expose the illegitimacy of public debt and ensure transparency.
- Reject debt repayment policies that impose austerity measures and reduce funds for universal social protection.

THEME 3: Democracy, civic space, and human rights

Issues and concerns:

The rise of security states as opposed to welfare states in various South Asian countries has had adverse effects on human rights, democracy, gender equality, and marginalized groups. This has led to widespread societal polarisation. Civic rights are being increasingly controlled and restricted, leading to a shift in the working approaches of NGOs, with less direct advocacy work being done.

Democracy in Southeast Asia is declining, with a growing trend toward authoritarianism and militarization. Governments have imposed laws and regulations to limit the activities of NGOs and Civil Society Organizations in countries like Indonesia, Cambodia, Thailand, India, Myanmar, and others. Furthermore, restrictions have been placed on foreign funding for human rights organizations and civil society platforms, while internet censorship and media repression are on the rise.

Demands:

- We disapprove the rise of security states in the region.
- Call on states to respect and protect fundamental freedoms, especially freedom of association and expression.
- Advocate for increased collaboration to amplify voices on national and regional platforms.
- Ensure that the Internet remains free, open, and secure for all citizens.
- We express concern about escalating warmongering and hostility among various Asian countries.
- Highlight the adverse impact of rising religious fundamentalism and majoritarianism on minority communities.
- Address electoral authoritarianism and demand greater accountability from governments in the region.
- Condemn increased restrictions on fundamental freedoms, including freedom of speech, association, and peaceful assembly.
- Highlight the violation of rights of women and persons with disabilities during and after the pandemic.
- Demand the inclusion of youth in decision-making processes.
- Recognize the crucial role of civil society in speaking out against the suppression of democratic freedom.
- We urge governments to protect organizations that promote democracy by providing citizens with reliable information and channels for communication with their representatives.

THEME4: Climate justice and Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR)

Issues and concerns:

The climate crisis has arisen as a result of the excessive consumption by a select few at the expense of the majority. This problem is exacerbated by climate change, largely caused by wealthy and developed nations, which disproportionately impacts low-income countries and marginalized communities. Climate

change has a far-reaching impact, even contributing to the increase in the number of street children. As parents migrate from their rural homes to urban areas in search of livelihoods, it often results in dysfunctional and fractured families. The crisis is closely tied to a development model driven by greed. To effectively address it, consumption patterns need to be regulated not only in rich countries but also among affluent individuals in developing nations. Hence, it is crucial to recognize that those who bear a disproportionate burden of climate change are often not the primary contributors to its causes. Climate change is not only an environmental problem: it interacts with social systems, privileges and embedded historical injustices, and affects people of different class, race, gender, geography and generation unequally. The climate solutions advocated by proponents of climate justice, aim to rectify deep-rooted systemic injustices.

Demands:

- Emphasis on climate justice.
- We need convergence of different movements for collective action.
- Commitment to climate financing, especially from multinational companies.
- Transition to green energy sources (not fossil fuels) by governments and civil society groups.
- Divestment of public funds from industrial agriculture and fossil fuels, reallocating to agro-ecology and renewable energy.
- Common but differentiated responsibilities with wealthy industrialized countries increasing climate finance contributions, including grants for climate-induced loss and damage.
- Implementation of seed bombing programs in schools to involve and educate more students on climate change and climate justice.
- Focus on creating more livelihood opportunities for impoverished communities as part of climate change mitigation programs.
- Protection and support for the livelihoods of coastal families.
- Mandating substantial funding contributions from major corporations for climate change mitigation.
- Ensuring communities understand sustainable development principles to empower them in advocating for their rights.

Endorsed by Organizing Partners:

1. Global Call to Action Against Poverty (GCAP) (Coordination)
2. Asia Dalit Rights Forum (ADRF)
3. Global Forum on Communities Discriminated by Work and Descent (GFoD)
4. Asia Civil Society Partnership for Sustainable Development (APSD)
5. Asia Democracy Network (ADN)
6. Asia Development Alliance (ADA)
7. People's Vaccine Alliance (PVA), Asia Chapter
8. OXFAM Asia

9. South Asia Alliance for Poverty Eradication (SAAPE)
10. ActionAid International - Asia Region
11. Aide Et Action – International
12. Wada Na Todo Abhiyan, India
13. NGO Federation of Nepal
14. Philippine Rural Reconstruction Movement (PRRM)
15. Noakhali Rural Development Society, Bangladesh
16. Sri Lanka United Nations Friendship Organisation (SUNFO)
17. Sanayee Development Organisation, Afghanistan
18. Pakistan Development Alliance (PDA)
19. ONE Singapore
20. Africa Japan Forum
21. Coordination Committee of Cambodia (CCC)

