

FOURTH SOUTH ASIAN PEOPLE'S SUMMIT

*Islamabad, Pakistan
02 – 04 January 2004*

South Asia Partnership-International

South Asia Partnership-Pakistan

**South Asian Alliance for Poverty
Eradication**

Report: Shiraz Raj
Composing: Anjum Shahzad
Title and Design: Mahboob Ali and Anjum Shahzad
Photographs: Azhar Jafery, Mahboob Ali,
Mohammad Saeed
Published: January, 2005
Copies: 1,000
Pages: **128**
Price: US\$ 10 (South Asia)
US\$ 20 (Rest of the World)
Printer: Lahore
Publisher: South Asia Partnership-International
in association with
South Asia Partnership-Pakistan

We very gratefully acknowledge the generous support of **Church World Service, Pakistan** for the Publication of this report.

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Table of Contents

1.	The message from SAP-Network Chair Person	07
2.	Foreword	09
3.	Note from Summit Coordinator	11
4.	Executive Summary of the Summit	13
5.	The Summit Joint Declaration	22
6.	Inaugural Ceremony	29
7.	Presentations by Thematic Commissions	37
8.	Launching the Report; Poverty Report by SAAPE	60
9.	Thematic Papers	65
10.	Concluding Speeches	96
11.	Appendices	105

The message from SAP-International Chairperson

This is a great pleasure to see that a small initiative by the civil society of South Asian countries is slowly but surely transforming into a strong symbol of the aspirations of the people of this region..

The fourth South Asian People's Summit was held in an environment of hope. The SAARC summit was being convened with gestures of friendship specially from India and Pakistan that went so close to a deadly war with unprecedented military buildup. This was unlike the previous summit when the states of India and Pakistan were roaring against each others. The summit was convened nonetheless with the slogan that, "if leaders don't meet, let people meet and let people lead." The fourth summit, despite of comparatively better situation regarding regional peace, was a continuation of this slogan.

From livelihood securities to the social charter, the summit demands so many things from the states that are habitual of creating and sustaining animosity for the vested interests of their ruling classes,.. sometimes in the name of nationalism and sometimes in the name of religious identity. All this is being asked from a system that prefer building up armies instead of lessening the miseries of more than one-fifth of the human population on this planet earth.

One year down the road, the zeal of the peace gestures has again transformed into the depressing tiredness of shallow slogans of "national interests," "unchangeable positions," and "state securities." There is no concrete achievement in any of the South

Asian countries as far as their internal conflicts, economic deprivations and mutual mistrust is concerned.

However, there is one ray of hope that nullify all the depressions and desperations. That is the increasing incapability of the states to block the passion of the people to meet each others. Last year saw countless delegations from different walks of life visiting each others and expressing loudly and clearly that they want peace.

We continue our struggle with the same repetition of the same demands that we are presenting again and again. We say again that the people's aspirations, so evident from so many ways, are the best path to tread on. The people's demands are the real national interests, their livelihood securities are the real national security and the bright future of their coming generations is the best national goal to achieve.

In the end, I would like to thank all of the delegates that came from different South Asian countries to participate in this event. And I would like to thank the SAP network that worked so hard to make this a successful event. I would like to thank our SAAPE friends who joined hands with us in our efforts. Last but no the least, I thank all the friend organizations in Pakistan who helped us to achieve this mammoth task.

Bushra Gohar
Chairperson
South Asia Partnership-International

Foreword

The report in your hands reflects a small but sincere effort from the peace lovers of South Asia. The basic strength of this document is that it portrays not only the dreams but also the concrete intellectual achievements on the part of the people and their representatives from civil society.

Apart from the details that you shall read in this report, the foremost fact is that it is not merely an intellectual activity. Rather it is a culmination, a documented shape of the collaboration between intellectuals, journalists, trade unionists, students, women, minorities, lawyers, civil society organizations and the representatives of other walks of life that joined hands in convening this event to make it a symbol of people's cooperation.

The level of intellectual depth recorded in this report is another source of satisfaction for us. You shall find not only general demands but also concrete suggestions and recommendations prepared by the expert minds. This is in fact an effort to show the states that people possess the truest knowledge of their issues and their solutions.

As evident in the declaration of fourth South Asian People's Summit, the major demand of the people of this region relates to the people's right to rule. The in-depth discussions around a variety of the issues lead to the same solution of democratic structure of the state. That said, democracy does not mean the persistent structures in some of the South Asian states that boast of being democracies without letting their people participate in the decision

making process at any level of the system. The only solution of the myriad problems of South Asian people lies in forming a truly representative democratic system.

Secondly, the emphasis on the just distribution of the resources lies at the heart of all the debates. From gender disparities and discrimination against minorities to the unjust globalization, the issue of unjust distribution of the resources could be found at the base. Needless to say, it transforms into the most violent internal conflicts, communal violence and nationalist wars in this region.

The South Asian People's Summit is only one of the many initiatives being undertaken by the people of South Asia. We are presenting this report without any kind of tall claims. The only thing we can claim that this is a serious effort done in a serious manner.

For us, the organizers and participants of this event and also the readers of this report, This document is a ray of hope that at least thinking and struggling souls of this region have developed consensus on the fact that the future of this region lies in peace and cooperation. One day, the states will have to agree on this. Let's hope to see this day in the near future.

Mohammad Tahseen
Executive Director
South Asia Partnership-Pakistan

Note from Summit Coordinator

When my director, Mohammad Tahseen, asked me to coordinate this event, I was really not aware of the fact that he put me in an exercise so rich in learning and so enriched in feelings. As a human rights activists and a chronic dreamer of regional peace, especially Pak-India friendship, it was really a lifetime opportunity for me to be among some of the ablest minds of this region. It was indeed a strong feeling that the personalities we have been reading were sitting among us in a serious but humane and personal manner.

The experience of working with state departments especially regarding international travel was another great learning experience. It reflected how procedures have in-built philosophy of keeping people away and discouraging interaction between them. It is so absurd that the states are still desperately trying to keep their citizens away from each other. They certainly want to hide the reality that there is no understandable justification of animosity between people.

Another learning for me was that the small initiatives, if seriously pursued, are capable of contributing towards building peace in the region meaningfully. These small steps cast deep effects. The summit was only one event (and perhaps the weakest one in terms of resources) that were being organized along with SAARC Summit. But the visible seriousness and sincerity of this event made its place and it attracted not only printed and electronic media but also the SAARC Summit's attention.

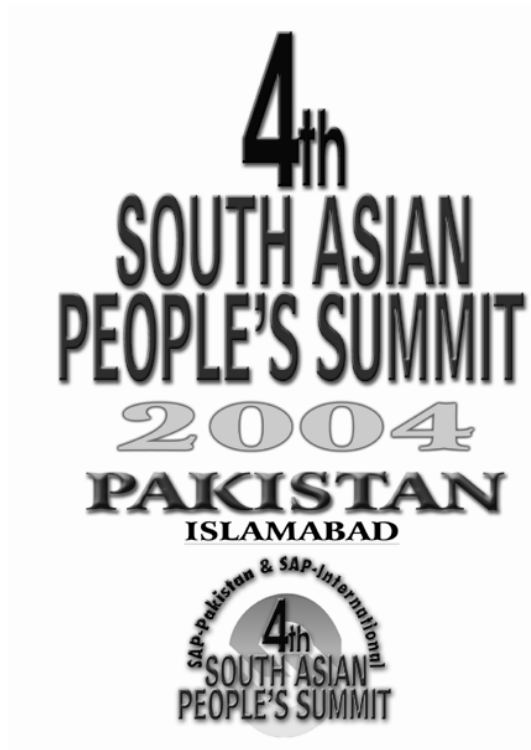
The cooperation from SAP family members, friend organizations and volunteers from Islamabad was another reason to believe that the desire of regional cooperation is so common among all

of us. We are ready to cooperate with anybody who is working for friendship and cooperation among South Asian States, governments and societies.

The process of writing this report gave me the opportunity to learn from in-depth deliberations held during three days of the Summit. The content of the material is not only focused but comprehensive as well. This was possible only because of intellectual profoundness of the participants and guests.

In the end, two cultural evenings were really the reward of the hard work done by the organizing team. It was mesmerizing to see South Asian community dancing on one beat. And that was an expression of our common dream as well. In fact, we all dream to see South Asians dancing on the same beat of friendship, peace and harmony.

Shiraz Raj
South Asia Partnership-Pakistan



The fourth South Asian People's Summit
2-4 January 2004, Islamabad

Executive Summary

Background

The fourth South Asian people's summit, as a parallel representative forum of civil societies of South Asian countries, was conceived as an opportunity to formulate the demands and aspirations of the people of this region. The main idea was to assemble by the sidelines of SAARC summit and propose some concrete suggestions, besides issuing a joint declaration comprising overall vision of the South Asia, within the agenda under discussion by the heads of the states and governments.

As hoped and planned, this event soon became as an independent initiative of the peace lovers of South Asian societies. It became and acknowledged as a platform that lobbied for the resolutions of conflicts and for the socio-economic justice in the region. Besides attracting many well known intellectuals, peace lovers and human rights activists, it succeeded in establishing a group of civil society organizations closely linked with each other for the pursuance of goals mentioned above. The independence of this initiative, from state shenanigans, was evident from the fact that two summits were organized despite of state's failure to convene SAARC summit. The main slogan of third people's summit organized in Islamabad was exclusively reflected this scenario by saying that "If leaders don't meet, let people meet and let people lead"

Fourth South Asian People's Summit (2-4 January 2004)

South Asia Partnership-International and South Asia Partnership-Pakistan, in collaboration of South Asian Association for Poverty Eradication (SAAPE) organized

fourth South Asian People's Summit on January 2-4, 2004 at Islamabad. The summit was organized in different circumstances since SAARC summit was being convened and Prime Minister Vajpaae was expected to attend the meeting amidst peace gestures from India and Pakistan that generated hope for comparatively softer visa policy for civil society activists. Since heads of the states and the governments had succeeded in at least sitting on one table, especially of India and Pakistan after unprecedented army build up on borders, the South Asian peoples Summit opted to raise the issue of “ **Livelihood Securities, Peace and Regional Cooperation**” as the main slogan of the summit.

Pre Summit preparations

The preparations started about two months before the summit. A preparation committee was formed comprising civil society organizations from Sindh, Punjab, NWFP, Balochistan and Islamabad along with other volunteers belonging to different socio-political groups. The main task for this committee was to suggest the program and to define the thematic areas for the summit. The committee, after discussions of three meetings, decided that the summit, a) shall involve maximum civil society organizations and political expression in the process and try to make it a truly representative voice of all the non-state peace loving forces of South Asia and b) the summit shall develop specific recommendations within the frame work of SAARC agenda to be able to do precise and effective lobbying on recommendations and joint declaration.

Later in the process, as the date of the event came nearer, the Islamabad based organizations were involved in the preparation process. It was encouraging to see that all the friend organizations (Action-Aid, Oxfam, AF, TheNetwork, SACHET, SPO, Christian Study Centre, SDPI and many other organizations) extended full support to SAP-PK. They not only committed secretariat facilities but also picked lunches and dinners besides co-hosting musical evenings. Above all, these friend organizations undertook the responsibility of mobilizing participation especially for the inauguration ceremony of the summit. This was crucial due to the fact that summit was being organized in Islamabad. Secondly, it was crucial to implement the decision of the preparation committee that resolved to make it a representative and collective platform of all the civil society organizations and peace activists.

Program and Thematic Areas

The in-depth discussions of the preparation committee resulted into defined thematic areas for the summit. These were

- Economic Cooperation, SAFTA and WTO
- Poverty and Livelihood Securities
- Peace and Human Securities
- Social Development and
- Trafficking in Women and Children

The program of the summit was designed on the lines of previously held conferences. It was decided that the opening of the general issues concerning South Asia will be

done in inaugural ceremony and concerted debates on thematic areas will be conducted in thematic commissions. Commissions will be comprised of the experts and individuals with special interest in the theme. The recommendations developed by these commissions shall be incorporated in the final declaration that will be presented to media and SAARC secretariat as the joint demand of the civil societies of South Asian countries.

Participation

The most encouraging aspect of the summit was large participation from other South Asian countries especially from India. More than 45 foreign delegates attended the summit including many internationally known human rights activists and intellectuals.

The participants from Pakistan represented a mix of different socio-political expressions of the society. They included lawyers, journalists, human rights activists, writers, students, CBOs, labor leaders, teachers, poets and artists. Inaugural ceremony was the event of large gathering of around 500 people while thematic discussions held among a selected group of almost 150 people. Besides them, some media personals were invited to attend the summit.

Recommendations

Thematic commissions developed specific recommendations on the thematic areas mentioned above. It was done after extensive discussions on the thematic papers presented in the commission by experts. The

common feature of all the recommendations was the desire to make this region a truly peaceful, prosperous and secular region with guaranteed freedoms and securities to the citizens.

The commission on Social Development, while formulating specific demands, demanded a free, peaceful, just and tolerant society while asking for conducive environment for democracy. It demanded the ratification of CEDAW optional protocol and ending discriminatory laws against women, minorities and other marginalized sections of the society. The commission on “peace and human security” identified the bad law and order situation, bad governance and ineffective justice system as the root causes of issue. It demanded, among other steps, implementation of South Asian convention on Small Arms Control, nuclear free zone, no war pact, reduction of arms and military expenditures and diversion of resources towards human security. Last but not the least, it demanded a South Asian convention on the suppression of terrorism.

The commission on “Poverty and Livelihood Securities” identified centralization of powers and resources as the main cause of poverty. It demanded truly representative democratic governments with authority to reject anti-people policies of international financial institutions. In specific terms, it demanded end of structural adjustment policies, labor rights, freedom of speech, land reforms, democratic participation of women and other marginalized groups in the decision making processes and legislation to ensure the availability of staple food and dairy products.

Likewise, the commission on “Economic Cooperation, SAFTA and WTO”, first of all, welcomed the idea of improving trade between SAARC countries while demanding it to be more fair than free. The self sufficiency should be directed toward eradication of poverty. It demanded the adoption of SAARC charter on labor rights and a comprehensive social security system. Above all, it underlined representative democracy and regional peace as the prerequisite for alleviation of the poverty. The commission on “Trafficking in Women and Children” welcomed the SAARC Convention on trafficking on women and children and demanded its effective implementation through monitoring mechanism and amendments of existing laws in the light of this convention.

These recommendations were incorporated in the shape of a **joint declaration** that was presented before media at the end of the summit. The declaration while endorsing the above mentioned recommendations, demanded a peaceful, democratic and prosperous South Asia with guarantees of human rights and civil liberties.

Cultural events

Cultural events are also an essential part of people's summits. The program of the summit contained handicraft exhibition, photo exhibition, theatre performance, peace songs and two musical evenings. A beautifully decorated candle vigil was organized where all the summit participants and foreign delegates lit the candles and sang peace songs. The music evenings invited many known vocalists and instrumentalists of Pakistan, which turned into memorable events especially for the foreign delegates.

Follow-Up Strategy

Thematic discussions and sideline meetings of the organizing committee of the summit highlighted many areas where concerted efforts are needed in order to make people's summit a profound and effective forum of the South Asian masses. Following are given the suggestions for the follow-up of the summit

- The summit shall not be a one time activity organized on annual basis. It must be an ongoing process of discussions, dialogues and deliberations. The main concerns and demands of the summit should be discussed within the process of thematic forums on specific socio-political and economic issues of labors, farmers, women, minorities, teachers etc. This process should be done in all the countries of South Asia.
- The agenda of the summit should be evolved as a result of the above mentioned process.

- SAFTA should be debated in length with all the actors of the society especially with those segments of the society that are going to be affected or benefited by this convention.
- The people's summit, as a parallel event of SAARC, has established its worth in the region and it must continue to impress upon the governments of the region that the people of South Asia demand peace and prosperity rather than war and poverty.



Joint Declaration

This representative assembly of civil society organizations, human rights activists and networks of South Asian countries (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka,

Reaffirming the importance of the observance of the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations for the promotion and protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms for all the persons in all the countries of South Asia,

Stressing that all the member countries of SAARC shall fulfill, jointly and separately, their solemn obligation to promote and encourage respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without distinction of any kind, including distinctions based on race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status,

Acknowledging the important role of regional cooperation for and the valuable work of individuals, groups and associations in contributing to the effective elimination of all violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms and realizing that regional cooperation is the most important prerequisite for the progress of the people of South Asia,

Recognizing that all the human rights and fundamental freedoms are universal, indivisible, interrelated and interdependent, and should be promoted and implemented in a fair and equitable manner, without prejudice to the implementation of each of these rights and freedoms,

reiterating the pledge to promote people's struggle for a peaceful, democratic and prosperous South Asia; and to actively oppose all actions and policies of state and non-state actors that

increase poverty, militarization, intolerance, extremism, patriarchy and exploitation,

Welcoming the agreement on SAFTA and believing that its implementation will lead to enhanced interaction and cooperation for the benefit of the peoples of entire region, and hoping for free communication and easy travel across the borders for all the citizens of the region,

Condemning the rise of religious extremism in the region and its patronage by the states through fanning religious and communal hatred, and rejecting all the discriminatory laws against religious and cultural minorities of the region,

Taking serious note of the increasing use of repressive measures by the South Asian states against rights-based people's movements (such as the eviction of tenant farmers), and insisting upon states to initiate dialogue with these movements and set up political processes for the solution of intra-state conflicts in the region,

Recognizing the imperativeness of demilitarization and denuclearization for creating lasting peace and prosperity in the region,

This assembly demands that the states of South Asian region:

- Reduce existing military expenditures by at least 10% annually, diverting the savings to the creation of Social Security Funds, to be used primarily for gender equality and youth empowerment programs. And stop glorification of nuclear weapons, through state media, display of war toys and replicas at public places. South Asia should forthwith be

declared Nuclear Weapons Free Zone with collective No-War Pact.

- Include a clause on non-proliferation of small arms and light weapons as an additional Protocol to SAARC Convention on Suppression of Terrorism, 1987.
- Withdraw all reservations and apprehensions, such as those made on CEDAW, and fully implement and enforce all international conventions and treaties signed and ratified by these states through statutory means; sign and ratify Optional Protocols added to Conventions and Treaties; and set up a SAARC Commission to monitor implementation, with the inclusion of civil society members.
- Commit themselves to spend at least 10% of their GDP to basic minimum needs and social sector development, especially gender equality, education, health, safe drinking water, sanitation and environment.
- Come up with clear checks on governance ensuring decentralization of power at various levels and democratic participation of women in the decision-making processes and protection of human rights ensuring the inclusion of all disadvantaged and marginalized groups.
- Desist from implementing anti-poor conditions, such as withdrawal of subsidies on basic needs, imposed by international financial institutions and other lenders including World Trade Organization. And restore subsidies in agriculture, water, food security and on the delivery of basic social services.

- Take immediate steps to eliminate child labor and its root causes and ensure core children rights including right to live in a healthy and cleaner environment, health care and education.
- Take more steps towards an independent fair, free media and ensure complete rights of information and right of self-expression of the people of South Asia.
- The well-documented feminization of poverty must be addressed through concrete measures, including, but not limited to the following:
 - Title deeds of state lands given to landless farmers must be handed over jointly in the name of both women and men in the family;
 - Women farmers and livestock managers must be paid wages for their labor and produce, rather than the current practice of handing over a lump sum payment to the male household head;
 - Women must have access to low-interest micro-credit through group guarantees and similar mechanisms, without the need for collateral;
 - Enact legislation ensuring adequate availability of staple food and dairy products to indigenous people, poor peasantry, agricultural workers with effective support price mechanisms before permitting exports and allowing free trade;

- Address on priority basis the negative impact of mechanization and corporatization on rural agricultural women's livelihoods.
- Enact legislation ensuring adequate availability of staple food and dairy products at reasonable prices before permitting exports and allowing free trade.
- Recognize core labor rights of all workers in all sectors of economies including agriculture and ensure strict compliance of ILO Conventions. Adopt the SAARC Charter on labor rights and guarantee free mobility for labor within SAARC countries. Ratify the Ninth SAARC Convention while amendments should be made in the Convention (according to the definition of UN Protocol 2000) in coordination with the recommendations of SAARC Special Reporteur on trafficking of women and children, and establish a SAARC Task Force for the amendments, proposals, policies and implementation of ninth Convention.
- Declare a clear timeframe for resolution of inter and intra-state conflicts through participation of victims and the civil society actors. And formulate a methodology for the repatriation of prisoners, refugees and victims of trafficking.
- Involve NGOs, media, academia and other civil society groups and organizations in the SAARC process and invite them to the official SAARC Summits as observers.
- Protect and promote the rights of religious, sectarian and ethnic minorities by repealing all discriminatory laws against minorities, low casts and indigenous communities.

- Allocate, protect and manage all human and natural resources (including land, water and forest) in the interest of local communities, protecting property rights of the indigenous people, with a pro-poor and right based approach.
- Disarm and disband all extremist religious, quasi-religious and other militant groups in the region. And include secular subjects into the curricula of religious and parochial schools and seminaries inside mosques, temples and churches. While instituting comprehensive peace education programs through setting up regional commission to scrutinize all text books and curricula.

The Summit also demands establishment of a South Asian Commission, with the full representation and participation of civil society, empowered to adjudicate cases of violation of fundamental rights of citizens.



Inaugural Ceremony

The 4th South Asian People's Summit, held in Islamabad from 2nd to 4th January 2004 was attended by more than 500 human rights activists and leading intellectuals from South Asian countries. The first ceremony of the summit was its inaugural session that introduced the issues to be discussed in the following session while impressing upon the governments to fulfill their responsibilities and commitments made in SAARC summits.

The ceremony was chaired by the Chairperson of the South Asia Partnership-International, Ms. Bushra Gohar while Mohammad Tahseen (South Asia Partnership-Pakistan), Babu Mathew (South Asian Association for Poverty Eradication), Rohit Kumar Nipali (South Asia Partnership-Nepal), Dr. Padma Ratnayke (SAP-Srilanka), Ms. Talya Rehman (Democracy Watch-Bengladesh), Arjun Karki (director SAAPE), Mr. Karamat Ali (Pakistan Institute for Labor Education and Research) and Dr. William James Arputharaj (South Asia Partnership-International) addressed the audience.

Welcoming the guests and participants, Mr. Irfan Mufti, Program Manager South Asia Partnership-Pakistan gave brief introduction of South Asia Partnership-International, South Asia Partnership-Pakistan and South Asian Alliance for Poverty Eradication (SAAPE) that coordinated to organize 4th South Asian People's Summit. He said the forum was fast becoming a joint platform the prominent names of the region who voice their concerns and give concrete recommendations around specific themes. He said it was necessary to set the agenda for the actions plan for the people of South Asia. He emphasized upon regional cooperation as pre-requisite to any improvement in human development in South Asia.

Next, Mohammad Tahseen was invited to make keynote speech. After welcoming the guests, he said it was a great honor for him to be a part of the efforts to bring the people of South Asia together to voice their concerns and demands from the states of the region. “It is really nice to have with us so many civil society leaders from South Asia, especially from India. I welcome the gesture of the Pakistani government to grant visas to our Indian friends for this important event of civil society,” he added. He recalled how Pakistani government never allowed Indian guests, except Dr. George Mathew, to 3rd People’s Summit.

“The present South Asian context underlines the importance of promoting contacts between and among the regional civil societies. Considering the common nature of problems being faced by the people of this region, it is imperative to come up with regional solutions,” he added. Talking about the adverse effects of the globalization upon people of South Asia, he said, “regional cooperation is also the best solution to problems resulting from the policies of international financial institutions. The only way we can counter their onslaught is to formulate joint strategies and adopt liberal trade policies in the region.”

Talking about the socio-political and economic situation prevailing in the region he said South Asia depicted a disappointing picture in every social, economic and political context. The regional was almost perpetually plagued by various intra and inter-state conflicts and crises stemming from the myopic attitudes of largely illiterate masses and apathetic approaches of the ruling elite towards the solution of these issues.”

He said South Asia was moving totally against the global disarmament trends. Global military spending declined by about 37% from 1987 to 1994; however in South Asia it went up by

12% during the same period. Similarly, he said, South Asian states were expanding their standing armies unlike other regions of the world. “SAARC has to play an affective and meaningful role in a region that has been replete with conflicts and discords. The growing emphasis on economic cooperation is significant in view of the fact that intra-regional trade among SAARC countries is presently as low as 3.4% that is far below in comparison with ASEAN, the EU and NAFTA with regional trade amounting to 27%, 70% and 19% respectively,” he added.

“The need of the hour is the total overhauling of the South Asian systems, keeping in mind the realities of the rapidly changing post-Cold War era. This fundamentally necessitates renewed and greater efforts on the part of South Asian countries to evolve into a complete region through action rather than pure rhetoric,” he said while taking note of some positive trends in the region.

“It is hoped that such trends would be zealously encouraged with the desire of imparting the long-eluded quality of ‘region-ness’ to South Asia in the not-so-distant future. The emergence of several trading blocs and economic groupings all over the world clearly indicates that the economic survival, prosperity and integrity of any nation crucially depends on its ability to successfully integrate with other economies,” he said while giving overall view of the People’s Summit as a concerted effort to achieve the objective of regional cooperation.

After Mohammad Tahseen, Ms. Talya Rehman addressed the audience. She said only regional cooperation could enable South Asia to voice their concerns and demands at international forums. It was the only way to give more visible and influential presence in the world affairs. “At this critical juncture of world situation, raising voices in unison by all south Asian countries will have some effects or at least make the world powers stop

and listen to us,” she said while emphasizing her point for increased regional cooperation.

Talking about the effects of rising poverty in the region, she said the poverty resulted into deprivation, death, malnutrition, corruption, violence, insecurity, conflicts, gender repression, trafficking and breakdown of social norms. All this jeopardized the governance in the region. Besides that, she pointed out the reasons and manifestations of gender repression in the region especially in her country, Bangladesh.

Explaining the plight of the women and children in Bangladesh, she said, “ 25,000 women and children are victimized each year from trafficking, 28,000 women die annually due to the pregnancy related complications that are easily treatable, ten million children are doing risky physical jobs, 47% people of Bangladesh are poor and 31% are poorest of the poor.” While citing similar figures and phenomenon in other South Asian countries, she said South Asian people had to struggle together to uphold the democratic process and its culture. “We are dealing with the people’s problems. The leaders are far away from the peoples and the only hope is the joint struggle of people themselves,” she said while concluding her speech.

Next was Mr. Rohit Kumar Nepali to speak. He concentrated upon specific human rights issues in South Asia especially in Nepal while giving the perspective of international scenario. Speaking about poverty in South Asia, he said that it was not merely the issue of one region rather it included whole human community. “If one-third people of human community is languishing under severe poverty, it is shame for all the world,” he said.

He said it was imperative to seek international solutions to the regional issues. “International social harmony at world level is pre-requisite for regional peace. This is because of the fact that all of the issues like poverty, extremism etc are connected to international forces and events,” he added.

Dr. Padma Ratnayke deliberated upon the ethno-political conflict in Sri-Lanka. She emphasized upon the initiatives like People’s Summit in order to seek collective solutions of the problems that are more or less collective. She said the conflict in Sri-Lanka was not merely a political or ethnic conflict. Rather, it includes and generated so many inter related issues like gender repression, child soldiers, poverty, collapse of infrastructure, religious intolerance, extremism, terrorism and nationalist chauvinism. The states, she said, exploited these conflicts for tightening grip on the sources of power and for, above all, further usurping rights of the people. She cited examples of the crisis of civil and political rights and liberties in Sri-Lanka before thanking the audience and fellow speakers.

After her, Mr. Arjun Karki was invited to speak. He introduced his recently published poverty report on South Asia and presented an overall picture of the region through the window of most penetrating issue of the region; Poverty.

Speaking about his organization, SAAPE, he said South Asian Alliance for Poverty Eradication was a regional network of civil society organizations consisting of trade unions, peasants movements and other socio-political expressions. He said it was built to fight against poverty and injustice in South Asia.

“The purpose of this report is to analyze the structural causes of poverty in the region, disseminate the findings and remind the concerned of their commitments towards eradicating poverty.

This report is a product of series of interactions, debates and consultations at various levels with civil society activists, government representatives and other actors concerned. Each country report is written by authors working at the grassroots in varying roles,” he said.

Introducing the content and scope of the report, he said, “ The entire region suffers from the lack of basic facilities and support systems to address education and health needs which are essential to build capacities and foundations of enhanced earnings which could help mitigate the effects of rock-bottom poverty. As many as 40 to 73 percent of adult population are still illiterate except in Sri-Lanka and Maldives. And 34 to 54 percent of secondary-school children do not go to school. Infant mortality rate range between 61 to 85 per 1000 live births. In a nutshell, his report is an attempt to unfold the depth and gravity of human sufferings in the region.”

“In the Eleventh SAARC Summit held in Kathmandu, the South Asian leaders reiterated the global commitment to reduce poverty in South Asia by enhancing economic and commercial cooperation. However, given the history of failed promises and commitments, it is too early to celebrate,” he added. He emphasized upon the role of civil society organizations in the pursuit of poverty eradication by saying that only by forging strong alliances of civil society organizations and groups working with poor can we force governments of the region to eradicate poverty and thus build prosperous and peaceful South Asia.

Mr. Babu Mathew expressed his disappointment over the South Asian leader’s inability to rise above the narrow differences and petty interests. He cited the example of rising religious intolerance in the region. He said, in almost all the countries, the

Frankenstein was let lose by the states themselves and now they were failing to bottle the genie. He explained the socio-political and historic background of fundamentalism and violence in the region. “Only people’s wish and capacity to live peacefully is the fact that generate hope. We have to keep this flame alive. This is the light that can eliminate the darkness of ignorance, hunger and misery,” he said.

After him, the moderator of the session invited Mr. Karamat Ali to address the audience. He spoke about the plight of labor in the region while explaining the role of governments and international forces in keeping the problem alive. He said states and governments of the region had their vested interest in depriving labor of their basic rights and freedoms. He said labor were only one segment of the society. And the situation was same with all the people especially marginalized sections of the society.

Dr. William James Arputharaj explained the objectives and processes of the initiative of People’s Summit by South Asia Partnership-International. While Ms. Bushra Gohar, Vice-President of SAP-International, thanked the participants and guests from South Asian countries for attending South Asian People’s Summit. She said human security needed peace in the region and peace needed political will by the leaders. And that was not possible without restructuring the whole system for enabling people to bring at the helm of the power their true representative. “It is a long and painful journey. But with commitment and love to each others, we can make it easy and pleasurable,” She concluded.



Presentations & Recommendations

by Thematic Commissions

The commission on “Economic Cooperation, SAFTA and WTO”

Scope of discussions

The “Economic Cooperation, SAFTA and WTO” was most important theme of the summit primarily due to the fact that it was one of the main agenda of SAARC summit waiting for the approval of the heads of states and governments. The issue got added important because of increasing manifestations of poverty in the region especially in the context of increasingly penetrating forces of globalization under World Trade Organization.

Moreover, well thought out recommendations by civil society representatives could present the context of the people’s needs and aspirations regarding state’s endeavor to establish close economic links at SAARC level.

The commission members, that comprised civil society activists, economic experts, educationists, lawyers and observers, discussed in length the effects of globalization on the economies of the regional states. It was consensus opinion that the globalization under World Trade Organization was causing widespread poverty in the region besides virtually destroying the agriculture and small/medium industrial sectors.

Rising unemployment, displacements, starvation deaths, domestic violence, ethno-religious conflicts and political upheavals were directly related to the phenomenon of globalization. Moreover, the spread of religious extremism was connected to the effects of globalization in the region.

Most of the commission members mentioned the issue of “free or fair trade” keeping in view the fact that free trade was becoming a tool of plunder of cheap labor, consumer market and

natural resources of poor countries by MNCs/TNCs. The free movement of value added products and capital in absence of similar free movement of labor was hampering the potential of South Asia to become a prosperous region.

SAARC charter of labor rights was referred during discussions on the labor issues in South Asia. Besides that, whole range of issues from poor infrastructure to corruption in South Asia were looked into in length.

The commission was of the view that economic cooperation is the only way for the state of South Asia to free this region from poverty and conflicts. There is no option but to concentrate on the real issues of the masses and utilize the collective resources for the benefit of people instead of defense expenditures.

The commission emphasized upon putting the issue of economic cooperation in the context of the standards of civil, political and developmental rights. The issue of economic cooperation in the region was connected with not only developmental rights but also with socio-political realities of the region. The policy decision merely around economic sphere might not be useful and viable.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Economic Cooperation, SAFTA and WTO

- We welcome in principle the idea of improving trade between SAARC countries while impressing upon the states to ensure that such trade should be “Fair trade” safeguarding, above all, the interests of all sections of the peasantry, indigenous people, and agricultural workers in all the countries of South Asia.
- We take note of the fact that food self-sufficiency alone does not ensure food security for the people. We are aware that there can be starvation deaths even when our granaries are full and this is due to ruination of poor peasants as a result of which they do not have the purchasing power to buy food even when it is available.
- Trade within our region must be carried out in order to ensure the condition of poorest in the agriculture-sector is not further aggravated. Hence, our call that free trade must be “fair trade” within our region.
- The whole process of free trade should be led by people’s political leadership and not economic interest group. Participation should be given to civil society in the best interest of the poor people of South Asia. Corporate interest should not dominate this process small stakeholders should be heard.
- Adoption of SAARC charter on labor rights to guarantee free mobility for labor within SAARC countries.
- Each member country of SAARC should establish a comprehensive social security system for all citizens.

- Each country should increase further investment on development infrastructure, people friendly market systems, local industries and skilled laborers.
- Value added industries should be encouraged.
- SAFTA should promote and enhance cooperation between the South Asian countries to improve the process of research and development in science and technology.
- Energy and power cooperation trading in the region, building gas pipe lines across South Asia.
- Development of regional infrastructure of road links, railways along with watershed development, soil conservation, community control over local resources.
- Restructuring growth, poverty alleviation, value addition, agri-products, dairies, vegetables and fisheries etc.
- Service industry should be given due focus on health and education.

The commission on Peace and Human Security

The scope of the discussion

Thematic group on “peace and human security” delved into detailed analysis of the nature and root causes of myriad inter and intra state conflicts in South Asia. Keeping in view the role of states in sustaining, exploiting and, most of the time, even engendering these conflicts, the group primarily emphasized upon building political will as prerequisite for any viable, practical and lasting solution of any of the issues.

To start with, Kashmir conflict in Sub-Continent and ethno-political conflict in Sri-Lanka were mentioned as most glaring case studies of such conflicts. One of diverse results of such impasses is the proliferation of small arms. In other words, the conflicts have engulfed not only armies and states but also the society especially youth.

In most of the cases, even children are not spared since they are not only victim of social repercussions of the conflicts but are also being inducted as soldiers. On the other hand, health and education sectors are virtually destroyed causing irreversible damage to young generation. Nepal is facing this problem in its most acute form. The youth and children are virtually hostages of the conflict.

Nuclear arsenal’s build-up by India and Pakistan is most glaring example of how states in South Asia tend to ignore the real issues. The weapon of mass destruction have proved to be useless in every aspect. They are useless in averting conventional wars. Kargil battle and recent border tensions betray the facts so clearly.

Secondly, the states are blindly ignoring rather protecting the rising trend of extremism. Not only the conflict ridden areas, but societies are also coming in the grip with so grave repercussions. Whole social structure is distorted, political freedoms are under pressure, and basic rights are grabbed sometimes for the “conflict of civilization” and sometimes in the name of war against extremism. The extremist layers in Kashmir make the people suffer from extremist groups and states alike.

Another example of states interest in sustaining conflicts is the nature of curriculum of state run schools and educational institutions. The relevant text is designed with the sole purpose of fanning hate for the “enemy” country or nation. The history is deliberately distorted even in the state run institute to record and research the historic facts.

With all these nationalistic, ethnic, religious and sectarian conflicts, internal socio-economic situation especially rising poverty in virtually all the countries of the region compels the ruling classes to divert the reactions of the masses towards fake issues. The nationalistic fervor is often applied as the election propaganda tool by political parties of all the colors. And in this pursuit they don't forget displaying was symbols and replicas as the proof of their patriotism.

The group was of the consensus opinion that without shunning narrow interest in the favor of larger interest of the masses of whole region, the peace and human security was not possible to achieve.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Peace and Human Security

- We take note of the fact that South Asian societies are replete with small arms that are not only being used in different conflicts in the region but also provoking youth to take up arms as a symbol of power. The proliferation of small arms has contributed to the ongoing animosity, sometimes bloodshed, in the region. In this regard, we urge the states of South Asia to adopt and effectively implement the South Asian Convention on Small Arms Control.
- We urge the states of the South Asia to declare this region as Nuclear Free Zone. The nuclear weapons have capability to destroy the entire region especially the Sub-Continent. Both India and Pakistan cannot use these weapons without causing irreversible damage to themselves. The weapons of mass destruction are a symbol of insecurity rather than security.
- We insist upon the states of Pakistan and India to refrain from building tension at the borders. Recent army build-up on the borders between India and Pakistan prove the fact that over one billion people of Sub-Continent are vulnerable to any sabotage activity of terrorists. The states should act in the larger benefit of masses. We demand that both India and Pakistan announce immediate ceasefire.
- Moreover, We demand that all the states of South Asia declare no war pact at bilateral and collective level. In the face of different conflicts in the region, it is imperative to achieve no-war pact in order to solve the existing conflicts through dialogue.
- We demand that all the states of South Asia bring drastic reduction in arms spending. Keeping in view the rising

poverty and deterioration in health and education sectors, we urge the South Asian states to create a social security fund by allocating the resources otherwise used in arms purchase.

- It is a great pity that South Asia, historically a land of peace lover Sufis and thinkers, has become a hub of extremism and terrorism. The whole region has become hostage of small armed groups. We urge the states of South Asia to effectively implement the South Asian conventions on suppression of terrorism and extremism.
- A methodology should be formulated for the repatriation of prisoners and refugees.
- We denounce the fact that most of the inter and intra-state conflicts in the region are still unresolved due to the lack of political will of the leaders. Most of the time, shallow processes of dialogues and negotiations don't include civil society representatives. We demand that the states should declare clear timeframe for resolution of inter and intra-state conflicts with participation of victims and the civil society actors.
- It is a hard reality of South Asia that the states often use hate propaganda as a tool to get political benefits. We demand that South Asian states promote culture of peace, tolerance, non-violence rather than adopting policies that promote hate and extremism.
- Educational curriculum: Deletion of material promoting hatred, ethnic and communal disharmony distorted history and glorification of wars out of the text books and other educational material
- Stop glorification of weapons through state media and display of war toys and replicas at public places
- Stop selling war toys (no production, trade and demand of war toys)

The commission on Poverty Eradication

The scope of the discussion

The current situation of poverty in the region and its myriad manifestations came under discussion of the commission set up on the theme “Poverty and Livelihood Securities” in South Asia. Three reasons were identified as the root causes of the poverty

- Increase of poverty due to anti-people conditions of donors
- Increase of poverty due to bad governance by the states
- Increase of poverty due to high spending on defense expenditures

The whole economic and state structure in South Asia, according to commission member’s view, was currently under tremendous pressure by international financial institutes and the structural changes required to be the part of the World Trade Organization. It was considered a hard reality that the masses of the region especially the marginalized classes were rapidly losing whatever social security they had.

The most painful repercussions were mentioned as unemployment, rising cost of inputs for farmers due to end of subsidies, high cost of energy and migration of farmer’s community towards cities causing socio-political crises. The fact that over fifty percent people in the region were living below the poverty line, was mentioned as undeniable proof of above mentioned fact.

Moreover, the issue of poverty was made further complicated with the bad governance by South Asian states. All the countries of the region were still being run under the systems imposed by the colonial forces that ensure centralization of power and resources as the main feature of socio-political and economic

structures. The result was the massive loot and plunder of the national resources, at one hand, and destruction of especially service delivery sector, on the other. Another result that was mentioned was diverse conflicts generated by the over centralization of power and resources.

The governments of South Asia, in commission's opinion, needed to evolve a South Asian Charter for Governance. This was deemed necessary for the realization of common issues of livelihood and to devise some common strategies against such problems. Overlapping and wastage of the resources, plunder of national wealth and chaos in the service delivery sectors were identified as some of the problems that could be reduced if such charter was developed and implemented in true spirits.

Besides that some steps such as pro-poor land reforms were considered necessary if any viable system was intended in the region. The feudal system, according to group discussions, had not only strangled the energies and potential of a large section of the societies but also imposed feudal lords as rulers. The feudal psyche had never allowed democracy to take root beyond merely structures of elections and parliaments. Human rights remained an alien concept under this pattern of living.

The thematic commission pointed out the issue of food shortage in the region. It was a pity that food basket of the world has started facing acute shortage of food. This is to the extent that the food security had become one of the biggest and basic challenges of the region. More and more people were falling under the line of poverty. It is imperative upon the states to secure the right to food and basic necessities of the people of the region. The failure in this regard could endanger the integration of the South Asia.

The commission concentrated on feminization of poverty as well. It was the consensus opinion of the group members that the women of the region were the most suppressed and exploited section of the society of South Asia. In most of the cases, women have to bear the cost of whatever wrong policies and corruptions that men do in state and society. And during violent manifestations of these policies, women have to suffer as victim of rapes, torture and displacements. A glaring example of the effects of poverty on women is the rising trafficking of women in the region.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Poverty and Livelihood Securities

- The South Asian Governments should cut down their rising expenditures on Militarization and increase the budgetary allocations in Social Development sectors such as education, health, welfare, etc.
- One of the root causes of poverty in the region is poor governance which leads to centralization of power and unequal distribution of resources. Hence, SAARC should come out with a clear Charter on Governance ensuring decentralization of power at various levels, democratic participation of women and disadvantaged groups in decision-making process and protection of human rights.
- The increasing landlessness and marginalization is pushing the region towards unemployment leading to increasing poverty. Hence, Effective Pro-poor Land Reform Measures must be adopted and implemented by the South Asian States.
- We demand that our Governments work with Civil Society Organizations to collect, compile and disseminate accurate data on the level of poverties in our countries.
- We demand that our Governments revoke anti-poor conditionality being taken in South Asian countries under multi-lateral and bilateral agencies dictated poverty reduction strategy programs: such as removing subsidies from basic minimum needs and livelihoods especially in agriculture, water, food security, social sector service delivery and privatization of common property resources.
- The feminization of poverty is well documented phenomenon across all SAARC countries especially in rural

areas and urban slums. We demand that concrete measures be initiated by all South Asian Governments in this regard, e.g., women must have access to low interest micro-credit through group guarantees and other similar mechanisms without the need for collaterals.

- The South Asian is exhibiting the trend of increasing corporization and export of food crops leading to decrease in food security of the poor people. We condemn this trend and demand that our Governments enact legislations first to ensure the adequate availability of staple food and dairy products at reasonable prices before permitting exports.
- Some mechanisms should be developed to document the poverty and security related best practices from across the region and disseminate within the region with the involvement of Civil Society Organizations.
- We want a South Asia free from hunger, poverty and suppression and exploitation of all kinds.

The Commission on Social Development

The scope of discussion

The Commission on Social Development looked at the progress made in the social sector so far, the developments as described by SAARC and observed how the Social charter or any interventions by SAARC had an impact on social development.

While identifying constraints for social development, the Commission also deliberated on the impact, follow up action to the Social Charter. It was consensus opinion in the group that social development meant a free, peaceful, just and tolerant/pluralistic society with basic social securities.

The commission identified the state's indifference towards international standards of human rights as one of the basic impediments against peace and prosperity of South Asia. The ruling classes are easy with wrong justification for not implementing these standards. The cultural relativism and religious exclusivity is considered superior to universality of human rights.

This criminal irrelevance to human standards gives way to horrific negligence and deliberate manipulations resulting in ever decreasing standards of social development in the region. The states in the region keep on blinding accepting all the conditions of donors irrespective of their impacts on the people. Moreover, they deliberately avoid making reliable data base and impact analysis of these policies.

The question of social development is related to the questions of poverty, livelihood security, regional peace, economic cooperation and human security. It is impossible to see this issue in isolation of other aspects. In this regard, the social fabric of

the society holds primary importance since it is extremely distorted by discriminatory laws and wrong policies.

One example is the exclusion of minorities and women from the mainstream economic and social life. Both the sections, along with children and youth, constitute the weakest segments of the society but they bear the harshest result of the policies. Especially youth are being the victims of proliferation of small arms, law and order situation and criminalization of society.

Another victimized section of the societies of South Asia are indigenous people and native communities that are displaced, tortured and raped during the implementation of mega projects. Besides rapid deforestation and corporatization of natural resources is depriving these communities of their only source of income and their right to live on their own land is being severely undermined.

The commission was of the view that the only way to achieve some reasonable standards of social development was to invest national resources on education, health and housing sectors. It was suggested that the South Asian states should evolve a charter of social development and fully implement it through cooperation. It was considered imperative that a South Asian vision of social and human development be formulated and achieved to liberate the masses of this region from fear and want.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Social Development

- All SAARC government should withdraw reservations made to international Conventions/treaties and ratify the CEDAW Optional Protocol.
- All international Conventions/treaties ratified by SAARC be fully implemented and enforced through statutory means and a SAARC Commission/Committee be established to monitor the implementation of international treaties.
- Re-appraisal of micro credit/micro economic programmes so far guided by international financial institutions and re-orientation of these programmes for empowerment of the deprived and vulnerable sections of society.
- Rights of religious minorities be protected. All discriminatory laws against religious, cultural and other minorities be immediately repealed. All the strategic policies that lead to socio-political situations harmful to minorities be immediately revoked. And states start affirmative action to bring minorities into the mainstream of political and social life of the societies.
- Remove all hate material in curriculum. The curriculum in South Asian countries betrays the fact that states and ruling classes have vested interests in keeping the conflicts alive. Stop contextualizing hate towards other in the name of nationalism and religion. And stop

involving young generation in narrow strategic maneuverings.

- War propaganda/jingoism be discouraged/eliminated. The state media, especially electronic, has been a tool in the hands of the states. We strongly demand that the mystification and glorification of war be immediately stopped. And the ethical code of refraining from vilifying others be truly observed.
- Laws that are discriminatory to women be repealed. The feminization of poverty in South Asia is enough proof of the fact that women of this region are the ultimate end of all the hardships and injustice in all the socio-political, economic and even cultural spheres of life. All social policies should have inbuilt gender perspective and, we demand, true implementation of CEDAW in the region.
- Rights of indigenous people to live/lead their lives according to their own beliefs and cultures be recognize, upheld and protected. All the agreements with multi-national companies and national mega projects that lead to their displacements be cancelled.
- All national resources i.e. human and natural (land, water and forest) be allocated, protected and managed in the interest of local communities with a pro-poor and rights-based approach.
- Traditional social security, based on natural resources be fully protected and the marginalized sections should be covered through new social security safety net.

- Education for all. With 10% GDP allocation for education, all boys and girls should have full course of primary education and basic health facilities be provided by 2010.
- Corrective measures by States, and awareness raising measures by Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) to curb increasing disparity in sex ratios.
- Commission for social development be formed at the SAARC level to set standards in the regional context.
- All the South Asian states drastically cut down their defense expenditures and invest these resources on social and human development.

The commission on Trafficking in Women and Children

The scope of discussion

Discussions of the commission revolved around the SAARC Convention on trafficking of women and Children (Ratification, amendments, implementation, and monitoring of the implementation). Commission suggested that each country should amend existing laws in the light of convention, formation of new laws and its implementation. Awareness raising is needed at all levels.

The foremost concern of the commission revolved around the lackluster approach of the regional states towards the above mentioned convention. With large networks of trafficker's mafias, porous borders and highly corrupt state officials, the crisis to trafficking, according to the commission, was getting graver instead of being minimized.

The commission mentioned the state's tendency to see the convention as a document isolated to other human right documents evolved by the human community. The dangerous approach to disconnect this issue to developmental and civil rights of the people had generated paralysis on the part of the state departments as far as active and meaningful implementation of the convention is concerned.

The main reason behind human smuggling and even trafficking was identified as poverty especially in the rural areas with borders. Moreover, lack of any mechanism for monitoring, documentation and analysis of the issue further deepens the crisis. There is a dearth of reliable data on the exact scope and range of the problem. Even there is no repertoire on trafficking of women and children.

The rescued victims, on the other hand, face the ordeal of investigations and humiliations. Sometimes they fall prey of

even harder conditions after being rescued from mafias. There is no system of humane rehabilitation of the victims. The societies are often unsympathetic rather hostile towards the women and that brings the question of reintegration of victims that are being utterly ignored. Besides that, the delay and corruption in the judicial system add to the woes of victims of trafficking in the region.

Apart from the convention yet to be implemented, there is no bilateral, multilateral and trilateral set of agreements between the states to ensure the stoppage of trafficking. The states and governments are not interested in evolving any information sharing mechanism on the modes, centers and networks of trafficking in the region.

The commission condemned the state's behavior of putting the civil society organization out of the decision making channels, rescue efforts and investigation processes. It demanded that the civil society organizations be an integral part of all the phases and process of the issue and counter efforts.

Besides that, the commission took serious notice of the level of the understanding of most of the government institutions and departments especially police and border security forces. In commission's view, it was urgently needed that a comprehensive human rights training courses be initiated with the officials to apprise them of the intensity and gravity of the situation in human perspective.

RECOMMENDATIONS

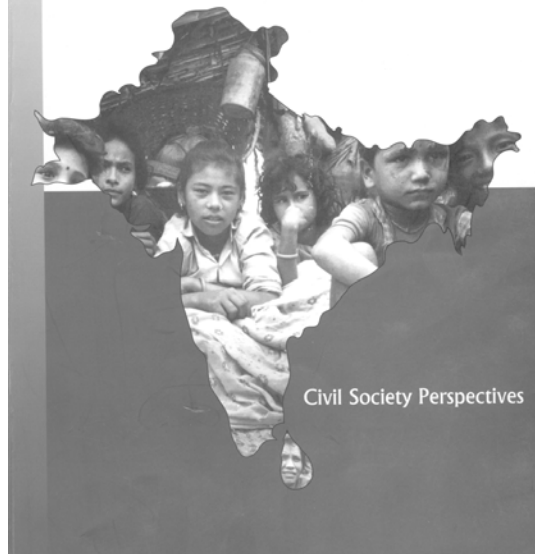
Trafficking in Women and Children

- The SAARC convention on Trafficking on Women and Children should be implemented with utmost seriousness. The South Asian countries that have not signed the convention immediately sign it.
- The convention should be amended in the context of universal standards of human rights. It should be evolved as an inalienable part of human rights declarations, conventions and covenants. Moreover, the definition of trafficking should be in accordance with UN protocol 2000.
- SAARC Special Repertoire on trafficking should be appointed.
- A SAARC level task force should be established (according to the convention) for amendments, proposal, policies and implementation of the convention. It must have representation of Government and Civil Society.
- There must be a Treaty Monitoring system as permanent body (GO, Civil Society Representative and Anti-trafficking Experts. The system should take care of reporting and accountability especially bi-annual review of the issue. Besides that it should try to ensure the respect of the human rights of the victims during rescue, reintegration, rehabilitation and repatriation.
- A SAARC Policies (SAARC-POL) should be established to deal with the incidents of trafficking in the region.
- Bilateral/trilateral and multilateral agreements be made with regards to all aspects of trafficking i.e. prevention, protection, rescue, reintegration, rehabilitation and

repatriation. For example; Agreements between sending, receiving and transit countries, Support to the victim (if do not want to return to the country of origin), Speedy Court Procedure and agreement on investigation process and rehabilitation/protection of the survivors and due compensation for them.

- There must be an information sharing among the SAARC Governments about trafficking modes, trafficked victims in the destination countries, about traffickers in the sending receiving and transit countries, domestic and administrative matters and traffic prone areas & routs of trafficking for joint interventions
- Information should be made available to the civil society and Human Rights Activists
- Capacity Building initiatives for Law Enforcement Agencies and Border Police / Securities and Immigration Authorities be started especially on awareness about laws and sensitization about Human rights Framework, sensitizing about women and children victims, conceptual clarity about trafficking and Prostitution, adult v/s Child Trafficking and women v/s children trafficking and role and responsibilities of each department.
- There must be Border Monitoring System Involving surveillance by Government and NGOs. There must be good record of migration

Poverty in South Asia
2003



Report on Poverty
By
SAAPE

**Poverty in South Asia 2003:
Civil Society Perspectives**
Dr. Arjun K Karki

The South Asia Alliance for Poverty Eradication is a regional network of civil society organizations consisting of trade unions, peasant movements, NGOs, woman movements, independent academicians and other grassroots movements in South Asia. It was built to fight against poverty and injustice in the SAARC region; it aims to work as a pressure group in advocating for pro poor policies of national governments, SAARC, EC, UN agencies and multilateral bodies. This Report is an endeavour towards that end.

The purpose of the Report is to analyse the structural causes of poverty in the region, disseminate the findings and remind the concerned of their commitments towards eradicating poverty. This report is the product of a series of interactions, debates and consultations at various levels with civil society organisations, government representatives and other actors concerned. Each country report has been written by authors working at the grassroots in varying roles. Some of them are community organisers. Some are engaged in human rights defence, some in gender justice movements while others are fighting for trade union rights. Each of them however shares a common goal — to fight the evil called *poverty*.

This Report is about the factors and phenomena such as caste and class relations; failed policies and programmes of governments, inter-government bodies and international financial institutions; and about policies governing Official Development Assistance which have created and perpetuated structural POVERTY in South Asia; a phenomenon that affects a

quarter of humanity in the world and half the inhabitants of the region, a striking majority of them women and children. Poverty in the region is coupled with socio-political tensions, armed insurgencies, gender discrimination and violence, child labour and appalling inequalities. The power and politics has been under the control of a few elites while a large majority of the people has been systematically denied.

Around one-third of South Asian people always live with untold suffering, exploitation and deprivation. The region shares a common phenomenon of gross human rights violation of and discrimination against women, minority groups, indigenous people, *dalits* and other marginalised groups of people. The fact that nearly 38 percent of the adult population (aged 15 and above) is illiterate and 15 percent of the total population does not survive to age 40 speaks of the gravity of deprivation. Around 328 million South Asians are undernourished, some 205 million are denied access to safe drinking water and 614 million are deprived of proper health and sanitation facilities.

The entire region suffers from the lack of basic facilities and support systems to address education and health needs which are essential to build capacities and foundations for enhanced earnings which could help mitigate the effects of rock-bottom poverty. As many as 40 to 73 percent of the adult population are still illiterate (except in Sri Lanka and Maldives) and 34 to 54 percent of secondary school-age children do not go to school. Curable diseases such as tuberculosis, malaria, and respiratory illnesses still claim a large number of lives every year. Infant mortality rates range between 61 and 85 per 1000 live births (except in Maldives and Sri Lanka). A large number of women suffer from poor nutrition and lack preventive measures against vulnerability to chronic diseases such as anaemia or ability to bear and nurse children.

In a nutshell, this report is an attempt to unfold the depth and gravity of human sufferings in the region which we may dislike hearing but cannot deny.

Poverty is no neologism, neither as a perception nor as a reality. What is new however is the overwhelming recognition it has received at the highest level of heads of states when they declared, at the UN Millennium Summit in September 2000, “We will spare no effort to free our fellow men, women and children from the abject and dehumanising conditions of extreme poverty...” In the Eleventh SAARC Summit held in Kathmandu, the South Asian leaders also reiterated the global commitment to reduce poverty in South Asia by enhancing economic and commercial cooperation. These promises raised both hopes and suspicions. Poverty eradication has been placed at the heart of the highest level of global, regional and local political discussion, and heads of states have taken upon themselves the responsibility of fighting poverty within a specified time-frame. This obviously has generated hopes. However, given the history of failed promises and commitments, it is too early to celebrate.

The situation of poverty violates the fundamental human rights of the people. Poverty exacerbated the situation of food sovereignty; it contributed to accumulate frustration, pile up dissatisfaction and fuel social strife in South Asia. This report reveals that many armed conflicts in the region have stemmed from extreme poverty and want.

For SAAPE, the declaration of “fighting unitedly against poverty, hunger and injustice” in South Asia has provided a benchmark to look at the progress, or regression, vis-à-vis state commitments. This Report is first of its kind published by civil society groups as a tool for policy advocacy at various levels.

If the goals of poverty reduction, let alone poverty elimination, are to be met in actions, as promised globally and locally the heads of the states — who made these promises and are responsible for matching them with actions — as well as international bodies who claim to support poverty eradication, need to reorient themselves, their policies and actions.

Only by forging strong alliances of civil society organizations and groups working with the poor can we force the governments of the region to eradicate poverty and thus build prosperous and peaceful South Asia.



Thematic Papers

Human Security, Conflict Resolution, Peace building and Small Arms Campaign

Dr. W. James Arputharaj

More than half-a-million people, women, men and children around the world die due to arms. Many more are maimed, tortured or forced to flee their homes and their livelihood lost forever. Every minute, throughout the world, one person is killed by armed violence and each year, half a million lose their lives. Millions of men, women and children are living in the fear of armed violence. The uncontrolled proliferation and misuse of arms fuels conflict, deepens poverty and facilitates human rights abuses. The problem is getting worse as high powered weaponry proliferates and previously peace communities become saturated with guns. Hitherto, peaceful and harmonious communities are being more and more weapon-dependent.

In South Asia, political instability, internal conflicts and armed violence has taken a heavy toll. Small Arms and Light Weapons proliferation is not considered a major issue in the region. Therefore, we're not only looking at creating awareness of the gravity of the problem, but also aiming at recognizing the emerging issues on security and address the problems of proliferation of small arms and conflicts in the region.

Global Campaign on Arms Control

TWENTY TWO MILLION ARMS ARE IN CIRCULATION WORLDWIDE: ARMS ARE OUT OF CONTROL – This is a Global problem. Thirteen million are already refugees due to conflicts. Therefore, we need an International Arms Trade Treaty. Governments do have a responsibility to control arms. On October 9, 2003, we launched the 'Control Arms' campaign together with Amnesty International, Oxfam and IANSA

(International Action Network on Small Arms) in 65 countries. Our message is that the rising toll of deaths and suffering must be stopped. It is the right of every man, woman and child to live a life free from the threat of armed violence. Restricting the flow and availability of weapons is a key step to making this right a reality. Some of the steps we are advocating are:

- The adoption of an international Arms Trade Treaty by 2006 to prevent the export of arms where they contribute to violations of international human rights and humanitarian law.
- More funding for practical assistance to arms-affected communities to support efforts made at the local level or community level to reduce armed violence and understand root causes of conflicts.

In order to demand for tougher controls and push governments to put in place an Arms Trade Treaty, we are having the 'Million Faces Petition'. Our aim is to collect one million faces as a powerful global message of support for the Arms Trade Treaty. For this, we are calling on people to join the campaign by adding their photograph to the 'Million Faces Petition'. People can log on to www.controlarms.org for more information and to join the campaign. In order to enable people even in the rural communities, we're distributing leaflets in the local language. People who do not wish to have their picture on the web can draw their portraits and send it to us. For those who approach us, we take a picture using a digital camera if they wish to add their picture to the website.

We have also been writing to civil society organizations, diplomatic missions and community based organizations calling for their support to spread the message. On request, we also have presentations on the campaign to a group of people. The 'Million

Faces Petition' is the first of its kind differing from the usual signature campaigns. The Arms Trade treaty puts together various International Humanitarian Laws and Human Rights Laws. Ultimately we aim for **Commissions free of armed conflicts and gun-free villages.**

South Asia Small Arms Network (SASA-Net)

Excessive accumulation of arms by the Governments and the easy and cheap availability of arms to Non-State Actors (NSA), both pose a serious problem to the societal peace. It is important to note that most of the illegal arms in circulation have originated through legal transfers. More than two-thirds of the arms in the world are in the hands of the civilians – indiscriminating issue of arms to civilians – indeed a problem. There is no International Law to control export or brokering, and there are no ban of arms exports to NSA. There are heavy pilferages from the Govt. stock piles, private security agencies are mushrooming, common man may ask if ministers want private armies to protect them, who will protect us? Most of the arms are outside the theatre of conflict. Added to this are arbitrary arrests, violent culture, long waiting under trials. We learn that private licensing often lead to misuse. In the State of UP India there are 600,000 licensed gun users, Lucknow 27,000. 1500 gun factories in Bihar, 8 factories and 2600 arms shops in Pakistan where 40,000 are employed, and in Bangladesh. 80 criminal syndicates of which 28 are in Dhaka. 200,000 illegal arms are in circulation, 700 are trafficked every month from India / Burma.

Arms freely enter universities in Bangladesh, election poling booths in India and also in night clubs and casinos in Sri Lanka. There is nexus between private ownership and the growth of the crime rate. Mafia and underworld groups are expand their

networks. Our societies are becoming more and more a **weapon dependent society**.

In South Asia, there are more than 75 million illegal arms in circulation. While there are uncontrolled illegal production most of the arms are due to the conflict in Afghanistan and others which have been legally transferred. Proliferation of arms **undermine democracy**, lead to increase in **human rights violations** and **undermine development, escalates conflicts** – promote a culture of violence and increase poverty. The turnover from arms business annually is US\$ 839 million. 639 million arms are produced annually by 1135 companies in 98 countries.

Sri Lanka National Commission: SASA-Net and SAP-I are strengthening the National Commissions in South Asia. We do hope the national commission in Sri Lanka to be established in December 2003 and will be independent in nature. Hopefully, it will address De-weaponization, Demobilization and Rehabilitation at the end of the conflict and will amend National legislations in tune with the UN Program of Action.

People's Summit held alongside the SAARC Summit in January 2004

We are appealing to SAARC to have a Regional Convention to Control Arms in South Asia towards Conflict Resolution and Peace-Building. We will also be holding workshops at the World Social Forum to be held in January 2004 in Bombay, India.

Some of the areas we would like to address include documentation of peace building community coping strategies and mechanism which could be role models to other communities; harmonize national legislation on small arms in keeping with the UN Program of Action; influence national

governments and SAARC to draft a Regional Convention to Prevent the Illicit Proliferation, Circulation and Trafficking of Small Arms and Light Weapons.

In response, SAP-International has put together in a book, legislative practices in relation to small arms in five South Asian countries i.e. Bangladesh, Nepal, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, making available a reference material that has been lacking. National seminars to create awareness on the UN program of action have also been held while SASA-Net has formed a dialogue group that will help constant exchange of ideas and information on the issue. At this SAARC Summit, we do hope that the Heads of Governments will mandate the SAARC Secretariat to work on a draft regional convention to prevent proliferation of arms. This will also strengthen SAARC's will to address terrorism and to usher in human security for people of South Asia.

Livelihood Security, Peace Building and Regional Cooperation in South Asia

Malla K. Sundar

Human Security and Livelihood: General Perceptions

Every man is a sovereign by birth. He/She is entitled to live on its-own way. Survival of a man is recognized as one of basic rights of citizen. Subsequently, the Universal Declaration of the Human Rights and other international human rights instruments which specifically refer to the principle of individual freedom and integrity of human being have been legalized by the United Nations. Since, such approval by the world body we can see among state parties and peoples at large a consensus on personal freedom and individual rights of a man. In most part of globe, by respective legal systems most of the state parties have given protection to individual freedoms and security as the fundamental rights of the citizen. But, it is a pathetic that despite complying with the Universal Declaration which guaranteed personal freedom, individual sovereignty and dignity of a man for last fifty-six years people at large are still not truly ensured for that. But, on the contrary, human life itself has become most threatened species on the earth. Sense of insecurity has intensified to a serious magnitude that at any time mankind itself can fall to annihilation.

In spite of constant efforts by the international community millions of human beings continue to live with the unprivileged livelihood which denies human dignity, security and individual freedom. As a result of such disparities and discrimination, inter and intra state conflicts and widespread violence persists in many parts of the world. It seems that our modern civilization is now strangled in a new age of violence, so that effective and

early action as well as strong measures are required to protect human dignity, freedom and their livelihood.

Now time has come for each and every driver of social changes to ask itself certain questions. Are our concepts of human development, security, livelihood and individual freedom implemented effectively? Are those conventional provisions sufficient to ensure dignity of mankind? Are our norms of behavior based on the principles enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights?

Effects

We must dare admit that our present world is still not free from a malady of discrimination, disparities and domination whereas the remedy is less in evidence. But still, it is a global tendency sticking with legacy of bankrupt development concept and process, which is rather missing moral core at the heart of its economical growth and technological advance. Similarly, there is an emerging concept of security and development in the South Asian Region, which places stability of a state or national boundaries, not human bonds, at the core of commitments.

So, it has become a normal phenomenon of this region to determine development paradigm based on the productivity and GNP, not the dignity of human life. As a consequence, in the SAARC region the gap between haves and have-nots has become inevitably the most tragic and grave challenge of this point of time. Dissatisfactions heighten to the rebelling apex and resentments are transforming to violent conflicts. There is a dusky canvass of a big threat against the security, individual freedom and sustainable livelihood of a man in the region.

Regional Issue

In a lack of effective equity system for hundreds of year social justice is found most fragile in the region. A large section of the society have been excluded from mainstream for centuries, there voices are been never heard. These groups are been prevented from their reach to national resources and policy framing bodies. In a real sense the state parties neither considering their political obligations to these large sections of people nor willing to open any entry for them in the state-polity. At large, those are forced to live in a disparities and discrimination, which are apparent as indigenous, ethnic, tribal, national, regional, lingual, religious as well as dalit communities of our society.

Continuity in discriminative attitude of the state parties and denial of basic human rights, freedom and livelihood to such communities has constantly provoking people to be involve in violent conflicts. Whereas, conflict and instability in the region has stalled all process of development and livelihood turned to a misery. It was not foreseen that a peaceful geo-physical location of this region, where the Champion of Peace Lord Buddha was born, would go through a violent conflict. It is not only a case of any particular state boundary but it has become a common feature of the region as whole, if we look at the issue of Al Jajeheera, Hureeat, Nagas, Bodos in India, Sindis, Punjabis and Al Queda in Pakistan, Tamils in Sri Lanka, non-Drukpas in Bhutan and Maoists in Nepal.

As the home of a third of humanity, if the variable degrees of conflict are not contained in a proper manner it could potentially affect not just the region but would implicate the whole of humanity. But, as conflict is an emerging issue and experience to deal with it is still limited in region, strategies need to be developed to grapple with it through the involvement of the survivors themselves to reinstate governance. There is urgency

of developing a new structure of human security as well as changes in concept of sustainable livelihood.

Root Cause

While root cause of present state of affairs in the region, including Nepal, is social and economic leading to abject poverty and inefficient delivery of social services, it has political, ideological and even geo-political dimensions. Similarly the upsurge of conflict in the region is grounded on multiculturalism and pluralistic structure of the region, which the state polity seeks to unify through, forced homogenization and exclusionary system and or imported Westminster or authoritarian system contrary to its own diversified social context. Denial of human rights and development, marginalisation, and exclusion of its populations in contributing to decisions that affect their lives, all had manifested in violent conflict.

Experiences from Nepal

As, Nepal Communist Party (Maoist) boomed the air with its first gun shot launching '*People's War*' on 12 February 1996, the flame of violence flared up to a blaze, at present. Making their best efforts to strengthen respective strategic positions, insurgent group, NCP Maoist and Security Force of His Majesty's Government of Nepal, subsequently unfenced a frontier of protracted war. An intensified violence is slowly conceiving a psyche of cold blood. It is a pathetic moment both the insurgents and security forces with a wrong conviction of armed solution of present conflict they involved in waging illogical warfare. Eventually, the outcome is an escalation of loss of lives, increase in civil casualties and violent assaults. Though there is no official record of disappearance, abductions and kidnappings of people, but it is at a climax.

Arbitrary detention and illegal killings as well as third degree method of torture in detention has become a normal phenomenon. In totality, basic fundamental rights of citizens are badly threatened. Principles of Global Human Rights and Geneva Convention are disregarded from both sides. Dignity of a man has become a mock cry in Nepal, at this point of time. As attempts to find an amicable solution for present conflict for the first time the state and insurgents came across the negotiation table on August 30, 2001, but after sitting for third time the Maoist force unilaterally broke the peace talks by mid-September, same year. The failure of peace dialogue was subsequently followed by massive attacks from Maoist guerrillas in Syangja and Dang, major strategic points of the state, on November 1, 2001. In a retaliation mood the government immediately imposed emergency, which was continued for a year.

Prior to it, the state has also made access to Maoist insurgents through some human rights activists but they couldn't agree for initiating a formal dialogue at the point of time, that was on the first week of November, 2000. After a big misunderstanding between the Government and NCP (Maoist) regarding release of some rebellions then the access was broken by a number of days.

When, the state-polity continuously failed to address the Maoist insurgency with a political option and in a proper manner on time eventually the national political problems accumulated in such a way which had stimulated the royal palace to assert a blunt move of 4 October 2002.

Finally, elected parliament was dissolved, prime minister was sacked and the king resumed his lost power. After dissolution of all constitutional process, on one hand, a new kind of political contradictions within so-called constitutional forces is evolved

and, on the other hand, once again violent activities of insurgents escalated to an extreme.

But, with a big surprise, one morning on 8 February 2003 the Maoist and HMG of Nepal made announcement of reaching agreement for ceasefire and initiating a new peace process. As a good gesture and steps for confidence building, the state has immediately withdrawn terrorist leveling, price tagging and issuing red corner notice against Maoist. In a follow-up, they came with a joint agreement on code of conduct and forming a monitoring team. But time and again the drama was ended without any substantial conclusion, efforts for six month proven as a futile exercise. In the last week of August last year, the Maoist unilaterally declared retreating from peace process and breaking ceasefire.

Once more, a new series of violence has activated in Nepal. The Maoists, with their new strategy aiming at individuals for their physical annihilation, categorically the personal from security forces and non-Maoist political parties. Similarly, abduction of people and forcible displacement of families from their homeland by Maoist armed force is a new phenomenon at this juncture. On the other side the security forces have also intensified their activities of terrorizing commoners, unlawful search operation and arbitrary arrest is heightened. In the name of encounter the security forces are launching their campaign of arbitrary killings. Now it is quixotic to dream for peace in Nepal.

Conclusion

Drawing a conclusion with sharing experience from Nepalese present conflict it has become more apparent that regardless number of attempts for peace negotiations and ceasefire eventually that will turn to futile exercise. War can be stopped by several measures but it is hard to win the problems. Observations

are indicating vivid picture of source of causes as lack of sustainable livelihood, equity, equality, human rights, security and freedom, which are urging state parties to address it in a proper manner. Now the time has come to change political psychology of either state-polity of the region to prefer shopping tanks and missiles than worrying for a bottle of milk for a new born baby. If a peace building is not only stopping gun fire and our concern is a sincere conflict transformation then we have to find out common agendas to address our root causes of socio-economic as well political problems. We must dare recommending a total structural changes and revision of respective constitutional as well as legal provisions.

It has to confess from our past experiences that conflicts may be managed by forceful means, but not tragic consequences of conflicts. They travel without a passport, and they travel in unpleasant forms. Conflicts have no border and hence should be best addressed jointly or at regional level rather than within the nation in scattered fashion only, specially in peoples' level.

Problem of Proliferation of Small Arms in South Asia

Hiranyalal Shrestha

South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC) should pay attention to poverty alleviation and SAFTA, adoption of Social Charter on the basis of social justice and effective control of terrorism. Another area seeking its attention is the control of proliferation of small arms and light weapons. The need to address this problem has become more urgent in view of the fact that smuggling and an unhindered supply of small arms have intensified various kinds of violent conflicts resulting in the increased loss of civilian lives. In fact, the proliferation and misuse of small arms have hindered social, economic and political development in the region. It has exacerbated and prolonged violence, promoted the culture of guns and strengthened organized crime. This is why it has become necessary for all the countries of South Asia to take various steps to control small arms and light weapons of various kinds. It has, therefore, become necessary draft a convention on the prevention of the proliferation of small arms and to adhere to human rights and humanitarian laws.

All the countries of South Asia, big or small, have been facing the problems of armed conflict of one kind or another and there is an extensive use of small arms and light weapons. There is Maoist insurgency in Nepal, Sri Lanka is facing a separatist revolt, different separatist rebel groups are escalating their insurgence in the north east India and have even challenged the sovereignty of Bhutan by setting up armed camps in its territory, there is a strong resentment of extremist groups and minority people in Bangladesh, there has been occasional attack by mercenaries in the Maldives and the religious fundamentalists

are waging terrorist activities in Pakistan. Afghanistan has even face external invasion because of internal conflict and its complicity in international terrorism.

After the suicidal attack on America on September 9, 2001, the attention of international community has shifted to South Asia and Afghanistan. When Afghanistan became the center of anti-terrorist operation, Pakistan had to face the situation of being a front-line state. Afghanistan had to face both terrorism and imposed war. Therefore, the people of the world are raising their voice in favor of giving effective role to the UN against both terrorism and war.

For some months now, there has been some improvement in the relationship between India and Pakistan. The resumption of air service, the decision to resume the railway services, the ceasefire on the line of control Kashmir, decline in the cross-border terrorism are some of the positive signs. The terrorists have mounted attack on President Musharraf of Pakistan more than once with the intention of assassinating him because of Pakistan's participation in anti-terrorist campaign. In such challenging situation the 12th SAARC summit should be used as an opportunity for regional solidarity against terrorism. The leaders of the SAARC countries should pay serious attention towards formulating a regional action plan to control small arms and terror. While doing so they should also pay a special attention to bring a peaceful social-economic transformation in this region by addressing the root causes of the armed conflicts.

Emphasis should be given on political solution instead of opting for military solution of the problem. On the basis of mutual respect, equality and partnership, a multi-ethnic democracy should be nurtured in South Asia which is multi-ethnic multi-religious and multi-lingual. Instead of allowing traditional

aristocracy and majority ethnic groups to politics of exclusion, a system of amalgamation and inclusion should be developed. If the culture of dialogue, consensus and participation can be nurtured the gun toting culture can be defeated paving way for a broader practice of human rights.

There have been accusations that the South Asian countries are providing shelter to the rebels of other countries and turning blind eyes to the smuggling of illegal weapons. Even without the knowledge of the government there is mutual cooperation and supply of weapons among insurgent groups. Various causes are found to have influenced the proliferation of small weapons. The most important of them are as follows:

First, since South Asia is located in the midst of Golden Triangle and Golden Crescent notorious for drug trafficking, there is inter-relationship between weapons and narcotic drugs. In some cases, terrorist groups swap drugs with weapons. They have established a nexus with the child and woman traffickers.

Second, the politics has been criminalized. The smugglers and organized criminals have been protected from political sector. Since politicians win election with the help of the donation and booth capturing by the mafia gangs, the weapons smugglers have been encouraged and protected.

Third, control of Illegal weapons has become difficult for lack of good governance and the existence of rampant corruption. The situation which allows illegal business and personal benefits makes it easier for the smugglers to acquire weapons through the help of corrupt government officials.

Fourth, since a hefty commission is attached with the purchase of weapons and a large margin of profit is maintained in

smuggling, the dealing of weapons has remained a profitable trade.

Fifth, external elements are always eager to fish in troubled waters and take advantage from the instability in neighboring countries. This has encourages the proliferation of weapons. Similarly, the tendency of other actors to supply weapons to counter insurgents has created an interminable cycle of smuggling of weapons.

The South Asian countries should extend their hands of cooperation to prevent the proliferation of weapons by addressing its root causes. It is always counterproductive if anyone supplies weapons or turns blind eye to the proliferation of weapons. Effective steps should be taken to control the proliferation of weapons through effective border regulation. It will also contribute to control the women trafficking and drugs smuggling. In fact, a code of conduct should be prepared to regulate the transaction and trade in weapons. The transaction of weapons should be made transparent and a SAARC level police institution should be created to monitor it. In order to prevent smuggling of weapons, a mechanism for the exchange of intelligence should also be developed at the regional level. An agenda should be introduced at the current summit on the prevention of the proliferation of small arms and light weapons and the SAARC secretariat should be instructed to initiate ground work for the preparation of the draft of a convention and prepare action plan for its implementation. A culture of peace is essential to replace the culture of guns prevalent in South Asia.

Small Arms and Light Weapons Proliferation in Nepal

I. Introduction

The proliferation of small arms and light weapons resulting toll inflicted on civilian population in countries around the world pose one of the greatest humanitarian challenge of our time. Weapons trafficking has serious, immediate and long term implications for the security and stability of states, especially small and weaker ones.

In the past, weapons in Nepal were limited in the hands of police, army and some big shots of society. A gun would have a status value for an elite class. Besides these people who used to keep guns formally, criminal also used to smuggle arms illegally through own nexus. But the monopoly of the state and ruling elite class over the possession of weapons was ended after the rise of insurgency in 1996. Proliferation of small arms and light weapon happened to be rampant. About eight thousand and five hundred people were killed during the conflict and most of them were innocent civilians. Therefore, voices were begun to be raised against the war. Need of controlling weapon proliferation was felt in Nepal too.

II. Background

Weapons like *khukuri* (curved traditional Nepali knife), sword, axe and spear were used in the ancient and medieval times. Guns, pistols and cannon were came into use by the 18th century. As late Pritihivi Narayan Shah himself went to Banaras and purchased relatively superior weapons, it had made him quite easy for the re-unification of the kingdom. Modernization of Nepali army began after the Rana Prime Minister lung Bahadur returned from his visit of Great Britain in 1850. Small

arms began to flow into Nepal after Rana prime ministers permitted British government to recruit Gurkhas. As the Gurkhas returned from I and II world wars, the number of people to use small arms and light weapon was increased significantly. Among certain ethnic groups in the hill areas, it made it to a tradition of firing guns to display feu de joie on the occasion of marriage and other ceremonies. It is worth mentioning here that the ironsmith at the local level used to make small arms and muzzle loaders. The well to do families in the north used to keep guns for hunting while such families in the south used to keep guns for protecting themselves from dacoits.

The Mukti Sena (liberation army) in 1950 fought war against the Ranas by collecting weapons from illegal sources of Bunna and India. After the Royal take over of 1960, Nepali Congress had operated "hit and run" campaign in the border areas. Being influenced from the naxalities, the Jhupalies had also taken arms. Militant workers of Nepali Congress had hijacked an airbus of Royal Nepal Airlines and had landed in Farbeshgunj of India to take away 3 million Indian Currencies of Nepal Rastrya Bank. Attempts were also made on the life of late kings Mahendra and Birendra by hurling hand made bombs in Janakpur and Biratnagr respectively. This reveals use of violence and terrorism in Nepali politics. Journalist Padam Thakurathi was shot at in Kathmedu itself in 1987 by a mafia group. However, he was survived from the life attempt.

III. New context

Multi-party democracy was restored in Nepal in 1990 as Nepali Congress and United Leftist Front launched joint movement against partyless Panchyat regime. But the democracy could not bring about socio- economic transformation in the country. Anomalies and aberration were emerged in the society due to the lack of good governance. Practice of wining election at any cost

even by the use of five Ms - money, muscle, media, mafia and manipulation.

Political criminalization and criminal- politician nexus was on the rise. Ethnic people, women, dalits, Terai people and people from remote districts were feeling alienated from the mainstream. After 1996, Maoists cashed the disgruntles of those people in the name of establishment of a people's republic under their leadership. In the beginning, they operated "hit and run campaigns" by collecting weapons available at the local level. As they attacked police posts, they started snatching away weapons from there. They brought weapons and firearms from the illegal arms peddlers of India too.

As the first round of negotiation failed and Maoists attacked in Dang barrack on 23 November 2001, they looted small, big and sophisticated weapons. They took away most of the weapons from the barrack of Royal Nepal army. Looking at the explosion by electronic devices in and around Kathmandu valley just before the cease-fire, transfer of modern technology in the arms is understood clearly.

IV. External Environment

After the end of second World War, the cold war rivalry started between the USA and USSR. They confronted with each other in many ways including proxy wars around the world. Afghanistan can be taken as a one of the nearest examples. Both parties supplied small arms and light weapons to the rival tribal groups. Even as the Soviet Union was dissolved and the cold war was ended up, the weapons spread in the region were not collected. The abundant weapon in Afghanistan was subsequently proliferated in other parts of South Asia.

Myanmar, Afghanistan and Pakistan are major drug producers of the world, A network of drug traffickers is expanded all over the world to supply drugs in advanced countries. Drug traffickers carry arms with them. Therefore, narco-terror and arms trafficking are interrelated in this region. There are several contradictions in south Asia like that of religious, ethnic, class and caste. They never had lack of weapons to fight themselves. Small arms and light weapons have such nature that they are easy to carry and difficult to trace out and relatively simple to maintain. Therefore, such weapons are more used in this region. Terrorists have networking and cooperation an over the world.

The suicide bomb attack by terrorists in the Twin Tower of the World Trade Center in 11/9, 2001 caused heavy loss of life and property. The US force launched attack in Afghanistan and ousted the Taliban government for the charge of giving shelter to Bin Laden, the architect of terrorist attack The post 11/9 period marked the beginning of war against terrorism with international coalition under the leadership of USA. The world focused its attention upon the need of stopping the proliferation of small arms and light weapons and thereby freezing financial support to the terrorists all over the world. In the bid of strengthening capacity to fight against terrorists, Nepal government also started obtaining weapons, logistics and military training from the governments of USA, India and United Kingdom. As claimed by the Maoists there was a strategic equilibrium inside the country. Simultaneously, there was a possibility of external military intervention. So, the Maoists entered into cease-fire due to these two considerations.

V. Interrelated issues

The followings are some of the interrelated issues in Nepal regarding small arms and light weapons.

1. **Criminalisation of politics:** Since nexus between politician and criminals has been increased, criminals enjoy impunity, five Ms—money, muscle, media, mafia and manipulation have been used to win election at any cost. Small arms and light weapons are often used during the elections. The murder of sitting MP Mirja Dilshad Beg by international mafia gang is one of the examples of political criminal nexus. It is felt that the value based politics is the need of the day. We should realize that democracy can not be consolidated without moral ground.
2. **International terrorism:** The hijacking of Indian airbus from Kathamandu in December 1999 has revealed existence of networking of international terrorists. They had used small arms and light weapons. Taking a lesson from that incident, security of the air service has been beefed up. The Tibetan Khanlpa refugees in the past had misused the hospitality given in Nepal and carried out anti-china activities from Nepalese soil. Royal Nepal army had forcefully disarmed them. The small arms and light weapons scattered by them are still found in Himalayan region of Nepal. Even as Nepal is not an origin and destination of international terrorists, news reports often state that Nepal was being used as a transit point. Nepal should stick to her commitment not to allow any activities in her soil against neighboring India and China. Nepal herself should enhance her capacity to contain international terrorism. The SAARC convention against terrorism and relevant recommendations of United Nations should be complied with.
3. **Insurgency:** It is wrong to think that insurgency was erupted just because arms were easily available. In fact, insurgency is the expression of grudges and dissatisfaction of the people, especially the backward and underprivileged ones,

dalits, ethnic people and discriminated women who was not getting social justice. However, easily available small arms fuel more violent action. Both the state and Maoist sporadically used terrorist tactics during their campaign against each other. Therefore, both sides have to shun cult of violence and thereby choose negotiation and consensus for a political solution. Weapon is never an ultimate goal of a political force which have mission of transforming society. Therefore, civil society should play a catalytic role to bring them into peace process.

- 4. Open border system:** Nepal shares more than 1800 KM open border with India. This open border has made an ease for the terrorists, organized criminals, insurgents to transport weapons. But open border is not one and only reason for the same. There is open border between United States and Canada. There occur some Instances of drug trafficking but not arms smuggling. Socio-economic and cultural factors across the border are responsible for the social evils like arm smuggling and drug trafficking. Regulated border system must be introduced to check such arms smuggling and drug trafficking. It's very difficult to identify one's nationality just by looking at the face. Whether a Kashmiri is Indian or Pakistani or proponent of independent Kashmir. So, their movement in border should be checked and registered and it should also be maintained in a log what they bring back and forth.

V. Measures to control

Controlling transportation of small arms and light weapons is not possible through a single measure. Distinct and pertinent approaches should be adopted in a holistic manner. Recommendation made by UN Conference on the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all aspects held in New York in

July 2001 should be implemented sincerely. Ground realities of a given country should be assessed and suitable measures should be adopted. Cooperation should be obtained from the neighbor countries to control cross border transportation of weapons.

After the cease-fire, both parties should be honest to comply with the code of conduct. Post conflict disarmament elements should be focused. Good governance should be delivered to the people by eradicating corruption. Then, we must introduce community security system.

VI. Conclusion

There is a need of strong national and international vigilance and control upon the producer, traders, transporter and smugglers of small arms and light weapons. The activities of military industrial complex must be transparent and accountable. Commission agents of lucrative arm trade must be registered and their dealing must be transparent. If you can addressing the root cause of conflict, the demand of illegal weapons will atomically withered away.

The global and regional powers should refrain from steering the conflict in the countries of their interest. They should realize that destabilization will be counter productive ultimately. In Nepal, the cease-fire should be transformed into stable peace and everyone should work honestly for post war reconstruction. Civil society should firmly say "No" to the cult of violence and thereby promote culture of peace. There should not be dictation of weapons, reasoning must prevail.

Threatens to Human Security

Nadira Malik

The South Asian People's Summit (SAPS) is an assemblage of activists, social workers and representatives of humanitarian civil society organization of South Asia to build consensus/ solidarity among the civil society organizations, social workers and activists on issues requiring immediate attention for the well being of people in South Asia and persuade SAARC and National governments to take effective measures for a long lasting peace, security and development in the region.

We all know about establishing the SAARC regional convention / agreement on Food Security Reserve, Suppression of Terrorism, Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic substances, Cooperation in Police Matters etc.

The Convention on suppression of Terrorism provides a regional focus to many of the well established principles of international law in this respect. Under its provisions, member states are committed to extradite or prosecute alleged terrorists thus preventing them from enjoying safe heavens.

Regional Cooperation is also envisaged in preventive action to combat terrorism. Exchange of information, intelligence and expertise are among the areas identified for mutual cooperation under the Convention.

The problems of Terrorism, Drug Abuse and Drug Trafficking with its linkage with organized crime, illicit arms trade in and outside the region, has been high on the Agenda of SA ARC since its inception and has been focused at every successive SAARC Summit reiterated the need for a constant dialogue and

interaction among the concerned; agencies of member states including submission of periodic recommendations to the Council of Ministers.

A SAARC Conference on Cooperation in Police Matters held in Colombo in July 1996 to consider a number of issues relating to suppression of terrorism, organized crime, combating drug trafficking and drug abuse as well as extradition of offenders. The conference reiterated the need for strengthening the SAARC Terrorist Offences Monitoring Desk (STOMD) and SAARC Drug Offences Monitoring Desk (SDOMD).

The conference also expressed the need for having greater interaction among the member states in the areas of training such as professional police management, conflict resolution, stress management with latest techniques a valuable in the field gained by each member country and urged member states for sharing of expertise especially in the different areas of police investigation and investigation of original crime and drug related crimes.

Narco-production and trading is a lucrative business in this region. There exists a vibrant but complex relationship between opium growers and heroin producers, drug dealers and consumers, security and custom officials, high-risk investors and money launderers, and that again, not only nationally but also regionally and globally.

In smuggling heroin from Myanmar beyond the region and the continent both India and Bangladesh are used as transit points (BCB, 2002:4). This further exacerbates problems related to narco-terrorism in the region. In fact, one critical problem arising out of the confluence of two major narco-producing and trading regions is the cementing of a diabolic relationship between insurgent groups, arms dealers and narco-terrorism. Such a

relationship is quite common in and around Thai-Myanmar, Indo-Myanmar and Bangladesh-Myanmar borders. Not that all the insurgent groups engage in narco-production or narco-trafficking but it has been found that almost all of them have regularly taxed and extorted money from the traffickers while providing protection to the latter for conducting trafficking in drugs.

Firstly, the transnational narco-networks, now backed by armed insurgents, make anti-narco production or anti-narco-trafficking drive immensely difficult. And given the terrain (both physical and topographical) in which the insurgents and the traffickers operate there is now all the more reason to believe that the nationally-organized military or coercive solutions may not be the correct way of overcoming the menace of narco-terrorism.

Secondly, weapons, particularly small arms, in the hands of both the insurgents and traffickers become more rampant, indeed, to the point of threatening the law and order situation in the vicinity. A large portion of the money received from taxing and extorting the narco-traffickers goes on to purchase small, at times sophisticated, arms for the insurgents.

Finally, subaltern aspirations get entwined between insurgency and narco-terrorism, almost to the point of blurring the distinction between the two.

Narco-terrorism would not make much headway without the practice of money laundering. It is the latter that provides the required funds for the production and later on, shipments of the narcotics across regions and continents. The weakness and corruption prevalent in the banking system of the region remain easily susceptible to money laundering. Often drug traffickers invest their drug profits in the country's infrastructure and

legitimate businesses (BCB, 2002: 11). The drug traffickers cum money launderer otherwise with the connivance of the bank and the state end up running legal businesses! When such a structure comes into being it becomes impossible to eradicate narco-trafficking and all the corroborating agencies, including money laundering and terrorism, unless and until the state itself goes through a sustained period of reforms and restructuring.

If anything that has empowered the terrorists and mastans lately, it has been the proliferation and use of illegal small arms. In April 1996 the Bangladesh military seized the following weapons from the vessels off Cox's Bazar (Nepram, 2002:99), a place incidentally not very far from the Bangladesh-Myanmar border:

List of Illegal Small Arms:

- | | |
|---------------------|------|
| 1. AK-47 Rifles | 500 |
| 2. Machine Guns | 80 |
| 3. Rocket launchers | 50 |
| 4. Grenades | 2000 |

It is difficult to imagine that these weapons, including many in the pipeline, enter Bangladesh without some connivance of the state machineries, particularly police and customs departments. But even the knowledge of possible 'helpers' does not provide a clear picture as to who received the arms and more importantly who supplied them. The best we can do in this kind of circumstances is consult Jane's Infantry Weapons, a book of notable distinction, and find out the names of the countries manufacturing these weapons. According to Janes 1996 edition, the following countries, both developed and developing, were listed as the main producers or suppliers of small arms: Argentina, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Britain, Chile, China, France, Germany, India, Iran, Iraq, Israel, North Korea, Pakistan,

Russia, Singapore, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, Switzerland, Turkey, USA, Venezuela and many more.

But this does not help much unless we identify the birthmark (i.e. the original manufacturer) of the small arms that are found and used in terrorist activities. But since the public had no access to the seized weapons mentioned above, there was no way to find out the birthmark of these weapons. But then a survey conducted at Dhaka University in 1995-1996, supplemented by various newspaper reports, helped to trace the type, birthmark and cost of small arms found in the hands of student political cadres and in-campus mastans. The following is the list:

Small Arms Used by Terrorists in Dhaka University

Type	Birthmar / Manufacturer	Price (Taka & in thousand)
Saddam Pistol	India	40-50
9mm bore pistol	Italy	50-60
22 bore pistol	Spain, Italy, Brazil	30
7.65 mm bore pistol	Italy	60
Chinese rifle	China	80
303 cut rifle	Britain	25
0.45 revolver	USA	60
German revolver	Germany	n.a.
0.324 revolver	Pakistan	15.22
Pipe gun	Local	3-5
Shutter gun	India	n.a.

Source: Shams (1996); Husain (1999)

The type and birthmark of the small arms indicate that the bulk of them were produced in developed countries but then it does not tell us how they made it to University. It is unlikely that

these weapons were directly shipped or airlifted from the manufacturing countries to their destination in Dhaka. What is more likely is that these weapons entered Bangladesh from various border points (Bangladesh-Myanmar as well as Indo-Bangladesh) via a vibrant subaltern network (both dubious and political) that possibly included at various stages of their shipments members of both developed and developing countries.

The macro-micro interventions may be initiated at three levels. Reforming the police is the first. The group that is responsible for tracing, seizing and destroying illicit small arms is thoroughly inadequate.

Empowering civil society is the second. Creative micro interventions are required in this area. One could think of activities ranging from 'civil watch groups on small arms' to forming local, national, regional, even international' associations of the victims of small arms'.

Finally, insofar as the proliferation and use of illicit small arms is beyond national boundaries, a South Asian civil-police force ought to be creatively nurtured and established. In this region, policing has been an absolute prerogative of the government and the coercive forces, namely the police and the military. There has been virtually no role for the civic population or the civil society on matters related to security. But there is more civil content than military when it comes to narco-terrorism, money laundering and illicit small arms. Indeed, these are critical sectors in the nexus that is responsible for reproducing contemporary terrorism and the demonic use of small arms. Beefing up the power of the police or the military to contain and resolve these issues would take us nowhere. A combined civil-police force and that again South Asian in scale would have the effect of not only degovernmentalizing but also depolicing

security issues, indeed, to a point where civic population would be engaged in the task of creatively challenging and combating the shadowy and dubious networks within and beyond national borders. Indeed, right to safe environment can come about only when we have dutifully created an environment for it!

The region has been so riven with religious, social and economic differences that it has to rise above them to make the common man's life meaningful and secure. You may be anything Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Sri Lankan or Nepalese. You may be Hindu, Muslim, Christian or Buddhist. These are your own beliefs and they must be respected. But you have to imbibe a South Asian temperament and outlook. All dissensions and quarrels over territories be it Kashmir or northern Sri Lanka will dissolve in the togetherness of South Asian entity.



Concluding Speeches

I-A-Rehman

It is a very happy occasion concerning the life and welfare of the people in South Asia. This reflects our ability to at least discuss the issues in the perspective of human values. Because on the practical level, we are still struggling with our collective psyche that does not accept human rights as a standard of human living.

We are still not ready to accept women as equal human beings. We are still not ready to accept the fact that women have the right to enjoy and decide about their lives and they don't need anybody's protection. And we are still not ready to protect the weaker segments of our societies. We don't have any regrets by saying that all the crimes and sufferings of the people of this region are due to those people who are in power. The people who take decision and formulate policies.

The habit of working together has to be acquired soon. One positive manifestation is this occasion where we met and submitted our recommendations. Out of five commissions, two are devoted to regional cooperation while rest are in the national domain. The entire recommendations on social development and poverty eradication are strictly national issues.

Sometimes we demand that the authoritarian states should do something in the interest of the people. But we do this without realizing that we are asking them to do something contrary to their interests. So, we will have to find some time to examine the nature of the state. For example, the question of democracy needs proper evaluation.

What do we do? We hold some kind of elections, manipulate them, keep people out of the process by one method or other. We are very much interested in enforcing parliamentary majority in

the name of democracy. So whatever parliamentary majority says becomes democracy in South Asia.

We can have a National Democratic Alliance in India, a marriage of convenience between political groups who only pursue their narrow interests, and we really feel that democratic state has been established. We exclude people under the constitution of Sri-Lanka. In stead of real democracy, we are comfortable with the rule of majority. The real struggle lies ahead and that is to convert majority rule into democracy. I would suggest that we would have to go into the functioning of state, the nature of state and only then our recommendations could become material.

Nevertheless, we worked well and developed very good suggestions and recommendations. I would compliment personally and on the behalf of SAP-Pakistan that we have good opportunity of interacting with the senior colleagues from India, Srilanka, Bangladesh and Nepal. And I am personally very happy on the recommendation of cutting down military budget by ten percent annually. By doing this, we can save tremendous amount of resources to be invested on human welfare rather than on defense.

Our work becomes somewhat harder so long as the SAARC acts in the general terms that they should do this or that. But at the beginning of some life in SAARC organization, we will have to be more watchful. We will have to focus on the effectiveness of the conventions. And we will have to resist the temptation of endorsing the document without reading the applications.

The convention on trafficking neglect some important aspects of the issue. Of course, women are being trafficked for the purpose of prostitution but they are trafficked for other purposes also. We

have to be watchful to the SAFTA as well. And we have to be careful in expressing and extending our thinking.

We have to ask for uniform things. I would like to submit to you that please do ask for uniform freedoms because this is the question of rights and all the citizens of South Asia should have uniform rights. But please don't ask for the uniform regulations because seven majoritarian states coming together can make regulations that may be conflicting to the people's interests. And uniform regulations kill innovation that underlines the competition.

We Pakistanis would like our friends in Nepal to set good examples in creating good practices so that we could say let us learn from our Nepali friends as far as basic freedoms are concerned. And yes, the debate within the SAARC society should continue. Similarly, when we ask for the respect of international conventions we have to take them together instead of asking them for the rights of labor and factory labor separately.

To our mind, all the universal and international rights are interrelated. We have to keep this in mind that while asking for civil and political rights, we don't have to ignore economic and cultural rights which are all not UN instruments.

To the problem of governance, I find it related to all the recommendations. But we have to elaborate what we mean by good governance? what do we mean by participation? And what do we mean by empowerment? This is important because all of our recommendations for social development and poverty deal with crucial question of where does the focus of the power resides. Giving power to the common people is sometimes called decentralization and sometimes devaluation. But devaluation has

become a dirty word ever since it is vulgarized in Pakistan. But important thing is to practically empower the people.

Finally, I would like to suggest that we should also recommend something to ourselves while we are recommending so many things to others. We would have to concentrate on our follow up actions. The problems of SAARC are the problems of national entities. The SAARC weaknesses are rooted in our individual societies. Our struggles lie primarily where we are located. The idea of meeting South Asian friends is to seek an opportunity to learn from regional friends in order to refine the methods, strategies and tactics to build a better Pakistan. I am very happy that we have an action plan for each national group.

I am quite sure that we now have a body of large number of people who have demonstrated their commitment to basic human values. Their struggle is the basic capital that we have. Let us go beyond recommending things and take up our roles and start doing it. I thank you all.

Ms. Bushra Gohar

The gathering of such able minds of this region to have a serious, concerted and organized thinking process and their coming up with a formal declaration is reflection of the fact that the people of this region have the capacity of solving and resolving their problems and conflicts. This is the light, though flickering.

We need this flickering light that we see in the people. It will give us some strength because what we look around ourselves is so much destruction and so much devastation. We need to take it very seriously. So, while I am ready to be critical, I fully endorse what Mr. Arjun Karki has said that we need to evaluate our contribution towards people's summit. This is necessary because of the importance of this forum. We need to work together and we need to be prepared for the follow up actions.

The last year when I stood here in front of all of you I said that this will be the follow up plan that we will focus upon. And yet this year too I am saying the same thing because I think we have failed a little in pursuing our goals. But even coming together is not a small achievement. This is in fact our performance. Isn't it very difficult to organize a regional summit? You have seen how states prevent us from coming together. So, we need to work harder if we want people's summit to do something for the people of this region.

I would like to mention what Mr. I-A-Rehman said that whenever we get the opportunity to sit together we should think of concrete action plans. All of us have to work in our own national contexts. This is the only option to ensure the implementation of our decisions.

But I am still optimist. I think even consistently meeting with each other could bring some change. And this is how people's

movements gather momentum. We will keep on meeting each others, appreciating each others and criticizing each others. By this, we will show that we are really serious about the issues we are confronted with.

I am not going to make any promises. I hope that the South Asia Partnership has taken a good initiative. When first time we met at Colombo, we assembled a very good group of intellectuals and activists but we were not clear how would we move forward. Now we have linked it with SAARC process and we are going to work closely by setting up a follow-up mechanism. The South Asia Partnership will not do it alone. It will make alliances with other grass roots groups, national networks and people's networks to ensure that the follow-up is relevant and meaningful.

I would like to thank South Asia Partnership-Pakistan without whose support the successful completion of this event would not have been possible. It is extremely difficult task to bring together people from South Asian countries and they made it easy for us. And they did it at right time when we can raise our voices to be heard in relevant forum.

We talk about alliances and we really do mean it. This is first time that South Asia Partnership-International has gone into in alliance with South Asian Association for Poverty Eradication (SAAPE). I thank SAAPE that they joined hands with us. I am very grateful that this time we have one participant from Maldives. This is because of SAAPE and we are thankful for this also. Thank you.

Arjun karki

First of all, I would like to thank all of you. The three days we spent together prove the seriousness of this crowd towards their overall crises. For last three days, we have been discussing about the role of SAARC to solve the myriad issues of this region. This the apex regional forum, the biggest hope.

The real weakness, however, of this forum is that it lacks the people's active participation in the process and decision making and, obviously, implementing the decision. We have to provide this forum its lacking strength. We have to help them in setting right agendas and in picking right paths. But for this, we have to work hard particularly at grassroots level.

We need a real people's alliance. This People's Summit and other initiatives like it are the glimpse of hope, a right path. But it is just beginning. We have to involve people, we have to train human rights activists and we have to facilitate between different socio-political and cultural expression present in our societies. We have to bring our agendas, demands and follow-up plans to the grassroots. This is the real challenge.

This is imperative to save our energies and meager resources that we have. If issues are inter-related and if problems are common, then struggles should also be coordinated and common. If we keep on our disintegrated efforts we would reach nowhere, I fear.

We need a regional pressure group of people. We need intellectuals, lawyers, teachers, scientists, students and above all artists and dreamers of this region to join in common struggle. This is the only way to get out of the mess that our rulers have created for us. If our governments don't feel themselves accountable to people, then let us bring this realization to people

that they have all the rights to make their governments and states accountable.

The basic fact is that we are being ruled by minority groups. In the name of democracy, a few thousand people rule us. They make laws and institutions to protect their own interests. They want to make us believe that 3 to 5 percent people elected by 30 to 40 percent people represent the whole population of South Asia. We don't believe this.

That is why we need immediate action to bring people of this region into practical alliance. The first thing we need is pro-people governments in this region. Only then we could establish a peaceful and prosperous South Asia.

Our initiatives should be broad based. We really need to work collectively. Otherwise, we can gain wealth, appreciation and media attraction but we won't be able to bring any change in the region. That is why we need to build grassroots movements. The movements for people's democracy.

Appendices

List of Participants

ECONOMIC COOPERATION, SAFTA AND WTO

FAROOQ AHMED KHAN

Cholistan Development Council of Pakistan
5-A, Model Town (L)
Bahawalpur,
Pakistan
Ph# 0621-883045
E-mail: cwcbwp@hotmail.com

QAMAR HAYAT

Omer Asghar Khan Development Foundation
VPO. Hattar
Tehsil& Distract Haripur
NWFP, Pakistan
Ph# 0995-617473/639137, 03005130314

IMRAN KHAN

Rural Development Project
Tehsil& Distract Haripur
NWFP, Pakistan
Ph# 0995-615502

ROOH-UL-AMIN

Sarhad Coordinating Council
7th-Hassan Gari Lane, Shami Road
Peshawar, NWFP
Pakistan
Ph# 0333-9136358

SAGHIR SHAH

All Karachi Hosiery & Garments Labor Association (AKHGLA)
Piler 209- Regal Trade Center
Ph# 021-7750581

FAISAL QASIM

South Asia Partnership- International
571/15, Galle Road
Colombo 6, SRILANKA

MS. HEWALUNUWILAGE JEEVIKA WEERAHEWA

Official Address: Department of Agricultural Economics
Faculty of Agriculture
University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka
Tel: 081 2387177

E mail: jeevikaw@pdn.ac.lk

FOZIA TANVEER

Strengthening Participatory Organization
H # 09, St # 39, G-6/3, Islamabad
Ph #: 051-2820983/2272978

MS. TALEYA REHMAN

Executive Director
Democracy Watch
7, Circuit House Road
Ramna, Dhaka-1000

DR. SAJIDA

The Network for Consumer Protection
Ramazan plaza
G-9, Islamabad
Ph# 051-2261085

MUAAZ MUBASHIR

South Asian Center
No. 4, Service Road, I-8/3, Islamabad
Ph #: 051-4449613

ANUSHEH

POVERTY AND LIVELIHOOD SECURITIES

SOHRAB HASSAN

59 North Road
Dhanmondi, Dhaka - 1205
Bangladesh

IKRAM ARIFI

South Asia Partnership-Pakistan
Haseeb Memeorail Trust Building
Nasirabad, 2km Raiwind Road
Thoker Niaz Beg Lahore
Punjab, Pakistan
Ph# 042-5426470-72
E-Mail: info@sappk.org

M. LATIF ABID

105-13, Faisal Town
Lahore, Pakisatn
Ph# 042-5161817

MUHAMMAD AKBAR

PILER Lahore
435/D, Green Colony
P.O. Ismail Nagar
Ferozepur Road Lahore
Pakistan
Ph# 042-5801763/5822063

SULTAN KHAN

PCMLF & APFOL
Hassan Plaza Flat # 1,
M.A. Jinnah Road Quetta, Pakistan
Ph# 081-829818-8/ 03204789208

PREM DANGAL

Secretary General of All Nepal
Peasant Association (ANPA)
Madan Nagar Khatmandu
Nepal
Ph # 4288409

DR. MADAN PRIYAR

SAP-International
571/15, Galle Road
Colombo 6
Sri Lanka.
E-Mail: sapipm@eurika.lk

KRISHNA SUNDAR MALLA

SAP-Nepal
Babar Mahal
G.P.O 3827, Khatmandu

SULEMAN G. ABRO

SAFCWO
H # 248/49 Cooperative, Housing Society
Shehdadpur, Sanghar
Ph #: 02232-41242/ 0300-3012303

MEHMOOD AHMAD

South Asia Partnership-Pakistan
Haseeb Memeorail Trust Building
Nasirabad, 2km Raiwind Road
Thoker Niaz Beg Lahore
Punjab, Pakistan
Ph# 042-5426470-72
E-mail: info@sappk.org

TAHIRA ABDULLAH

H3 15, St.3, F-8/3, Islamabad
Pakisatn
Ph# 051-2282111/ 0300-8545171
E-mail: tabdullah@wtmeca.net

SHAFIQ BUTT

100-Tipu block New Garden Town
Lahore Pakistan
Ph # 042-5830985/ 03036365629
E- mail: shafiqbutt@lokpunjab.org

EHSAN LEGHARI

OXFAM
A-57, Muslim Housing Society
Hyderabad, Pakistan
Ph # 0221-655960
E-Mail: eleghari@oxfam.org.uk

ABDUL WADOOD

SEHAR
335-B, St # 13,
Samungli Housing Society,
Quetta
Ph #: 081-826745

CHANDRANI WERASHINGHE

SAP- Srilanka
No. 6 Sakvithi Lane
Colombo 5
Sri Lanka.

M. IDREES KHAN
OXFAM GB, Pakistan
60/42/C Jinnah Ton,
Quetta
Pakistan
Ph # 0300-8380518
E-Mail: mkhan@oxfam.org.uk

REEHAN HASHMI
PES
H# 25, St# 21, F-7/2
Islamabad Pakistan
Ph# 051-2653111
E-Mail: rehanahashmi@hotmail.com

ASMA PERVAIZ KHAN
PILER Karachi
St # 01, Sector X- Sub sector V,
Gulshan-Mehmar KDS Scheme 45,
Karachi
Ph # 021-6351146/7
E-mail: ekahn@nd.edu

MD. EMRAN-UL-HAQ
Director UDDIPAN
9/25, Sirsiyyad Road, Muhammad Pur
Dhaka Bangladesh
Ph # 8115459/8123848
Fax: 9121538
E-mail: udpn@agni.com

DR. SANDEEP LALJI PENDSE

Vikash Adhyan Kendra (VAK)
D-1 Shivdham, 62 Link Road, Malad (West),
Mumbai- 400064, India
Tel: 91 22 8822850/8898662
Fax: 91 22 8898941
E-mail: vak@bom3.vsnl.net.in

HABIB AHMED

Aurat Foundation
T/229 & 230, Khyber Colony 2,
Peshawar.
Ph #: 091-842850

NEELAM

Aurat Foundation,
T/229 & 230, Khyber Colony 2,
Peshawar.
Ph #: 091-842850

DR. ARJUN K. KARKI

President
Rural Reconstruction Nepal-RRN
667 Neel Saraswati Marg, Lazimpat
Kathmandu, Nepal
Phone: 977-1-4415418, 4422153

MR. T. M. ROY ANTONY RODRIGO

JANAWABODA KNDRAYA
64 Chilla Road, Negombo, Sri Lanka
Ph# +94-31-2233466
E-mail: janawaboda@zelan.net

MS. M. CHANDRIKA KUMUDINI

Samaabimani Centre
527/10, Liyanagamulla, Seeduwa
Srilanka
Ph# +94-11259251

REV. SR. NOEL CHRISTINE FERNANDO

MONLAR
527/10, Liyanagamulla, Seeduwa
Srilanka
Ph# +94-11259251
E-Mail: siddamal@dynaweb.lk

PEACE AND HUMAN SECURITY

IRFAN MUFTI

South Asia Partnership-Pakistan
Haseeb Memorial Trust Building, Nasirabad,
2km Raiwind Road, P.O. Thokar Niaz Baig,
Lahore-53700, Pakistan.
042-5311701-05
info@sappk.org

FIUZIA NOUREEN

PILER Lahore
43-a Green Colony Ferozpur Road Lahore
042-5801763

FARAH MALIK

Insaan Foundation
160-A-3 Johar Town Lahore
042-5175275
insane@insanpk.org

MS. NADIRA MALLIK

Program Coordinator
SAP-Bangladesh
880-2-8112103, 8114697
Fax 880-2-8113033
Nadiramalik@yahoo.com

MR. TASSIE SENEVIRATNE

SASA Net
Anicut Rd, Asginya, Gampale Sri Lanka
033-2222303

NASSULLAH KHAN

Oxfam
Jinnah Town Quetta
081-825708

RAO ABID HAMID

HRCF Lahore
rao@hrcf-web.org

HIRANYA LAL SHRESTHA

SASA net Nepal
72/a yakikaran Sadak, Kathmandu-17
Po Box No 5816, Kothmande
0977-1-4251855(R)

NASIR HUSSAIN

KRSO
Parachinar Kurram Agency NWFP
0926- 310508
krsokrso90@hotmail.com

IJAZ KHAN

Citizen for Peace Peshawar
ijazk@hotmail.com

PROF KAPIL SHRESTHA

NHRC
G.P.O Box 6312 Kath Merda Nepal
977-1-4720877
nhrc@nhrc.nepal.org
y2kyberlafe@hotmail.com

RAKSHINDA PERVEEN
Agehi Resource Centre Sachet
F-8 Islamabad
2254933/2250553
rakshi@comsats.net.pk

TAHIR MUHAMMAD KHAN
HRCF
387-A/7, Hali Road Quetta Cantt
081-842900

DR. MUNWAR CHAND
HRCF
Res # 7657616

DR. W. JAMES ARPUTHARAJ
ED South Asia Partnership Int Sri Lanka
Sapi@eureka.lk

M. PARKASH
Chairman MRCP
56 Bhitai Nagar HyderabadPakistan
613549/610169/ 03009370161
mparash@hotmail.com

SALMAN RASHID
Writer free lance
75-a Pcsir Staff Coop. Society,
College Road Lahore 54770
042-511-7218
odysseus@beaconet.net

MOHIUDDIN AHMAD

CDI

House No 39,
Road 15 Dhanmorrdi Dhaka 1209,
Bangladesh

Mohiuddina@hotmail.com

MS. HIROSHARRI PRIYANKA GUNATHILAKE

SAP International
517/15Galle Road,
Co-06 Sri Lanka

sasantet@enreka.lk

BUSHRA GOHAR

SAP-International HRMDC
18-F UniversityTown Peshawar
091-842850
091-850920(fax)

hrmde@brain.net.pk

AIJAZ AHMAD

PILER

St 1, Sector X, Sub Sec V,
Gulshan-e-Maymar Karachi
021-6351145-47

piler@cyber.net.pk

KARAMAT ALI

PILER

St 1, Sector X, Sub Sec V,
Gulshan-e-Maymar Karachi
021-6351145-47, 0300-8237528

DR. ROHIT KUMAR NEPALI

SAP- NEPAL
ED SAP-Nepal
GPO # 3827 BABR MAHAL
KATMANDU NEPAL.
00977-1-4223230

LALA ARSHAD

BDCC
H-6- Vip Road Nawab Shah, Sindh
0241-70685

SAFDER HUSSAIN

IDSP
C-32 Railway Housing Society, Quetta
081-449775, 445192

MOHAMMAD ZIA-UR-REHAN

Awaz CDS
2440/8A, D-Block New Shamasabad Colony, Multan
061-7846061,584909
awazcds@brain.net.pk

BIDY DEVI BHANDARI

Anwa Nepal
0097714252140

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

M. FIAZ ABBASI

Patan Khurd Welfare Association
Hotel Al- Mizan
Katchery Road
Abbotabad
Ph# 03005246580
E-Mail: fay_abbassi@yahoo.com

TOUSEEF AHMED

PILER
73-L, Block 2, PECH Housing Society
Karachi
Ph# 021-4555577

AYESHA AYUB

OXFAM
H # 60/42/C, Jinnah Town
Quetta Pakistan
081-825708/ 03003813646

MEHMOD EHSAN KHAN

SUNGI Development Foundation
H # 17, St, # 67, G-6/4, Islamabad
Ph #: 051-2282481-2
E-mail: ahsan_asu@yahoo.com

SHAZIA NIZAMANI

OXFAM 6B
A-57, Muslim Housing Society
Hyderabad, Pakistan
Ph # 0221-655960

TARIQ ALI
SAMMILITA SAMAJIK ANDOLON
76/2, Gulshan Ave, Dhaka-1212
Ph# +880-2-882-4201

BANDARA BPARNAGE
Srilanka
Ph# & Fax: +94-22-32059

FATHIMA FARAZA FAROOK
SAP-International
571/15, Galle Road
Colombo 6, Sri Lanka.
Ph# +94-11-2500311
E-Mail: sapi@eureka.lk

NAVEED AHMAD SHINWARI
CAMP - Pakistan
F.F 24, 5th Floor, Bilour Plaza, Peshwar Cant.
Ph #: 091-5261443

DR. PADMA RATNAYEKE
SAP- Srilanka
No. 6 Sakvithi Lane
Colombo 5,
Srilanka
E-Mail: sapsri@slt.lk

ZAFAR MAILK
PILER
249-A Stanton Road
Railway Colony
Lahore, Pakistan
E-Mail: pyamalik@hotmail.com

MUHAMMAD ZUHAIR

Society for Health and Education (SHE) Maldivs

M.Kulunuvehi, Beeruzumagu

Mali, Maldivs

Ph# +960+315042/312221

E-Mail: she8804@dhivehinet.net.mv

BABU METHEW

12, King Street

Richmond Town

Bangalore - 560 025

Professor of Law and

Faculty Co-ordinator for Law & Society Cluster

National Law School of India University

Nagarbhavi, Bangalore - 560 072

E-mail: bmathew@nls.ac.in

TRAFFICKING IN WOMEN AND CHILDREN

DR. RENU PAJBHANDARI

WOREC

P.O. Box 13233

Khatmandu Nepal

+977-1-4494815

E-Mail: worec@wlink.com.np

NADEEM PERVEZ COUDHRY

Pakistan Federation of Labor Union

Federation House W Block 32/10

New Multan Pakistan

Ph# 061-555141/ 03006337287

SALMAN ABID

Aurat Foundation

8-B, LDA Garden View Apartments

Lawrence Road, Lahore

Ph #: 042-6306534/ 0300-8429311

Fax # 042-6278817

E-Mail: salman_abid@hotmail.com

ELIZABETH VICTOR SAMARAJ

R. No. 306, National Law School of India University,

Girl's Hostel, Nagarabhavi, Jnana Bharathi, Bangalore - 560 072

Associate Professor

Under Graduate Council Chairman

National Law School of India University

Nagarabhavi, Bangalore - 560 072, India

Phone nos. - 011-080-3213160/ 3212504

fax no. 11-080-3212504

E-mail: yselizabeth@nls.ac.in

ABID GULZAR

Caritas Pakistan
23/3 Race Course road Lahore
Ph # 042-63115584-5/ 03004163515
E-Mail: abidgulzar@hotmail.com

AYUB TAREEN

BBC Photo Service
B-5, Kabir building Jinnah road,
Quetta Pakistan
+92-300-9383569, 665663/836685 Fax 825068
E-Mail: ayubtreen@hotmail.com

DR. SHOMA ISHAQUE

MPA OXFAM
Dr. Flat E-6, Barrory Road
BMC Colony Quetta
Ph# 855541
E-Mail: shomaishaqu@yahoo.com

RANA SIDDIQUI

Tawka City Councillor Hyderabad
Aqeel Manzil, Near Odean Cinema
Hyderabad Sindh
Ph # 03003021161, 785145

SARTAJ ABBASI

Root Work
93, Street 11,
Phase I, Shahbaz town
Quetta Pakistan
+92-81-823678,832082
E-mail: rootwork@qta.paknet.com.pk

MIRZA ABDUL SHAKOOR

Community Development Concern
Head Marala Sialkot-51200
Ph# +92-432-50201
E-Mail: s_tarkhan@yahoo.com

DR. HELALUDDIN KHAN AREFEEN

Professor, Development of Anthropology
Dhaka University Dhaka-1000
Ph# 8611947(R) +966190014513(O)

SHEEN FARRUKH

Inter-Press Communication (IPC)
B-114, Block 4-A Gulshan-e-Block, Karachi
Ph #: 021-4812473

KALPANA KUMAL

Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities
P.O.Box 8975, EPC 7120
Khatmandu Nepal
Ph# +977-01-4256569/4358525
E-mail: kalpanakumal@hotmail.com

MR. MIZANUR REHMAN

Program Officer
International Organization for Migration (IOM)
H # 3-A, R# 50, Block NW(G)
Gulshan 2, Dhaka 1212, Bangladesh
8814604
mrahman@icom.int

YOUSUF BENJMAN

CAPS Peshawar
Flat # A-2, Zeeshan Plaza
Opp Latif Abad
P.O. Ashrafia
Ring Road,
Peshawar Pakistan
+91241129-30
yousafbenjamin@yahoo.com

DUNGA GHINUAL

ABC Nepal
ABC Nepal P.O.Box Kotswar 5135
6630346/6630072

DR. GOPAL K SIWAKOTI

INHURED/Himrights
GPO Box 4690 Khatmandu, Lalitpur Nepal
Ph # 5520054
Fax: 5520042
info@inhured.wlink.com.np

MD. EMRAN-UL-HAQ

Director UDDIPAN
9/25 Sir Syed Road
MuhammadPur
Dhaka Bangladesh
udpn@agni.com

THE SUMMIT TEAM

Coordination

Shiraz Raj

Tayyaba Riaz

Media Liaison

G. M. Ganjeera

Administrative Affairs

Aftab Jadran Khan

Financial Affairs

Shahzad Ahmad

Coordination with Participants

Shabnam Rashid

Naeema Malik

Uzma Zareen

Ikram Arfi

Video Documentation

Tariq Azim

Mohammad Saeed

Décor of Venue

Mahboob Ali

Still Photography

Azhar Jaffery

Drivers

Allah Noor
Rana Ajmal
Irshad Hussain

Administrative Assistance

Ajmal Hussain

SPECIAL THANKS TO VOLUNTEERS

MARVI SARMAD

Aurat Foundation,
Lahore.

SABIR NAZAR

The Friday Times
Lahore.

ALEEM SHAKIR

ALAAP
Lahore.

RAWASH NADEEM

Free Lance Journalist

JAVED ARSHI

Free Lance Journalist

ABDUL QAYYUM SIDDIQUI

GEO, Islamabad.

FRANCISCO SIDNEY D, SA

The Network, Islamabad.