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3RD QUARTER 2020

APRNewsletter

The Official Newsletter of Asia Pacific Research Network

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BANGKOK - Pro-democracy demonstrators hold signs during an anti-government rally at Thammasat University. (Diego Azubel/EPA/EFE)

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The Asia Pacific Research Network (APRN), a regional network of NGOs provides various forms of capacity on important socioeconomic and geopolitical issues such as people's trade agenda, cross border investments, development finance, democracy and militarism, governance and development effectiveness, among others. APRN does this through different programs and projects on research advocacy, training and seminars, coordinated researches, civil society networking, policy and communications.



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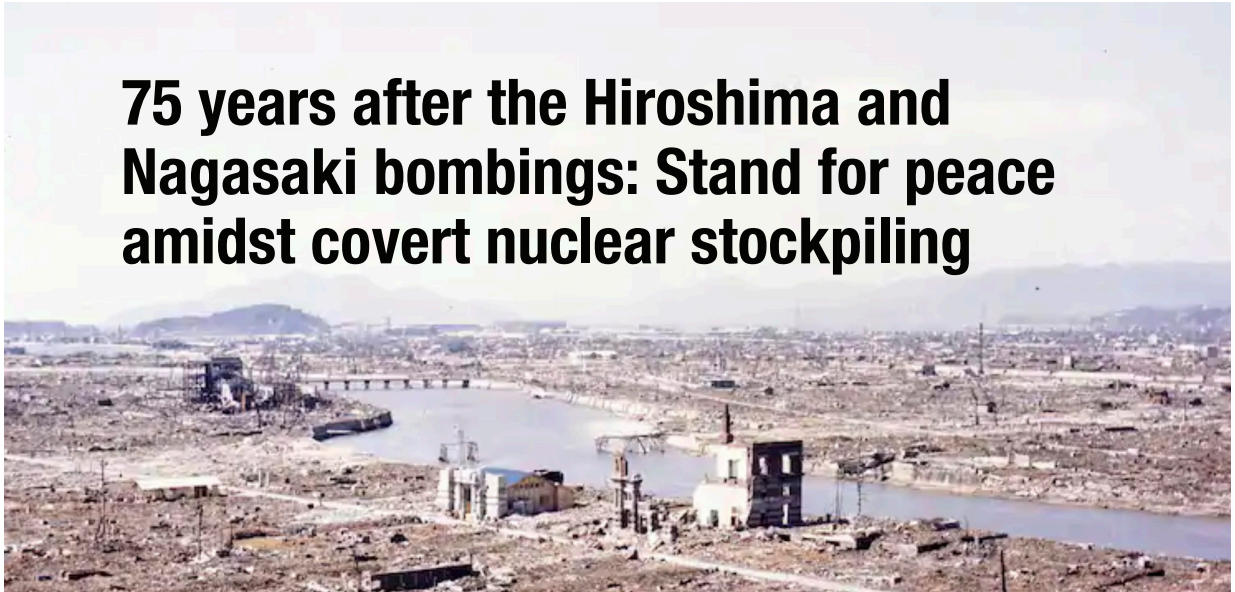


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75 years after the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings: Stand for peace amidst covert nuclear stockpiling



Seventy-five years after the worst atrocity against humanity occurred, we remember those who were lost in the devastating and unwarranted atomic bombings in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The indiscriminate use of nuclear weaponry towards a civilian population caused unprecedented destruction with lasting effects. Since then, it has been widely considered a war crime—an exhibition of the willingness of imperial powers, such as the United States, to forward its interests.

The bipolar tug-of-war by the Axis and the Allied powers bifurcated countries along definitive competing political and economic interests, resulting in the Second World War. This struggle for power has pushed for the development of catastrophic weapons at the expense of human lives. The disastrous bombings in Hiroshima and Nagasaki have launched a nuclear arms race between the United States and the Soviet Union. Although the world has taken a step back from

the brink of nuclear warfare at the end of the Cold War, the blueprint for this technology still exists. Countries who are capable of possessing such weapons continued efforts in modernizing their arsenals, despite its threats to the existence of humankind. Several treaties have been proposed and were passed regarding the use and possession of nuclear weapons but these are largely ignored by nuclear players. Billions of dollars are still being allocated to these efforts instead of channeling these big budgets for basic social services.

In the current multipolar world, with emerging players entering the global scene, the risk of conflict is now higher than ever. Disputes in several key areas, such as in India and the South China Sea have created new flashpoints that may spark direct confrontation. Making matters worse, the recent COVID-19 pandemic has heightened the likelihood of war with an increased focus on militaristic approaches as well as the postponement of

important meetings for expiring arms treaties. Although nuclear weapons were already stocked since 1945, its long term effects still linger and have left a permanent trail of devastation. Nuclear testing sites have left nuclear waste and radiation and have affected nearby indigenous and marginalized communities.

The Asia Pacific Research Network calls for the non-proliferation and disarmament of these nuclear weapons. Contrary to popular discourse, nuclear arms stockpiling and modernization do not serve as deterrents for war, but in fact promote it.

The Network reaffirms its commitment to genuine peace. More than the absence of war, genuine peace is based on a just and equitable world wherein people enjoy the full exercise of their economic, social, and political rights. Genuine peace leaves no quarter for the causes of war and strife to exist. This is what we all should strive for. ■



REFLECTIONS



From: Aaliyah Hasna (Malaysia)

Editor's Note: The following is a reflection of Aaliyah Hasna, a participant from Malaysia to the first Advocacy and Engagement Training (Online Run) conducted on August 19, 26, September 2 and 9 by the Asia-Pacific Research Network with support from the European Commission in "Building People's Organizations' Capacities to Claim their Rights and Sustainable Development."



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ASEAN countries are rich in cultural diversity, natural resources, and many more. With ASEAN being the third-largest economy in the world, many other countries are seizing opportunities to divert their investment in this part of the world. However, with the immense amount of rich resources, it cannot be said the same for the political settings in each of these countries. Many of the ASEAN countries practice semi-authoritarian regimes or rigged democratic regimes. Unfortunately, these

political settings constrict civic spaces.

Civic Spaces in ASEAN

Despite such settings and the absence of civic spaces, rights defenders in these countries are speaking on behalf of marginalised communities that are disturbed by social issues. Rights defenders use public spaces to not only gain attention from the mass public but force governments to pay attention to the matters that are being advocated for, and demand for change. Although some of the

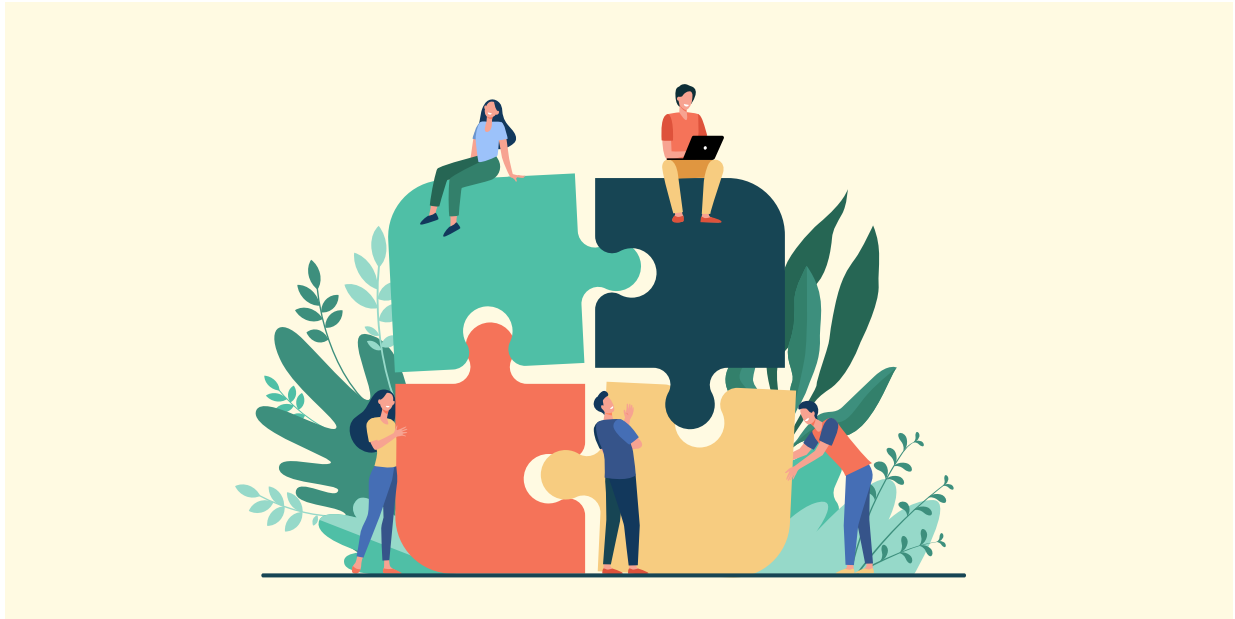
issues are addressed, it usually comes with a very hefty cost. Rights defenders face serious trumped-up allegations by local authorities, slapped with hefty fines or even receive death threats. Although the United Nations has condemned countries that attack rights defenders and criticised these atrocious acts, many activists in Southeast Asia continue to be at risk when carrying out their advocacy activities.

Although by engaging in these advocacy activities that pose risks and danger, this does not deter rights defenders from standing up for justice. Some resources are available to

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Many of the ASEAN countries practice semi-authoritarian regimes or rigged democratic regimes. Unfortunately, these political settings constrict civic spaces.

better-equip activists in pursuit of executing their advocacy. Supported by the European Union, Asia Pacific Research Network conducted a virtual training called the Advocacy and Engagement Training, where the method was centred on knowledge sharing sessions.



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Due to the global pandemic, the sessions were done virtually but it was constructive learning on how to advocate for social issues effectively.

A platform to share and learn

The training set the tone of learning the basic principles of advocacy and it became the platform where people across the ASEAN region came together to share experiences and discuss frameworks to advocate efficiently in constraint environments. The most important component of this training is the fruitful discussions during breakout groups, where the participants, despite the various settings, found common social issues they were advocating for. Apart from that, the participants learnt how various types of advocacies and strategies could be applied to influence better policymaking at a national level. Experts were present to share their experiences and principles to lobby for

ambitious policymaking decisions in partnership with other stakeholders. Participants and experts shared best practices in the region to better execute advocacy plans on the ground.

Better advocacy for better future

Capacity building is essential for people's organizations as they pursue justice for vulnerable communities. Many activists, particularly coming from the developing countries, require more assistance to continue their advocacy in local settings. The international community such as the United Nations recognizes that the people demanding for change are extremely vulnerable to threats and violence. However, it is crucial to further develop their skills to address social issues affecting the most vulnerable communities. Such training aims to strengthen capacities of people and activists on advocating more

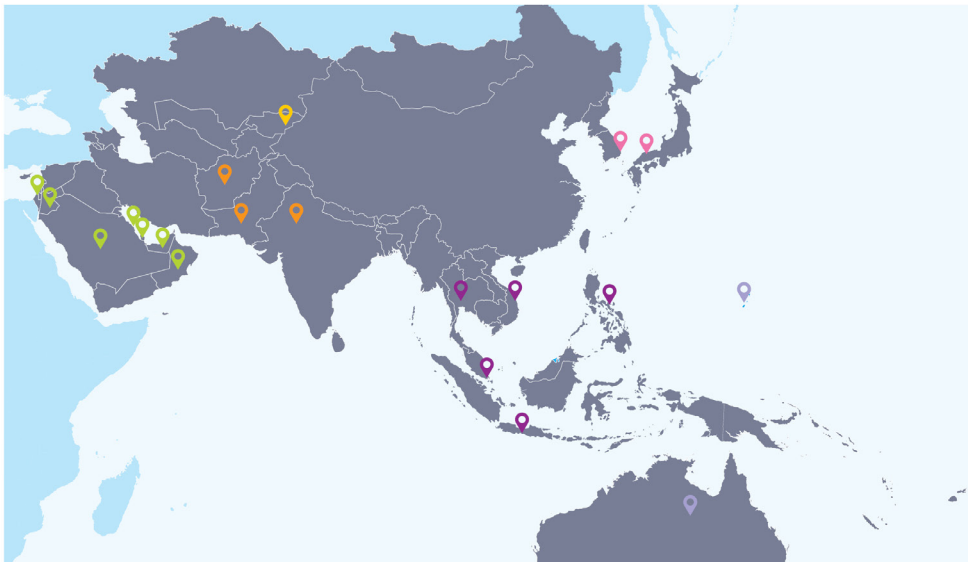
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safely and efficiently to create a safe and transparent future for all. It is crucial to acknowledge that collective activism is mainly to become watchdogs to hold governments accountable for their actions and to speak on behalf of vulnerable communities that are plagued with social issues. Hence it is vital to invest in NGOs or individual activists so that they may help shape the future of society to be equitable, transparent and inclusive. ■

In defense of investments: US hegemony in Asia Pacific

American independence has been based on the enslavement of Native Americans and peoples of color domestically; the primacy of neoliberal globalization clothed with the tenets of liberal democracy; and, its foreign policy of imposing unfair trade relations and flexing its military power to maintain global hegemony.



EXISTING DIRECT INVESTMENTS OF US TNCs IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC*



* <https://www.usasean.org/why-asean/investment>

PACIFIC ISLANDS

AUSTRALIA

- Pine Gap
- Marine Rotational Force – Darwin

GUAM

- Andersen Air Base
- There are more than 5,000 troops permanently stationed on Guam, a small US island territory that North Korea has declared as its target.
- Andersen Air Base is where B-1 bombers are currently positioned. It is also home to a squadron of F-16 fighters.⁶

EAST ASIA

JAPAN

- Still around 30 US bases in Okinawa⁷
- The US military has a massive presence in Japan, rooted in the end of World War II, with a total of about 50,000 troops in the country.
- The largest contingent of these is made up by the Marine Corps, which has more than 20,000 Marines permanently stationed in Japan including at Futenma and Iwakuni air bases.
- The Navy has a carrier strike group permanently based at Yokosuka in Japan, led by the massive USS Ronald Reagan aircraft carrier.
- The ships are part of the 7th Fleet which is headquartered at Yokosuka and is the largest of the Navy's forward-deployed fleets.⁸

SOUTH KOREA

- There are currently 28,500 US troops from the Air Force, Army, Marine Corps, and Navy stationed in the South.
- The bulk of these – about 19,000 soldiers – are from the 8th Army which is garrisoned at Yongsan in Seoul, just 25 miles from the border with North Korea.⁹

WEST ASIA

BAHRAIN

- Naval Support Activity Bahrain
- Isa Air Base

IRAQ

- Al Asad Airbase
- There were 505 bases at the U.S. occupation's height, but the Iraqi parliament rejected the Pentagon's wish to keep 58 "enduring" bases after the 2011 withdrawal. U.S. forces have occupied at least five bases since 2014 and are considering more installations.¹

ISRAEL

- Dimona Radar Facility

JORDAN

- Muwaffaq Salti Air Base

KUWAIT

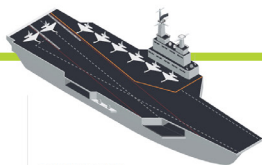
- Ali Al Salem Air Base
- Camp Arifjan
- Camp Buehring
- Kuwait Naval Base

OMAN

- RAFO Masirah
- RAFO Thumrait

QATAR

- Al Udeid Air Base



SAUDI ARABIA

- 64th Air Expeditionary Group (inactive since 2014)
- Prince Sultan Air Base

SYRIA

- Al-Tanf Military base
- Several facilities in northern Syria, within US-backed SDF territory.

SOUTH ASIA

AFGHANISTAN

- Camp Dwyer
- Forward Operating Base Delhi
- Forward Operating Base Geronimo
- Firebase Fiddler's Green

INDIA

- World's biggest arms importer
- The US is keen on working with India to counter China's growing assertiveness in the South China Sea²

PAKISTAN

- PAF Base Samungli

SOUTHEAST ASIA

INDONESIA

- Armed Forces Research Institute of Medical Sciences

PHILIPPINES

- Cesar Basa Air Base (Luzon)
- Antonio Bautista Air Base (Palawan)
- Facility near Clark Air Base
- Fort Magsaysay Military Reservation
- Lumbia Air Base
- Mactan Benito Ebuen Air Base
- No permanent US Base, but can rotate troops, and operate and build their own facilities in Philippine bases (EDCA).³
- The US can utilize the entire country as its military base.

SINGAPORE

- West Pac Navy Base and Sembawang Airbase

THAILAND

- The Pentagon rents space at the U-Tapao Naval Air Base from a contractor, allowing US and Thai officials to insist there's no US "base" and no inter-governmental basing agreement. The base was a major logistics hub for the Iraq and Afghanistan wars.⁴

VIETNAM

- While Hanoi's defense policy is believed to involve no military alliances or foreign troops stationed on Vietnamese soil, it has recently increased its military cooperation with the US amid an escalating dispute with Beijing over the South China Sea – known in Vietnam as the East Sea.⁵



CENTRAL ASIA

KYRGYZSTAN

- "Transit Center" in the Manas International Airport in Bishkek (2001)
- The US Air Force opened a "transit centre", rather than an airbase, at Manas International Airport near Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, in 2001 to support its activities in Afghanistan. It was handed back to the Kyrgyz military in 2014, and American troops left, after Russia, China and others spent years calling for its closure.

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The rise of US military dominance after World War II was in pursuit of its policy of containment and interventionism. Its alliance with 30 countries from Europe and North America through the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) has justified the maintenance of military bases and facilities across the world to ‘protect the people and the territories of its allies.’

While the declared purpose is to prevent conflict, the strategic positioning of US troops has served to preserve their economic interests by meddling in local affairs, diverting policies to ensure their gains, and interfering with the sovereignty of many independent nations.

A major effect of American troop presence has compromised several communities in the areas surrounding these bases. Reports of human rights violations have

increased and counter-insurgency programs have harmed innocent civilians in the countryside.

Currently concerned with the rise of a rival superpower in China, the US has become more aggressive in its strategy of containment by beefing up its military settlements in the Asia Pacific to protect investments and ensure political influence in key countries. This dynamic concerning the two superpowers has affected nearby countries and partners, allowing both to set up undeclared alliances in a battle not just for positioning and regional dominance, but also for the probability of war.

On the day of American independence, APRN calls for the eviction of overt and covert US bases, military installations, and settlements in Asia Pacific. APRN also calls for a pull-out of US troops in the region and the termination

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Currently concerned with the rise of a rival superpower in China, the US has become more aggressive in its strategy of containment by beefing up its military settlements in the Asia Pacific to protect investments and ensure political influence in key countries.

of the incentivization of war. The Network calls for genuine independence from the US hegemonic agenda, as well as from similar powers such as China’s domineering tactics disguised as soft-power diplomacy. ■



Protest in Okinawa demanding for the eviction of US bases in Okinawa after a woman was raped and killed by a former Marine serviceman (Associated Press)



Biofortification will never end global hunger – not now, not ever

By People's Coalition on Food Sovereignty

Proponents of biofortification are taking advantage of the COVID-19 pandemic to promote the development, production, and sale of genetically-engineered food crops as a silver bullet to the imminent hunger crisis.

If we are going to refer to the State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World (SOFI) 2020, the world's hunger and malnutrition figures are not getting any better – even without COVID-19 in the picture. The number of hungry people in the world increased by 10 million last year, to 690 million. About 2 billion people did not have regular access to safe, nutritious, and sufficient food in 2019, while approximately 750 million experienced severe food insecurity.

Factoring in the pandemic, the report estimated an additional 83 to 132 million people in hunger by the end of 2020.

With these numbers in sight, neoliberal actors led by agribusiness corporations are painting biofortification as a

relevant and urgent response to the global hunger situation, magnifying the “humanitarian” claim of GM crops and derived products amid pandemic. This blatant opportunism has resulted in some governments easing their restrictions on GMOs, which has recently unfolded in Europe and the US.

Africa – home to almost half the world's hungry – has been the hotbed of such reforms in recent years, however, through the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA). Established in 2006 by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and Rockefeller Foundation, AGRA has influenced poverty-stricken countries particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa to adopt policy frameworks that support biotechnology to boost the agriculture sector. This has allowed field trials, commercial production of various GM crops, and “flexible and innovative” biosafety regulations.

Yet what was supposed to guarantee domestic food security turned out to be a failure.

According to a study, AGRA's programs in the past 14 years only resulted in limited productivity improvements of commodity GM crops – far from the target double-crop productivity. The added productivity was also largely because of extensification onto new lands.

For instance, maize production in the past 12 years saw an 87% increase in 13 countries but was due more to the 45% increase in area harvested. Yield only rose by 29%. On the other hand, staple food crops such as millet, sorghum, cassava, sweet potatoes, and groundnuts declined in yields.

As expected, AGRA also failed to double the incomes for 30 million small-scale farmers. Because its programs promote input-intensive agricultural systems, smallholder farmers find the Green Revolution package too expensive.

Moreover, the hunger in the continent continues to rise – despite governments and institutions channeling

multibillion funds to AGRA's programs. Hunger prevalence in Africa is more than twice the world average, with more than 250 million hungry people as of 2019. The SOFI 2020 even stated, "Africa is significantly off track to achieve the Zero Hunger target, even without considering the impact of COVID-19."

Another study pointed out that GM crops in Africa promote the dependency on global markets given the role of multinational corporations that own, patent, and fund the GM technology. "[W]e are apprehensive about multi-million dollar collaborations that seemingly favor the concerns of donors and industry over those of African scientists and farmers," it said.

In other regions, the policy changes in favor of biofortification were widely opposed. Agricultural organizations in Bolivia rejected the passage of Supreme Decree 4232, which authorized the use of GM corn, soy, wheat, sugar cane, and cotton seeds. The de-facto government cited the "coronavirus emergency" as reason behind the measure's approval, but the groups assert that the measure is unconstitutional and will only benefit big businesses.

Meanwhile, the call to stop Golden Rice continues with the yearly international day of protest spearheaded by the Stop Golden Rice Network (SGRN). This year, the campaign focused on the corporatization of food

and agriculture systems amid the COVID-19 pandemic, specifically the agenda of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the promotion of Golden Rice.

The biofortified rice, which does not contain enough beta-carotene to battle Vitamin A deficiency as claimed, has been approved for human consumption in the Philippines. Bangladesh and Indonesia are expected to follow suit.

Defenders of the Golden Rice project are always quick to retort that it "has nothing to do with agribusiness companies" and that the opposition is but an "antediluvian hostility to science and technology." These allegations are plain disinformation and deliberately miss the point of contention: biofortification is a bane to small farmers. Africa's experience with AGRA is proof of how agrochemical corporations have only profited from small farmers, sinking them further into poverty and hunger.

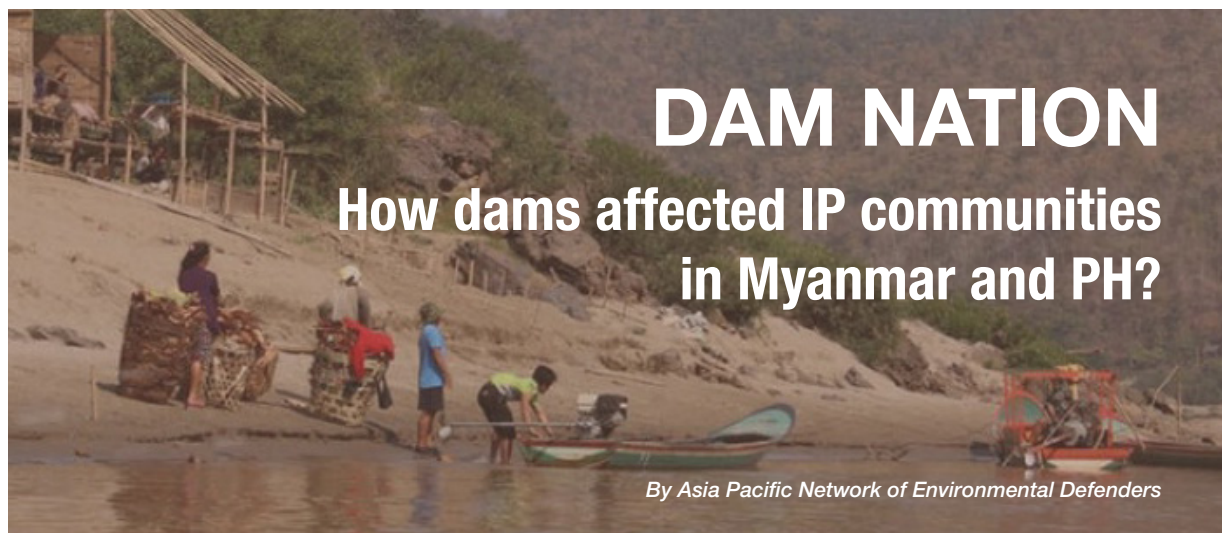
Like other GM seeds and crops, Golden Rice will significantly alter the lives and livelihood of rural peoples especially in Asia where rice is a staple food. On top of its impacts on public health and the environment, the cultivation of Golden Rice will endanger traditional rice farming and breeding practices as well as traditional varieties that rice farmers find to be more efficient and sustainable. Also, whether the seeds are

free or not, rice farmers will still have to spend for inputs and implements sold by the very same corporations behind Golden Rice for its production.

To put an end to hunger and malnutrition, what we need are comprehensive policy changes that put people's right to food and the rural food producers' welfare at the forefront. The People's Coalition on Food Sovereignty (PCFS) has outlined nine demands that propose radical reforms toward just, sustainable, and equitable food systems.

At the national level, members of the coalition are also actively resisting the use and production of biofortified crops. In Bolivia, Instituto Politécnico Tomás Katari has opposed GM corn. Meanwhile, many farmers groups in Asia have consistently mounted protests against various GM crops including Golden Rice. These include the Labour Resource Center and Bangladesh Agricultural Farm Labour Federation in Bangladesh, Aliansi Gerakan Reforma Agraria in Indonesia, and the Peasant Movement of the Philippines and Amihan National Federation of Peasant Women in the Philippines.

Neoliberal reforms in food and agriculture promoted amid pandemic are primarily designed to save agribusiness corporations from the ongoing global crisis. Biofortification is not and will never be the answer to worldwide hunger. ■



The discourse around large-dams continues to fuel the word-war between proponents and opponents. The issue isn't merely a topic of construction, but it has touched on economic, socio-cultural, and environmental subjects. Proponents have hailed large dams and dam projects as saviors of the economy while opponents decry its environmental impact. In the end, it's the communities who suffer, and it's their voices that need to be heard.

Case studies from Myanmar and the Philippines were presented in the webinar "Breaking the Barriers: A Webinar on the Impacts of Large-Scale Dams in Asia" last August 11, 2020. The Asia Pacific Network of Environment Defenders (APNED), together with the Asia Pacific Research Network (APRN), the International Indigenous People's Movement for Self-Determination and Liberation (IPMSDL), and the People's Coalition on Food Sovereignty (PCFS) organized the said webinar to highlight the

stories of rural and Indigenous Peoples (IP) communities affected by dam projects.

Karen ethnic territory in Myanmar

Saw Tha Phoe of Environment and Social Action Network (KESAN) discussed the effects of large dams in the Karen Ethnic Territory in Myanmar, where several dams and dam projects are in line. According to his discussion, three (3) dams are already complete; two (2) dams are in a memorandum of understanding (MoU) and pre-feasibility stage, while four (4) more dams are proposed from 2016 until now.

He also delved into the militarization of the Karen Ethnic territory. For 70 years, Karen territory conflicts with the Myanmar military that bred conflict and displacement among hundreds of Karen people. In 2010, Myanmar changed the form of government from military to civilian government. After the ceasefire in 2012, 2013 is a year

of aggressive rural development. Ten (10) dams are proposed in the territory, and they are mostly Chinese and Thai investments.

The displaced Karen peoples face a lot of adversities. The refugee settlements are in dire and inhumane conditions while affected peoples have been poorly compensated at \$3 per household. There is also no work nor livelihood in the area, which exacerbates hunger and poverty among refugees. The experiences lead to grave mental health conditions among the refugees; they have reported feelings of depression and loneliness.

Dumagat ancestral domains in the Philippines

Kakay Tolentino of BAI Indigenous Women Network shared the stories of resistance from the hills of Sierra Madre in the Philippines. The proposed Kaliwa dam stands as a significant threat to Indigenous communities in three provinces that lie at the foot of the Sierra Madre, including a Dumagat

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Ancestral domain. The Sierra Madre is a 690-kilometer

mountain range running from northern to southern Luzon in the Philippines.

Kaliwa dam is part of the centennial water source project in Agos river, the Dumagat Indigenous people's lifeblood in Southern Luzon, Philippines. The project is supposed to augment the source of freshwater in Metro Manila. The project was first hatched during the time of then-President Marcos during the 1980s. They shelved it during the Aquino Administration because of protests. The project's revival followed through and continues until the present Duterte administration in 2017 under the flagship "build, build, build" program. The Kaliwa dam is reportedly financed by China Energy Scheme Engineering Corporation, covering 85% of the total cost.

The dam is foreseen to displace

IPs from their territory and will submerge seven (7) villages, one of which has 720 families. The dam construction will also destroy Sierra Madre's rich biodiversity with a total of two (2) Ecoregions, three (3) national parks, and 13 protected areas. Some of these areas are the sources of food and livelihood among the Dumagats and their culture and identity.

Mega dams pose a significant threat to indigenous communities in Myanmar and the Philippines. It will further endanger the already endangered biodiversities. It will aggravate hunger and poverty, and it will further marginalize the already marginalized indigenous population, impending their death and destruction. It is only apt and justified that IPs, together with affected sectors, continue their militant assertion for their fundamental freedoms, rights, and welfare. ■





MILITARIST TRENDS IN SOUTH AND SOUTHEAST ASIA

The global spread of CoVID-19 has caused an unprecedented global health crisis, with the number of infections and fatalities exponentially increasing each day.

Governments across the world, especially in the Southeast and South Asia region have implemented strict lockdowns, along with a mass deployment of troops and armed forces among urban and rural communities.

Such measures have propagated a repressive and 'weaponized' response to the pandemic; one that clearly prioritizes state interests and blatantly disregards public welfare and people's rights. Worsening socio-economic conditions, an increase in human rights violations, and fast tracking of authoritarian laws been the overall state-of-play, one that is being orchestrated and is hidden under the guise of emergency response.

Download our newest publication "Weaponized response of states to CoVID-19: Militarist trends in South Asia and Southeast Asia" to learn more about the ongoing trends in the region on their actions towards addressing CoVID-19. ■

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