



APRN Newsletter

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Agenda 2030 Regional Priorities and Accountability: Asia Pacific at the Crossroads



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Agenda 2030 Regional Priorities and Accountability: Asia Pacific at a Crossroads

APRN Secretariat | www.aprnet.org

Thirty-six member states and more than 70 representatives from international organizations and civil society gathered in Bangkok on April 3-5 for the 3rd annual Asia Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (APFSD). The APFSD is a regional intergovernmental forum that aims to facilitate coordination and collaboration, constructive and inclusive engagement of stakeholders, credible assessments of progress, and an effective science-policy interface concerning sustainable development.

During the 2015 APFSD, member states and other stakeholders endorsed the development of the regional roadmap for implementing the post-2015 agenda to support the follow up and review at the regional level as encouraged by the UN General Assembly resolution 67/290 concerning the High Level Political Forum. The regional roadmap is envisioned to address regional priorities and dimensions of the Agenda 2030 while being consistent with the global framework. In line with the recommendations of the 2015 APFSD, member states and stakeholders were expected to initiate and define the regional roadmap during its session in 2016.

*“...member states failed to agree on the substantive part of the regional roadmap, CSOs remain at the margins of the meetings, and **corporate interests have taken the limelight in the regional priorities the forum chose to discuss.**”*

This year's APFSD could have been a defining, historical moment for the region to lead the way in ensuring that the new development agenda responds to the people's needs and aspirations. However, the 3rd APFSD was unsuccessful to do so as member states failed to agree on the substantive part of the regional roadmap, CSOs remain at the margins of the meetings, and corporate interests have taken the limelight in the regional priorities that the forum chose to discuss.

Accountability: Where will the Road Lead to?

The importance of a regional roadmap cannot be emphasized enough. Aside from ensuring that the implementation of the Agenda 2030 is informed by regional realities, this regional roadmap along with the APFSD is an important instrument in order to ensure accountability of governments and other stakeholders to their commitments on the new development agenda.

However, despite extending discussion sessions, ESCAP member states ended up not agreeing over the substantive content of the regional roadmap for implementing the Agenda 2030. What they managed to come up with was what Asia Pacific CSOs call a ‘soi map’¹, which is severely watered down and needs further discussions and possible negotiations in order to develop its substantive parts and bring it to a completion. Among the many other weaknesses of the document is its ‘lack of clear timeframes and details on processes that will produce a more meaningful regional blueprint for action on SDGs.’²

On the other hand, CSOs are glad that governments agreed to maintain APFSD as an annual forum and keep its multi-stakeholder character intact. Maintaining the multi-stakeholder approach of the APFSD enhances its potential to become a regional forum of different

¹‘Sois’ are small side-roads in Thailand, which more than often are hard to navigate and can lead to dead ends and roadblocks.

²AP-RCEM

stakeholders for shared learning, cooperation, and shared accountability for challenges that are regional in nature and are difficult to solve at country level alone, like climate change impacts and response for example.

The North-South differences in the position of member states regarding the regional roadmap and the form and function of the APFSD after 2016 are very notable. Japan wanted to postpone decision-making until after the HLPF. The delegate from United States of America who came during the last day of the Forum backed up this position. The delegate from United States of America who came during the last day of the Forum backed up this position. In contrast, southern countries such as Sri Lanka and China proposed a way forward through creating a working group that will move the process forward. Accountability, especially of developed countries, is further sidelined by the proposal initiated by Japan to take out references to the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities, which was reaffirmed by the A2030 outcome document although in very circumscribed manner.

The CBD principle calls for justice and accountability by tasking “those who have developed their economies faster through colonialism and overexploiting the global commons to bear more responsibilities in terms of providing finance, technology, and technical capacity for transitioning to a more sustainable path of development for all.”³ This principle is highly relevant in Asia-Pacific because the region is composed of least developed countries and former colonies, which continuously face huge economic difficulties because of the unequal global trade and financial architecture and developed countries, which seek to continue the same policies that benefitted their economies.

Discussions concerning the Forum echo the member states’ sentiments that while wanting cooperation and capacity building for implementing the sustainable development agenda, they do not want to commit to additional reporting and financing requirements. Concerns over additional reporting requirements can be addressed by designing APFSD to support reporting to the HLPF. However, shying away from the additional costs that the ESCAP might need casts shadows of doubt on the sincerity of member states to enable the APFSD. This presents one of the roadblocks in the ‘soi map’ since limiting ESCAP to present available resources can potentially limit the institution’s effectiveness in implementing its mandate of assisting member states in the implementation of Agenda 2030. Until this issue and other essential components have been defined, the ‘soi map’ is in danger of leading the region into a dead end.

Shrinking Spaces for CSOs at the APFSD

Although CSOs are pleased that the APFSD remains a multi-stakeholder space for engagement at the regional level, there is still much wanting in terms of CSOs’ meaningful participation in the Forum itself.

Since the first APFSD in 2014, CSOs are continuously being pushed towards the sidelines of the Forum, which can be observed in the decreasing number of CSO-selected representatives in the panel sessions, as well as in the number of intervention opportunities given to CSOs at the end of each panel session. Please see table below for comparison of numbers of CSO speaking opportunities from the first to the most recent APFSD.

Year	Panel Speakers/ Discussants	Interventions from the Floor	Total Spaces for CSOs
2014	7	17	24
2015	3	14	17
2016	3	7	10

This emerging trend in APFSD is a sign of backtracking on the commitments made in the resolution (67/290) on the HLPF, which emphasizes the importance of inclusiveness, and being open to major groups and other stakeholders in the promotion of transparency and implementation of the new development agenda.

“All over Asia-Pacific, countries are passing laws that limit the spaces of democratic engagement by CSOs.”

The state of CSO spaces in the region itself presents a no better picture. All over Asia-Pacific, countries are passing laws that limit the spaces for democratic engagement by CSOs. In Cambodia, the Law on Associations and Non-Governmental Organizations (LANGO) has entered into force on August 2015. LANGO requires not only mandatory registration but also “political neutrality” for all domestic and international organizations, and allows unlimited decision-making powers by the Ministry of Interior over registration.⁴ In Bangladesh, the draft Cyber Security Act 2015 is feared to become a threat to stifle online expression. The draft law proposes life time imprisonment for violators and gives the government broad powers of censorship which include blocking or removing online content if “necessary in the interest state or the integrity, security or defense of Bangladesh or any part thereof, friendly relations with foreign states, public

²AP-RCEM

³IBON International. (5, August 2015). The 2030 Agenda: Leaving behind the promise of sustainable development. Retrieved from <http://iboninternational.org/article/2015/08/2030-agenda-leaving-behind-promise-sustainable-development>

⁴<http://www.icnl.org/research/monitor/cambodia.html>

order, decency or morality, or in relation to contempt of court or commission of or incitement to an offence under this Act.⁵ This is intended to amend the provisions of the ICT Act, including Section 57, which has been used against bloggers and human rights activists.⁶ India on the other hand passed laws restricting national NGO's access to foreign funding. Same attempts are being done in Kyrgyzstan wherein the "draft law on foreign agents contains regulations putting NGO representatives under criminal responsibility". Moreover, CSOs in Asia-Pacific face criminalization and threats to their own lives especially those critical to government policies. In the Philippines for example, leaders of indigenous 'Lumad' groups were killed on September 1, 2015 because of their opposition to the government's mining projects in their ancestral lands.

Private sector over people? Regional Priorities for Implementation

The APFSD correctly identified the megatrends that will affect the capacity of the member states to achieve sustainable development: inequality, urbanization, climate change, intense resource extraction, and trade and economic integration. However, the APFSD has consistently failed to identify the root causes of these challenges which CSOs for the past three sessions of the fora have been pointing to: unequal distribution of wealth reinforced by local and international economic policies that allows the rich to accumulate ever increasing amounts of wealth at the expense of the poor and planetary sustainability.

"The APFSD has consistently failed to identify the root causes of these challenges which CSOs for the past three sessions of the fora have been pointing to."

As for the regional priorities for implementation, it is notable that the forum focused on Science, technology, and innovation (STI); and urbanization. While the Forum mentions the importance of civil society, more emphasis is given to private sector's role as enablers of sustainable development through mobilizing them for investments and partnerships without any mention of accountability. Nowhere in the Forum did member states discuss the private sector's contributions to the regional challenges that should be addressed and the sector's accountability for their actions leading to unsustainable development

and human rights violations. Also, STI and urbanization are two sectors wherein the private sector is expected to make profits through PPPs in research and development, public services, and infrastructure. Coupled with strict intellectual property rights that are inserted in various free trade agreements in the Asia Pacific such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement, corporate giants can monopolize research and development, preventing the people from accessing technologies and innovations for sustainable development.

Other equally important issues were not discussed in the Forum. One of these issues which has been an elephant in the room is militarism and conflict in the region. This elephant in the room has been hard to ignore during the plenary discussion wherein the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia was raised on the floor. The two countries' competition for control over the Nagorno-Karabakh has escalated once again erupted into armed conflict with both sides suffering casualties.

The destructive impacts of militarism and wars are continuously ignored by member states when discussing sustainable development. Ironically, while governments are citing lack of financial capacity to implement sustainable development as rationale for mobilizing private sector funding, in Asia Pacific, military spending has increased by more than 50% during the last decade. Also, it is very ironic that Japan and the US who consistently questioned the viability of the roadmap and the APFSD due to possible additional funding requirements, are among the highest military spenders both at the regional and global levels, and are also among the ones who lag behind their official development assistance commitments.

After the pomp and festivities in New York during the launch of the Agenda 2030, governments, CSOs, and other stakeholders are once again back to the work bench. The battle now shifts to the HLPF, which must come up with clear guidance on the role of the regional commissions, stressing the importance of the contribution of regional level follow up and review, as well as upholding meaningful CSO engagement in all the processes. As Asia Pacific member states are still charting the regional roadmap for the Agenda 2030, CSOs must continue remaining vigilant in order to prevent governments from backtracking from their commitments and to ensure that the new development agenda will be implemented to achieve justice and genuine sustainable development.###

⁵ Cyber security act to hugely curb freedom of expression. (28, June 2015). The Daily Star. <http://www.thedailystar.net/city/cyber-security-act-hugely-curb-freedom-expression-104074>

⁶ International Center for Not-for-Profit Law. (25, June 2015). NGO Law Monitor: Bangladesh. <http://www.icnl.org/research/monitor/bangladesh.html>

⁷ <http://csopartnership.org/cpde-forum-reveals-shrinking-spaces-for-ngos-in-kyrgyzstan/>

Photo courtesy: International League of Peoples Struggle

TPP deal signed amid global protests

Activists highlight threat to people's rights in favor of cementing corporate power

The Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPPA), touted as the biggest trade deal in history, was signed last 4 February by the US and 11 other member states amid widespread protests across the globe denouncing the deal as a 'threat to people's rights' while boosting corporate power.

Simultaneous actions were held in Malaysia, New Zealand, Peru, Indonesia and the Philippines to protest the signing of the trade deal in New Zealand's capital. In an earlier statement, more than 100 regional and national organizations from Asia-Pacific urged governments not to sign the deal citing detrimental impacts on farmers, indigenous peoples, workers and women from the region.

"Careful analysis of the text revealed that the TPP will violate a number of fundamental human rights and would negatively impact people's access to quality and affordable health care, further endanger the environment, and violate national sovereignty."

"Careful analysis of the text revealed that the TPP will violate a number of fundamental human rights and would negatively impact people's access to quality and affordable health care, further endanger the environment, and violate national sovereignty," the statement says.

Endorsing organizations also emphasized the role of the United States in pushing member states to an agreement on the dangerous trade deal.

"Signing the deal would increasingly promote the hegemony of corporations, neoliberal regimes and political and economic dominance of the US and other powerful states over the developing and underdeveloped economies of the world."

More than just a trade deal, the TPP is an important component of the US rebalancing in Asia Pacific.

According to President Barack Obama during the aftermath of the release of the TPP text, "...the TPP means that America will write the rules of the road in the 21st century..." the statement says.

"More than just a trade deal, the TPP is an important component of the US rebalancing in Asia Pacific."

Not yet a done deal

Despite the TPP being signed, critics remain hopeful that the groundswell of opposition across the globe can still stop the deal from being enforced.

In order for the TPP to be enforced, member countries must undergo a ratification process at the national level. The agreement will go into effect only when the collective gross domestic product (GDP) of countries that ratified the deal reaches at least 85% of the total GDP of all 12 member economies.

This means that while the TPP has indeed been signed, there remains a window of opportunity to stop the trade deal from being set into force by pressuring national governments and blocking efforts to ratify the TPP.###

Follow this link [Do Not Sign the TPP \(endorsers\)](#) for the full letter with the list of endorses as of February 3, 2016.



#FoodNotBullets: Updates on the violent dispersal of Kidapawan farmers

APRN Secretariat | www.aprnet.org

On the morning of April 1 local police forces opened fire at around 6,000 drought-stricken farmers and indigenous peoples demanding immediate relief and assistance for communities heavily affected by the El Nino dry spell in Kidapawan City, North Cotabato, Philippines.

The violent dispersal led to at least two documented victims killed, at least 37 people wounded and 79 farmers and ordinary residents illegally arrested including pregnant women and three senior citizens.



APRN together with the participants of the 1st Regional Consultation of the ACSC/APF in Bangkok express their solidarity to Filipino farmers injured, harassed, and killed during the violent dispersal of their barricade by police using firearms.

Since then came an outpour of international support and global condemnation against the government's brutal response to hungry farmers exercising their fundamental right to peaceably assemble. Immediately after the incident, an independent [National Fact Finding and Humanitarian Mission](#) led by local rights group Karapatan found several rights violations committed by the government including an attempt to cover-up incriminating evidence, continuing threat, harassment and intimidation as well as trumped up charges against leaders and protesters.

Illegally arrested farmers were released on bail last April 16. A senate probe on the incident revealed government's failure to release much-needed relief

amid the 14 million PHP calamity fund intended for drought-stricken communities in North Cotabato.

The probe also reiterated that the police were not allowed to use live ammunition during any dispersal operations. The provincial police chief was since then relieved from duty pending an ongoing investigation on the matter.

As the effects of El Nino continue to ravage communities in the Philippines, farmers in their thousands across the country are speaking out to demand food relief, and justice for their fellow farmers killed during the Kidapawan shooting. Around 3,000 farmers from four provinces in Region 12 barricaded the Koronadal-General Santos City national highway and picketed the Department of Agriculture in Koronadal City, South Cotabato to demand the release of the calamity funds and 15,000 sacks of rice last April. A similar number of farmers protested in Cagayan de Oro City, around 7,000 more in Bukidnon and 3,000 farmers in the Cagayan Valley. ###

ASEAN civil society to meet in Timor Leste

APRN Secretariat | www.aprnet.org

Civil society organizations across Southeast Asia are set to gather in Dili, Timor Leste from 3 to 5 August this year for the 10th ASEAN Civil Society Conference and ASEAN People's Forum (ACSC/APF 2016). While traditionally held in the host country of the official ASEAN summit, organizers of this year's ACSC/APF chose to conduct the parallel summit in Dili citing the repressive CSO environment in the current ASEAN host country - Laos.

In 2012, news of Sombath Somphone's disappearance broke out on mainstream media generating international pressure on the government as well as support from people's organizations across the globe. Sombath is a well-known community development worker allegedly abducted by local police on the evening of December 2012. Immediately after his disappearance, the Laos government denied any responsibility.

With the theme *"Expanding People's Solidarity for a Just and Inclusive ASEAN Community,"* ACSC/APF 2016 will focus on people's solidarity as an important component in realizing a genuine, just, and inclusive regional integration. ###

APRN Board of Conveners (BOC) stand in solidarity with the Kidapawan farmers and join the April 8 Global Day of Action for Food, Land and Justice.

Justice for the Slain and Injured Kidapawan farmers, Resist the Growing Militarism in Asia Pacific!

APRN Statement on the violent dispersal of drought-stricken farmers in North Cotabato, Philippines

The Asia Pacific Research Network (APRN) strongly condemns the recent brutal dispersal and indiscriminate shootings of protesting farmers in Kidapawan, Philippines that left at least (2) dead, hundreds injured and missing including women and children.

Around 6,000 farmers have been picketing the main highway in North Cotabato province on the southern island of Mindanao for three days to demand immediate government assistance to drought victims. Peasants and Lumads from Kidapawan have been suffering from the effects of climate change, as the severe drought caused by the El Nino has been destroying their food production systems since November 2016. Their suffering is further intensified by the encroachment of large-scale plantations into their agricultural lands.

Drought victims were calling for a dialogue with the local government to release the 15,000 sacks of rice that was promised to them as relief. With no food, no harvest and no fertile land to till, farmers took it to the streets to assert their rightful entitlement to food aid and assistance from the government.

At around 10AM on April 1, elements from the Philippine National Police (PNP) began bombarding the barricade with a water cannon. Bursts of gunfire followed shortly as soon as the farmers stood their ground.

This violent dispersal, shooting and continuing harassment of Kidapawan farmers comes at the heels of the Lumad killings perpetrated by the same state forces and state-backed paramilitary groups just last year. Ultimately, this new incident is a further violation to their fundamental right to peaceably assemble.

The Philippine government is one of the first to give its commitment to report the country's progress in implementing the Agenda 2030. The Agenda 2030 includes a goal (Goal 16) which deals with efforts to create 'peaceful and inclusive societies and access to justice.' This apparent doublespeak – to talk about the commitment to peaceful societies while at the same time shooting hungry farmers back home – presents the fundamental problem of a global development plan that operates around the same neoliberal political and economic framework.

Moreover, the repressive strategy of using military armed forces is not new to the Philippines nor is it an isolated case - various countries in the Asia Pacific region are also suffering from intense militarism and repression perpetrated by state forces. Just three days before the Kidapawan massacre, about 700 marching farmers in Central Sulawesi, Indonesia were blocked and fired upon with rubber bullets by the police and military. In Thailand, the military junta chief just granted the army sweeping powers to arrest and detain suspects which critics fear would lead to arbitrary arrests, human rights violations and a brutal crackdown on dissenting voices.

APRN stands with our brothers and sisters in Kidapawan who as of writing are still in the refuge of the United Methodist Church (UMC). The UMC is currently being cordoned by the state's armed forces to detain whoever tries to leave the premises. APRN calls for the immediate pullout of state forces who have been intimidating, harassing and illegally detaining protesters in Kidapawan. In the interim, immediate food aid and relief must be provided for by the government to the farmers as the quest for justice continues with the reiteration that the accountability over the Kidapawan massacre ultimately lies upon the State.

We urge our members, partners and the international community to express solidarity and support to the struggle of hungry Filipino farmers in Kidapawan and resist the growing militarism in the region.###

Land and food, not bullets: Stop the violence Against Asian Farmers

Pesticide Action Network – Asia Pacific (PAN-AP) statement on the Kidapawan shooting

We denounce these repressive acts in the strongest terms and call upon the authorities to immediately hold to account all those responsible behind the vicious attacks on Indonesian and Filipino farmers, indigenous peoples and their supporters.

On 29 March, about 700 marching farmers in Central Sulawesi province in Indonesia were blocked and fired upon with rubber bullets by the police and military. At least 14 were hurt while 103 were arrested and detained for than 24 hours. The farmers were supposed to join the protest rally in the provincial capital as part of the global action on the Day of the Landless organized by the Asian Peasant Coalition (APC).



Protesting farmers in Central Sulawesi, Indonesia were blocked and fired upon with rubber bullets by the police and military on March 29. Photo courtesy: AGRA

Then just three days later, on 1 April, the police opened fire at some 5,000 protesting farmers and indigenous people in Cotabato province in the Philippines. At least three people were confirmed dead while 116 others were wounded. Some 87 others were also reportedly missing. The farmers and indigenous people have set up a human barricade in

the provincial highway to demand urgent relief from the government amid the intense drought that has hit the province since last year.



A farmer tends to a wounded fellow farmer in the aftermath of the violent dispersal of drought-hit communities in Kidapawan City, Philippines. Photo courtesy: Kilab Multimedia

The farmers are simply exercising their basic right to make their grievances known to those who are in power and in position to address their legitimate demands. They have been compelled to protest apparently because of the failure of those who are supposed to promote their interest and welfare, including on issues of access to land and livelihood, and on sufficient and reliable government services. That they are met with state violence makes their oppression and neglect doubly worse and deplorable.

We believe that the right of farmers, indigenous people, rural women, and other marginalized and neglected rural sectors to live decently and with dignity must be upheld and promoted always. That is why we have been working closely with the Aliansi Gerakan Reforma Agraria (AGRA) and Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas (KMP) – the main organizers of the farmers' unjustly suppressed protests in Indonesia and the Philippines, respectively, in the campaign against land grabbing and human rights violations, and for food sovereignty and genuine agrarian reform.

We strongly support their demand for justice for all the victims of, and accountability from those behind, these latest cases of police and military brutality. We join the call to end the reign of impunity that has long been gripping the Indonesian and Philippine countryside at the expense of the poor and the landless. ###

Levy Imposition to Migrant Workers in Malaysia: An Act of Legalized Extortion & Bled Dry Migrant Workers

Asia Pacific Migrants Mission (APMM) Statement on Levy Imposition on Migrants in Malaysia

The Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants, a regional migrant centre based in Hong Kong, strongly criticizes the Malaysian government for its recent pronouncement of collecting more levy to the impoverished migrant workers.

Based on the statement recently released by Tenaganita, a migrant serving institution based in Malaysia, migrant workers in Malaysia will suffer a reduction of up to 17% from their already low income of RM 900 (US\$216.50) due to the levy adjustment. This will mean more hardship for migrants workers who already have to scrape a living.

Migrant workers in Malaysia are not only being used as source of cheap labor but at the same time being bled dry of their already meager salary.

Discrimination and double standards are rearing their ugly heads. Local workers who earn no more than RM 3000 a month are not required to pay taxes, while migrants workers who earn RM 900 as their minimum wage are now being taxed more via the levy rate adjustment.

The APMM strongly advocates “Equal Pay for Equal Work and Equal Treatment”. Migrant workers who are doing the same work should receive no wage discrimination and receive the same wage rates as those of local workers.

Both migrants and local workers should be treated equally and must receive the same benefits. Wage discrimination is a way for unscrupulous employers to undercut the wages of local workers while abusing migrant workers and robbing them of their rightful pay.

Wage discrimination is also a tool of employers to pit workers versus workers. It creates a race to the bottom, where all workers – local and migrants – are losers.

We add our voice to the civil society organizations raising concern with this recent development in Malaysia and we call the Malaysian government to immediately stop this discriminatory practice and uphold and respect labor rights of both migrant and local workers.###

Build a Global Society of Justice, Equality and without Discrimination

Center for Development Programme in Cordillera (CDPPC) Statement on the Brussels Bombing

The friendly city of Brussels, Belgium which hosts the European Union, was the latest victim of extremist bombings on March 22nd that killed at least 34 and injured more than 170 people. This senseless loss of life, injury and trauma for many innocent people going about their daily lives is attributed to the Daesh (ISIS/ISIL).

We condole with the Belgian people whom Cordillera people have had generations of exposure to the education services of early Belgian missionaries, and then decades of continuing solidarity relations with progressive Belgian NGOs and local governments for self determined sustainable development. Also with the reality of increasing Filipino diaspora all over the globe, we are closely affected by such tragic attacks anywhere in the world.

We strongly condemn this massacre that has no place in present global society. But it is a challenge as well, and it calls for understanding why there is such passionate murderous sentiment among some peoples in the world, like those involved in the Brussels bombings. This is rooted in generations of chauvinism and discrimination, exploitation and oppression, perpetrated by the unequal and unjust capitalist system. And this is led by the U.S.A. and its allies, who dominate global economy and politics.

Together with subservient local puppet regimes, they control resources like oil in the middle-east and wealth for the multi-national corporations and the ruling elites; while pauperizing the majority of peoples in the affected nations. Such situation with its Islamic religious context, nurture the Daesh (ISIS/ISIL) that then unleash attacks against innocent civilians.

We denounce U.S.A. led global economic – political and military dominance and interventions, whether in the Middle East or elsewhere like in its strategic pivot into Asia – Pacific. Such dominance with exploitation, oppression and chauvinism fosters wars, therefore instability and massive suffering. In the Philippines we take note that the Mamasapano massacre was an operation using Filipino military to fulfil a U.S.A. objective to get a single elusive target. And like the puppet that he is, President Aquino subserviently implemented this U.S.A. instigated operation, with disastrous carnage of Filipinos – 44 Special Action Force (SAF) government soldiers, 18 Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) soldiers and at least 7 civilians, and only 1 “blue eyed” alleged casualty among American operatives. Thus the strong opposition to the EDCA (Enhanced Defence Cooperation Agreement) between the U.S.A. and the Philippines which allows U.S.A. military basing in five locations within the Philippines; as well as opposition to the U.S.A. strategic pivot into Asia-Pacific. Like the Mamasapano incident, all these will drag and compromise the Philippines into U.S.A. led wars or interventions just so that U.S.A. global dominance is sustained.

We challenge Daesh (ISIS/ISIL) and other extremist groups to abandon terrorist acts and comply with the United Nations International Humanitarian laws in their struggle for justice, equality and people’s development within respective national and local contexts.

Finally, we call for international solidarity of all exploited and oppressed peoples to build progressive societies with justice and equality, where the agenda is people’s welfare instead of profit and greed; where there is tolerance and respect for diversity and people’s self determination; and towards global societies without discrimination. ###

Stop rush to finish India and Pacific Island trade deals before elections

Australian Fair Trade & Investment Network (AFTINET)

“Trade Envoy Andrew Robb’s stated intention to complete secret negotiations on the India FTA in the next six weeks could violate the Caretaker Convention which states that governments should not finalise trade deals in the election period, which is likely to be from May 11 to July 2,” AFTINET Convener Dr Patricia Ranald said today.

Dr Ranald said that final negotiations are also scheduled in June for the PACER-plus trade deal with the Pacific Islands and there are ongoing bilateral negotiations with WTO members on the WTO Government Procurement Agreement. Other trade negotiations are ongoing, but finalisation is not imminent.

“These negotiations are conducted behind closed doors and the final text is not released until after legal checking, which usually takes at least a month, so the text would not be available until after the elections. For example, a rush to finish the India FTA would result in a blast of publicity about the claimed benefits of the agreement before the election without publication of the text, meaning that both costs and benefits could not be scrutinised before the election. This is undemocratic.

We know in the case of the India FTA, that controversial issues like foreign investor rights to sue governments over changes in domestic law and increased numbers of temporary overseas workers are on the agenda as in previous agreements.

Democracy demands that these negotiations should not be finalised before the election,” said Dr Ranald.

“In the PACER-plus negotiations, Pacific Island Countries have not agreed to proposals which they believe would reduce their rights to regulate and reduce their local industry development capacity. They should not be pressured to do so before the elections.”

AFTINET has written to both Trade Minister Ciobo and Shadow Trade Minister Wong, quoting the Caretaker Convention, and asking for assurances that none of these deals will be finalised before the election. ###

Heading for Higher Ground: Climate crisis, migration and the need for justice and system change video re-launch

IBON International | www.iboninternational.org



On April 22, 2016, Earth Day, IBON International re-launches its video-documentary “Heading for Higher Ground: Climate crisis, migration, and the need for justice and system change” to signify its solidarity with migrants and refugees who continue to be driven out of their homes by poverty, wars and conflict, and climate change.

155 countries and world leaders convened last 22 April for a high-level signing ceremony of the corporate-driven Paris Agreement – an agreement that diminishes the historical responsibility of advanced industrialized countries. Despite the great attention that surrounded the event, the pledged contributions nonetheless remain insufficient to limit global warming to 1.5°C and will not decisively solve the climate crisis.

Rising sea levels, extreme drought, biodiversity loss and increasing frequency of extreme weather events are becoming the new normal. There is a need for urgent and ambitious solution. Science has already proven that human economic activities are the main drivers of climate change, yet multinational corporations continue to dominate and influence governments and continue to expand and operate extractive industries in poor and developing countries. The lack of political will and the rise of corporate power and greed are putting everyone, especially those from the South, at the losing end of this crisis.

Let us take a look back at what’s really at stake for majority of the people struggling everyday to keep up with the burden of poverty and climate change. IBON International aims to amplify the voices of those in the frontlines of the climate crisis - the voices

of women and children, indigenous peoples, farmers, and communities.

IBON International aims to contribute to the strengthening of the growing mass movements by relaunching the video in English and Spanish which can be used in study sessions, organizing and mobilizing for climate justice and system change.

The videos are available here:

EN: <https://vimeo.com/145996767>

ES: <https://vimeo.com/161839526>

APRN Signs Framework Partnership with European Commission

APRN Secretariat | www.aprnet.org



APRN along with 20 other global and regional civil society networks signed the Framework Partnership Agreement (FPA) with the European Commission (EC) during the 2016 CSO Forum on March 18 in Brussels, Belgium. The FPA stems from the EC’s commitment to support CSOs not only as providers of aid but also as pivotal actors of governance and key contributors to policy making. This is a long term cooperation between the EU and civil society organization as political partners in the field of anti-corruption, gender, accountability, human rights, social inclusion, and economic empowerment.

APRN General Secretary Marjorie Pamintuan states: “APRN contributes to people’s capacity to claim their rights through research and advocacy. It has been part of social movements, which critically engage different institutions, and contributes to people-centered analysis of development policy. The partnership with EC can enable APRN to step up its initiatives in promoting peoples’ research and critical engagement in the region.”###

APRN sets Biennial Conference on October 2016

APRN Secretariat | www.aprnet.org

APRN's Board of Convenors met at the sidelines of the 3rd APFSD in Bangkok to discuss the network's Biennial conference theme and schedule.

The theme of this year's conference is Militarism and People's Democracy. It will be held on October 2016, in Beirut, Lebanon. The country-venue has been selected because of its relevance to the theme and also the presence of vibrant civil society and peoples organizations working against militarism and wars. This conference will also be conducted one year before the 100-year anniversary of the Balfour Declaration, which holds an important place in the Palestinian struggle for their homeland.

APRN's biennial conferences are open to the public. Themes are selected during the network's General Council meeting according to their relevance and impacts to people's rights in the region. This year's theme was chosen because of grave impacts of militarism in the region in terms of destroying democracy, economic development, environment, etc, and also to reaffirm that the peoples of the region are struggling in different forms to assert people's democracy. ###

CSO DE WG meets in Brussels

APRN Secretariat | www.aprnet.org

Members of the CSO DE Working group attending the EU Policy Forum on Development and the CPDE's Coordinating Council Meeting in Brussels took the opportunity to meet on March 22, 2016 to discuss the workplan of the working group for year 2016.

One of this year's highlight activities is the Action Research on the State of CSO Development Effectiveness and Accountability, which will document CSOs' progress in implementing the Istanbul Principles and recommend actions for improvement. The working group is also set to launch the #IamAccountable

campaign which intends to gather more than 4000 CSO respondents to the CSO Accountability Test. These final results will be launched during the HLM2 to emphasize that CSOs are strong on their commitment to accountability and pressure governments to do the same.###

Political Commitment is Necessary among All Parties for Sense of Security to Reduce Illicit Financial Flow

Equity BD | www.equitybd.net

Dhaka 16th April 2016. Today in a roundtable title "Illicit Financial Flow and Our Political Economy" jointly organized by the Daily Bonikbarta and Equity and Justice Working Group Bangladesh (EquityBD), speakers are urged for a minimum political commitment from all parties to promote sense of security to reduce illicit financial flow. The roundtable was chaired by Mr Tazul Islam Member of Parliament (MP) the Chairman of Parliamentary Standing Committee on Ministry of Oil, Gas and Mineral Resources, the roundtable was moderated by Mr Dewan Mohammed Hanif, Editor the Daily Bonik barta.

Other speakers of the roundtable was Mr Amir Kashru and Lt Gen (Retd) Mahbubur Rahman from Bangladesh Nationalist Party, Dr. Salehuddin Ahmed ex Governor Bangladesh Bank, Dr Hossain Zillur Rahman Chairman PPRC and ex Advisor to caretaker government, Dr. M A Taslim Chairman Department of Economics Dhaka University, Dr Jamal Uddin Ahmed, Member Governing Board Bangladesh Bank, Dr Rashed Al Titumir Dhaka University, Mr. Farooq Ahmed Executive Editor the New Nation, Rezaul Karim Chowdhury Chief Moderator EquityBD and Executive Director COAST. Mr Ahsanul Karim of EquityBD presented the key note papers.

Ahsanul Karim of EquityBD mentioned that present illicit flow from Bangladesh was 7 % of GDP in 2014; it was 11 % higher than on that time foreign flow. Bangladeshi people's deposit in Switzerland Bank was 41 % higher compare to the figure of 2013, Bangladeshi s are third in second home program of Malaysia. He

recommended, to follow the instances of present Indian govt. steps to contain the situation i.e., submission of income and bank statement of dual citizens, each purchase more than \$ 2 thousand must go through bank channel in using of personal identification number, strong punishment in respect of false name asset.

Dr Salahuddin urge for strict compliance of rules and strong role of regulatory bodies. Dr MA Taslim mentioned that there should be study on why people transfer money; it is mostly because of hassles in law and insecurity in business investment. Dr Rashid Al Titumir said that illicit flow happened from the stock of money which is being accumulated out of public fund embezzlement, so corruption related to public fund have to be contained. Dr Hossain Zillur mentioned that illicit flow is multidimensional; even there is political certainty if there are no good governance illicit flow will happen. At the conclusions, Lt Gen (retd) Mahbubur Rahman, Mr Amir Kahsru of BNP and the Chair of the seminar Mr Tazul Islam MP emphasize the minimum political commitment to promote sense of security to reduce the illicit flow. ###

ANND at the WB/IMF Civil Society Policy forum

Arab NGO Network for Development (ANND) | www.annd.org

Under the name *"The Syrian Migration Crisis: Shaping a Developmental Post Conflict Model"* the session took place at the Civil Society Policy Forum, as part of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund Spring meeting.

The session organized by ANND discussed the socio-economic impacts of the Syrian Crisis and emerging cross borders violence economy and the humanitarian aid processes inside Syria, and their influence on outgoing flow of migration as well as on the perspectives for the return of displaced and refugees. In addition, it showcased the implemented humanitarian aid model in Lebanon and Jordan and the alternatives proposed by the recent World Bank report. Finally, the speakers presented policy recommendations for humanitarian aid, reconstruction and development for Syria, Lebanon and Jordan. ###

FEATURED PUBLICATIONS

APRN Briefer on Militarism and the Agenda 2030



Even as the implementation of the Agenda 2030 unfolds, questions remain on its enforceability and whether or not such an ambitious development framework can provide sufficient focus on critical issues that need to be addressed in order to transform the world for the better by the year 2030. A particular issue that appears to have been left out is the question of militarism and how it operates to serve the interests of economic elites and transnational corporations at the expense of peoples rights and welfare. There is a dearth of evidence and experience from Asia Pacific peoples attesting to the impacts of this emerging threat to sustainable development which begs the question: what should be done? and for whom?

This briefer aims to shed light on the emerging threat of militarism in the Asia Pacific region and how the Agenda 2030 responds to the issue. It highlights the issue of militarism being used as a legal recourse to aide large-scale resource grabs, how militarism is affecting women and indigenous peoples and how high military spending is diverting resources away from sustainable development financing.

You can download a copy here: http://aprnnet.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/APRN_Militarism_rev2.pdf

The **Asia Pacific Research Network** is a network of leading research NGOs in the Asia-Pacific. It is active in promoting exchange, coordination and capacity building support in research.

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SAVE THE DATES: *International Conference for Peoples Rights in the Philippines (ICPRP 2016)*

The International Coalition for Human Rights in the Philippines (ICHRP), Initiatives for Peace in Mindanao (InPeace), KARAPATAN Alliance for the Advancement of People's Rights, and Ecumenical Voice for Human Rights and Peace (EcuVoice) are pleased to invite you to the International

Conference for Peoples' Rights in the Philippines (ICPRP) from July 23 to 24, 2016, in Davao City, Mindanao, Philippines. The ICPRP is co-sponsored by the International League of Peoples' Struggle (ILPS) and Bagong Alyansang Makabayan (BAYAN - New Patriotic Alliance).

The ICPRP builds on the gains of the 2013 ICHRPP which raised the discourse on peoples' rights and strengthened efforts to forge international solidarity, not only for the Filipino people, but also for all struggling peoples of the world. The conference coincides with the 40th year anniversary of the Algiers Universal Declaration of the Rights of Peoples which recognizes the indivisible link between individual and collective rights; the interrelations between economic, cultural, and civil and political rights; and the right of the oppressed peoples of the world to fight for their liberation.

Kindly fill up the ICPRP 2016 Confirmation Form by following the online link here.
(cc: icprp2016@gmail.com)

[Cambodia] Research on Promoting Leadership and Strengthening Rights of Women Workers

Conducted between 2014-2015, this research project undertaken by CCAWDU's Gender Committee is an attempt to understand the challenges that women garment workers face at the workplace, the obstacles they face in participating in their union, and making their issues known and prioritised. The Committee makes specific recommendations for improvement in each of these areas, in order to ensure that women workers are able to have a voice, participate more effectively and have their issues taken up.

You can download a copy here: <http://amrc.org.hk/sites/default/files/CLC%20and%20C.CAWDU%20Research%20Paper%202016.pdf>