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Civil society groups reject RCEP: Excessive corporate powers at the expense of people's rights



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Civil society groups reject RCEP: Excessive corporate power at the expense of people's rights

APRN Secretariat | www.aprnet.org

More than 80 representatives from trade unions, peasant communities, indigenous peoples, health networks, and women's organisations met on 27-28 July in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia to strategize around how to defeat the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) and other emerging mega-regional free trade agreements (FTAs) in the region.

The RCEP is considered one of the largest trade deals in the world covering half of the world's population and almost 40% of the global economy. It is set to be finalized by 2017 and is currently being negotiated among 16 member states including all 10 ASEAN countries and 6 of its major trading partners (China, India, New Zealand, Australia and South Korea).

Beyond Investment Protection

With negotiations held in secret, the little that is publicly known about the RCEP comes from recent draft texts. "While corporate lobbies are invited to advise government officials, ordinary citizens who will live with the consequences have no say whatsoever," said Jane Kelsey, Professor of Law at the University of Auckland, New Zealand.

*"These so-called investment protection measures in RCEP and other FTAs in the offing are already **beyond mere protection of investor interests.** It is increasingly becoming **deliberate attacks on people's rights and sovereignty** driven by corporate thirst for profit and control."*

The leaked texts reveal that RCEP deals with more than

just trade – a large portion of the agreement is designed to give rich countries and their corporations the power to delve into non-trade issues such as investment and intellectual property while diminishing the right of states to regulate in the name of public interest.

"These so-called 'investment protection measures' in RCEP and other FTAs in the offing are already beyond mere protection of investor interests. It is increasingly becoming deliberate attacks on people's rights and sovereignty driven by the capitalist thirst for profit and control," said Marjorie Pamintuan, General Secretary of the Asia Pacific Research Network (APRN).

Included in the RCEP investment chapter are provisions on the notorious Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) – an investor-state arbitration system that allows corporations to sue states over actions detrimental to expected future profits. Currently, there are 696 known ISDS cases filed by corporations against 107 countries and the numbers are rapidly increasing. These cases broadly interpret investor rights to the extent that corporations can easily challenge state policies that are meant to protect public welfare, including providing a living wage, implementing agrarian reform, ensuring health and safety of the public from hazards, sound environmental policies, and so on.

Peoples Rights under Attack

The currently negotiated RCEP will impact 3.5 billion people including those in least developed countries and its most vulnerable sectors. "The RCEP favors rich countries and their corporations, not peasants and the poor. RCEP will facilitate intensified land grabbing and allow corporate monopoly control over seeds further depriving peasants and small farmers their right to land and food security," said Rhoda Gueta of the Asian Peasant Coalition.

Based on the leaked chapter on intellectual property rights, Japan and Korea are pushing for RCEP member countries to join the UPOV 1991 (International Convention for the Protection of new Varieties of Plants). The UPOV 1991 is a set of common standards that impose rules on how countries should implement plant variety protection – a scheme that favors seed companies at the expense of farmer’s rights to seed. Another proposal aims to criminalize seed saving by imposing criminal sanctions for carrying seeds across borders without due authorization from patent rights holders.

The leaked chapter on IP also reveals that South Korea and Japan are pushing for provisions on data exclusivity and extended patent rights that would allow big pharmaceutical companies to monopolize the drug market and keep charging high prices without generic competition. This becomes a grave concern for the region especially with India being the world’s largest producer of cheap, life-saving medicines. Once RCEP is enforced, access to affordable medicines for the world’s poorest people will be seriously compromised.

RCEP vs TPP?

During the strategy meeting, participants discussed the implications of RCEP on people’s rights as well as how it differs from other mega-FTAs such as the US-led Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP).

“ASEAN is pushing the corporate agenda through RCEP. Countries part of the TPP are using RCEP to push US-designed ‘WTO-plus’ provisions onto the remaining RCEP members which will only perpetuate inequalities,” said Joan Salvador from GABRIELA, a national alliance of women in the Philippines.

While RCEP is largely considered as a ‘subtler’ version of the TPP by providing lesser demands for liberalization, the China-led trade deal contains intellectual property provisions that are even worse than the TPP and the WTO by extending patent rights beyond domestic laws and international norms.

“The RCEP and the TPP are both extensions of the WTO framework – designed to concentrate wealth at the hands of global corporate elites,” said Beverly Longid from the International Indigenous Peoples Movement for Self-Determination and Liberation (IPMSDL).

“Neither the US-led TPP nor the China-led RCEP will address the long-standing demand for an international trading system that responds to people’s needs,” she added.##

Asia Pacific civil society groups condemn investor rights to sue governments in RCEP as Trade Ministers meet

Australian Fair Trade and Investment Network (AFTINET)

An unprecedented alliance of civil society groups from Australia, New Zealand, ASEAN countries, India, Japan and South Korea, today issued a call to Trade Ministers meeting in Laos to discuss the mega trade agreement involving 16 countries, known as the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP).

They urged RCEP ministers not to give special rights to foreign investors to bypass national courts and sue governments for millions of dollars in unfair international tribunals, known as ISDS, modelled on similar clauses in the TPP.

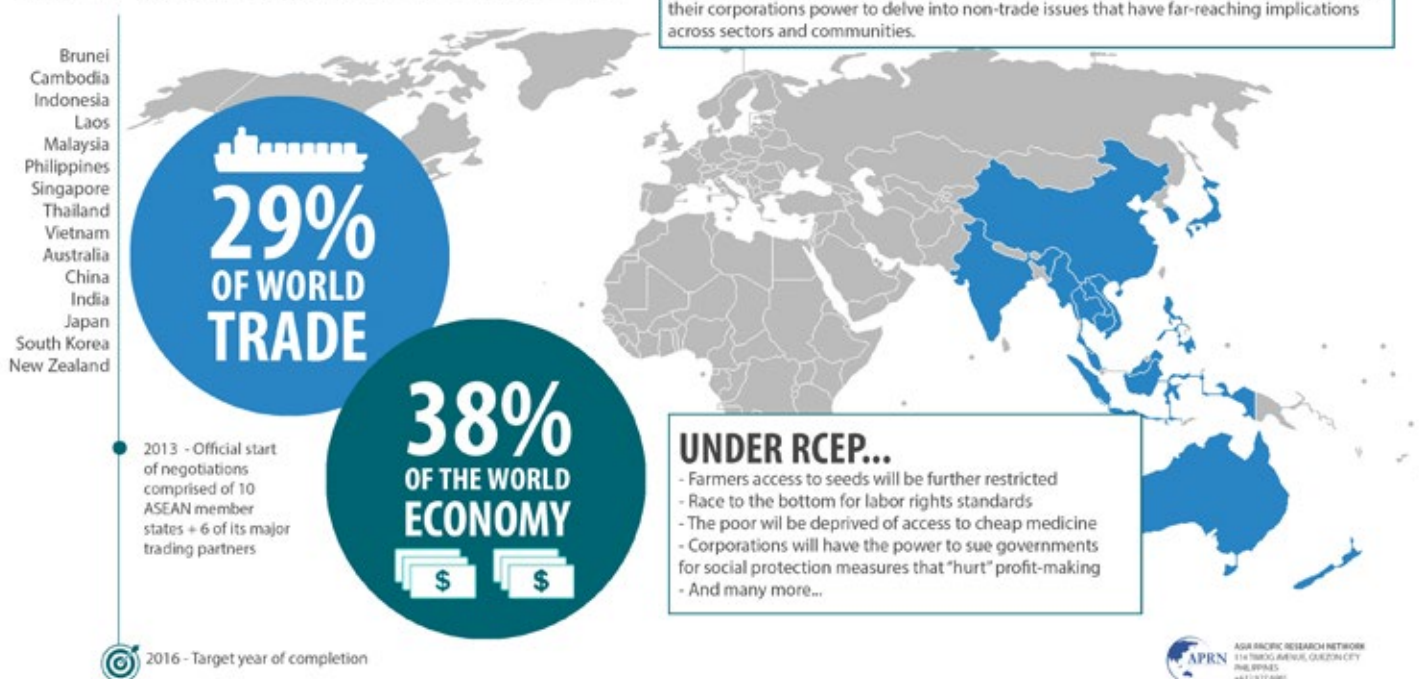
RCEP negotiations between Australia, New Zealand, India, Japan, Korea, Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Viet Nam have been conducted in secret since 2012, and are expected to finish in 2017.

“Foreign investors have launched ISDS cases claiming millions of dollars in compensation for Australia’s tobacco plain packaging law, for Canadian environmental regulation of mining, for a Canadian court decision on medicine patents, and even for a rise in the minimum wage in Egypt. Governments should have the right to regulate in the public interest without being sued by global corporations. ISDS undermines democracy and sovereignty,” Dr Patricia Ranald, Convener of the Australian Fair Trade and Investment Network said.

“ISDS has been a major driver of community opposition to the TPP between the US, Australia and 10 Pacific rim countries, and will generate the same strong opposition to the RCEP. Community opposition to the TPP in the US is so strong that the TPP implementing legislation is not likely to be passed by the U.S. Congress,” said Dr Ranald

“Two of the largest RCEP countries, India and Indonesia, are actually withdrawing from bilateral investment treaties which contain ISDS, because of ISDS claims of hundreds of millions of dollars against them. We urge the Australian government and other TPP countries like Japan and Korea not to pursue the failed TPP ISDS model in the RCEP,” said Dr Ranald.##

RCEP COUNTRIES REPRESENT



Often referred to as a "trade" pact, the RCEP deals with more than just trade – a large portion of the agreement will give rich countries and their corporations power to delve into non-trade issues that have far-reaching implications across sectors and communities.

APRN Conducts Workshops at the Asia-Europe People's Forum

APRN conducted two workshops at the 11th Asia-Europe Peoples' Forum held in Ulaanbaatar on July 4-6.

The first workshop organized with the People's Coalition on Food Sovereignty (PCFS) and the Mongolian People's Coalition for Food Sovereignty tackled the problem of increasing Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) in agriculture. According to Mr. Roy Anunciacion, global coordinator of the PCFS, PPPs in agriculture, especially corporate investments in research and development (R&D) will further take away farmers' control over what food and how food should be produced by transferring the control seeds from the hands of the farmers to big agricultural transnational corporations. Other forms of PPPs in agriculture also occur in the form of infrastructure built by the private sector such as water systems, post-harvest facilities, and even farm-market roads, which users have to pay for instead of being subsidized by the government. This increases the costs for farmers to produce food, which in many cases, cause the farmers to incur large debts.

The second workshop organized with Center for Human Rights and Democracy (CHRD) centered on how trade and investment agreements often violate democracy. Speakers from Indonesia, United Kingdom, and Philippines shared

stories on how different trade agreements have common features which are not aligned with democratic principles. In agreements that facilitated extractive industries as well as palm oil, activists have found that the agreements often do not have effective mechanisms to prevent and address human rights violations and environmental destruction caused by the investment projects. The people are kept in the dark as governments hold the negotiations in secret, while allegedly consulting large corporations on the side. The participants also expressed alarm over new mega deals such as the Transpacific Partnership, the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, all of which contain the investor-state dispute settlement which allows corporations to sue governments over actions that will damage their profits.

These two workshops helped participants in further understanding how corporate power subverts people's rights, and further highlighted the need to strengthen the struggles against harmful trade and investment agreements. APRN will conduct a collaborative research that will extract the experience and lessons from previous struggles against trade and investment agreements to support actions by peoples movements.###

Photo courtesy: AP-RCEM

Stakeholder Groups Provide HLPF Contributions

IISD

2 May 2016: The UN Secretariat has compiled discussion papers from Major Groups and other stakeholders on the theme of the 2016 session of the High-Level Political Forum for Sustainable Development (HLPF), ‘Ensuring that No One is Left Behind.’ The report outlines proposals from 11 groups for making progress on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The Women’s Major Group calls for action in the following areas to ensure that the 2030 Agenda will leave no one behind: inclusion and participation of grassroots organizations in planning, implementation and monitoring the 2030 Agenda at local and national level; financing and capacity building for women’s rights groups; and gender disaggregated data to inform gender-responsive SDG implementation, budgets and monitoring.

Children and Youth note that, unlike other marginalized groups addressed in the 2030 Agenda, children have no existing mechanism in the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) for tracking progress towards child focused goals and targets. They call for addressing this gap to avoid leaving children behind at the HLPF and beyond. They also suggest that the Technology Facilitation Mechanism (TFM), launched in September 2015, should develop guidelines for national-level technology assessment mechanisms that use community-based approaches to assess the social, environmental and economic impacts of a technology.

Indigenous Peoples recommend that disaggregated data should be used for every SDG by including “indigenous identifiers” in national data censuses, household surveys and other data gathering efforts. They also ask UN Member States and the UN System to increase political space for Indigenous Peoples and civil society, and to increase financial resources to support Indigenous Peoples’ participation on SDG implementation, policy formulation, development of national indicators, and data and reports production.

NGOs call on all governments to “urgently develop” national and local strategies for SDG implementation, including concrete, binding action plans with targets, timelines and milestones. They propose that: UN Member States report at least every five years to the HLPF on 2030 Agenda implementation, similarly to country reporting at the UN Human Rights Council (HRC); and that all public-private partnerships be held to account in a fully transparent manner, with “clear terms of reference for what is expected of all parties.”

As part of the NGOs’ contribution, Together 2030

proposes that the HLPF monitor and review the work of the Inter-agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators (IAEG-SDGs) to ensure that the process respects the ambition of the 2030 Agenda and is linked to regional and national indicators development. Together 2030 also calls on UN Member States to ensure that those “left behind” have the opportunity to participate and contribute to the deliberations of the HLPF.

Local Authorities report that the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments, in collaboration with the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and UN Habitat, have been working on the “localization” of the SDGs, which refers to the implementation and monitoring of SDGs at local and regional levels. It argues that the 2030 Agenda will only be achieved at the sub-national level if appropriate institutional architecture and governance models are established, and indicates that the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments is developing a roadmap of guiding principles and solutions to create an enabling environment for the effective implementation and monitoring of the SDGs at local and regional levels.

Workers and Trade Unions highlight the importance of social dialogue as a critical means for implementing the SDGs. They define social dialogue as any type of negotiation, consultation or exchange of information between representatives of employers, workers and governments on issues relating to economic and social policy, and say social dialogue is an example of multi-stakeholder partnership that has been ongoing in many countries for decades.

In order to ensure the participation of a wide range of stakeholders in the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda, the Education and Academia Stakeholder Group calls for offering participation in all UN official languages, and notes that the “English-centred” processes conducted during the negotiation and adoption of the SDGs “greatly limited broad participation.” It says reporting and review must be evidence-based, and “shadow” or stakeholder reports should be given due recognition.

Finally, the Asia-Pacific Regional Civil Society Organization Engagement Mechanism (AP-RCEM) says the HLPF should encourage UN Member States to adopt a “whole of society” approach in conducting national reviews, based on an inclusive, transparent, and accessible approach, and should utilize information and data accessed from governmental and non-governmental sources. It adds that when doing their Voluntary National Presentations at the HLPF, UN Member States’ should demonstrate accountability for actions affecting people and environment beyond national territories.#



Oppose US Military Bases in Japan! US Troops Out Now!

APRN Statement on Protests vs US Military Troops in Japan

The Asia Pacific Research Network (APRN) vehemently opposes the continued presence of US military troops in Okinawa Prefecture, Japan and condemns the Abe Administration’s continued negligence to the voices of the Okinawan people that led to the recent murder and rape of a 20-year-old Okinawan woman by a former US Marine.

Last May 19, Kenneth Franklin Shinzato was arrested by Okinawan authorities over the death of Rina Shumabukuro whose body was found beside a road in central Okinawa after being reported missing last April 28. The former US Marine confessed to raping Shimabukuro before strangling and stabbing her to death after which he transported her body in a suitcase. This is not the first time this happened in Okinawa – in 1995, three US Marines gang-raped a 12-year old Okinawan schoolgirl which marked the groundswell of peoples opposition against military bases in Japan. Massive demonstrations in 1995 prompted the US to publicly ‘pledge’ in reducing its military footprint in Okinawa which ironically until now still serves as a linchpin to US’ security relations with Japan and a strategic location for the US to pursue its pivot to East Asia.

The recent killing and rape of a local Okinawan woman sparked yet again simultaneous mass protests across the country that gathered tens of thousands of people in Japan calling for the ouster of US military bases in the country. The heavy US military presence in Okinawa operates under the US-Japan Security Treaty first signed in 1952 which allows the US to take unfettered military actions in Japan in the interest of ‘maintaining peace’ in East Asia. The security treaty was further amended in 1960 to include a separate pact called the SOFA (Status of Forces Agreement) agreement which unduly protects US military personnel, servicemen, base employees and certain civilian workers who commit crimes in the country by giving the US jurisdiction over such cases. It must be noted that in this case of violence against Rina, the former US Marine was arrested by the Okinawan authorities,

and is expected to face criminal court under the local authority. However, that may not have been possible had he fled into the US bases, or if the violence had occurred while on duty.

The continued US military presence this treaty perpetuates puts the Japanese peoples at risk as it allows free reign for US soldiers and service people to commit crimes with impunity, and provides the US with unrestricted access to Japan’s resources to secure its geopolitical interests in the region. For seven decades now since the end of World War II, the people continue to bear the weight of vast US military bases in Okinawa along with the numerous human rights violations associated with them.

In addition, Okinawa’s land mass is less than 1 percent of Japan’s but it is home to 74% of exclusive-use US military facilities in the country[3]. Okinawa currently hosts 26,000 US military personnel, 32 US military installations, 20 air spaces and 28 water areas that serve as training zones exclusive for US military use.

This over burden is, in part, due to the ignorance by the Japanese Government to let this go on. As an island on the peripheries of the Japanese Archipelago, the Okinawan people have historically been subject to discrimination by Tokyo. Nearly 80 percent of people in Okinawa have always demanded that the burden be at least matched by other prefecture’s share of US bases. However, the voices only fell into deaf ears of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party, especially under the current Abe Administration, who himself is aggressively leading the militarization of the Far East.

APRN stands in solidarity with the Okinawan people demanding justice for the death of Rina and the immediate pullout of US military troops from their land. We likewise urge our members, partners and the international community at large to continue opposing the presence of US military bases across the Asia Pacific region.#

APRN in solidarity with South Korean people vs US THAAD Missile Defense System

APRN Statement on the deployment of US THAAD Missile Defense System in South Korea

The Asia Pacific Research Network (APRN) supports the South Korean people in denouncing the proposed deployment of a United States anti-missile unit in their country. Citing so-called missile threats from Pyongyang, South Korea's president Park Geun-hye recently announced plans to install the US-designed THAAD (Terminal High Altitude Area Defense) anti-missile defense system in Seongju County, North Gyeongsang Province.

The THAAD is an anti-ballistic missile system supposedly intended to be a defensive measure against long-range ballistic missiles. The THAAD system was designed and developed by Lockheed Martin Space Systems and other industry players such as Raytheon under a 689 million USD defense contract with the US Army in 1992. It was in 2008 that the US Army in Fort Bliss, Texas activated the first THAAD battery unit. There are currently six (6) active THAAD batteries stationed in the US, Hawaii, and Guam. In 2011, Lockheed Martin received a 1.96 billion USD contract to produce two THAAD weapons systems for the US Missile Defense Agency and the United Arab Emirates. Qatar has already entered into talks with the defense company to install the missile defense system in its soils under a 6 billion USD sales contract.

In a 2010 report, the US government unveiled its new strategic defense architecture that relies on a globally distributed surveillance and communications systems including THAAD deployments which can be altered to gather ballistics intelligence if placed in strategic locations of interest. Since the US' withdrawal from the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty in 2002, it has been conducting massive deployments of missile defense systems to encircle Russia and China. The recent decision to deploy THAAD in South Korea is a key component of the US Pivot to Asia. While making public announcements that the missile defense system to be built in South Korea is intended to prevent attacks from Pyongyang, the real target is to launch a global ballistics defense network that can foil China and Russia's deterrence capabilities while employing the US military's first-strike strategy against North Korea.

The deployment of the THAAD in South Korea complements the other military activities made by the US to secure its Pivot in the region, which include military exercises with South Korea and other Asia Pacific countries, as well as strengthening defense treaties to build new bases Japan and in the Philippines.

The decision sparked protests from residents across the country citing fears over their health and safety, the inevitable increase of US military presence, and the THAAD system becoming a wartime target should South Korea's adversaries choose to strike. More than 5000 farmers gathered in Seongju County staged protest to defend their lands against the proposed missile defense system.

Earlier in July, two Korean-American activists were denied entry into South Korea because of their plans to join the protests. Last August 15, more than 900 South Koreans publicly shaved their heads as part of a series of anti-missiles protests in opposition to the deployment of the THAAD on their land. Residents voiced concerns on the probable rise of cancer incidence due to prolonged exposures to high-frequency waves produced by the system's radar. Aside from the health concerns and possible land grabbing, protesters also lamented the democratic deficit in the decision-making on the installation of the THAAD. According to them, no prior consultations were made with the residents and local government.

The deployment of the THAAD in South Korea further fuels the increasing militarism in the Asia Pacific, and pushes the region into a costly and dangerous arms race placing the people at the center of conflict, displacing entire communities, and violating people's rights in the process. We call on peoples organizations and civil society in the region to unite in exposing and opposing these US-sponsored military actions as part of its dependence on endless wars of aggression in its bid to salvage itself from economic decline and maintain its hegemonic grip in Asia Pacific.#

Japan's Ruling Party Using Nazi Playbook?

Pacific Asia Resource Center

On July 9th, the Japanese ruling Party, the Liberal Democratic Party posted on their official website, a form asking people to send in cases where school teachers have deviated from political neutrality, citing among others an example where a teacher expressed strong concerns over “sending children to war” or strong opposition over a controversial and unconstitutional law passed by the LDP in 2015. It is a grave threat to democracy, if the ruling party truly thinks these opinions constitute a deviation from neutrality.

In 2013, Vice Prime Minister Taro Aso has mentioned in public that “we should be learning from the Nazis”. Currently, it seems the party is not just learning from the Nazis, they are aggressively using strategies from their playbook. This absurdity must be stopped.

The online form read as follows:

“The Party commission on Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology is in pursuit of unbiased education, but it is a fact that there are teachers who argue in the field of education that ‘a politically neutral education is impossible’ or that ‘we should not be sending our children to war’ and conduct teachings that deviate from neutrality. While education for the purpose of building sovereign citizenry is important, there is a concern that a biased education will make students lose a diverse perspective, and the party is deeply concerned that politically biased education being conducted purposefully for mock voting classes in high school education will bring students to conclusions tainted in certain ideologies. Hence we conduct this survey on the actual situation of political neutrality in school education. We ask all for your cooperation.”

And the form continues below to ask the cooperator to say specific when a certain teacher has deviated from political neutrality. Asking for the informants name and contact as a mandatory information to complete the form.

This is apparently a system with many similarities with the Nazi regime asking people to turn in Jews in the community. There is no logical argument which says teachers telling students not to send children to war is beyond political neutrality. It is just basic human decency.

What is more, the online statement has been altered a couple of times after criticisms mounted on the internet, and the changes give us a glimpse of what the LDP is really looking for.

The second version of the statement listed as examples of not neutral education where a teacher may say the “securities laws should be abolished”. This cites a highly controversial law passed in 2015 that allows changes to the security protocol of Japan. A majority of professors in Law had condemned the law as unconstitutional, but the LDP decided to railroad the law in spite of public opposition. Many people still consider this law unconstitutional and that the law must be abolished or at the least be changed to follow the constitution.

There have been multiple polls showing that.

So essentially what the LDP is asking is to turn in teachers, including those from public schools overseen by the government, who have expressed opposition to their own policies.

This is not what a matured democracy is supposed to look like. This is fascism, and it comes from the Nazi playbook.



Uphold the rights and dignity of Migrant Domestic Workers

Ratify C189 and reform national policies for the human rights of MDWs | UFDWR Statement on C189

Today marks the 5th year since the International Labour Organization (ILO) approved Convention No. 189 or the Domestic Workers Convention. Five years and still no qualitative change can be gleaned on the condition of migrant domestic workers (MDWs).

Erwiana Sulistyarningsih, Elis Kurniasih and Mary Jane Veloso are just some of the recent names who have shown that the vulnerability to abuse of MDWs remains, and violations of their rights as migrants, as workers and as women go unabated.

In the world, there is an estimated 67.1 million domestic workers of which 11.5 million, or 17.2 per cent, are MDWs. The number of MDWs also constitutes 7.7 per cent of all migrant workers in the world. About 73.4 per cent of all MDWs are women and most of the MDWs are concentrated – with about 17 to 20 per cent of all migrants – in the Arab States, Eastern Asia, Southeastern Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean. In Northern states such as USA, Canada and countries Western Europe, MDWs constitute 5 to 10 per cent of all migrants in the country.

With such huge numbers, it is disappointing to note that only 19 States have ratified C189 since its approval. Many countries hosting MDWs have not taken up the concern or have refused to align their national policies on MDWs to the spirit and letters of the convention.

While we believe that ratification of the convention alone will not qualitatively change the situation of MDWs, for countries to make such a move is a positive step towards showing recognition of the rights and dignity of MDWs. It will mean an abiding commitment to uplift condition of MDWs, reduce their vulnerability, curb violence and abuses, and recognize that they too are workers with labor and human rights.

Five years after, the major issues of MDWs are still unaddressed. Some of these are:

1. *Exclusion from statutes that are in line with international standards on labor, women and human rights.*

MDWs continue to receive some of the lowest wages of all workers and their benefits are severely limited as domestic work is considered as low-skilled jobs. They are not covered by existing labor laws and their access to social services, public utilities and infrastructures and even to avenues of justice and redress are dictated by their insecure immigration status. Their rights to health and occupation safety are also not secure. In both the sending and receiving countries, effective redress and compensation mechanisms must be established for MDWs.

2. *Mandatory live-in employment, confiscation of documents, and denial of days off*

In many countries, MDWs are forced to live in the household they work for. This presents a very difficult situation wherein they are made to be available anytime and they have to work for inhumanely long hours. Abuses and violence also often go unreported and happen for a long stretch of time inside the confines of private homes. Many MDWs are trapped in abusive conditions also because of confiscation of legal documents that are supposed to be in their possession.

Social relations of MDWs also suffer as they only get limited time for social interactions within their community or with the local people. Many even do not get days off – much less, paid days off – as their rest days lie on the discretion of their employer.

3. *Unscrupulous practices of recruitment agencies*

Private recruitment agencies are provided great control over MDWs, which they wield to get the most profit from them. Exorbitant fees charged by agencies immediately put MDWs to indebtedness even before they start to work. If there are policies in place to regulate recruitment fees, these are routinely violated while the system to monitor, investigate and prosecute erring recruitment agencies remains absent.

Problems of MDWs are clear and present. Five years without drastic actions and committed resolutions is a grave injustice to MDWs who have long been laboring under the most extreme work and living conditions. While recruitment agencies are given more freedom to organize themselves into associations that can influence state policies, MDWs in many countries are being deprived of their rights to be organized and join trade unions.

Even graver are the injustices perpetuated by the commodification and modern day slavery of MDWs. For sending countries, labor export is a temporary relief to respond to growing unemployment and to increase GDP through remittances. Migrants such as MDWs are treated as mere commodities for export that are then bought for cheap labor by migrant-receiving countries. Businesses and industries thrive on the profit gained from the army of migrants that the economy of underdeveloped and developing countries churns out.

This leads to wealth inequalities among the people and between countries. Marginalization and exploitation of women also worsens.

But instead of addressing the root problems resulting from neoliberal offensives, States – especially the leading powers – are pushing to further neoliberalism that will surely intensify the crisis in many countries leading to further exploitation of migrants. For example, the growing regional integration like the ASEAN Economic Cooperation (AEC) in Southeast Asia, and the South Asia Free Trade Area (SAFTA) will further facilitate so-called free movement of capital and of skilled – but cheap – laborers. Meanwhile, majority who are considered ‘unskilled’ like domestic workers will seek to migrate through restricted (often controlled by private agencies) and even illegal means that will put them at more risk.

It is high time for countries hosting MDWs to do more for the dignity of MDWs and for countries sending domestic workers overseas to stand with their nationals for their rights. Positive steps should be taken to protect MDWs and promote their wellbeing alongside comprehensive reforms that will radically change forced migration and the exploitativeness of present-day migrant work.#

Harnessing Development Justice to Put People at the Core of the Environmental Dimension of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

AP-RCEM Statement to the UNEA 2

On the occasion of the second session of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA-2), we, members of the Asia Pacific Regional CSO Engagement Mechanism (AP-RCEM), wish to convey our recommendations for consideration by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), member-states, civil society organizations from other regions and formations, and other stakeholders. This is based on a framework of development justice founded on the bases of redistributive, economic, social, gender and environmental justice, and accountability to the peoples, and places people in the heart of the sustainable development goals,

We welcome the continued commitment of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to gather member states, UN agencies, international NGOs, civil society, and the private sector to discuss and move forward with implementing and reviewing progress on the environmental dimensions of the SDGs. Of special note is the Forum of Ministers and Environment Authorities of Asia-Pacific (FMEAAP) organized by UNEP in 2015 to allow CSOs to interface with governments at the regional level. We hope the FMEAAP will evolve into a principal platform for regional deliberations on environmental issues and ensure the delivery of environmental commitments. At the same time, we hope to see linkages and coherence with other regional and sub-regional forums such as UN ESCAP’s Asia Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development, an important platform for follow up that feeds into the High Level Political Forum.

Any agreement, be it Agenda 2030 or its means of implementation and follow-up, should put people and

people's rights at the center of priorities. The state of the world's most marginalized people would be our best indicators of the health of every ecosystem. However, small farmers, peasants, pastoralists, fisherfolk, indigenous peoples, workers, especially the women among them who are natural stewards and frontline defenders of the environment, remain invisible in the goals and indicators. It is as if they are not major stakeholders in their respective ecosystems. Their voices must be heard, their rights respected, their capacities to protect and manage the environment enhanced. We believe that sustainable development should squarely respond to the question of "for whom?" as it talks about "leaving no one behind."

This year's theme for UNEA-2 is delivering on the environmental dimension of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. We believe that in order to do this, there is a need to recognize the inextricable linkage of the economic, social and environmental dimensions. Environmental challenges confronting communities everyday - particularly rural, indigenous, workers, migrant, urban poor women - cannot be separated from the underlying causes of poverty, powerlessness and lack of access to resources. The neoliberal extractive-based model of economy comes at massive costs to the world's natural resource base, and creates gross inequalities of wealth, power and resources between countries, between rich and poor and between men and women.

Delivering on the environmental dimension of the 2030

Agenda can only be done with a serious commitment to deliver redistributive justice, economic justice, social and gender justice, environmental justice, and put forward accountability to the peoples, This compels us to recognize the historical responsibilities of countries and elites within countries whose consumption, production and extraction patterns have led to human rights violations, global warming, and environmental disasters. Putting forward justice also means compelling those actors to alleviate and compensate those with the least culpability but otherwise suffer the most. This is already reflected in the Rio Principles, notably the principles of common but differentiated responsibility (CBDR) and the Polluter Pays principle.

Delivering on the environmental dimension of the 2030 agenda can only be done with addressing the global macroeconomic and trade policies that are threatening the three pillars of sustainable development. The megatrade and investment agreements like TPPA, TTIP, RCEP and other mega regional and North-South FTAs are undermining environmental policy regulations and natural resource conservation by allowing transnational corporations to sue national governments in secret arbitration cases under Investor-State-Dispute-Settlement (ISDS) clauses for any policy changes that may reduce profits. Pressures from harsh competition promoted by current trade regime lead to increased exploitation of natural resources. Trade and financial policies that perpetuate poverty, food insecurity and all forms of inequality must be abolished.#



OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE ASIA PACIFIC RESEARCH NETWORK

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:
24-25 OCT 2016
APRN Biennial
Conference on
Militarism and
Democracy**

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.

Contact secretariat@aprnnet.org for more information

RCEP:
Corporate Wishlist, Threat to People's Rights
APRN Briefing on the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)

With the lackluster performance of the WTO negotiations in the past years, corporate capital has renewed its focus on bilateral and regional free trade agreements (FTAs). This new strategy aims to create trade regimes that would circumvent not the possibility to advance within the context of a worldwide trade regime such as the WTO. This strategy is increasingly being left across Asia-Pacific with the recently concluded Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), and now the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) which is recently gaining steam. Both agreements if passed will threaten all human rights and free trade of people in the region. These free trade agreements development is heightening rivalry between the TPP and the RCEP. RCEP now sets the standards of trade in the region. However, it must be made clear that in the long run, the real concern for the people is not about which side they are on, but the fact that the RCEP and the TPP are both free trade agreements that will not only be the long-standing people's aspiration for an international trading system that responds to their needs.

Recent conclusion of the TPP agreement and economic progress on RCEP negotiations is great up talk and such an agreement by the end of 2016. While recent delays in the conclusion of the negotiations indicate that the 2016 deadline would most likely be missed, the urgency to resist this trade deal and its potential threat on people's rights nevertheless remains.

RCEP COUNTRIES REPRESENT

Approx. **29%** OF WORLD TRADE
Approx. **38%** OF THE ECONOMY UNDER RCEP

APRN Briefer on the RCEP

The recent conclusion of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) deal mounted enormous pressure on the Beijing-led Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) negotiators to speed up talks and reach an agreement by the end of 2016. While recent delays in the conclusion of the negotiations indicate that the 2016 deadline would most likely be missed, the urgency to resist this trade deal and its potential threat on people's rights nevertheless remains.

Download the briefer here: <http://aprnnet.org/?p=439>