



APRN Newsletter

THE 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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RESIST THE NEOLIBERAL ASEAN INTEGRATION, BUILD A GENUINE PEOPLE-CENTRED REGIONALISM

Sign-on Statement on the 28 & 29th ASEAN Summit and the 11th East Asia Summit

As the ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) holds 28th and 29th summit concurrently with the 11th East Asia Summit (EAS) in Vientiane, Laos from 3-8 September 2016, civil society across Asia Pacific calls attention to the intensifying neoliberal agenda in the region as it seeks integration in the economic, political security, and socio-cultural spheres.

ASEAN Thrust for Neoliberal Integration

The ASEAN's political thrust is to fully realize a so-called ASEAN Community that is built around three "pillars" namely the ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC), ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), and ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC). Looking at the ASEAN Vision 2025 however, the whole framework presents the fundamental problem of a neoliberal economic pillar that drives the whole integration process altogether. The AEC is considered to be the most developed pillar among the three and is meant to further open up ASEAN economies to monopoly capitalist trade and investments.

Under the AEC blueprint, ASEAN economies are expected to become a single market and production base that seeks to facilitate the free flow of goods and skilled labor. But the neoliberal thrust of the AEC however can only aggravate existing inequalities between and within member countries. Countries that stand to gain from the integration are those with higher levels of technology and infrastructure already in place while less developed countries are left with lesser value functions in the global production process. This uneven playing field allows more advanced economies to maintain their position in the upper tier of the value chain as development in weaker economies become increasingly distorted.

Even at the country level, the uneven distribution of gains will exacerbate the wage gap between skilled and unskilled workers, and create fewer employment opportunities for women. The sectors that are expected to experience job growth such as transport and construction are also prone to be informal and vulnerable. In addition, the increased migration of low to medium-skilled workers without their rights properly protected, will subject a greater number of migrant workers to human rights abuses.

As part of ASEAN's economic integration objectives, a wide range of 'enhanced' investment protection measures are now in place. The investor-state dispute settlement (ISDS) for example allows investors to sue governments over actions that "harm" expected future profits – giving corporations the power to challenge state actions that are meant to protect public welfare and interest, including providing a living wage, implementing agrarian reform, ensuring health and safety of the public from hazards, sound environmental policies, and so on.

In addition, governments are compelled to provide security and protection to investments which must be granted at all times. The so-called 'investment defense forces' essentially use military and paramilitary units to protect investor interests and crush local resistance in areas rich in natural resources – the same areas that serve as havens for big mining and logging corporations.

Competing Interests in the Region

Southeast Asia remains an important region in terms of economic and political value. Its combined population of 633 million and an increasing gross domestic product (GDP) of \$2.4 trillion[2] make it a hotbed for foreign investment opportunities. Eight of the ten busiest container ports in the world are located in the Asia Pacific region, almost 30 percent of the world's maritime trade routes pass through the South China/West Philippine Sea every year while around \$1.2 trillion worth of products going to the United States transit the region's sea routes. The rich resources, cheap labor and vital trade routes in the ASEAN region make it a strategic target for United States' and China's economic, political and military control.

In this context, the US continues to pursue its strategic pivot to Asia. In efforts to secure its own sphere of influence in the region, it has escalated military operations by deploying tens of thousands of military troops and maintains hundreds of military bases in Asia Pacific. Japan and Korea alone hosts over 80,000 US military personnel – a stark difference from the 65,000 troops currently stationed in Europe and 35,000 deployed in the Middle East[3]. China on the other hand has embarked on a substantial modernization of its maritime military forces and naval capabilities in a bid to enforce its claim in the South China Sea. It has forcibly reclaimed reefs and built airstrips capable of hosting military equipment sparking tensions with competing claimants – the Philippines and Vietnam.

Complementing these militarist and diplomatic advances is a layer of economic offensives which include the push to ratify the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPP) – a mega-regional free trade agreement composed of the US and 11 Pacific Rim countries notably excluding China. The TPP is seen to advance favorable conditions for the US to consolidate strategic alliances with ASEAN countries participating in the trade deal: Borneo, Malaysia, Vietnam, and Singapore. Philippines and Thailand have already expressed their desire to join the TPP.

The TPP however does not go unchallenged – as a means to counter US economic offensives, the China-led Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) is recently gaining steam with a deadline to finish negotiations by the end of 2016. The RCEP excludes the US and covers all ASEAN member states along with China, India, Japan, Australia, New Zealand and South Korea. The rise of these two mega-regional FTAs

represents the heightening contention between US and China over who sets trade rules in the region and eventually re-orient the Asian supply and value chain to their favor.

It must be made clear however that both agreements pose major threats and equally devastating impacts on people's rights and sovereignty across the region. Despite the seemingly competing interests between the two trade pacts – it must be pointed out that both the RCEP and the TPP find grounding in, and act as extensions of the WTO (World Trade Organization) framework constituting the neoliberal objective of profit accumulation and the concentration of wealth and resources at the hands of global corporate elites.

This also poses critical problems especially in the context of ASEAN integration as both the TPP and RCEP endorse the ISDS – heavily criticized for favoring corporations. With ISDS already present in the ASEAN Comprehensive Investment Agreement (ACIA), inclusion in these trade deals will cement investor's rights to sue governments and will severely limit ASEAN member states' right to regulate. Once these agreements come into force, rich countries and their corporations can block national social and environmental protection policies by filing claims in ISDS tribunals and even dictate policies that will bolster corporate profit at the expense of dropping public interest laws leading to the corporate re-colonization of ASEAN economies.

The need for genuine people's solidarity

Indeed, ASEAN's model of regional integration operates under the neoliberal economic framework that begets corporate-led incursions posing grave threats to national sovereignty and people's rights across the region. The proliferation of trade and investment deals within and between ASEAN and global economic superpowers support monopoly capitalism's insatiable drive for superprofits. Weak domestic industries and agricultural systems are subjected to foreign monopoly control while public services and utilities are gradually taken over. Developing ASEAN states are increasingly forced to compete with each other to attract foreign investment largely through labor repression, flexibilization and wage depression. This direction is further fueled by US interests to reinforce its stronghold in Asia Pacific and counter China's aggression. At the same time, multinational corporations are increasingly being awarded the freedom to exploit the natural resources of developing economies in the region including their wealth, and labor power under the guise of 'development'. Militarization spreads across Asia displacing entire populations and subjecting the people, especially women, children and indigenous peoples to violence, threats, harassment and extrajudicial killings.

An alternative to this model of integration must advance each country's national economic interests free from the dictates of any foreign power. It must essentially do away with the market-led growth framework which ASEAN espouses and is founded upon. As a counterpose to this neoliberal notion of integration, a pro-people alternative must be forged along the principles of solidarity, cooperation and complementarity among states; it must recognize and uphold people's sovereignty and people's rights; premised on friendship and peaceful co-existence; it must pursue environmental sustainability and finally, direct the accountability of States and the private sector to the people.

Throughout the region, the people are asserting their sovereignty in various fronts to resist neoliberal and militarist policies. In the Philippines, indigenous Lumad communities remain irrepressible in asserting their right to land and in exposing mining and plantation investment schemes that continue to threaten their ancestral lands with the states use of military and paramilitary forces to protect investor interests. Thousands of farmers in Indonesia are relentless in demanding land ownership that has long been overdue. In Cambodia, women's garment-workers are fighting for living wages and safe working conditions. Malaysians have conducted mass protests calling for government accountability and clean elections.

All over the region, peoples movements and activists have repeatedly come together to demand ASEAN governments to uphold peoples rights . We are calling on people's organizations and the CSO community across the region to join Asia Pacific people in resisting the elite-centred ASEAN integration, the rise of militarism and neoliberal trade agreements.#

Signatories:

Center for Participatory Research and Development, Participatory Research Action Network, Bangladesh Ubiniq/Narigrantha Prabartana, Working Group for Peace, Gender and Development for Cambodia, Positive Change for Cambodia, Asia Monitor Resource Centre, Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants, Advasi Navjeeewan Gathan navjyoi Agua, APVVU, SAHANIVASA, NISARGA, Association for Promotion Sustainable Development Hisar, Seeds-India, Resistance and Alternatives on Globalization, Kiribati Association of Non-Government Organization, Association for Improving Reading Standard of Multi-Ethnic People Adapt to Climate Change, CBR Network, Jaringan Rakyat Tertindas (Oppressed peoples movement), Malaysians Against Death Penalty and Torture, Committee for Asian Women, Metta Development Foundation, POINT Myanmar, Association of Human Rights Defenders and Promoters, Alternative ASEAN Network on Burma, Airavati, Burma Partnership, Forum for Community Upliftment System (FOCUS Nepal) Dhading, National Youth Federation Nepal, NGO-Federation of Nepalese Indigenous Nationalities, LAHURNIP, Kirat Youth Society, Kirat Chamling Language Culture Development Association, People Unity Youth Society, Unity Society Nepal, Active Society Nepal, Youth Awareness Society Nepal, Indigenous Nationalities Women Youth Network, Kirat Chamling Association, Kirat Chamling Youth Society, Youth NGO-Federation, Indigenous Nationalities Women Network, Makawanpur, Chundevi Society Nepal, Kirat Chamling Khambatim, Pacific Islands Association of NGOs, Pacific Women's Indigenous Networks, Pacific Regional Language Partnership, Vagahau Niue Trust, Pacific-New Zealand CSOs Fono, Kilusan Para sa Repormang Agraryo at Katarungang Panlipunan (KATARUNGAN), Freedom from Debt Coalition, PAHRA, Focus on the Global South, Sentro ng mga Nagkakaisa at Progresibong Manggagawa (SENTRO), MASIPAG, Center for Women's Resources, Initiatives for International Dialogue, IBON Foundation, Cordillera Women's Education Action Research Center, Katribu Kalipunan ng Katutubong Mamamayan ng Pilipinas, WomanHealth Philippines, KAMP (Campaign for a Life of Dignity), Center for Environmental Concerns, PINAY (Filipino Women's Organization in Quebec), Community Development Services, Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development, SCODE, Borok People's Human Rights Organisation/Borok Indigenous Tribal People Development Center



Photo: www.monsanto-tribunal.org/main.php?obj_id=743045043

People’s Verdict vs. Agrochem TNCs Revisited as Groups Hold Monsanto Tribunal

PAN-AP

PENANG, Malaysia – Five years ago the Permanent People’s Tribunal (PPT) found Monsanto and five other giant agrochemical companies guilty of “gross, widespread and systematic violations of the right to health and life, economic, social and cultural rights, as well as of civil and political rights, and women and children’s rights.”

On 6 December 2011, the PPT, an opinion tribunal that looks into complaints of human rights violations, issued a landmark verdict upholding the charges made by affected communities against Monsanto, Syngenta, Bayer, Dow Chemical, DuPont and BASF.

Convened in Bangalore, India and organized by Pesticide Action Network (PAN) International the PPT said that the world’s then six largest agrochemical transnational corporations (TNCs) are responsible for violation of indigenous peoples’ human rights, and further found that “their systematic acts of corporate governance have caused avoidable catastrophic risks, increasing the prospects of extinction of biodiversity, including species whose continued existence is necessary for reproduction of human life.”

“It is important to revisit the historic PPT verdict as we prepare for the Monsanto Tribunal. The evidence presented against Monsanto and other agrochem TNCs remain valid today,” PANAP executive director Ms. Sarojeni V. Rengam said.

According to its organizers, the Monsanto Tribunal is an international civil society initiative to hold Monsanto accountable for human rights violations, for crimes against humanity, and for ecocide. Eminent judges will hear testimonies from victims, and deliver an advisory opinion following procedures of the International Court of Justice. The Tribunal will take place from 14 to 16 October 2016 in The Hague, Netherlands.

“The poisoning of people and the environment is still going on as highly hazardous pesticides such as glyphosate are being produced and marketed by corporations like Monsanto. This is even in the face of the classification of the International Agency for Research on Cancer of glyphosate as a probable carcinogen,” added Ms. Rengam.

One of the tragic cases heard by the PPT in 2011 was the death of eleven-year old Paraguayan Silvino Talavera, who died on January 2003 because of exposure to glyphosate (Round-up Ready) being applied to Monsanto’s genetically engineered RR soybeans.

“We have proof that there was poison in his blood. We are trying to hold Monsanto accountable for the death of my son from pesticide poisoning,” his mother, Petrona Villasboa, then said during the PPT hearings.

Ms. Rengam said that until today, glyphosate is being used and children continue to be exposed and vulnerable to glyphosate poisoning.

“The PPT on agrochemical TNCs and now the Monsanto Tribunal are marks of an escalated international people’s movement against agrochemical TNCs and to stop these corporations from violating the human rights of people, particularly children and marginalized communities,” said Ms. Rengam.

The PANAP official also noted that another significant development is the push in the UN for a binding international treaty on TNCs and other business enterprises with respect to human rights. An intergovernmental working group has already been set up to elaborate on the said proposed international legally binding instrument that would regulate, in international human rights law, the activities of TNCs and other business enterprises.#

Protest greets 16th round of RCEP Negotiations in Indonesia

Groups to gov'ts: We shall not let RCEP pass

People Over Profit

JAKARTA—Civil society groups and social movements from Indonesia and across Asia Pacific warned of intensified land grabs and unemployment as the 16th round of negotiations for the China-led Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) begins in Indonesia from Dec 7-9, 2016.

Protesters from AGRA (Aliansi Geraka Reforma Agraria) marched towards Indonesia Convention Exhibit (ICE) in Tangerang – the venue of the RCEP round of negotiations in Indonesia.

“We expect no less than escalating cases of land grabbing and militarization of our communities, a sharp increase in unemployment, and the continued worsening of poverty in Indonesia once RCEP becomes enforced,” said Rahmat Ajiguna from Aliansi Geraka Reforma Agraria (AGRA).

‘People at the losing end’

The 16-member RCEP trade negotiations officially began in 2011 and recently gained steam after the US-led Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPPA) met its untimely demise following Donald Trump’s victory in the US elections.

“Much like the TPP, the RCEP contains provisions that go beyond traditional trade concerns bringing to fore a torrent of devastating impacts on people’s rights while further empowering corporations,” said Lei Covero of IBON International.

“Despite their differences however, it must be made clear that both agreements pose major threats and equally devastating impacts on people’s rights and sovereignty across the region. Despite the seemingly competing interests between two trade pacts – must be made clear that both RCEP and TPP serve as extensions of the WTO,” said People Over Profit Network coordinator and APRN Program Officer, Mark Pascual.

“Whether it’s TPP or RCEP, the people will find no refuge in these FTAs because as long as they are designed to concentrate wealth at the hands of powerful countries, people will always be at the losing end,” said Joan Salvador of GABRIELA – Filipino Women’s Alliance.

‘We shall not let RCEP pass’

“We shall not let RCEP pass. As attacks against our rights become ever more acute, so shall our collective resistance,” said Asian Peasant Coalition Chairperson Chennaiah Poguri.

FPR together with POP and APC staged a protest rally in front of the Indonesia Convention Exhibition (ICE) – the venue of the 16th round of RCEP negotiations to highlight the people’s rejection of RCEP and other FTAs.

“We shall fight RCEP the same way we fought and brought down other Free Trade and Investment Agreements (FTAs) – through the power of mass actions that proved decisive in the fallout of TTIP, TPPA and other FTAs,” added Rudi HB Daman of Front Perjuangan Rakyat (FPR).#



People Over Profit Primers on FTAs

People Over Profit Network has released the first two in its series of primers on mega-regional FTAs.

FTAs proliferate as WTO negotiations continue to be trapped in deadlocks. This has resulted in decentralized neoliberal attacks in the different global regions that effectively undercut workers rights and displace peasant communities and national minority groups from their lands.

The primers tackles three of the biggest FTAs: the US-led Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement, the China-led Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement, and EUs Economic Partnership Agreements with the Africa, Caribbean, and Pacific countries.

Download the primers on these links:

RCEP and TPPA: <http://bit.ly/2hjpDxd>

RCEP dan TPPA (Bahasa): <http://bit.ly/2gaTB4Y>

RCEP at TPPA (Filipino): <http://bit.ly/2hZx2PA>

ACP-EU EPAs: <http://bit.ly/2gurLwL>



CSO DE WG engages the World Social Forum in Montreal

The CSO DE WG of the CSO Partnership for Development Effectiveness (CPDE) engaged World Social Forum in Montreal on August 2016.

On August 8-9, the participants in the Action Research on CSO Development Effectiveness and Accountability met to share on the status of their researches. The country researches presented were from Vietnam, Canada, Dominican Republic, Bolivia, Zimbabwe, and from the migrants sector. The Sharing Session on the Action Research met its objectives of providing a space for the researches to come together, share the status of the researches, and provide constructive feedback on each other's work. The researchers were divided into pairs and each of them was tasked to provide feedback at the end of their partner's presentation. The exercise enables the participants to take in perspectives of other countries wherein the context of implementing the Istanbul Principles are different from each other. However, challenges presented by the lack of/eroding enabling environment at country level is a common theme that is present in the presentations.

The CSO DE WG also shared its initiative called the CSO Effectiveness Awareness Check (CSO Check), which is a reinvented version of the Istanbul Principles Self-Assessment Checklist. The CSO Check [\[Insert link\]](#) is an online self-assessment check, which aims to help CSOs assess how the Istanbul Principles of CSO Development Effectiveness are being by an organization. The test also aims to help organizations in reflecting how they are improving in their commitment to development effectiveness.

The IP+5 workshop titled: The Istanbul Principles Five Years after (IP+5):

Civil society development effectiveness and accountability in a changing landscape was conducted on August 11. The workshop was registered as part of the World Social Forum with the aim of socializing the Istanbul Principles with the CSOs participating in the WSF. Anas El Hasnaoui of ESPACE, and the co-chair of the CSO DE WG chaired the first session of the workshop. The first session tackled the reflections and challenges on the implementation of the Istanbul Principles since their landmark adoption five years ago. The first panel featured CPDE co-chairs

Jorge Balbis and Maria Theresa Lauron, former CPDE Co-chair Antonio Tujan, Jr., and former CSO Co-chair of the Task Team on CSO Development Effectiveness and Enabling Environment. All of them participated in the processes that eventually came up with the Istanbul Principles. The second panel on the other hand featured case stories on the implementation of the principles at country level from Management for Sustainable Development-Vietnam, Alianza ONG-Dominican Republic, and the Pacific Women's Indigenous Networks -migrants sector.

The second session of the workshop was chaired by CPDE Co-chair Justin Kicullen. It featured an interview with Maina Kiai, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Rights To Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and of Association. This interview focused on the global phenomenon of shrinking spaces for CSOs and the opportunities for CSOs' accountability. Case stories showing the relationship of enabling environment and CSO accountability and also the implementation of Istanbul Principles were presented by researchers from National Association of Youth Organizations-Zimbabwe, Unión Nacional de Instituciones para el Trabajo de Acción Social-Bolivia, and council members of the Canadian Council for International Cooperation.

Aside from the workshop and sharing session, members of the CPDE present in Montreal participated in the opening march of the WSF in solidarity with other CSOs advocating for enabling environment not only in Canada but also in other parts of the world.

It should be noted that from the original 14 confirmed participants of the sharing session, only seven were able to make it due to rejection and non-action of Canadian embassies on visa applications. According to reports from the WSF organizing team, these are not isolated cases. More than 200 visa applications, which are largely from the global south countries, were denied by the Canada. This has somewhat negatively impacted the achievement of the objectives set by the WG in organizing the events in Montreal by reducing the number of the WG's participants in its sharing session, as well as the overall number of CSOs that the workshop might have reached in its workshop. This incident speaks of how spaces for CSOs are closing down, even in the global north.#

Women forge unity vs Militarism and War

“End Imperialist Wars and Militarism,” was one of the top cries of women activists that came together during the World Social Forum in Montreal, Canada.

On August 12, a workshop taking up this issue was organized by the International Women’s Alliance (IWA) with the theme “Women Resisting Militarization, Occupation and Wars of Aggression.” Speakers included Palestinian refugee Khalida Hussein, Kurdish Representative to the Turkish Parliament Selma Irmak, APRN General Secretary Marjorie Pamintuan, and IWA Vice-Chairperson Marie Boti. A representative of the women of Sahraoui also spoke of her people’s on-going liberation struggle, and a representative from Canada shared stories of the struggle for land of their indigenous women.

According to IWA, fascism and militarization has gripped communities from the global south, to indigenous lands in the global north, as a new era of occupation and economic wars dawned following the takeoff of the US War on Terror.

The workshop was concluded with a renewed commitment to add the voices of women to the struggle for just peace.

IWA’s campaign of the same theme was launched earlier on August 8, to mark the 1945 US bombing of Hiroshima.#



Photos from facebook.com/IWA4grassrootswomenforliberation

NETWORK UPDATES

People’s Researchers Commit to Build Global People’s Research Network

People’s researchers from Asia, Africa, and Latin America met in Nairobi, Kenya on December 4, 2016 to share their experiences, lessons, and technologies on doing research for social change. The half-day event was hosted by IBON International Africa. Among the participating organizations are: APRN, IBON International, FAHAMU, Bunge La Mwananchi, ARCADE, Center for Research and Advocacy-Manipur, Partners of Community Organizations, SODNET, Struggle to Economise Future Environment (SEFE), ESAFF-Tanzania, Observatorio Cooperación / Ciudad, and Coordinadora Civil. At the end of the discussion, the researchers committed to work towards launching the Global People’s Research Network in 2017.

APRN Conducts People’s Research Trainings

Asia Pacific Research Network (APRN) conducted three national-level People’s Research Trainings on September 2016 and December 2016. The trainings were held in partnership with NGO Federation of Nepal (Kathmandu, September 2016), Center for Human Rights and Democracy (Ulaanbaatar, December 2016), and Promotion of Nature and Indigenous Together-Myanmar (Yangon, December 2016). The trainings aim to develop the capacity of grassroots organizations and CSOs to conduct their own research and investigations that apply the principles and objectives of Peoples Research to serve advocacy and campaigning.

INDIES Introduces New Director

The Institute for National and Democratic Studies (INDIES) announced that it has a new director. Mr. Kurniawan Sabar took the helm of the organization on August 2016. He can be reached at indies4indonesia@gmail.com.

Trade and Human Rights Trainings Launched

Peoples Over Profit held trainings on trade and human rights in the Philippines and Indonesia in partnership with IBON International, Asia Pacific Research Network (APRN), and various grassroots organizations and people’s movements. The trainings intend to build awareness on the different free trade agreements (FTAs), particularly the Transpacific Partnership Agreement (TPPA) and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) and build their capacity for campaigning against these trade deals.

In partnership with the Asian Peasant Coalition (APC), Institute for National and Democratic Studies (INDIES), Front Perjuangan Rakyat (FPR), IBON International, and APRN, People Over Profit participated in the Multistakeholder Forum on the RCEP held in Jakarta, Indonesia during the RCEP Negotiation Round on December 2016. POP raised the workers’, women’s, and migrants’ concerns during the said forum.

TPP RULES IN RCEP MUST BE REJECTED!

This is an urgent call by 316 civil society organisations from across the Asian and Pacific countries negotiating the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), which includes the 10 ASEAN Member States with China, Japan, South Korea, India, Australia and New Zealand.

This letter comes at a very important political moment, when in the aftermath of the US elections it seems clear that the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPP) will not be ratified by the USA, in spite of its big push since February 2016 when the agreement was signed by the 12 countries.

It is clear that the TPP has been soundly rejected by the American people and there has also been widespread opposition to it in other TPP countries on both sides of the Pacific. According to the TPP text, if the US does not ratify it, the TPP cannot come into force.

The current negotiations in RCEP are complicated by the fact that there are 6 countries which are part of the TPP and there have been many attempts to import TPP texts into RCEP and sometimes even an attempt to go beyond the TPP. A few examples below bear testimony to how TPP wording is being proposed in RCEP.

In the investment chapter, apart from a few safeguards, all the TPP's substantive and main investor-to-state dispute settlement (ISDS) provisions have been proposed in the leaked RCEP investment chapter.

In services, for example, all the substantive TPP telecommunications chapter rules have been proposed in RCEP according to the leaked RCEP text.

In RCEP's leaked draft e-commerce terms of reference, all the TPP ecommerce chapter rules appear to be proposed and all the

RCEP ecommerce ideas appear to come from the TPP, therefore proposing an exact match of the texts.

In the leaked RCEP intellectual property (IP) chapter, Japan, South Korea and some others are pushing many of the main substantive stronger IP provisions of the TPP

With the demise of the TPP, there is no justification for adhering to the TPP texts in RCEP because these have no mandate. This is even more irrational in the absence of the TPP as Asian countries (including least developed countries (LDCs)) would end up carrying the load that other rich countries in the TPP (US, Canada) will not have to bear any more.

The RCEP texts which have leaked so far have many fundamental problems that will negatively impact all sectors of society in RCEP countries.

We call upon the governments participating in the RCEP, to recognize this critical moment and not to bring the toxic content of the TPP into the RCEP and instead to stop the RCEP negotiations.

We urge you to revisit the trade relations between the 16 countries. A new model must be based on cooperation and not competition, one that puts the development needs of the region above that of corporations, and puts people and the environment at its centre, that recognizes economic policy can work only if it is inclusive, not only in terms of the impact on different constituencies but also if it integrates the social and environmental concerns of the world.#





A Call to Action to Stop RCEP, TPP, TTIP, CETA, TiSA and EPAs

Trade for the People, not for Corporate Elites!

PEOPLE OVER PROFIT

The world's people have long been subject to ever-worsening poverty and injustice – from the erosion of labor protection measures across the globe, the continued privatization of key sectors of the economy, to the rampant dispossession and displacement of peasants, farmers and indigenous communities from their lands. The unrelenting depression of the global economy has pushed millions of workers to leave their home country in pursuit of greener pasture elsewhere; women continue to suffer miserable wages, landlessness, and hunger atop of discrimination and violence as the world's youth are perpetually deprived of free and accessible education and decent employment. But the worst is still yet to come.

The dire conditions of the world's poor and marginalized are all set to intensify once the torrent of mega-regional Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) become finalized and enforced across different regions of the globe. The consecutive failures of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in the past years have prompted a renewed focus on bilateral and regional FTAs revealing no less than a system in chronic crisis. In a desperate bid to salvage itself from this crisis, monopoly capital is now turning to mega-FTAs such as the China-led Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) and the US-led Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) accounting roughly up to 38% and 40% of the global economy, respectively. In Europe, the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) between Canada and the EU represents 19% of the world's economic pie while the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) will cover almost half of the global GDP. The US and EU-led Trade in Services Agreement (TiSA) on the other hand binds 50 countries towards liberalizing global trades in services such as banking, health care and transport. In Africa, Caribbean and the Pacific, numerous EU-led Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) continue to rise.

The depth and range of these trade pacts is striking – covering more than just trade, undercutting worker rights, dismantling labor, environmental, health, and financial laws while boosting corporate profit and control. These facts show how rich industrialized countries and global corporate elites are dividing the world across politico-economic lines while unveiling the insatiable hunger of corporations to amass more profit, and consolidate transnational corporate control over labor and natural resources.

Governments negotiate these trade deals in behalf of corporate and elite interests in their countries. As such, these trade deals favor TNCs from the most powerful and wealthy countries – including an investment clause that allows corporations to sue governments for laws and policies that are perceived harmful to corporate profits. Previously signed mega-regional FTAs such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) blatantly favored investor interests to the extent that corporations easily challenged laws that were meant to protect public welfare and interest, including providing a living wage, implementing agrarian reform, ensuring health and safety of the public from hazards, sound environmental policies, and so on.

Past treaties have also forced workers to compete for what remains of desperate and low-wage labor around the world. In 1994, when the NAFTA was signed between Canada, United States and Mexico, economists and US officials predicted the generation of hundreds of thousands of jobs due to a supposed growth in trade surplus with Mexico. The result however has led to 682,900 American jobs lost and the displacement of over one million Mexican campesino farmers not to mention wage depression, labor flexibilization, and increased forced migration.

Beyond investment protection, FTA standards on intellectual property rights have severely restricted the use of patented seeds and plant varieties threatening local peasant and indigenous farming practices as well as their access to seeds. In addition, these FTAs intend to further extend medicine patent rights thus enabling big pharmaceutical companies to monopolize the drug market and keep charging high prices without the competition of generic alternatives.

Indeed, these corporate-backed trade agreements cover an expansive and increasingly worrying array of areas and issues which multiply impacts across sectors and communities, and provoke wide-ranging resistance in many countries.

In Europe, the movement to defeat TTIP and CETA has reached massive proportions over the past few years with thousands marching in the streets to oppose austerity, poverty and the onslaught of FTAs. At the same time, African governments and people's organizations are rising up against EPAs that continue to exploit the continent's rich natural resources and cheap labor. In North America, Latin America and the Asia Pacific, people are organizing to defeat the RCEP and TPPA. People across the globe are coming together like never before in a concerted escalation to stop the corporate takeover of the world and build a people's movement against FTAs and corporate plunder.

We, peoples movements and civil society organisations, trade unions, farmers and grassroots activists from across the globe stand united in opposing RCEP, TPP, TTIP, CETA, and EPAs. These sinister trade deals threaten our democracy, our jobs, our lands, and our lives.

But we shall not let this pass. As attacks against our rights become ever more acute, so shall our collective resistance. We demand no less than living wages for workers, land to the tillers, and access to free and accessible medicines, public health care and education. We shall fight for a pro-people trading system that is forged along the principles of solidarity, cooperation and complementarity among nations. A system that recognizes and upholds people's sovereignty and people's rights; premised on friendship and peaceful co-existence, and directs the accountability of States and the private sector to the people – a world trade order that responds to people's needs, not to corporate elites.#



RCEP: A devastating blow to the Philippine economy and its peoples

APRN statement on the RCEP Ministerial meeting in Cebu, Philippines on 3–4 November 2016

Trade ministers of the 16-nation Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) are set to meet on November 3–4 in Cebu, Philippines aiming to resolve roadblocks to the negotiations.¹ The RCEP ministerial meeting is happening at the heels of the 15th round of negotiations held last October 17–21 in Tianjin, China wherein talks revolved around market access negotiations on trade in services, goods, and investment.²

RCEP negotiations continue to be shrouded in secrecy – with negotiation rounds and side-meetings happening unannounced and without allowing peoples participation during the talks. Last October 25, India's Commerce and Industry Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced that “there is going to be a ministerial meeting early November in the Philippines,” to iron out issues including the proposed single-tier system of tariff reduction. Despite not being an official negotiation round, the Cebu ministerial will include all contentious topics in RCEP – effectively meant to push the negotiations to a close by the end of 2016.

The Asia Pacific Research Network (APRN) strongly opposes RCEP and any move to railroad its conclusion. Civil society groups across Asia Pacific have rightly and repeatedly pointed out the devastating impacts RCEP will unleash once it comes into force. Often referred to as a ‘trade’ pact, the RCEP will deal with more than just trade – giving rich countries and their corporations excessive powers so as to sue governments and delve into non-trade issues all of which have far-reaching implications across sectors and communities in the region.

RCEP and the Philippines

Once RCEP comes into force, the reduction of trade barriers among member economies is expected to result in a 2.2 percent increase in total exports among RCEP member economies.³ It must be noted however that this expected increase in export growth is lopsidedly in favor of rich industrialized and emerging economies known as the “+6” countries (Japan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand and India). Export volume from the “+6” countries are expected to rise up to 3.68 percent by 2023 while ASEAN states' export volumes will become stunted at 2.21 percent as they absorb increasing imports from more developed economies.⁴

RCEP will entail a devastating blow for the Philippine economy and its people. Despite predictions of higher GDP growth rates by 2023⁵, the backward agricultural system in the countryside especially for domestic rice production will suffer greatly due to the deluge of cheaper imported rice from Australia, New Zealand and Japan. Proponents of RCEP cite projections that the influx of cheap imported rice and other products will benefit poorer households, but what's missing in the picture is the widespread joblessness and landlessness that comes after local production systems are destroyed by the domination of highly subsidized imports from rich industrialized economies.

RCEP is expected to bring in an additional USD 2.4 billion in foreign direct investments (FDIs) into the Philippines within a ten-year period⁶ – an estimate that is often used to justify how the China-led trade deal will lead to more homegrown jobs. However, looking at the current USD 5 million worth of FDIs approved in the Philippines for 2015, only around 169,075 jobs are expected to be generated from the current host of FDIs – a far cry from the 2.2 million unemployed Filipinos as of October 2015⁷.

The Philippine labor export policy will find a more solid grounding as the RCEP seeks to facilitate an ever-increasing supply of cheap labor force for export. Meanwhile, job opportunities in the Philippines will become scarcer as wages continue to depress and labor standards decline in the name of attracting a greater inflow of foreign direct investments.

The increase in cheaper textile imports from neighboring economies will damage the thriving local textile production in the country. Several billion dollars of investments and loans from China are bound to facilitate greater land grabbing, the expansion of plantations and factories to supply China's burgeoning market. Inevitably, RCEP's adoption of the infamous corporate tribunals will allow foreign corporations to sue the government over sanctions and policies that threaten their profits. The use of ‘investment defense forces’ to protect investor interests will intensify as foreign corporations find more reasons to ravage and exploit the resource-rich lands of indigenous and Moro peoples.

Without substantial changes in the Philippine economy especially genuine land reform and the push to build its own national industries, enforcing RCEP in the Philippines becomes no different than the impacts of other new generation free trade and investment agreements (FTAs). While Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte's attempts to build better relations with China signals a welcome step to veer away from decades of US domination and control, an independent Philippine foreign policy will not prosper in conditions of economic subjugation from one superpower to another. It is imperative that closer relations with China or any other country be premised on solidarity, mutual benefit, peaceful co-existence and cooperation. In the interest of ensuring that the people are not disadvantaged in trade deals such as RCEP, we call on peoples organizations across Asia Pacific to intensify our collective resistance against RCEP and other FTAs in the offing.

STOP RCEP! FIGHT FTAs! PEOPLE OVER PROFIT!#

1 The Economic Times. (Oct. 25, 2016). RCEP trade ministers to meet next month: Nirmala Sitharaman. Retrieved from <http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/foreign-trade/rcep-trade-ministers-to-meet-next-month-nirmala-sitharaman/articleshow/55065970.cms>

2 Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan. (Oct 12, 2016). 15th Round of Negotiations for Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). Retrieved from http://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/press4_e_001302.html

3 Philippine Institute for Development Studies. Policy Notes Issue No. 2015-23, November 2015. Will the Philippines benefit from the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership? Retrieved from: http://dirp3.pids.gov.ph/websitecms/CDN/PUBLICATIONS/pidspn1523_fnl.pdf

4 Ibid., p. 3

5 Ibid., p. 2

6 Philippine Institute for Development Studies. 2015. RCEP is beneficial to the poor – PIDS study. Retrieved from: <http://www.pids.gov.ph/pressrelease?pr=253>

7 Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA)



Civil Society statement on the Second High Level Meeting (HLM2) of the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation (GPEDC)

The CSO Partnership for Development Effectiveness (CPDE) welcomes the Nairobi Outcome Document (NOD) and commits to further advancing the effective development cooperation agenda.

CPDE, an open platform of civil society organisations (CSOs) worldwide and as a member of the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation, attended the HLM2 with a delegation of 400 strong CSOs. Civil society representatives led and participated in the planning of all plenaries, as well as numerous amphitheaters and side events. We spoke in panels and in interventions from the floor. We raised our voices and chanted our messages in collective action. We made formal submissions to all versions of the Nairobi Outcome Document (NOD). All this was done so that with one united voice we are heard in our key asks:

1. That effective development cooperation commitments made since Paris are upheld and applied to all stakeholders through a monitoring framework that recognises different dimensions of development;
2. That shrinking and closing spaces for civil society be recognised and addressed, and GPEDC recommit to providing an enabling environment to maximize CSOs' contribution to development;
3. That all members of the Global Partnership ensure that the private sector exercise accountability in its development interventions, especially in aspects of labour, environment, and other human rights standards;
4. That the integrity of GPEDC's mandate as an inclusive multi-stakeholder platform to ensure effectiveness of development cooperation be upheld, as this contributes to the realisation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); and
5. That the inclusive character of the platform expresses itself in parity in representation and leadership, including governance arrangements that allow for a fourth non-executive co-chair.

We see significant progress in many of these areas. The NOD recognised that implementing previous commitments is central to moving forward with the effective development cooperation agenda. It commits to reverse the trend of shrinking and closing civic spaces and help develop the full potential of CSOs to contribute to effective development. It also advanced the role of the GPEDC in implementing existing effectiveness commitments as well as advancing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

We recognise that these gains were made possible through the hosting of the government of Kenya, which oriented the negotiations of the NOD in the spirit of partnership. Through its leadership, stronger language on gender equality, women's empowerment and youth's role in development was made possible.

Despite these achievements, CPDE remains concerned about the absence of references to democratic ownership as a shared action agreed in the Busan Partnership Agreement, the dilution of civil society's role in holding governments accountable (Para. 41f), and the lack of emphasis on the importance of each country's ownership of its own economic and social development (Para. 36). Further, we are concerned about the lack of clarity of purpose – i.e., eradicating poverty and reducing inequality – in the use of international public finance for private sector development (Para 23). CPDE intends to follow up on these concerns in the GPEDC.

CSOs worked hard throughout the process, and in the conclusion of the HLM2 we have achieved some significant commitments from the Partnership that can be used as a basis for holding all the Parties of GPEDC accountable, including ourselves. Beyond the HLM2, we commit to applying the language and spirit of the NOD to contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals and address country realities. For our part, we take to heart the many commitments we made in the NOD. We will continue to be guided by these, as well as by the Istanbul Principles on CSO Development Effectiveness.

Finally, we note that political will, backed by high-level engagement, is needed for the implementation of the new commitments. Civil society acknowledges the HLM2 as a milestone in the GPEDC's continuing evolution, and commits to engage all partners in the effective development cooperation agenda. We will do this at all levels in order to help build political momentum. We will move forward in this unique multistakeholder platform, celebrating our successful contributions, but never resting until we see better results for the poor, marginalised, and those living in vulnerability.#

Free Detained Land Activists and all Political Prisoners in the Philippines!

PAN-AP

Consistent with our advocacy to defend and promote human rights – including the people’s right to land – we support our friends and allies in the Philippines as they call on their national government to immediately release all political prisoners.

As noted by one of our partners, the Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas (KMP), majority of these political detainees “are farmers and land reform advocates who were arrested, charged with fabricated cases and jailed because of their struggle for land and democratic rights”.

We believe that the appeal for their release through a general amnesty is a fair and legitimate demand. Their prolonged detention is a form of continuing repression, aggravated by the fact that their imprisonment was caused by merely asserting their rightful claim to land and rights, and standing up for what is just.

We also note the urgency of the call as bitterly demonstrated by the recent death of peasant political prisoner Bernabe Ocasla due to cardiac arrest and lack of proper medical attention because of his continued detention. Twelve other political prisoners have already died under similar circumstances since 2010.

The criminalization of the struggle for land of peasants and indigenous people is a scheme that is prevalent not only in the Philippines but also in the region. Along with other forms of human rights violations, the filing of trumped up charges and detention of land rights activists and members of local communities are happening as well in other countries.

But Filipino activists, including those who are involved in land struggles, are among who suffer most from the filing of fabricated cases. Based on our monitoring, 19 Filipino farmers, indigenous people, and land activists have been filed with trumped up charges in the last two years alone. That’s almost 20% of the total number of victims of trumped charges related to land struggles and conflicts that we have monitored in Asia Pacific and other regions during the said period.

We respectfully urge the Philippine government under President Rodrigo Duterte to heed the people’s appeal for the release of all political prisoners. We hope that like the theme of this year’s International Human Rights Day on 10 December, Mr. Duterte will stand up for the rights of Filipino political prisoners who did not commit any crime but merely served and fought for the poor and landless.#

CSO DE WG Launches Action Research on CSO DE and Accountability

The CSO DE WG launched the action research titled *Istanbul Five Years After: Evidencing Civil Society Development Effectiveness and Accountability* during the CSO Forum prior the 2nd High Level Meeting of the Global Partnership for Development Cooperation held in Nairobi, Kenya on December 2016.

All over the world, civil society has made strides in improving their effectiveness and accountability since the landmark adoption of the 8 Istanbul Principles for CSO Development Effectiveness in 2010, and the Siem Reap CSO Consensus on the International Framework for CSO Development Effectiveness in 2011. These were documented in the publication *Journey from Istanbul*, which highlighted case stories from 19 countries describing civil society’s continuing efforts to promote and implement the Istanbul Principles through trainings, advocacy, and developing educational materials.

This action research builds on the results of the *Journey from Istanbul* casebook. It is composed of eleven (11) reports from seven (7) countries and four (4) sectors.

The results of the action research show that five years after Istanbul, the challenges that CSOs face to further improving their effectiveness and accountability are still the same, and in some cases, these challenges are getting worse. We see that despite the rhetoric on multistakeholder partnerships, spaces and opportunities for dialogue and engagement are actually closing at the global, regional, and national levels. Laws that restrict CSOs activities are being put in place, negatively impacting development workers in both South and North especially for those working on human rights, environmental rights, and gender equality. Fundamental civil liberties and human rights are severely under threat, if not under outright attack.

While challenging policies and initiatives that diminish CSO enabling environment, CSOs have not stopped pushing for the implementation of the Istanbul Principles. From the 11 reports, we’ve seen evidences on lots of effort put into building awareness and integrating the Principles into the mandate of CSO platforms, adapting the Principles to the needs of a constituency and country organizations, promoting the Istanbul Principles as a framework for assessing CSO development effectiveness in aid provider agencies policies, and strengthening programmatic practices consistent with the Istanbul Principles.

CSOs are continuing to focus on accountability as an overarching and essential dimension of their effectiveness. Through familiarization workshops, accountability reports, transparency platforms, and specialized training and capacity development, CSOs are committed to the Istanbul Principles as a shared framework for defining CSO effectiveness as development actors in their own right.

The publication can be downloaded here: <http://csopartnership.org/istanbul-five-years-after/>

