

## EDITORIAL

# Development Aid with Chinese Characteristics?

In the last fifteen years, the world has seen China's impressive rise as a major player in the international development finance. In such a short period, China has transformed from being an aid recipient to a net aid donor, rivaling traditional major donors and lenders. It has also financed big ticket infrastructure projects in mostly low-income countries.

A number of factors are driving China's profile rise in global development finance. Despite its growing economic influence, its role in major international financial institutions such as the US-led World Bank and Japan-led Asian Development Bank (ADB) remains limited. In response, it has promoted the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and the Silk Road Fund with a view to bridge the huge financing gap in infrastructure investment demand and supply in Asia-Pacific. The ADB and World Bank not only failed to meet the demand for infrastructure investment in developing countries but also came with tighter conditions such as market-oriented reforms. China has taken advantage of this not only to edge out Japan and US in the region, but also to enable it to offload some of its excess industrial capacity, secure markets and raw materials to support export activity, and arrest China's economic slowdown.

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Photo: Lakruwan Marniarchi/AF/Getty Images

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President Xi Jinping's Belt and Road Initiative aligns with China's economic imperative "Going Out" to maintain its existing growth pattern and expand this overseas. The BRI will spread China's tentacles across Asia, Africa, Europe, and Oceania via "The Belt" which will recreate the old Silk Road land trade, and the "Road" which will create a sea-based trade route spanning several oceans. This ambitious initiative is expected to spur investments in large-scale gas and oil pipelines, roads, rails, and ports as well as link economic corridors.

The BRI is an evolving design. It is not limited to infrastructure; it includes "financial integration," "cooperation in science and technology," "cultural and academic exchanges", and "trade cooperation mechanisms". The BRI is also expanding geographically. In September 2018, Venezuela announced joining the New Silk Road commercial plan. Venezuela follows Uruguay, which was the first South American country to receive BRI funds.

So what are the key concerns of peoples in the Global South with regard to Chinese development aid?

### **Collateralizing sovereignty**

Chinese loans and investments have been heavily criticized for their transparency deficit. Information on terms and conditions of Chinese loans is scarce to nonexistent and data on lending from China's development banks are not standardized. Deficiencies in accounting could mean that the international policy community may be in the dark regarding many developing and emerging countries' external debt situation.

As yet another debt crisis among poor and underdeveloped countries loom in the background, China's growing ownership of key infrastructure as a result of, or built into, the terms of its loans is a cause of worry. The media is abuzz with talks of so-called China's debt trap diplomacy. The strategy seemingly consists of China providing billions of dollars of loans to poor countries and once unable to pay, are forced to give up their natural resources and strategic assets as collateral. An oft cited case is Sri Lanka's hand over of a strategic port to China on a 99-year lease after the former could not repay its more than \$8 billion loans from Chinese firms.

### **Business investment disguised as official aid**

Chinese official aid has often been cast as "conditionality-free" making it seemingly more attractive for developing countries. However, Chinese official aid, according to a study conducted by AidData, is intended for commercial projects and loans that are required to be repaid with interest. As observed by Matt Ferchen from the Carnegie-Tsinghua Centre for Global Policy in China, "China's aid is only a very small part of what it considers to be development engagement, which often simply means doing business deals".

According to Antonio Tujan, Jr., activist from the Global South, Chinese development assistance in 1990s under Deng shifted its focus on economic and infrastructure development to promote Chinese corporate sector. Since Chinese corporations are both public and private, their overseas engagements are both investments and official aid. Thus, there is no bidding as in traditional official development assistance or ODA; projects are awarded to Chinese firms as investments. In BRI, 90% of projects are being built by Chinese companies.

In the Philippines, 3 infrastructure projects with Chinese funding are in the pipeline: the Chico River Pump Irrigation Project, the New Centennial Water Source-Kaliwa Dam Project, and the North-South Railway Project-South Line. According to the country's socioeconomic planning Secretary Ernesto Pernia, the Philippine government would select among 3 Chinese companies. This is a fertile ground for corruption, according the Philippine Supreme Court Associate Justice Antonio Carpio, since said firms can simply collude and agree among themselves on who will corner which project.

Furthermore, this arrangement is biased against domestic business and entrepreneurs. While Chinese firms and contractors will profit from their country's "development assistance" projects, Chinese aid will reinforce dependency and potentially erode the nascent and fledgling industries of poor and underdeveloped countries.

In some instances, Chinese-financed projects are not only built by Chinese companies but also use Chinese workers and materials. Such was the case with the construction of the Bar-Boljare motorway in Montenegro. In the Philippines, the influx of Chinese workers for the government's mega-infrastructure program Build, Build, Build is questioned amid high unemployment rates in the country.

### **Fueling the climate crisis**

Chinese companies have been investing heavily in coal power especially in BRI countries. According to Global Environment Institute China is currently involved in coal power projects in 65 BRI countries. Between 2001 and 2016, China was involved in 240 coal power projects in BRI countries, with a total generating capacity of 251 gigawatts. The top five countries were India, Indonesia, Mongolia, Vietnam and Turkey. The research also reveals that China's involvement in coal power projects in Belt and Road Initiative countries has been increasing overall.

If the trend continues, China will lock these countries into coal-power assets that will damage people's health and well being and exacerbate climate change.

### **Suppression of rights and militarism**

China's megaprojects come at a sharp cost to human rights, causing massive displacements of communities. The China-funded New Centennial Water Source Kaliwa Dam Project in the Philippines is set to displace the Dumagat-Remontados indigenous peoples who have been living in the area and enjoying a symbiotic relationship with nature for centuries. Until now the indigenous peoples have not been given a Free Prior and Informed Consent to the Kaliwa Dam as required by national laws. The dam will be constructed over the Infanta Fault and will be a sword hanging over the head of 100,000 people living downstream the Kaliwa River.

Such megaprojects have faced fierce resistance from affected communities. Consequently, private security companies serving Chinese companies in BRI projects have grown exponentially. In 2013, there were 4,000-registered firms, employing more than 4.3 million personnel. By 2017, there were 5,000 firms with around 5 million staff.

Chinese aid may not be significantly different from its Western counterparts after all. For China to increase its aid effectiveness it should increase grants than loans, promote partnerships that foster mutual respect, solidarity, and non-exploitation, and ensure that it does not replicate the same neocolonial relations that have tied peoples and nations to centuries of peonage and maldevelopment. ■

*(This article was first published by SLUG Nettverk for rettferdig gjeldspolitik (Debt Justice Norway))*

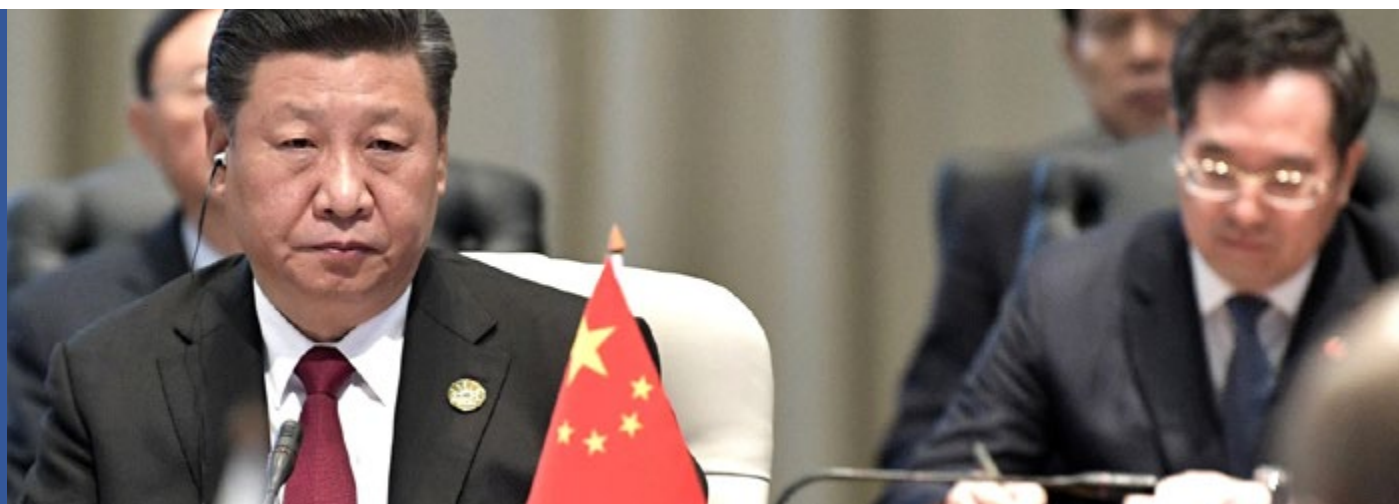


Photo from [en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/58104](https://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/58104)/photos

# Activists, CSOs bolster call to reject RCEP in Bali negotiations

Carrying placards calling for the rejection of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (RCEP), activists managed to slip past the tight security of Nusa Dua Complex in Bali, Indonesia to conduct a protest in front of the Bali International Convention Center where the RCEP Trade Negotiating Committee is holding its 25th negotiation round.

Joining the protest were members of Front Mahasiswa Nasional (FMN/National Students' Front), Aliansi Mahasiswa Papua (Papuan Student Alliance), Serikat Perempuan Indonesia (SERUNI/Indonesian Women's Union), and People Over Profit – Indonesia.

Inside the convention center representatives of people's organizations and civil society organizations are delivering their statements in a Stakeholder Dialogue with trade negotiators. The delegates echoed the key messages on issues discussed during the CSO forum held prior to the meeting.

Retno Dewi representing Indonesian women's group SERUNI minced no words in criticizing the conduct of negotiations for the trade pact. "You have kept us blind; you have kept the details of this deal a secret. For that reason alone, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement or RCEP deserves an unequivocal rejection from women, and all the other sectors here present now," Dewi said.

Andrew Zarate of APRN slammed the evident corporate interests behind the new trade deal. According to Zarate "signing the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership will further seal the control of ASEAN economies by the few powerful corporate elites that influenced most of RCEP's chapters."

"RCEP will galvanize labor contractualization schemes, push down wages, and erode labor standards won by the workers themselves. RCEP will destroy what's left of our local industries resulting to forced migration and labor export.

"In this same chapter, corporations would wield the power to sue our governments in investor-state dispute settlement tribunals, question laws that promote people's welfare, and when they win, reap billions from people's taxes," he added.

Kartini Samon of GRAIN aired her group's opposition to RCEP's intellectual property (IP) provisions that would target seeds and other agricultural products. According to Samon RCEP's IP chapters would only "benefit the seed industry and

systematically eliminate local seeds and create dependence of farmers on the seed industry, and create indebtedness."

The Indonesia AIDS Coalition raised their concern on the proposed extension of patents for life-saving medicines which would inevitably cut or immensely delay the supply of affordable generic medicines.

Another big concern are the provisions on e-commerce which would consolidate the monopoly of tech giants over digital technologies, infrastructure, services, and data. Leaked text of RCEP's e-commerce provisions reveal that it closely resembles those in the recently signed Comprehensive and Progressive Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (CPTPP) whose provisions generally reflected the demands of U.S. digital monopolies.

Proposals would allow service suppliers to transfer and process data offshore which include personal and commercial information, this would disarm governments from policing the use, sale and abuse of those data. Furthermore, governments cannot require service providers to use or locate their computing facilities within the client country, discouraging governments to invest in their country's local digital infrastructure. Restrictions against giving preferences to local firms that develop content using local knowledge and cultural content are also being negotiated.

As governments race to finish negotiations before the year ends, people's organizations and civil society groups across the region commit to sustain their vigilance and remain at the forefront of opposing the trade deal.

In a students' forum on RCEP held in Bali's Udayana University, youth leader Thofu Ajaa of FMN, pledged to conduct more activities to raise the public's awareness on RCEP and other similar neoliberal trade agreements and economic policies. "Building a popular movement must start from exposing the adverse impacts of neoliberal economic policies on people's lives and livelihood. The youth must help in all efforts to expose pro-corporate and anti-people trade deals and policies, and to mobilize thousands to oppose them," said Ajaa. ■







## APRN Pushes for Effective Development Cooperation Amidst Shrinking Spaces for CSOs

APRN member organizations Aidwatch, Center for Women's Resources (CWR), Ecumenical Institute for Labor Education and Research, Inc. (EILER), and IBON Foundation, Inc. attended the consultation sponsored by the Council for People's Development and Governance (CPDG) on April 5, 2019.

The aim of the event was to jumpstart a series of policy dialogues among national oversight agencies, sectoral line agencies, civil society organizations (CSOs), and development partners. One of the intended outcomes of this series of policy dialogues is a roadmap for a multi-stakeholder country compact on development effectiveness.

"This activity is very timely. This comes at the heels of government issuances that restrict space for CSOs to freely do advocacy and development work. Memorandum Circular (MC) No. 15 Series of 2018 of the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), for instance, enumerates additional compliance requirements depending on the risk rating of a non-profit organization (NPO). This effectively stigmatizes and worsens surveillance of organizations critical of the government," disclosed Jose Enrique Africa, Chairperson of IBON Foundation, Inc.

"CPDG partners such as Rural Missionaries of the Philippines-Northern Mindanao Sub-Region (RMP-NMR) and IBON Foundation, Inc. have felt the adverse impact of SEC MC No. 15 (S. 2018). Despite the shrinking space, our partners remain committed to delivering concrete services to the marginalized," noted Jazminda Lumang, General Secretary of APRN.

At the dialogue, CWR expressed its willingness to get involved with gender and development initiatives sponsored by the government. Despite its broad reach among women's grassroots organizations and prolific evidence-based publications, CWR feels that they have been excluded.

EILER, on the other hand, highlighted the need for the

government to consult with CSOs on labor issues such as wage and contractualization as part of their social accountability. Moreover, unions across the country have been systematically dismantled. Those on strike have been indiscriminately labelled 'rebels', thereby making them enemies of the state and targets of state forces.

On the part of AidWatch, observations about the stifling environment of CSOs working on human rights, sustainable development, and social justice were raised.

Other CSOs in attendance were Mindanao Interfaith Services Foundation (MISFI), Fair Trade Foundation, Panay, Philippine Network of Food Security Programs (PNFSP), Climate Change Network for Community-Based Initiatives (CCNCI), Urban Poor Resource Center (UPRC), Philippine Social Enterprise Network (PhilSEN), Federation of Free Workers (FFW), Working For Empowerment and Good Governance Institute (We Govern), and Philippine Partnership for the Development of Human Resources in Rural Areas (PhilDHRRRA). Their representatives shared the work that they do and the particular challenges that have emerged due to the increasingly limited space for CSOs.

In response, the Department of Budget and Management (DBM), National Economic Development Authority (NEDA), Commission on Audit (COA), Philippine Commission on Women (PCW), Commission on Human Rights (CHR), and NAPC outlined respective programs that can be maximized by the CSOs. They mentioned that the nature of the bureaucracy and access to information make work with other stakeholders difficult.

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Philippines expressed its support for CPDG's open platform as the aims are aligned with its good governance principles.

The dialogue ended with a higher sense of commitment towards more meaningful collaborations among the government, CSOs, and development partners. ■

# GOALS VS REALITIES: LOOKING BACK AT THE PEOPLES' FORUM & APFSD 2019

Running on its 6th year, the Asia Pacific People's Forum for Sustainable Development (People's forum) 2019 has gathered the largest number of civil society organizations (CSOs) once again to push forward a people-centered development agenda.

With the theme "Strengthening People's Power for Development Justice in an Unequal and Divided World," the People's forum was held last 23–26 March in Bangkok, Thailand. Over 200 activists, advocates and CSO representatives from 27 countries attended the event.

Participants included national and regional civil society organizations representing 17 various constituencies and working on thematic areas relevant to sustainable development.

## People's forum

The People's Forum is organized by the Asia Pacific Regional CSO Engagement Mechanism (APRCM) which is a platform that is initiated, owned and driven by the CSOs, and seeks to engage with UN agencies and Member States across the region on the issue of sustainable development.

Represented by the network's General Secretary Jaz Lumang, Asia Pacific Research Network (APRN) sat as one of the three co-chairs of the platform this year. APRN, its members and allies maximized the forum to initiate a critical discussion on the major issues affecting peoples and communities in the region.

In session 1: Panel on "Empowering people for a more inclusive and equal Asia-Pacific" with the theme "Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality", Mr. Atama Katama of Borneo Dayak Forum said that "Governments must reverse not only the shrinking but the disappearing spaces for people's democratic participation as shown by the attacks against CSOs and activists and the people as we are being vilified, and killed because of our critical voices."

In Plenary 1: Inequality and the Setting of Global Capitalism, Patriarchy, Fundamentalism, Militarism and Authoritarian Governance Aaron Ceradoy of the Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants stated that the empowerment of migrants "... for collective thoughts and actions must be developed as solidarity is heightened among migrants and with other sectors in their home countries and in countries where they live and work."

Speaking on science and technology for sustainable development at the panel on "Means of Implementation as Key to Addressing Systemic Barriers and Implement the SDGs," April Porteria of the Center for Environmental Concerns-Philippines stated that "The Science, Technology, and Innovation should be centered around meeting the most basic needs of all people and oriented towards serving the interests of the most marginalized sectors of society."

## Workshops at the People's Forum

The program consists of plenaries, workshops and breakout groups to facilitate discussion on sustainable development goals with geographical representatives from the regions of Pacific, East/North East Asia, North/Central Asia, South/Southwest Asia, and Southeast Asia. A total of 23 workshops were held during the event.

The Reality of Aid Network organized the workshop "Making the SDGs Happen in the Asia Pacific: Exploring the Development Effectiveness of ODA People's Empowerment, Inclusion, and Equality in the Region." The participants reached a consensus that, "Resources allocated for development should be used effectively to achieve internationally-agreed sustainable development goals (SDGs)."

Quo Vadis Goal 16? Is a civil society review of the state of peace, justice, and inclusion in the Asia Pacific organized by APRN and APRCM. Participants agreed that "achieving the targets of Goal 16 remains a growing challenge especially with the rise of repressive governments, shrinking, if not closing, of civic spaces, and growing militarism."

Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law, and Development (APWLD) led the workshop "Reclaiming Accountability - Case Studies and Lessons Learnt of People-Centered Monitoring with Development Justice Lens" together with one of its partners and fellow APRN member Center for Women's Resources Philippines. The workshop acknowledged "existing and even increasing systemic barriers leading to lack of rural women's inclusion and participation in the policy and decision making."

BPO Industry Employees Network with APWLD organized "Women Workers Unite for Decent Work: Reclaiming Women's Voices, Shaping Labour Movement thru Feminist Participatory Action Research". Asia Pacific Network of Environment Defenders and Center for Research and Advocacy-Manipur organized "Defend Our Rights: A gathering of environment defenders for information exchange and advocacy strategies in the Asia Pacific." The Urban Poor Resource Center of the Philippines organized the workshop "Defining Development" to look into the dominant and alternative models of development.





## Collective statement

Results of the workshops helped shape the collective statement of the People's Forum. The People's Forum highlighted in the statement that "leaving no one behind" is recognizing and addressing the root causes and systemic barriers that continue to hamper people's development.

Meanwhile, the statement delved into the glaring inequality between the rich and the poor. The inequality is exacerbated by regressive tax systems and illicit financial flows, increasing human rights violations, further degradation of the environment, deprivation of people's access to resources and services, worsening impacts of climate change, and shrinking democratic spaces. These are the systemic barriers that have caused communities in the region to remain the one of poorest and most marginalized in the world.

Looking at the means of implementation, the People's forum explained, "Most of the SDGs cannot be achieved without fair trade rules, especially for poorer countries." Thus, the current trade flow must be reviewed to benefit the poor countries and not in favor of corporations. It should be reformed in the framework of sustainable development and the needs of developing countries, their people and natural resources.

These barriers that have led to the current situation will continue to adversely affect peoples while benefiting a few around the globe and hinder the achievement of the SDGs if they are not confronted and addressed.

## Spaces at the APFSD

The Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (APFSD) is a regional forum held 26 – 29 March 2019. It aims to foster and promote the exchange of views and ideas on UN Agenda 2030 in the region. It hosted by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP). APRN, its members and allies helped provide a critical analysis at relevant spaces of engagements.

Mr. Jiten Yumnam, Secretary of the Centre for Research and Advocacy, Manipur at Parallel Roundtables for an in-depth review of SDG 13, climate action hit the root causes of the climate crisis, "The systemic issues causing climate crisis, such as increased adoption of neoliberal economic order and corporatization of development should be reviewed."

Ms. Urantsooj Gombosuren, Chairperson of the Centre for Human Rights and Development (CHRD), Mongolia on Session 3: Parallel Roundtables for in-depth review of SDG 16 spoke

about the shrinking spaces in the region “Curbing illicit financial flows, including tax avoidance by multi-national corporations and the wealthy, is imperative for raising and mobilizing additional resources for sustainable development, as well as fostering accountability, transparency and democratic governance.”

Tirtha Prasad Saikia of North-East Affected Area Development Society (NEADS) delivers the Constituency Statement of People Affected by Conflict & Disasters stating “In addition to the risk posed by natural hazards, many of the poor in this region live in countries affected by political instability, civil conflict, weak governance, and economic insecurity.”

Ajay Jha Kumar from Centre for Community Economics and Development Consultants (CECOEDECON), India, representing farmer’s constituency of APRCEM during Session 6: From Regional To Local delivered a crucial point to achieve Agenda 2030 by having to “focus on rights and participation of communities including all marginalized including landless farmers, peasants, and impoverished communities and communities who largely depend on natural resources for their survival.”

Jaz Lumang APRN General Secretary and APRCEM Co-Chair at the Inclusive Participation as Key Driver and Accelerator of SDG 16 and 10 stated that “We must continue our assertion that human rights should be at the core of Agenda 2030” as a response to the shrinking spaces in the region.

Triana Kurnia Wardani of Seruni at the side event “Ensuring Women’s Inclusiveness and Equality in Land Rights and Management of Natural Resources: The Role of Women Human Rights Defender” explained the importance of collective action of women, “Apart from gender-specific violence, having experienced grave injustice and being in dire living and working conditions, the women in agriculture of Indonesia has seen the vital importance of collective action.” To wrap up two consecutive events and to mark the Day of the Landless, APRN together with the farmers’ constituency led a solidarity action during the forum’s final session at the United Nations Convention Center in Bangkok.

The silent demonstration was halted by the center’s security officers, and participants were told to put away their placards containing the calls “Reclaim our Land, Reclaim our Future;” “No Land, No Life;” and “Stop Killing Farmers.” Undaunted, the participants continued with the solidarity action with their placards in reverse to dramatize the silencing of critical voices in official spaces.

Moving forward, APRN members and allies renewed their commitment to further push for a truly transformative development agenda within and outside the APFSD and other advocacy and engagement platforms.





# Quo Vadis\* Goal 16? A people's review of the state of peace, justice, and inclusion in Asia Pacific

*\*lit. Where are you going?*

Asia Pacific Research Network (APRN), in partnership with Asia Pacific Regional Civil Society Engagement Mechanism (APRCM), held the panel discussion titled “Quo Vadis Goal 16?” at the Asia Pacific People’s Forum on Sustainable Development 2019 (APPFSD) on March 25 in Bangkok. Thirty five (35) participants from regional and national CSOs, people’s organizations, UN agencies and members of the media attended the said forum.

Goal 16 of building peaceful, just and inclusive societies is important as a means and an accelerator to achieve Agenda 2030. And yet, achieving the targets of Goal 16 remains difficult given the rise of repressive governments, closing civic spaces, and growing militarism.

The forum identified the systemic barriers to Goal 16 namely shrinking spaces for CSOs and limiting people’s participation in the development process, increasing militarization, and widespread attacks on fundamental rights and freedoms.

Ivan Enrile of APRN gave an overview of Goal 16 and the challenges to achieving the goal’s interlinking targets. “The transformative nature of SDG 16 makes it uniquely powerful, yet also difficult to achieve as it requires significant shifts in all its interlinked aspects,” Enrile said. “Peace should be sustainable and positive, not simply the absence of violence; accountability should be mutual; justice must be comprehensive including social, economic, environmental, cultural and political justice,” he added.

Enrile further shared the move of the Philippine government to tighten its grip on democratic participation of CSOs through a new memorandum released by the government’s Securities and Exchange Commission that would classify CSOs according to the risk they pose for being used for financing terror groups.

“Shrinking space as a real threatening trend in our region. It is going in various ways- in political restrictions, in physical arrests and killings, in disappearance, in growing treats,” adds Nurgul Dzhanaeva of Forum of women’s NGOs of Kyrgyzstan underscoring the increasing dangers civil society have to face to fulfill their part in achieving development goals.

Daya Sagar Shrestha of the NGO Federation of Nepal shared the same experience as their government reinstitutes



restrictive laws which make it more difficult for CSOs to register, operate, and access resources.

Kartika Sari of Palangkaraya Ecological And Human Rights Studies (PROGRESS) talked about militarization of development. “In Indonesia, the National Commission on Human Rights (Komnas HAM) revealed that there are a total of 1,500 cases of conflict related to disputes, conflict and struggles for land and natural resources. Thirty percent (30%) of these cases involve palm oil plantations,” Sari shared.

The same attacks on rights were also noted in the labor sector. “Despite the recent upsurge in labor strikes in the Philippines, the calls to end contractualization have fallen on deaf ears. More than 30,000 workers who went on strike suffered repressive blows varying from threats, intimidation and assault. A total of 28 killings have been recorded in the labor sector from 2016 to 2018,” reports Otto de Vries of the Ecumenical Institute for Labor Education and Research (EILER).

To cap the discussion, Ajay Jha of CECODECON and feminist activist Sarah Zaman talked about the different ways that civil society and movements were resisting militarism, closing civic spaces, and exclusion. Zaman shed light on the experience of Pakistani women in confronting repression, threats of arrest, and misinformation. Jha meanwhile shared how Indian farmers’ organized resistance reversed court decisions that trampled on their rights.

Participants agreed to come up with a strong statement on the shrinking spaces for CSOs and advocate for a rights-based approach to development at the coming Asia Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development. They further agreed to strengthen and widen the solidarity in pushing back against efforts to stifle the voices of the grassroots and to undermine their struggle for development justice. ■

## STATEMENT

# Reclaim our Lands, Reclaim our Future!

We face today a world of increasing repression of rural communities and worsening threats to their rights to land and resources. We witness how landless peasants, farmers, farm workers, indigenous people, fishers, rural women and youth, and other marginalized rural sectors greatly suffer under authoritarian populist regimes. We see how massive infrastructure projects and agricultural “development” programs, many funded through onerous foreign debt and investments, displace rural peoples from their lands, livelihoods and cultures – all in the name of imperialist domination and plunder, local elite rule and private profits.

The neoliberal restructuring of agriculture endures through programs bankrolled by multilateral financial institutions such as the World Bank and Asian Development Bank (ADB) as well as through new regional trade and investment agreements like the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) and Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). Global powers – now counting emergent China – and their corporations continue to intensify their endless pursuit of and competition for control and exploitation of the world’s natural resources, including lands and all the wealth these hold and can produce.

All this feeds the unabated concentration (or reconcentration in the case of countries that attempted land reform) of land in the hands of a few at the expense of the vast majority who actually till and enrich the lands for generations. Latest available estimates show that of the 570 million farms worldwide, 475 million are small holder farms (i.e. less than two hectares). While comprising more than 83% of the total number of farms, these small holder farms only operate about 12% of the world’s agricultural land.<sup>2</sup>

However, structural issues, chief among them landlessness or lack of effective control over land and resources, push those who actually make these lands productive into perpetual and increasing poverty and hunger. While small farms are concentrated in sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and Southeast Asia and could produce almost three-fourths of food commodities globally, these same regions account for 95% of the rural poor.<sup>3</sup> Overall, eight out of every 10 of the world’s poorest live the rural areas, based on latest estimates.

Many of the rural displacements are often accompanied by criminalization of land conflicts, militarization and systemic violence perpetrated by governments and foreign business and elite interests. It is not a coincidence that regions where foreign and domestic land deals for mining and plantation operations, economic land concessions, industrial zones, infrastructure development projects and others are also the same regions with the highest incidence of human rights atrocities related to land conflicts and struggles. This has been the case in Asia, Africa and Latin America which accounted for 78% of total number of land deals (74% in terms of size), based on the

latest Land Matrix data.<sup>5</sup> These same regions were also those monitored by PAN Asia Pacific (PANAP) in 2018 with reported human rights violations related to land conflicts and struggles including killings (63 cases with 98 victims); arrests, detention and legal persecution (37 cases with 136 victims); and threats, harassments and physical assault (24 cases with 50 victims).<sup>6</sup>

But we also face the world today with even greater resolve and determination to reclaim our lands and future. We witness how movements of oppressed and exploited rural peoples in various countries push back against the onslaught of land and resource grabbing despite of and amid the systematic killings, persecution and harassment of their ranks. We see them march from their farms and villages to the capitals and urban centers to exact accountability from public officials and assert people’s sovereignty, declare their demands and fight for both urgent and long-term policy reforms.

Land occupation and collective cultivation campaigns in Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand persist despite the massacres, threat, and intimidation. In Brazil, campesinos occupying and cultivating disputed lands have been defying eviction orders by agrarian courts and in some cases successfully reversed the orders. Across India, tens of thousands of farmers are participating in a series of historic marches to demand, among others, that the government recognize their right to land and to stop infrastructure projects that cause their dislocation. In Cambodia, communities continue their resistance against land grabbing by foreign firms including through the filing of landmark court cases and class-action lawsuits.<sup>7</sup> These are just some of the stories of resistance and to be sure many others are happening as rural communities around the world carry on their struggle for land and life.

Today, we mark the Day of the Landless to celebrate and highlight the struggles and victories of peasant movements in the world against landlessness and poverty; against oppression and exploitation; and against imperialist and feudal rule. We mark the Day of the Landless to let the world recognize our legitimate demands for land to the tiller and genuine agrarian reform; for food sovereignty; and for people’s rights and democracy.

Today, we reaffirm our commitment to reclaim our lands and our future from the powerful forces that took them away.

*(This statement was issued last 29 March 2019, a date annually marked by various peoples’ organizations and movements, and civil society organizations as the DAY OF THE LANDLESS. One hundred twenty-six organizations composed of 18 global and regional groups and networks and 108 national and local organizations from 24 countries in Asia and the Pacific, Africa, Latin America, North America and Europe have endorsed this statement. Please visit this link to view the full list of organizations: <https://panap.net/2019/03/day-of-the-landless-2019-reclaim-our-lands-reclaim-our-future/>)*



NEW PUBLICATION

# The Peoples' Global Conference Against IMF-World Bank In Bali, Indonesia

The proceedings of the Peoples' Global  
Conference against the IMF-World Bank is now  
available in print and online!

You may download a digital copy on the this link:

<https://peoplesglobalconference.weebly.com/resources.html>

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