

The Rajchadamnoen Pledge

December 10, 1992, Bangkok, Thailand



Preamble

We, over 500 Thai and foreign participants of the People's Plan for the 21st Century meeting in Bangkok between December 6-10 1992, represent people's movements and networks, national, regional and international NGOs and solidarity groups from 46 countries from all regions and continents. We have come together to reiterate and renew our commitment to build transborder alliances of peoples in struggle, solidarity and hope. We gather in the spirit that we pledged ourselves to in the Minamata Declaration (1989) which marked the birth of PP21.

Since Minamata, people-to-people alliances and processes at the local, national, regional and cross-continental levels have been realised across boundaries and cultures. Significant milestones in this process have been the forging of relations with the indigenous, black and people's resistance movements in the Americas and the establishment of a group in Central America.

We have met as women, as workers, as peasants, as youth and students, as indigenous peoples, as urban poor, and as activists and advocates of peace and human rights, participatory democracy, ecologically-sound grassroots destructive tourism-related (or resort) development. The encounters and experiences, the ideas and action plans that emerged from these sectoral and multi-sectoral activities held in various parts of Thailand culminated in the main Forum in Bangkok, where we shared our experiences of life and struggles in various forms -- through poems, songs, dances, dramas, and visual exhibits.

PP21: From Minamata to Bangkok: Renewing the Alliance of Hope

PP21 is taking place in Thailand in the midst of momentous global and national changes which challenge the very basis of our existence.

The Soviet Union has collapsed. The international capitalist system has become more dominant. There is unprecedented global concentration of power with the United States and its allies in the Group of 7 exercising a virtual monopoly over political institutions, economic resource, military power, information and technological products and processes. Institutions such as the IMF, the World Bank, GATT and the Asian Development Bank work together to enforce the dominance of multinational corporations in the name of the free market, totally irresponsible to the basic needs and survival of the marginalised in society. The United Nations, particularly the Security Council, has become a tool of US foreign policy as demonstrated in the Gulf War and in subsequent events. Integral to this system of global domination is a whole pattern of national control and domination expressing itself in different facets of life. Most governments in the region are armed to the teeth with wide-ranging powers that are stifling the growth of civil society. Democracy has become a system of symbols and rituals shorn of substance. The fundamental civil and political rights of our people continue to be denied. This denial of rights is perhaps most blatant in societies under military rule, but is equally, if not more, destructive in societies where authoritarianism parades with a human mask.

There is mass poverty and blatant exploitation of labour and of the environment. Marginalisation of women continues unabated, and violence against them is on the increase. Elites in many countries in Asia-Pacific emphasize the perpetuation of power and the pursuit of profits at the expense of the basic needs and fundamental rights of the people. The fatal grip of international capital and export-oriented industrialization on our countries, which have been propped up as "economic miracles" (NICs), in itself brings further misery and destitution to the poor.

But we have no reason to despair. We know that unjust structures whether at community, national, or international levels must crumble and collapse. They cannot last. Our confidence is not born of naiveté. Our faith in the just future of humanity is not the product of some utopian dream. In the last three years since Minamata, we have seen our struggles grow and develop.

Seven months ago, unarmed people waged a battle against guns and tanks to establish democracy. The people in this country became visible on the streets of the city and in the towns in the countryside. As they challenged state power the people once again demonstrated the power of non-violent popular struggle. Through blood and tears they displayed their moral courage and their process they reasserted their inherent dignity and recovered the power that is their own.

While this was perhaps the most dramatic portrayal of people's power in the region since Minamata, we have experienced ongoing struggles of women against violence and domination; indigenous peoples for their survival and preservation of their cultural and ethnic identity and harmonious relations between nature and humanity; peasants for their land; workers for more just and human working conditions; urban poor for the right to shelter; youth and students for a just and democratic society; local and indigenous communities against mass and luxury tourism; and people against unsustainable development paradigms and programmes.

Furthermore, democratic struggles were successfully waged in 1990 in Bangladesh and Nepal against authoritarianism and military rule. The ongoing protracted struggle of the Burmese people against the military junta cries out for justice and international support. In the Philippines, the rejection of the RP-US Military Bases Treaty on September 16, 1991, has removed a major threat to peace in the Asia-Pacific region.

Each of these is a witness to the awakening of people's consciousness; a stir in our hearts in response to the injustices and the inequalities of the existing order. Each struggle demonstrates the ability of people to determine their own destiny. This is proof of our confidence in our capacity to alter the course of history, which in turn strengthens that confidence.

The significance of these struggles within the Asia-Pacific reality is that they emphasise a profound commitment to life. It is a commitment that has great meaning since Asia is the continent that has given birth to the world's major spiritual and moral tradition. At the same time these struggles also point out the relevance and significance to the traditions, cultures and values of the indigenous people of the Asia Pacific region. Central to these traditions is a vision of life and the living inspired by justice, love and compassion. Harnessing what is essential in them demands reinterpretation of the traditions. It is this re-interpretation which has a resonance in the struggles of the poor and the oppressed to reassert their humanity.

Reasserting our humanity means destroying those unjust structures at family, community, national and international levels which de-humanise us and hold us in bondage to wealth and power. This demands a concerted effort on our part to create participatory democracy and foster genuine development. It demands strengthening of grassroots initiatives and networks, building alliances of people's organisations. It demands transborder linkages at the regional and international levels in support of people's struggles to create an ecologically sustainable, equitable and gender-just society.

Alliance Building

Alliance building is oriented towards the long-term goals of the PP2I Alliance of Hope, namely, global people's power which will confront and prevail over the powers of this unjust and unequal world. Building such power requires us to work towards the forging of alliances of people's movements at the grassroots, local, national, regional and global levels.

This alliance is based on people-to-people contacts rooted in a culture of friendship and partnership that transcends borders and sectoral and organisational concerns. This demands of us an attitude to learn from each other's struggles and strengthen the relationships and alliances already underway in our own societies. We are challenged to be open to other cultures and experiences in our efforts to link not just ideas but persons; to support and contribute rather than merely expect support; to give meaning to language and communication between peoples; and to be open to initiatives and alternatives coming from all levels.

PP21 is based on the initiatives and participation of peoples and their organizations. This is the essence of our alliance-building, wherein we encourage and endorse the concrete agenda on which people's actions are based.

We, as participants of PP21 Thailand 1992, endorse the proposals and action plans adopted by the participants in the various sectoral and thematic forums that preceded the Main Forum, as an integral part of PP21 Thailand 1992. At the same time, we have adopted for ourselves the following:

Information Exchange and Dissemination

We need to know more about the things happening to and around us and must keep abreast of the fast-changing realities trends and tendencies in all their dimensions, for many reasons. For one, information is increasingly being denied to us, and there is a deliberate tendency to block our access to information. For another, there are dominating processes at work in our localities, societies and regions which can only be fought against in a transborder manner. Furthermore, we need to learn from and build on each other's knowledge, experiences and struggles. All these bring us closer together and point the way towards concerted collaborative action to mutually reinforce our respective struggles. Information dissemination is not to be seen merely as a process of mechanical transfer, given the complexity of issues that have direct and far-reaching impact on the lives of the people. Ideas emerge from people and we need to be conscious not to impose our own ideas on them. Moreover, we also need to ensure that the ideas and analysis do not remain trapped in academic language. Proper communication strategies need to be implemented so that concerned sectors can utilise their own information base as well obtain such analysis and information in easy, people-oriented language for purposes of action.

During the Main Forum participants expressed the need for information exchange and dissemination on a wide and diverse range of issues. These included, among others:

- the impact of bio-technology on agricultural cash crops, drugs and pharmaceuticals, and the implications for the vast majorities of people in the region;
- an inventory of NGOs in the region, and their respective skills, resources and areas of concern;
- the sex trade and industry; aid, trade, debt and structural adjustment;
- environmental issues directly related to development and sustainability

Lobbying, Advocacy and Solidarity Action

The demand for accountability of multinational corporations and governments to serve the needs and promote the fundamental rights of people was also constantly expressed. Among the issues that need solidarity action are: the demand for the right of free association, protection and promotion of human rights, and the right to self-determination.

South-South, South-North Alliance Building

We need to build transborder sectoral and inter-sectoral alliances from the village to the international levels. Already some processes and initiatives are underway. One such exchange involves fisher folk in southern Thailand and northern Malaysia. Another ongoing transborder initiative is being undertaken by a task force for the survival of Asian agriculture, farmers and peasants. Participants from among students and youth have pledged to link up with farmers and indigenous peoples. Trading links on equitable terms have been forged and are being further developed between consumers in the north (e.g. Japan) and producers in the South (e.g. Sugar workers in Negros, Philippines). At the Main Forum we learned of many transborder actions and events being organised by groups from different countries which cover various themes and concerns. Among these initiatives that repeatedly found mention are:

- Strengthening mutual support networks for shelter, rescue, legal assistance, counseling, reintegration, etc., for women, particularly Thai women, who fall victim to the international flesh trade (in Japan, etc.) As well as the trade in migrant female labour.

— Women forging alliances across gender, sectoral, cultural and national lines, to strongly condemn, on 25 November 1993, the violence perpetuated against women.

— The mobilization of national and international support for the tribal and indigenous peoples to mark 1993 as the Year of Indigenous Peoples. International Treaties and Declarations asserting the rights of indigenous people should be translated into the indigenous languages and made available in an easily understandable form.

Intercultural Alliance Building

We must build alliances based on liberative cultures to respect and enrich our diversities amidst growing tendencies towards ethnic chauvinism, communalism and racism.

PP21 Follow-up and Facilitation Work Continuing Mechanisms

We need to reinforce and strengthen the people's organisations' leading role and participation at the local, national and inter-sectoral levels, in collaboration with regional groups and alliances. On the regional level a minimum facilitating mechanism to ensure the follow-up of the PP21 process is proposed. Regional consultations must be held to decide upon the form and flow of future PP21 events. Some specific proposals include, among others.

-- the preparation and dissemination of a directory of participants (including personal profiles) in the Thai PP21 events; and

— translation into local languages of the Thai PP21 materials (it has been suggested that participants themselves undertake this task).

As we pledge our commitment, we are aware that we are creating power - it is a power that is not based on relying on the powerful, but in our capacity to do things despite the existing oppressive structures, a power that is based on our determination to create and maintain our own spaces of action, in our confidence and ability to learn and to build reliable relations and alliances towards the 21st Century.