

The Sagarmatha Declaration

Shaping Our Future



**People's Plan for the 21st Century
Asia-Pacific People's Convergence
Kathmandu, Nepal, 1996**

CELEBRATING DIVERSITY, CELEBRATING LIFE

We are people from the Asia-Pacific region (along with friends from Africa, Latin and North America and Europe) from popular organisations, political movements, voluntary organisations and support groups active in the struggles of women, peasants, workers, youth and indigenous peoples on cultural pluralism, justice, ecology and democracy. We have come together in Kathmandu, Nepal in March 1996 for the Third People's Plan for the 21st Century (PP21) Convergence, and shared our experiences, dreams and plans at this critical juncture in our collective history.

We meet as a broad coalition of peoples and interests to continue a process of building an alliance of hope begun in 1989 in Minamata, Japan. There we critiqued the dominant model of development and declared the natural and universal right of people to "criticise, oppose or prevent the implementation of decisions affecting their lives, no matter where those decisions are made." In 1992, we met in Bangkok, Thailand, to renew our pledges and promises, reasserting our humanity in "destroying those unjust structures at family, community, national and international levels which dehumanise us and hold us in bondage to wealth and power." These two convergences highlighted our ongoing linkages and interactions in a multiplicity of ways.

As we share the diversity of our struggles and celebrate the plurality of our resistance, our hopes and our aspirations, we are strengthened. Our interactions with others from different sectors and concerns have added fresh perspectives to, and generated transformations of, our positions. We demonstrate our vibrancy and commitments in our continued pledge to constantly seek and work towards building a society of peace and justice for all.

While the dominant economic and political systems attempt to relegate our concerns as peripheral, we collectively reaffirm the centrality of our struggles and our visions. This centrality is rooted in our daily lives, in our living and in steering our ways through the chaotic currents stirred up in the dominant systems. This centrality is the multiplicity of our practices and responses in which lie imaginative alternatives to the dominant systems.

We will not, and need not, wait only for our elected representatives and political leaders to address and resolve the multifarious economic, political, ecological and cultural crises that we face. We will not, and need not, accept the disappearance of our forests, the dying of our rivers, the pollution of air, the degradation of our lands, the destruction of our livelihoods, and the oppression of state and non-state actors. We have come together to discuss our common experiences and exchange the alternatives that we practice and have developed. We are, in this process, strengthening an alliance of hope and self-confidence, as we take our lives and our dignity in our own hands.

We celebrate as women empowering ourselves everywhere in convergences locally, nationally and globally. We have demonstrated our courage and action in fighting for gender justice, equality, dignity and other human rights, and fighting against trafficking and all forms of overt and covert violence inflicted on women. We as women struggle along with men to liberate ourselves from all forces of domination, oppression and marginalization no matter who the perpetrators are. We strive to practise development alternatives to create life-centred relations and life-support systems based on the values of compassion, sharing, nurturing and caring both in our private and our public lives. These are opposite to the values of the dominant mode of modern development characterised by a militarized, self-centred, competitive, masculine mentality, by violence ingrained in our cultures and societies.

Dauntlessly, we as women have mobilised against the manipulations of politics and religion and have been empowered in the struggle to protect women's human rights. We celebrate our stands against extremism of all kinds, in all guises. We reaffirm our right to be free from fear, in the home and on the street. We resist increasing militarization that violates and prostitutes us. We protest against weapons of mass destruction such as mines and the testing of nuclear

weapons which claim life from land and sea and sky. We pledge ourselves to continually say NO! to wars and conflicts that leave us in sorrow.

We gather strength as we struggle against poverty and poisoned environment that deprive our children of health and happy childhood. Our affection for the trees, mountains and rivers shines through in struggles against their destruction by colonial and corporate interests. We say NO! to the rationality that prescribes development only to destroy, order only to disrupt, control and efficiency only to dehumanize.

We celebrate as youth and children. We reaffirm our right to a decent livelihood and a space for developing our creativity. We refuse to conform to the dominant culture which attempts to homogenize us and entice us to wastefulness, selfishness and greed. We remain hopeful in the midst of unemployment. The cry of child workers resounds, compelling us to confront the misery and tragedy of all exploitative systems.

We honour our struggle as indigenous and colonised peoples for self rule, decolonisation, and the reassertion of our cultures and identities. We celebrate our perseverance and struggle against large destructive development projects that dispossess and displace us. We continually confront the forces that make us refugees, and aid all efforts that let us go home voluntarily.

We struggle as traditional fishing communities in the face of unsustainable modern commercial fishing, intensive prawn cultivation, telling of mangrove forests and mining of corals. We renew our efforts against the polluting of coastal lands and lagoons, and the dumping of nuclear and industrial wastes. We promote our many attempts as farmers to develop biologically diverse and ecologically sane agricultural systems as an alternative to the dominant thrust of multinational agribusiness to reorganise agriculture in the industrial mode -- mass production of cash crops for export, standardisation of products, and vertical integration. We endeavour to strengthen and widen the practices of organic production through networks of producers.

We take courage in our manifold struggles as workers to fight unemployment, low wages, deplorable working conditions, and violations of our right to organize. We further cross-border linkages as workers to confront transnational and national corporations. We extend our solidarity to victims and survivors of industrial disasters and hazards. Together, we reject the logic of the "free" market that drives for profits and benefits only a few.

We seek a society where surviving is not dependent on involuntary migration within or without borders, as we affirm our right to work and live where we choose. We demand our right to be protected from abuse and exploitation.

We encourage efforts to forge non-exploitative and democratic partnerships between producers and consumers, in spite of national and regional economic policies which privilege export over local needs, which privilege private accumulation over people's security.

We applaud our language of protest as writers and poets in condemning the present state of the world which legitimises coercion in the name of democracy. We struggle against forces that discriminate against religious and ethnic minorities, perpetuate gender, class, race, and caste chauvinism, protect religious bigotry and extremism, and promote consumerism. We uphold all struggles for empowerment towards a new century based on solidarity, dignity and freedom.

We celebrate the creativity and resistance of our diverse cultural traditions, art, dance, theatre and music, and the diversity of languages and cultures despite a centralising communications system that attempts to homogenise and project a monocultural view of the world.

We recommit our efforts for quality health care and education, in spite of moves to privatise or withdraw social programmes, and we energise ourselves in seeking alternatives.

We sustain our struggle to restore livelihoods despite the increasing polarisation of wealth and poverty which has doubled in the last three decades. We also support the continuing efforts to have the external debts of our countries written off.

As we celebrate, rejoice and draw strength from our actions, our struggles, our movements, we reaffirm our hope ---- hope across borders and languages, cultures and thoughts. Yet, we must also acknowledge our inherent weaknesses as movements, organisations and actors of social change. We must be consistently honest, humble and self-reflecting, and never allow ourselves to become unaccountable, non-transparent and aggressive. We must not be co-opted by national and international institutions and structures of power. We encourage others to join us, in the hope and belief that this is not a dream to be realised in a distant future, but one that is turning into reality here and now!

ENVISIONING THE POSSIBLE

We recognise that it is only our continuous efforts in building our movements through active linking and resisting that can sustain and further our celebrations. Our efforts will become effective forces of intervention when our movements continue to shape and reshape our visions of the possible. It is from such a dynamic vision that we must assess, confront and transform the dominant political, economic, social and cultural systems.

Here at the threshold of a new century, economic and political elites are envisioning and targeting our region as the centre of global economic growth. A hegemonic alliance of international trade and financial institutions, in league and supported by government technocrats, businessmen, military leaders, politicians and other elite groups, is re-configuring each of our societies. Simultaneously, a remarkable range of popular activities is slowly coming into its own. What is increasingly reflected in this vast and diverse array of our experiences and struggles is the rejection of the rhetoric that lauds our region as the centre of global economic growth. These voices stress the need to go beyond incremental reforms in the dominant economic and political systems. For us, "progress" is not in aggregate growth, in higher export earnings, in rising gross national product, nor in the multiplication of shopping arcades, hotels and golf courses.

"Progress" is not the squandering of vast resources on military expenditures at the expense of basic needs that create secure conditions for everyone to achieve a healthy productive life with dignity. "Progress" is not in losing control to increasingly centralised economic actors and processes.

For too long have we watched our forests, lands and waters being scarred by large dams and pipelines and toxic pollutants, by unsustainable farming and fishing practices, by the reckless and criminal extraction of natural resources to sustain private accumulation and unsustainable industrialism. For too long have we been displaced, dispossessed, enclosed, excluded, bonded, jailed, tortured and killed. For too long have we as women been forced into trafficking and prostitution. For too long have we as children wasted our childhood in excruciating and demeaning labour. For too long have we watched others, far removed from the sources of production, taking decisions that so fundamentally and adversely affect our lives. For too long have we witnessed efforts to divide our unity, our struggles and our links to nature. For too long has the mesmerising power of the consumerist dream held the hearts and minds of so many of us captive. For too long have our cultures and languages, our ways of knowing and being, been devalued, disrupted, corrupted and marginalised. For too long have religious and cultural intolerance, political extremism, racism and homophobia pervaded our communities and our lives.

In the name of humanism, the dominant form of modernization dehumanizes. In the name of its rationality (mostly through mindless and irrational quantification like GNP) and its claim to truth, it justifies inequality, exploitation and subjugation. We represent growing voices that are saying, Enough! Voices that celebrate collective envisioning of societies that are gender just, ecologically sustainable and politically democratic; societies that celebrate diversity and pluralism; societies where sustainable livelihoods, security and dignity are

assured; societies which are responsible to the peaceful, just and ecologically secure future of our children.

Our vision projects the task of fundamentally remaking the dominant paradigm of civilisation characterised by the myth of linear development, unlimited GNP growth, progress based on the 'conquest' of nature, primacy of production at the cost of replenishment and reproduction, male domination, cultural homogenisation and continued colonisation of people, identities, and nature. In our vision, different dimensions of life have to be linked in an organic and dynamic manner so that cycles of production, consumption and reproduction are coordinated with the cycles of nature.

Our vision projects a society based on life-centred values – compassion, caring, nurturing and sharing – values that will be embraced by all, men and women alike, and will permeate social relations and introduce dialogic relationships between human communities and nature. Our vision projects a process of integration of productive activities with reproductive activities - our pursuit to eat, feed, bear, nurture, enjoy, mourn, to regenerate ourselves and the next generations in social relations – into a wholeness of life.

This process requires serious efforts, particularly on the part of men, for the dominant values consolidated through history assume that production is supreme and reproduction secondary, and that the endeavour to achieve mastery over one's fate is the pursuit of conquest of nature and other human beings through annihilating competition, destructive technologies, military actions and institutional violence in the name of government, politics, ethnicity, economics and religion. Our vision informed and enriched by our feminist perspectives will release us from the trappings of the "male"-centred logic of dualistic thinking that dichotomizes relations into two poles - - body and mind, nature and man, public and private, traditional and modern, unpaid therefore worthless work and paid therefore valued work, as well as the gender dichotomy assimilating women to nature and men to civilization.

Our vision projects a democratic and participatory mode of governance and functioning that goes far beyond conventional representative democracy. Democratisation must be carried out in everyday relationships, in households between men and women as well as adults and children, at the community level as well as the national and global levels. The functioning of institutions and bureaucracies must also imbibe processes of participatory functioning. Community control of natural resources and plural systems of social organisation are important elements of our vision. The enriched concepts of human rights — indigenous peoples' rights, women's reproductive and social rights, and other collective rights, which represent the best legacies of the people's struggles, will be promoted and enhanced in this democratic process.

Our vision projects global democracy — transborder participatory democracy highlighted in the PP21 Minamata Declaration — to counter and to finally dismantle global power centres and also overcome the overarching problem of human society today --- the division of the people of the world into the North and the South.

We shall work to build new relationships with each other — between men and women, between producers and consumers, between urban and rural, between North and South, between human beings and nature. These processes of democratisation, at all levels, will be exercised by alliances of people throughout the world — Alliances of Hope -- which will be formed in dynamic interaction in the spirit of peace, tolerance, ecological sanity and peaceful coexistence. People's governance will be rooted in these alliances. Sustainability, in our vision, means that global human socio- economic systems are reorganised on the principle that human activities are integrated with nature through eco-cycles, and not based on unilateral exploitation of nature. This calls for a fundamental cultural and value change. Asia-Pacific abounds in experiences and wisdom of indigenous peoples, women and farmers who have developed nature-friendly approaches and views of life. The people's wisdom points to an entirely different paradigm and norm of human society. Obviously we are not advocating going back to a pre-modern period. Such wisdom will be fully developed through integration with positive aspects of the legacy of modernity.

We approach the burning issues of peace and security from people's perspectives. We refuse to be misguided by the doctrine of the national security state, or be trapped by ethnic or religious chauvinistic cries for the exclusion of others. We seek to establish people's security. It does not make a difference who violates our lives and kills us. Implicit in the call for peace is a call for an end to violence of all kinds, and especially an end to the use of violence to resolve conflicts. The increase in civil strife across our region — communal, religious, ethnic, sectarian — and inter-state violence have not only caused as much destruction and damage as full-scale wars; they have installed militarisation in our midst in such a way that tools of destruction are today an increasing feature of the landscape in our countries. While struggling to make the state and other institutions of power accountable to the people, we empower ourselves to begin building alternative systems of production, circulation and consumption of goods and services under people's control, and encourage the gradual emergence of people-based economic, social and cultural systems. We shall work to build linkages for the circulation and development of people's knowledge and people's governance at all levels. In resisting and building, we work for the empowerment of ourselves. Without resistance, we cannot build our alternatives; without linking, our resistance will not be sustainable. In

building a new society with new relationships, we do not pretend that we already have the complete vision and the path — we have trails amidst hazy light. We strive to widen the trails and reduce the haze by reflecting on and critiquing our own complicity in the perpetuation of the dominant system, our own reproduction of hierarchical relationships, our own tacitness in the face of injustices, and our own fears and shames. By confronting ourselves, as well as our foes, resistance can be developed at all levels, from family to community, from intra group relationships to inter group relationships.

COMMITTING OURSELVES, BUILDING LINKAGES

Having outlined the celebrations of not only our struggles and visions, but also of the constructive work being done to forge new alternatives through grassroots practice, we assert, with undiminished hope and optimism and with fresh vitality, our commitments.

We commit ourselves to build and strengthen alliances within and across national boundaries. The basis of these alliances will be love, peace, mutual trust, and non-exploitative and transparent relationships. These alliances will not remain confined to mere expressions of solidarity, but will facilitate alternative social, economic and ecological relationships based on systems of dynamic, organic circularity.

We commit ourselves to build people to people alliances that will actively intervene in the existing institutions of power and decision making, at the local, national and global levels. Such empowered intervention will have as its goal the reorientation and making transparent and democratic the functioning of processes and institutions of power and decision-making. In particular, we commit ourselves to wage a ceaseless battle to ensure the transparency and democratization of international and regional trade and financial institutions whose functioning is devastating the lives of a majority of people.

We commit ourselves to strengthen and regenerate local production and economies which act as the basis of life-support systems of a majority of people. In order to achieve this, we commit ourselves to resist imposition of large-scale destructive projects (such as huge supermarkets at the cost of local shops, or large dams), and to protect and conserve natural resources through practices of sustainable use, to promote and strengthen the diversity of cultural and social practices, to strengthen empirically validated traditional wisdom in areas like health care and community health, artisanal technologies and agricultural practices and above all, we commit ourselves to facilitate and

restore the democratic control of resources, production and markets to the primary producers.

We commit ourselves to build an entirely new science/technology- society relationship that integrates traditional practices and wisdom with new knowledge in a manner that ensures decentralised, ecologically friendly, gender sensitive processes of production to fulfill needs rather than greed.

We commit ourselves to conserve biodiversity and protect indigenous people's and local community's knowledge and people's intellectual property rights against onslaughts from foreign bioprospectors especially those associated with transnational corporations. It will be our endeavour to ensure that local species and related knowledge and practice remain community properties of associated people. Attempts to monopolise such knowledge by forces of greed and profit will be effectively challenged. Regeneration of local seed varieties, setting up of herbal gardens combined with practices that integrate agriculture, horticulture, floriculture, pisciculture, silviculture, poultry and animal husbandry will be one of our agendas for action.

We commit ourselves to work ceaselessly towards the empowerment of women so that women and men share equal responsibility for decision making and control not only at political and public levels, but in each household. Waging strategic battles against the forces of patriarchy in all its manifestations is our commitment. In particular, we commit ourselves to work towards rooting out all forms of violence against women and children, including trafficking. We are also committed to reorient processes of social functioning and discourse to enrich families, communities and societies with values of peace, love and cooperation.

We commit ourselves to the spreading resistance of workers all over Asia against super-exploitation, long working hours and hazardous working conditions --- suffered particularly by young women workers from the countryside. Efforts are needed to redress the disruption of the countryside which is one main reason for the outflow of rural labour.

We commit ourselves to the resistance against arbitrary relocation of factories by multinationals and business interests pursuing quick returns. We pledge the fight for labour rights especially the right to organize autonomous labour unions and movements. We commit ourselves to promoting region-wide people's networks to build effective resistance to the multinationals.

We recognize the immediate concern of migrant workers and commit ourselves to find help and provide solace in an effective manner. At the same time, we commit ourselves to a process of building a migrant workers movement for the

development of the means and spaces that can guarantee the taking back of control over the conditions of production, reproduction and consumption.

We commit ourselves to support the struggle of indigenous and colonised peoples for self rule and decolonisation. We celebrate our perseverance and struggle against large unsustainable development projects. We will continue to struggle against disposition and displacement.

We commit ourselves to work with determination to eliminate sources of widespread violence that are inherent in religious intolerance, mindless militarisation and testing of nuclear bombs and weapons of mass destruction at enormous costs. We are committed to usher in an era of peace, cooperation and security for all peoples.

We commit ourselves to counter the very premise of affluence, consumption and consumerism that are the basis of Northern lifestyles as well as aspiration of minority populations in Southern countries. This will be attempted by organising critical interactions at the level of theory and practice, between social movements, activists and sensitive intellectuals and professionals to systematically search for new theories, philosophy, spirituality, strategies and alternative models, drawing on the enormous wisdom and practice in the East.

We commit ourselves to promote a transparent and democratic form of functioning among people's organisations, voluntary groups and NGOs in order to ensure that our functioning and behaviour remain immune from dangers of cooptation or inappropriate representation.

Our gathering here, at this place, is not the beginning nor is it the end. It is only a stop for refreshing, renewing and rejuvenating our journey for life and truth. As we pause here under this shade of inspiration, we pledge never to lose our sense of outrage against injustice.

Refreshed and rejuvenated, we commit ourselves to support and to learn from one another because we depend on one another and because we are different from one another. Diversity is our vitality. It is through maintaining and promoting our diversities that we can more organically link with one another laterally, converge in our efforts to resist subjugating forces, and build mutually enriching, plural relations. To maintain the vitality of all these, we commit ourselves to participate in the process of shaping and reshaping our visions of the possible, which is at the same time the process of learning from one another to articulate our problems and alternatives anew, allowing the micro and the immediate to be reframed in global contexts.

(Sagarmatha is the Nepalese name for Mount Everest. We originally planned to converge in Colombo, Sri Lanka, but due to circumstances beyond our control, an alternative venue was sought. In a true spirit of solidarity, encouragement and support, friends from Nepal offered to host the convergence. Though in Kathmandu, our hearts and prayers, concerns and good wishes are with the people of Sri Lanka and their quest for a just and peaceful resolution to the conflict).

