



**THE ASIA EUROPE PEOPLE'S FORUM**  
*Interregional network of social movements and  
civil society organizations across Asia and Europe*

## **Call to Action - Challenging and Eroding Corporate Power - Building States of Citizens for Citizens**

### **Background**

From 4-5<sup>th</sup> October 2010, heads of state and governments from across Asia and Europe met in Brussels for the eighth Asia Europe Meeting (ASEM8) to discuss their future priorities and plans. From 2-5<sup>th</sup> October around 600 civil society, NGO and people's organisations representatives, activists and parliamentarians from across Asia and Europe, met in Brussels for the 8th Asia Europe People's Forum (AEPF).

AEPF is a strategic civil society gathering of Asian and European social movements fighting poverty and inequality and working for social justice. AEPF began in 1996 in Bangkok, in parallel, and in response to the first ASEM summit which pushed for stronger regional blocs and the promotion of corporate power. AEPF is grounded in the common desire of people's organisations and social justice networks across Asia and Europe to open up new venues for dialogue, solidarity and action.

The following call to action is based on the recommendations from the many events that were held throughout these four days, focussing on the relation of corporate power to trade and investment, food sovereignty, climate change, decent work, and peace and security.

**For further information please see [www.aepf.info](http://www.aepf.info)**

### **Call to Action - from the 8<sup>th</sup> Asia Europe People's Forum**

*Poverty is created by unequal economic systems - it can be eradicated. Governments need to reassert their control over corporations and be accountable to their citizens. Ultimately it is a question of political choice and priorities.*

Charles Santiago, MP

Malaysia

ASEM8 is an historic opportunity for governments to take the timely and decisive actions needed to address the social, economic and environmental crises that have deepened the poverty, injustice, loss of employment, and exclusion faced by millions of women and men across Asia and Europe. The gap between the rich and the poor is widening, and access to resources, livelihood opportunities and basic services remain grossly unequal.

Despite the policy failures of trade liberalisation, market deregulation and privatisation, governments continue to ignore the growing tangible consensus for fundamental policy change. Instead of fulfilling the needs of

people and reinvigorating local economies, hundreds of billions of dollars have been mobilised to save the banks and financial system, while essential social services remain under-funded and threatened.

Despite existing laws, regulations, standards and mechanisms, governments have failed to prioritise human rights, environmental security and labour rights, over the profits of companies. There has been a lack of political will in implementing regulation and establishing redress mechanisms for companies operating in, and beyond their territories.

Companies and businesses have used their expanded legal rights and exceptional access to decision-makers to aggressively push for policies that open up new markets and allow access to raw materials regardless of the social or environmental costs. We see this repeated in Brussels with the Asia Europe Business Forum, which brings together EC, government officials and corporate lobbyists.

*Governments must live up to their human rights obligations, including the duty to protect against abuses involving corporations.*

Mary Robinson

The consequences of this corporate domination are experienced in the lives of millions of women, men and children across Asia and Europe. This has led to a hollowing out of democratic accountability as elites make decisions and implement policies with little or no scrutiny from citizens, creating the conditions for poverty, inequality, environmental devastation and growing social unrest.

**The Asia-Europe People's Forum, representing citizens, people and social movements from Asia and Europe, is calling on the Heads of State and Government of the ASEM member countries to take forward the following actions:**

<b>Promote human rights and tackle exclusion</b>
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- Fully ratify and integrate into national laws the commitments made in the **Convention of the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women.**
- Take immediate measures to **prevent discrimination** on any grounds, including **caste-based discrimination**, and take special measures to assure decent work conditions for the Dalits in South Asia.
- Ensure **democratic, transparent and just governance systems** that are accountable to citizens based on agreed international human rights principles and legislation.
- **Stop the criminalisation of undocumented migrants and refugees.** Repeal the EU Return Directive which legitimises the massive arrests of undocumented migrants and detention without due process of law, up to 18 months (of detention) including pregnant women and a ban of no

return for 5 years.

### **Promote sustainable solutions to the economic and financial crises**

*Europe and Asia should pursue a comprehensive recovery plan with people and the environment at its heart, based on principles of redistribution of income and wealth, enabling countries to invest in low-carbon development, sustainable decent jobs, education and to meet basic needs.*

- Introduce a **Financial Transactions Tax** to generate funds to support poverty alleviation and climate adaptation.
- Ensure **stabilised exchange rates** by establishing a new global reserve currency system, as promoted by the recent UN summit on the global crisis.
- Strictly **regulate all financial actors, institutions and products**. All financial operators must operate with full transparency and be regulated and supervised. Restore the clear separation between savings banks and investment banks. Prohibit off balance sheet and offshore transactions, over the counter trading and high risk financial operations (i.e. short selling, structured investment vehicles and collateralised debt obligations). Ban all speculation on commodities.
- **Reform and restructure the International Financial Institutions**.
- **Reverse the privatisation of the banking sector** and return banks to the purpose for which they were designed.
- **Implement universal social protection policies**, essential in alleviating poverty, using the UN Social Protection Floor Initiative as a starting point. Ensure social protection is part of the EU's Development Co-operation strategy and develop a Communication on Social Protection in development cooperation, linked to a concrete, time-bound action plan with dedicated resources to support the implementation of long-term and sustainable social protection systems. The state has the obligation to provide and manage social protection schemes and they should not be managed or run as a business insurance system.
- **Responsibly address the debt problem** in Asia and Europe. Conduct debt audits, end unsustainable and illegitimate debts and reform lending and borrowing procedures.

### **Support a Just Trade and Investment system**

*Europe and Asian governments should take forward trade and investment policies that put the interest of farmers, workers, the environment and respect for human rights first by:*

- Agree to a **moratorium on the EU's Global Europe Strategy and all ongoing free trade negotiations between, and within Asia and Europe**.
- Put on hold all European member states **Bilateral Investment Treaties negotiations**, while the new EU investment policy framework is being

- defined. Ensure the protection of public rights over private interests.
- Support an **independent investigation and stakeholder consultation process on the impact of current EU and Asia trade policies** on poverty and social, environmental and human rights.
  - Replace the **investor-to-state dispute settlement mechanism**, embedded in international treaties, with a state-to-state mechanism.
  - Base **all future EU-Asia trade relations** on an approach that:
    - o recognises small producers' rights to trade protection within their own domestic and regional markets
    - o bases its relations on a principle of non-reciprocity and differential treatment
    - o recognises and supports food sovereignty of countries, consumers and producers
    - o respects the right of countries to formulate and pursue their own development strategies and economic models in the public interest
    - o promotes and enables universal access to essential public services
    - o allows for the regulation of imports, exports and investments to fulfill social, economic, civil and political rights
    - o is democratic and inclusive, subjecting any agreement to a public and parliamentary scrutiny and regular review and accountability mechanisms
    - o prevents discriminatory and devastating subsidy regimes

### **Make corporations accountable to governments and governments accountable to citizens**

*Voluntary codes of conduct have not prevented human rights and environmental abuses. Growing corporate influence has created a democratic deficit that urgently needs to be addressed. Asian and European Governments should:*

- Work, with the full involvement of the ILO towards the development of **international legally binding instruments** to define and enforce corporations' legal responsibilities and accountability for their activities. Increase transparency of corporate accounts by adopting a country-by-country reporting standard for multinational companies. Ensure that corporations annually disclose their finances, environmental, workers safety, human and labour rights, lobbying and tax records.
- Promote the creation of an **International Economic Tribunal** that can adjudicate on trans-national corporations and impose appropriate sanctions.
- Introduce a **high-quality, mandatory lobbying transparency register**, to end the excessive political influence of corporate lobby groups. Assure full transparency, rules and safeguards against corporate

capture of policy making and European Commission advisory groups; close the revolving door between the European Commission and industry lobbies; implement effective conflicts of interest rules for Commissioners, Commission officials and Commission Special Advisers and institute enforceable ethics rules for corporate and business lobbyists, among others.

- **Close down tax havens** under the jurisdiction of any EU member state and Asian countries.
- Ensure **greater transparency in the management of natural resource revenues**, by demonstrating support for complementary voluntary and mandatory mechanisms. Support the global Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative by providing increased political, financial and technical support to resource-rich countries to ensure full and timely implementation of the EITI. Champion revenue transparency by requiring country-by-country financial reporting for companies engaged in oil, gas or mineral extraction (through the adoption of national laws, stock listing requirements or as part of an International Financial Reporting Standard).
- Repeal the **EU Raw Materials and Access to Markets legislation**.

## **Protect rights to food, water and health**

*EU and Asian Governments should promote agriculture, food, energy and trade policies to meet the need for healthy, adequate and affordable food, and water and sanitation. Asian and European Governments should:*

- Building on the July 2010 UN Resolution on the Fundamental Right to Water and Sanitation **increase the funding for publicly managed water and sanitation infrastructure**. Increase political and financial support for public-public partnerships in the water and sanitation sector.
- Take immediate action to **curb financial speculation on food stocks and prices** by implementing a global registry of all commodity-related spot and derivatives transactions (including both exchange and OTC futures); restrict or prohibit investment funds' (including ETFs') access to commodity markets; introduce effective position limits and introduce comprehensive regulation of OTC trade, including the clearing of transactions.
- Reform **the EU Common Agricultural Policy and export-led agricultural models to end dumping of agricultural goods and support small scale sustainable food production and food sovereignty**.
- Stop promoting the use and the production of **industrial agrofuels**, the EU should revoke its mandatory target on agrofuels by 2020.
- **Stop land grabbing and forced land acquisitions** that are taking millions of hectares out of essential food production. Guarantee security of access to land and coastal and marine resources for women and men involved in small scale agricultural production and fishing.
- **Safeguard and fund accessible and free health care**.

- Stop the building of large dams which have produced severe environmental, economic and safety concerns and have evicted millions from their homes and livelihoods.

### **Promote Climate Justice**

*Addressing climate change requires a shift towards a low carbon economy. To achieve this Asian and European Governments should:*

- Ensure **global temperatures do not rise more than 1.5°C to avoid catastrophic climate change**. European countries should reduce their emissions by 40% of their 1990 level by 2020 without offset or resorting to dangerous and costly nuclear power - enabling greenhouse gas concentrations to stabilise at 300ppm.
- All climate change interventions should be made within the **framework of social and inter-generational justice and human rights**.
- **European countries should meet the costs of adaptation and mitigation** based on differentiated responsibilities (not through loans).
- **Invest in the just transition of the economy comprising green decent jobs, skills development, vocational training, social dialogue and protection**, and co-ordinated industrial policies. Invest public funds generated by new taxes in the rebuilding and expansion of public infrastructure (public transport, sustainable local energy systems etc). Subsidies and aid packages for any industry sector should be used to help the sector and its employees to transition to a low carbon economy, in the reconstruction of devastated communities and environmental regeneration.
- Introduce an **international tax on shipping and aviation emissions** to reduce emissions.
- Support the creation of a **Climate and Environmental Justice Tribunal**.
- All funds for climate mitigation and adaptation should be managed **by legitimate UN agencies** such as UNCTAD.

### **Promote Decent Work**

*The decent work agenda requires Asian and European governments to commit to Core Labour Standards, the creation of decent jobs, social dialogue and social protection. To achieve this Asian and European governments should:*

- **Ratify and implement ILO Conventions and Core Labour Standards revising labour laws where they are not in compliance with Conventions**. In particular:
  - o ILO Convention 87 and 98 on Freedom of Association and Collective Bargaining.
  - o Support the finalisation of an ILO Convention on Domestic Work at the International Labour Conference in July 2011.

- Sign and implement UN Convention on the Protection of the Rights of all Migrant Workers and Members of their Families.
- Adopt national economic policies that **guarantee decent wages.**
- **Create and protect decent jobs for all**, particularly for young people, women, disabled people and workers within the informal sector, by prioritising investment of resources in local economic development and tackling the persistence of precarious working conditions through the development and enforcement of labour laws. Temporary contracts should be limited to work that is temporary in nature only, and direct employment of workers should be ensured through strong regulation and restriction of employment through labour agencies. Governments should invest more in labour inspection, (i.e. more resources for the training of inspectors, increase the number of independent inspectors and perform more labour inspections in the field).
- Initiate a process of “**upwards**” **harmonisation of workers incomes, social and labour rights in Asia and Europe, including equal rights for migrant workers.**
- **Guarantee access to social protection, job security, health care, maternity leave and essential services for permanent, contract, disabled and migrant workers** by implementing national integrated and participatory policies on social security. Prioritise the enforcement of employment law over the enforcement of immigration policies to address the widespread exploitation of migrant workers and to ensure that migrant workers have full access to legal redress mechanisms when their rights are violated (including the provision of visa/residence permits independent from the employer).
- End all forms of **gender-based violence and discrimination against workers, including migrant workers** (e.g. obligatory pregnancy and/or STD tests), through ensuring appropriate legal and policy standards in coordination with women organisations and migrant communities.
- Take immediate steps to prevent the **exploitation of child labour.**