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Follow-up Action on **Peoples Agenda**

South Asian Regional Forum **REPORT**



KATHMANDU



2005

SOUTH ASIAN PEOPLES SUMMIT

South Asian Regional Forum
R E P O R T

Follow-up Action on
Peoples Agenda

**Kathmandu
2005**

South Asian Peoples Summit

Organized by
SOUTH ASIA PARTNERSHIP INTERNATIONAL (SAP I)

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MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

South Asia Partnership International's (SAP-I) through a sequence of People's Summit events is facilitating regional people's movement, through campaigns confronting some of the most pressing problems faced by the people and advocated that SAARC and its constituent states fulfill their responsibilities in ensuring basic Human Rights, social justice and services.



SAP-I in an effort to mobilise citizen's consensus on common regional issues has facilitated follow-up sessions to further articulate and prioritize key themes outlined in the People's Summits and shared them widely with citizens and the governments of the region. It is increasingly become important that people of the region forge strong linkages and support mechanisms across boundaries to build people's pressure on their respective governments to take up issues on an urgent basis.

SAP-I has therefore convened five annual People's Summits in the past to coincide with the planned SAARC Summits. On two of these occasions, SAARC failed to meet but the People's Summit continued. Each event brought several hundred people from different regional civil society organisations and networks together to raise critical issues that affected people's lives across the region.

In the follow-up discussions held over three days during Regional Forum held in Kathmandu from August 1 to 3, 2005 representatives of civil society organizations have identified five critical themes, out of many in the region, and developed plans to mobilize public attention. The forum called for:

1. Realizing people's democratic rights through immediate restoration of democracy in all SAARC states.
2. Peaceful, democratic and just resolution of all conflicts in the region
3. Guarantee basic economic & social rights of the people by setting minimum regional standards.
4. Prevent or mitigate water-related & cross border disasters through regional dialogues and take concrete measures to address the core issues.
5. Institute concrete social security measures providing a minimum income, unemployment benefits, health care and education for all citizens.

The issues and recommendations outlined in this report have been formulated through intensive deliberations. I therefore urge the Heads of Government of the South Asian Region through the SAARC secretariat to take the people's recommendations outlined in this report and open up their process to include meaningful dialogue on critical issues with the people in the preparation for and during the SAARC summit.

Finally on behalf of the SAP-International board and staff, I would like to thank SAP-Nepal's team for their hard work and effective logistic management throughout the summit. We are indeed also thankful to CIDA, for providing assistance to make the event possible.

Bushra Gohar
Chairperson
SAP-International

FOREWORD

South Asia is home to the world's poorest of the poor. Increasing communalization, religious fundamentalism and weaponisation have magnified numerous regional issues such as mass poverty, environmental degradation, natural catastrophes, social security, small arms trade, girl child and women trafficking and economic cooperation. The production of nuclear weapons by India and Pakistan has further jeopardized the region's security.



The South Asian region comprises a multi-ethnic, multi-linguistic, and multi-cultural society. In order to retain their distinct identities the people of the region expect proportional access to policymaking and political options. However, some of the despotic regimes of South Asia have denied the people their basic rights and democracy has become a farce. Similarly, social security has largely been ignored as it has received little priority from the governments of the countries within SAARC.

“Peace” is a major area of concern for the people of South Asia where the atmosphere is predominantly hostile. Water and its distribution is a major cause of dispute between India and Pakistan, Nepal and India and between India and Bangladesh.

SAARC has fallen behind in the promotion of regional cooperation, the restoration of peace and the settlement of regional disputes. The absence of a collective effort for regional cooperation has caused SAARC to lag behind other regional blocs. Its failure to promote regional cohesiveness and settle disputes, the low levels of regional and bilateral trade, the proliferation of small arms, and increasing militarization have created a the lack of ‘region-ness’ among the South Asian countries.

At the same time, people of the region are concerned about the preservation of their identity and their sovereignty. On the other hand, they face the challenge of coming together and cooperating in the larger interest of the region. There cannot be any achievement of results until the people and the civil society become more vibrant. Not only is there an absence of close regional cooperation but there is also a focus on a militarization process that undermines the basic rights of the people.

Since the countries of the region share similar problems there is a need for a consolidated approach to encourage people-to-people connections among South Asian nations. SAP-I has for long been facilitating different regional forums to achieve this objective. During the various people's summits and again in the Regional Forum held in Kathmandu, the participants highlighted the people's desire for peace despite various hardships.

The Regional Forum was held with an objective to institutionalize regional forums, to enhance people-to-people initiatives and to provide opportunities to learn from each other's experiences. People from various walks of life have been invited and collective action planned. It recognises and appreciates the concerted efforts of all the participants to gain success.

We are grateful to CIDA for providing the financial assistance required to organize this event. Finally, I would like to thank SAP Nepal and Bellasap team members for their dedication in making the process of Thematic Commission a success.

Rohit Kumar Nepali, Ph D
Executive Director,
SAP International

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1. BACKGROUND

1. BACKGROUND

1.1 Introduction

New social movements spearheaded by the civil society (people's movements and NGOs) have been instrumental in forging a people-to-people forum in South Asian countries and in enabling non-government voices to be heard at the regional level. South Asia Partnership International (SAP-I) and its member national organizations in Bangladesh, Canada, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka have, for more than 20 years, been promoting regional linkages among civil society organizations for effective human development.

The People's Summit, held annually since 2001, is an important event of the SAP network that provides a platform for the action on the "people's agenda" of common South Asian issues on which civil society can engage with national governments and regional institutions. While SAARC does not have the mechanism to enable the civil society to interact with them, the People's Summit with its people-to-people approach helps achieve this objective.

The fifth People's Summit, which took place in Bangladesh on February 5&6, 2005, was another milestone in attaining the larger goal of regional development. Over 200 people from different civil societies of the region participated in the summit. SAP-I organized a Regional Forum from August 1-3, 2005 as a follow-up to the previous summits to redirect the commitments made by various stakeholders towards the alleviation of the identified regional issues. This event was organised at SAP-Falcha, Babarmahal, Kathmandu, Nepal

1.2 Objectives

Although South Asia is rich in natural resources and has a huge pool of manpower, it is ironically one of the poorest regions in the world.

Even though India and Pakistan are nuclear powers, many countries of this region are still developing states with their own constraints and conflicts. Most of the countries in South Asia today are engaged in fighting either insurgencies or in attempting to root out terrorism.

At the opening of the forum it was emphasized that since the regional countries share similar problems there was an increasing need for a **consolidated approach** to encourage people-to-people connection between the countries in South Asia. SAP-I has, for long, been facilitating different regional forums for this very objective. During the last people's summit held in Bangladesh, the participants highlighted the people's desire for peace despite various hardships.

The objective of the sixth summit was therefore to institutionalize regional forums, to enhance people-to-people initiatives and to provide opportunities to learn from each other's experiences. The summit was crucial in providing continuity to the efforts of SAP-I towards enhancing regional cooperation. The major objectives of the regional forum were:

- To formalize **South Asian Peoples' Summit** to bring the issue-based debates at the regional level on an ongoing basis.
- To develop collective regional and national plans of action and advocacy strategies on the issues generated by the fifth People's Summit,
- To analyze, synthesize, disseminate information on regional issues and propose follow-up actions.

1.3 Participants

In the follow-up event, more than 60 representatives of the civil society from South Asia discussed themes identified during the People's Summits.

The summit attracted a wide representation of people from various sections of society. Participants of the people's summit included SAP-I executives from various countries, journalists, civil society representatives, NGO delegates, students, experts, academicians, and human rights activists among others.¹

¹ Participant List is in the Annex 2

2. JOINT DECLARATION

2. JOINT DECLARATION

As representatives of movements, networks, and organizations from five South Asian countries, we assert our identity as South Asians and call for all citizens in the region to have their rights fulfilled.

In the discussions held over three days, from August 1 to 3, 2005, we have found:

- Continuing serious limits in the practice of democracy,
- a troubling growth in military expenditure at the cost of the people's basic needs,
- the absence of any real social security for most citizens,
- the persistence of hunger,
- inaction on many issues such as human trafficking and
- the inability of governments to deal effectively with disasters, natural and human-made
- the exclusion of many communities of society from full political, economic and social activities.

We have identified five critical themes, out of many in the region, and developed plans to mobilize public attention toward specific actions on them.

South Asia Partnership International has convened five annual People's Summits in the past to coincide with the planned SAARC Summits. On two of these occasions, SAARC failed to meet but the People's Summit continued. Each event brought several hundred people from different regional civil societies together to raise critical issues that affected people's lives across the region.

At this forum, held between People's Summits, participants responded to SAP International's call to transform the sequence of

People's Summit events into an ongoing movement, through campaigns that confronted some of the most pressing problems of the region and advocated that SAARC and its constituent states should accept their responsibilities fully and to transform the lives and conditions of people across South Asia.

The forum identified five broad themes that require urgent attention:

Democracy: As an important first set of steps toward realizing the people's democratic rights we call for:

- Immediate restoration of full democratic governance in all SAARC states,
- Enactment of a minimum of 33% representation of women at all levels of government throughout the region, and commitment by all political parties to ensure women's full participation in their organizational and electoral activities
- Full inclusion of historically marginalized communities into the democratic process
- Empowering local government to work directly on the people's needs in their communities.

We will launch, with other movements and organizations a regional **campaign for democracy**, starting with these demands, and aimed at establishing the sovereignty of elected parliaments and the inviolability of the fundamental rights of citizens.

Peace and militarization: We call for:

- the peaceful, democratic and just resolution of all conflicts in the region
- the reduction of military expenditure by 10% annually and the funds redirected to social security.

We see such a financial step by governments both as a substantial measure and a symbol of a move toward a more peaceful South Asia. We aim to create a **People's Peace Commission** to monitor peace processes and the arms trade and to focus public attention on these issues. We also resolve to observe September

21, the **United Nations' Peace Day**, as a day of peace throughout South Asia and call on all warring parties to observe a cease fire on this day.

Human Trafficking: We call for:

- the ratification and effective implementation of the SAARC convention on trafficking of human beings
- the adoption and ratification of the regional Victim/Witness Protection Protocol to combat trafficking, commercial exploitation and sexual abuse of women and children in South Asia
- regional protocol on minimum standard of care and support for the victims of trafficking and other forms of violence in South Asia
- the creation of a tribunal to monitor these instruments.

We also call on governments to address the issues of refugees in the region, both to resolve the difficult circumstances of these people and to eliminate the cause of trafficking in South Asia.

Social security: We call for:

- South Asian governments to guarantee basic economic and social rights of the people by setting minimum regional standards, and by instituting concrete social security measures to provide a minimum income, unemployment benefits, health care and education for all citizens
- the public scrutiny of major donor projects and other schemes to privatize social security measures and to assert government accountability to protect and provide for its citizens
- the substantial allocation of additional budgetary resources to education, health, and other social areas.

Disasters: We recognize that, in a disaster-prone region, many disasters are water-related, cross border in character, and created or magnified by human activity. We call for:

- governments to prevent or mitigate such disasters through regional dialogues and concrete actions, such as the

framework of action from the World Conference on Disaster Reduction.

- a regional review of the strategies for disaster management developed by UNDP and other agencies in consultation with governments to identify gaps and ensure public participation in their application

We intend to generate more public dialogues to bring a sharper focus to the issues.

We note that the next SAARC Summit is scheduled for November 2005 in Dhaka. So far SAARC has failed to address the concerns of the people of the region. We recognize that this twentieth anniversary is an excellent opportunity for the total reform and strengthening of SAARC. We reiterate our demand for this review, to include:

- the removal of the unanimity rule for the convening of SAARC and its decisions
- the ability to address bilateral issues and conflicts in the spirit of regional cooperation
- democratic and transparent process to allow broad dialogue with people's movements and civil society organizations.

Kathmandu
August 3, 2005

3. PROCEEDINGS

3. PROCEEDINGS

3.1 Inaugural Session

People's Summits have been organized regularly in various South Asian nations to discuss and design ways to deal with various issues confronting the regional countries. The sixth summit was effectively organized to discuss reasons for the pathetic inability of the governments to improve the socio-economic status of the people in the region. South Asia still has the highest level of illiteracy, women are still cruelly marginalized and people are still dying of starvation. This means poverty alleviation goals have not yet been realized. Thirty three per cent of the fund meant for development is diverted and spent on military expenditure, thereby making compromises on the needs of the people.

The regional forum for the follow-up of the People's Summit attracted a wide representation of people from various sections of society. Participants of the people's summit included SAP-I executives from various countries, journalists, civil society representatives, NGO delegates, students, experts, academicians, human rights activists, among others.

The participants had gathered to see what commitments had been made in past summits and how they could take these commitments forward; what kind of resources were needed; how to achieve the aims, etc. So, faced with these major challenges the three-day workshop started amidst a lot of enthusiasm. A set of action plans and recommendations were also framed for a one-year period during the entire Regional Forum.

Bushra Gohar, Chairperson, SAP-International chaired the inaugural session. Since the regional countries share similar problems the opening of the forum laid emphasis on there is an increasing need for a consolidated approach to encourage people-to-people connections between the countries in South Asia. SAP-I has, for long, been facilitating different regional forums for this very objective. During the last people's summit held in Bangladesh, the participants highlighted the people's desire for peace despite various hardships.

The Regional Forum was held with an objective to institutionalize regional forums to enhance people-to-people initiatives and to provide opportunities learnt from each other's experiences. The summit was crucial in providing continuity to the efforts of the SAP system as well as the civil society towards enhancing regional cooperation.

Of late, there has emerged an increasing number of positive signs that show that the participation of the civil society has been growing in South Asia. A lot has been discussed and said. "It is time for the civil society to play a role to give vitality to enable SAARC to perform and thus prod the governments into involving the people," said Ms. Bushra Gohar, Chairperson, SAP-I.

"In Dhaka, she said, "the summit was named "People's summit for people's SAARC," but the SAARC secretariat was not happy. This is just a small example of just how the attitude amongst the heads of the governments confirms the humongous challenges that lie ahead of us."

Referring to the colonial history and the nature of the states Ms Gohar spoke eloquently on this, saying, not long ago, there were colonial powers in the region, who exploited the people and endowed the elite with land and property. But now there are new viceroys in the form of dictators. We need to fight this. However, our response has become very weak. There was no ICT facility when the people fought against the colonial powers and yet the people came together to ultimately oust them. Now, with so much ICT the efforts of yore are lacking, though in today's world it is even more imperative that the new satraps ought to be ousted from their seats

of unbridled power. We have the best people in the region but why are we not standing for our rights? Our will and commitment are equally important for the success of any effort, and without such commitment nothing can be achieved.

Mr. Yadav Kant Silwal, Former Secretary General, SAARC Secretariat and also the Chief Guest of the opening session, said that the meeting of the regional forum took place at the most appropriate moment as the next SAARC summit was scheduled in Dhaka to commemorate SAARC's 20th anniversary. The exercise of the last five years would involve the people in building themselves into a functioning reality.

Until recently, regional cooperation was considered a legitimate right of the governments. But organizations like SAP provided the necessary fillip and vitality to the process. "If we are resolved to carry forward the plans, we will succeed. The commonalities between and among the South Asian countries are too visible to be ignored," said Mr. Silwal.

Mr. Yadav Kant Silwal said that on the one hand, people of the region were concerned about how to preserve their own identity and also protect their sovereignty. On the other, they faced the challenge of coming together and working in close cooperation in the larger interest of the region. The track-two approach was said to be mutually reinforcing. This required continuous political will and though it was easier said than done, there had to be perseverance on the part of the development workers. Unless the people and the civil society were vibrant, results could not be achieved. Mr. Silwal stressed the feelings of the participants and that hard work coupled with commitment could achieve a lot.

Mr. Karamat Ali, a Pakistan-based rights activist, spoke at length on this process. "The focus (in South Asia, right now) seems to be only on a military build-up."

Mr. Ali further remarked, "We see, on the one hand, closer regional cooperation but simultaneously we are undermining the basic rights of the people by focusing only on militarization process." Mr.

Ali said that there was an urgent need to find ways to deal with the official national ideology, for militarization and the division of people. He defined national interest in terms of the interests of the elite. He urged all to fight that sort of nationalism.

Privatization and other phenomena related to globalization were taking their toll on the lives of the poor of the region. For example, in Pakistan, electricity and the power supply sector had been the latest casualty — consigned to the status of an orphan while the focus remained on military build-up. According to Mr. Ali, there had been a constant attack on the rights of the people in the name of integration with globalization.

Mr. Ali proposed that, first and foremost, a great number of South Asians would have to collaborate to fulfill those goals that would be beneficial to all. “Unless we assert the rights of the majority there is no hope of creating mobilization in the interests of the people,” Mr. Ali added.

Although India was the only functioning democracy in South Asia, a study by Arundhati Roy, a renowned writer and activist, showed that Indians too were not happy with the democracy at home. In this context **Dr Padma Ratnayake**, executive director, SAP-Sri Lanka, drew the attention of the participants to the simple fact staring all of us in the face. She said that it was important to identify “how we perceive matters prevailing in our states.” “Whatever we do has to be done at the normative level: where we engage in conscious building among and within South Asian countries,” Dr Padma said. Many countries like Peru have already begun this process. In order to complement the government processes, engaged governance is vital.

These days more and more people emphasize on the role of Information Communication Technology (ICT), but what has it done so far? “There are the digital haves and have-nots.” Therefore, Dr Padma said that there were major challenges before the region. The people had to take initiatives and SAP was in a position to give new dimension to such initiatives.

Dr. Rohit Kumar Nepali, Executive Director, SAP-International, delivered his welcome note to the participants as the organizer of

the follow-up event. Dr Nepali laid emphasis on a greater “need for the civil society to come together and pressure the governments to be more sensitive of the people’s concerns.” He urged the civil society to come forward in an assertive manner. There was a need to forgo partisan politics for the sake of the poor. (For detailed speech, please go to Annex I).

For this, SAP-I has taken appropriate initiatives and within the region it is one of the most prominent bodies addressing these issues. The previous five people’s summits had invited people from various walks of life and also planned collective action. But the participants at the sixth meet believed that a lot more had yet to be done. In other words, a system has to be developed to help the people not just in the cities but by pressuring SAARC to formulate meaningful policies that will reach the majority living in the rural areas. Dr Nepali stated that there was a need to unite and develop guidelines for collective action on what had been decided in the past summits.

3.2 Day 1

SAP-Falcha, 1 August 2005

Second Session of the first day of the workshop started with a review of the past five Peoples Summits. The major task was to identify the priority areas where appropriate actions could be undertaken to tackle the identified regional issues. Mr. Mohamed Tahseen, Executive Director, SAP Pakistan and Dr Rohit Kumar Nepali coordinated the session.

Dr. Nepali made a presentation on the issues and recommendations of the last five People’s Summits that could be used as a basis for future discussion and planning. The issues and recommendations presented on the thematic areas of Reduction of Disaster in South Asian, Nations and Communities, Trafficking and Human Security, Poverty, Trade and Globalization, Livelihood, Gender & Labor, Governance and Peace & Militarization were as follow:¹

¹ A more detailed information on the presentation can be found in Chapter 4.

Reduction of Disaster in South Asian Nations and Communities

Issues and Concerns:

- Absence of regional policy framework and cooperation to deal with the cause of disaster
- Narrow state definition of disaster in some countries

Recommendations:

- Put poor and marginalized people at the center of disaster policies and practices
- Put pressure on countries to fulfill the commitments of the World Conference on Disaster Reduction (WCDR) & the Global and Indian Ocean early warning system

Trafficking And Human Security

Issues and Concerns:

- Definition of the SAARC Convention on Trafficking in Women and Children is too narrow and not in line with the UN Protocol 2000
- Globalization has created a lot of opportunities but has made women and children more vulnerable

Recommendations:

- Sign/ratify and implement all appropriate SAARC/ UN conventions, regional and international protocols related to Trafficking/ Migration of Women and Children,
- Establish a Treaty Monitoring System & Regional Tribunal to combat sexual exploitation

Poverty, Trade And Globalization

Issues and Concerns:

- Globalization and MNCs affecting facilities of the poor
- Changing policies in the region - a barrier to poverty eradication.

Recommendations:

- SARRC nations should come together to make the best use of their technologies

- Governments should provide opportunities to people dependent on agriculture e to escape vicious poverty circle

Livelihood, Gender & Labor

Issues and Concerns:

- The adoption of neo-liberal agendas of global economic growth systematically excluding women and the marginalized
- Absence of a comprehensive social security system

Recommendations:

- Governments' affirmative actions to eradicate all forms of discrimination
- Governments should ensure MDGs and report as part of international commitment

Governance

Issues and Concerns:

- Lack of power decentralization and devolution
- Deplorable levels of participation of women, *dalits*, and marginalized sections in decision-making

Recommendations:

- Stronger legal framework and implementation of decentralized local government institutions based on principle of subsidiaries
- Strengthen mechanisms to ensure women's participation in governance

Peace And Militarization

Issues and Concerns:

- Existence of economic and social discrimination based on caste, religion, ethnicity and gender
- Divisive politics of cultural nationalism & atrocities by the states

Recommendation:

- Creation of People's Peace Commission and Civic Monitoring Mechanism
- Develop a regional coalition to promote/strengthen a culture of peace

3.3 Day 2

SAP-Falcha, 2 August 2005

The following four areas of critical concern were again identified on the second day of the follow-up event:

1. Poverty, disasters and gender participation
2. Human trafficking, 3. Governance and peace
4. Organizational collaboration, institutional participation and network building

During the discussion the following New areas were also identified:

1. Neo-liberalization, social security
2. Democratization, equity
3. Militarization, nuclearization

The participants were then divided into five groups according to the five major identified thematic areas. The objective of the group work was to identify the major concerns circumscribing the thematic areas and then suggest appropriate recommendations and future plans of action to work on regionally. The thematic areas as identified in the Regional Forum were as follows:

1. Democracy
2. Peace and Militarization
3. Human Trafficking
4. Social Security
5. Disasters

Each group discussed to given issues and suggested appropriate recommendations and plans of action for future interventions. The recommendations and action plans suggested by each group will serve as guidelines for launching intervention strategies for each of the identified regional issues.¹

¹ The detail thematic group presentations are given in detail in the Chapter 4.

Group Works**1. Democracy****■ Focal Person : Dr. Padma Ratnayake**

The group discussed the major pressing issues regarding the failure of governance and the inefficient bureaucracy of the South Asian countries.

The major concerns of the region follow from the very nature of the state that is governing the populations of the South Asian countries. It is a fact that democratic norms and principles are undermined by the despotic regimes of South Asia. People are denied their basic rights and democracy has been reduced to a farce. In such a situation, instead of guaranteeing the democratic rights of the people, military set-ups or dictatorships are taking over. Since such undemocratic regimes discourage the constructive role of the civil society and the media, the theme of "democracy" was hotly debated on during the summit. Based on the discussion various actions have been recommended.

2. Peace and Militarization**■ Focal Person : Mr. E. Venkat Ramnaya, India****Group Members**

1. Ms. Shobha Gautam
2. Ms. Pinky Singh Rana
3. Mr. Narayan Adhikari
4. Mr. E. Venkat Ramnaya
5. Mr. Prasad Daluwatta
6. Mr. Bishnu Raj Upreti
7. Ms. Kalyani Shah
8. Ms. Shobha Shrestha

The group members of the Peace and Militarization discussed various issues and concerns governing the issue of peace and

security in the South Asian region. A topic of discussion was the rising military expenditure in the name of securing peace and security. This has further aggravated social problems ranging from poor literacy rates, public health issues to issues of unemployment.

Since most of the countries of South Asia experiencing conflict, “Peace” was a major theme during the summit. It is believed and has been proven through various reports that the majority of the poor in the region are living extremely insecure lives thanks to the rise in violence, and the increasing number of victims falling prey to this escalating violence. Based on the discussion various actions have been recommended.

3. Trafficking

■ Focal Person: Dr Durga Ghimire, Nepal

Group Members

1. Dr. Durga Ghimire - Nepal
2. Dr. Tirtha P. Gyawali - Nepal
3. Mr. Suresh K. Verma - Nepal
4. Ms. Sohani R. Bhandari - Nepal
5. Ms. Nadira Mallik - Bangladesh
6. Ms. Madhavi Singh - Nepal
7. Dr. Radha Sharma- Nepal
8. Ms. Basanta Basnet- Nepal
9. Mr. Abi K. Oli - Nepal

The group held discussions on the trafficking of humans, small firearms and narcotic drugs that had become major areas of concern for the governments of South Asia. Thanks to the porous borders between some countries of the region, South Asia today is home to large scale smuggling and trafficking of young and innocent people, especially girls and children. In order to halt such inhuman activity, it is vital to protect women and young girls and save them from being trafficked. The states need to formulate relevant and restrictive legal provisions.

For the last 30 years, trafficking for sexual exploitation has victimized some 30 million South Asian women and children. However, attempts at curbing trafficking have not been satisfactory as an increasing number of South Asian people (especially women and children) are being trafficked. Trafficking cannot be viewed as carried out only for prostitution. Thus, there’s a need to review and amend the SAARC convention on trafficking in women and children for prostitution as per the UN Protocol. Apart from this, the state should also look seriously into the lack of protection of the rights of migrant workers and their families. Based on the discussion various actions have been recommended.

4. Social Security

■ Focal Person: Mr. Karamat Ali, Pakistan

The main focus of the discussion was on the right to work, the right to education, the right to health and the right to life which are also some of the major components of social security.

Social security is one issue that has been generally ignored and seldom considered as a topic worthy of attention in South Asia. This issue has not been discussed widely in any of the SAARC summits held so far. Also, the governments of SAARC countries have never given any priority to the issue of social security. The issue of social security, which also includes labour rights among other things has taken a backseat in the eyes of the policy-makers. In order to empower and protect citizens, social security is extremely important. Thus, the summit took up this issue as one of its major themes in order to draw the attention of the authorities of the governments of South Asia.

A high military budget has been curtailing the allocation to social security. Sri Lanka, which has a good balance of military and social security budgets, is also a country with fewer people living below the poverty line than other SAARC nations. The other issue is the uneven distribution of resources. Based on the discussion various actions have been recommended.

5. Disasters

■ Focal Person: Mr. G. Nayeem Wahra, Bangladesh

Group Members

1. Mr. Deepak Poudel - NDMF-Nepal
2. Mr. Mohammed Tahseen- Sap-Pakistan
3. Mr. Ram Prasad Dhakal – CEAPRED, Nepal
4. Mr. Bimal Gadai - Action Aid Nepal
5. Mr. Sharad Joshi- CECOEDCON, India
6. Mr. Marc Sinclair- Executive Committee Member, SAPI
7. Mr. G. Nayeem Wahra- Dissenter Forum, Bangladesh
8. Mr. Kamal Sengupta – CODEC, Bangladesh

South Asia is home to the poorest of the poor in the world. The people here are denied even the basic requirements for a dignified life. However, it is not only hunger that South Asia is forced to fight but it is also one of the most vulnerable regions in the world for natural and man-made disasters. The life-shattering tsunami that hit the coastal areas of South Asian countries on December 26, 2004 killed thousands of people and rendered hundreds of thousands homeless. Since the region is forced to live with the possibility of recurring disasters, it is felt that the states should take upon themselves the responsibility to invest on weather forecasting and effective disaster management systems.

In a disaster-prone region, many disasters are water-related, cross border in character, either created or magnified by human activity. The magnitude of loss and damage from the recent tsunami stands as an example of the lack of appropriate systems for early warning and detection of disasters in the region. Further, lack of effective policies on disaster management has put the victims and survivors in a more vulnerable situation. Disasters like landslides (in mountains and hills) and floods (in the plains) have been triggered by the mega hydro-electricity projects, including dams and canals. The discussions led to various recommendations.

6. Other Areas of Discussion and Actions

It was pointed out that regional mechanisms to safeguard border security, regional disaster management systems and other key concern areas were still missing in South Asia. There was also a need to consider the increasing role of globalization in South Asia. It was proposed that the forum should seriously focus on the blind adoption of globalization, privatization policies and their consequences.

Gender-related issues were another important area since the participants echoed that women in South Asia had hardly any voice in the mainstream. Also, the very nature of the state became a topic of debate as the participants felt that the nature of states in the region was exploitative. Lastly, peace was identified as a priority area.

Signature Campaign on Cedaw

A signature campaign was undertaken on the first day to pressurize the government to immediately ratify the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Ms. Durga Ghimire, president of ABC Nepal, believed that a lot could be achieved for women's empowerment if this international document was ratified and also brought up this proposal.

3.4 Day 3

SAP-Falcha, 3 August 2005

On the last day of the workshop, the participants summarized the points of discussions and laid out a detailed plan of action for every country to adopt and follow. All the five themes were considered equally crucial and work in each area would be taken up for a year. The following were some of the major points raised during the regional forum for follow-up action on the People's Summits.

Summary of Major Points

During the closing session the activities of the governments of the region in various sectors were identified. For instance, the Nepalese government has set certain standards for the country's agricultural sector. Even though the government has drawn up strong policies, these are yet to be implemented. Trade unions have been carrying out advocacy campaigns but they are not that effective as they are not organized. Sri Lanka has identified the issue of minimum wages but these policies have not been implemented effectively.

Different online platforms have not reached the target communities. However, these platforms should be used for advocating efforts to fight the battle with the aid of facts and figures. Civil society organizations should also work to minimize the digital divide between the haves and the have-nots.

In the case of India, the rights to Food, Work and health are crucial. There is a need to scrutinize the experience of Sri Lanka and draw inferences for better policies. The focus should be on how to design a holistic campaign.

The participants highlighted the need to learn from the Sri Lankan experience and its commitment to developing education and health.

The government could take responsibility in concrete terms. There are certain obligations it has towards the people, and social security is one of them.

Mr. Karamat Ali said that the whole discussion boiled down to what kind of South Asia we wanted — a privatized one, or one run in the people's interests. But we had to suggest practical ways to obtain what we wanted to achieve.

The last day of the workshop concentrated on how to dovetail all those things discussed. Since it was practically impossible to work on all the suggestions, two main areas of concern were underscored. But work on all the five thematic area was to go on, side by side, with each of the five countries taking up one theme as a lead program.

Crucial areas of concern

1. Reduction of defense budget at least by 10 per cent annually
2. Enhancing women's participation at all levels of governance with a minimum of 33 per cent reservation for women.
3. Democracy (the question of "Democracy" relates to both the points above)
4. Inclusive democracy
5. Securing employment opportunities for all

Major areas of work for a year would be:

1. Advocacy for a minimum of 33 per cent reservation for women at all levels of governance, issue of exclusion of other minorities, and children's issues
2. Advocacy for reduction of military expenditure by at least ten per cent annually and more investment in social security.

Role, responsibilities and action plan:

1. **Reservation issue:** Ms Durga Ghimire and Dr Padma Ratnayake

Four specific issues for coordination: Quantum of required human resource, what kind of time requirement, what kind of infrastructures, manner and modes of travel and coordination.

Responsibilities: Collection of data (some already collected) and analysis of that data, collaboration with officials, mobilization, action plans to be operationalized, monitoring, proper communication with SAP-I.

Specific area: Pressure on political parties

2. **Military expenditure:** Forming human chain, making use of posters, running signature campaigns etc. (refer to the activities suggested by Group on peace and militarization)

4. PRESENTATIONS, DISCUSSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4. PRESENTATIONS, DISCUSSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Presentation on Previous Peoples Summits

■ **Dr. Rohit Kumar Nepali, Executive Director, SAPI**

Dr Rohit Kumar Nepali made a presentation of regional issues and recommendations identified during the last five peoples summits. The issues and recommendations presented for each of the issues are given in detail as follows:

4.1.1 Reduction of Disaster in South Asian Nations and Communities

Issues and Concerns

- Improvements in relief measures are important for them to be effective for the most vulnerable communities and groups (DAGs- the first victims)
- Disasters are perpetuated by to the failure of policy and governance
- Absence of regional policy framework and cooperation to deal with the cause of disaster
- Definitions of disaster in some of the countries are very narrow and so do not encompass the socio-economic and psychological effects that a disaster inflicts upon the disaster victims and survivors.

Recommendations

- Adopt a people-centered approach in discussion, planning and formulation of policies on disaster. The poor and marginalized people (ability, gender, generation and identity) should be at the center of all disaster policies and practices.
- Avoid or minimize construction or development work in disaster prone areas. Development in the name of tourism in the ecologically valuable areas should be stopped.
- Political commitments to say ‘no’ to large scale projects like dams, irrigation structures such as river linking projects should be secured.
- Introduce grass roots level disaster coping mechanisms to safeguard the lives and properties of the marginalized and disadvantaged groups from the aftermath of disasters
- Pressurize countries to fulfill the commitments of the World Conference on Disaster Reduction (WCDR) & the Global and Indian Ocean early warning system Undertake necessary steps with adequate resources to meet the commitments that our governments made in the WCDR. They should immediately define their national priorities under the WCDR framework, with active participation from the civil societies as outlined in the commitments. The civil society will first develop regional priorities, targets and indicators to assist the governments and then monitor the progress of the commitments.
- An effective South Asian system with a strong organizational basis should be established to share expertise, knowledge, good practices, funds and effective sharing of hydro-meteorological information
- The early warning system should not be considered as effective only from a technical viewpoint. Other important considerations have to be made like whether the most vulnerable people are accessing the early warning information or whether the system is built on other disaster systems (South Asia has so many other disasters) or how many institutions are ready to follow the early warning system.

4.1.2 Trafficking and Human Security

Issues and Concerns

- The definition of the SAARC Convention on Trafficking in Women and Children is too narrow and not in line with the UN Protocol 2000 which states that trafficking is the “recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power, or a position, or vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefit to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation.”
- At a minimum, exploitation covers prostitution or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labor or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.
- Trafficking as a manifestation of the failure to provide human security to its citizens
- Lack of empowerment or employment opportunities, social exclusion, conflict, poverty as chief causes of trafficking
- Globalization has created lots of opportunities but at the same time, made women and children more vulnerable and susceptible to trafficking and other forms of sexual exploitation

Recommendations

- Sign or ratify and implement the SAARC Convention on Trafficking in Women and Children: for Prostitution
- Ratify the Regional Victim/Witness Protection Protocol for Combating Commercial Sexual Exploitation and Abuse of Women and Children
- Ratify the UN Convention of 1990, on “The Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Member of their Families” and Migrants Rights ILO Convention no. 96 and 143
- Establish a Treaty Monitoring System as a permanent body (GO, Civil Society Representative and Anti-trafficking

Experts). The system should take care of reporting and accountability especially a bi-annual review of the issue, and should ensure preservation of the human rights of the victims during rescue, reintegration, rehabilitation and repatriation.

- Make bilateral and multilateral agreements on trafficking, as this malpractice is not confined to only two countries but exists among many countries.
- Develop a regional migration policy to promote safe migration
- Develop Capacity Building initiatives for Law Enforcement Agencies and Border Police/Securities and Immigration Authorities.

4.1.3 Poverty, Trade and Globalization

Issues and Concerns

- Globalization and MNCs affecting facilities of the poor
- The non-transparency of national/international agreements and programs
- Privatization of public enterprises resulting in high cost of services and rising unemployment
- Reduction in agriculture investment pushing farmers into jeopardy
- Changing policies in the region – a barrier to poverty eradication.

Recommendations

- SARRC nations should come together to make the best use of their technologies, modern or indigenous
- Governments should provide opportunities to agriculture-dependent people to escape the vicious poverty circle.
- Transparency in government proceedings should be maintained and user groups should be consulted before adopting any new technology
- A stable poverty eradication policy
- Local trade to be strengthened before opting for trade liberalization to avoid any kind of adverse impact

4.1.4 Livelihood, Gender & Labor

Issues and Concerns

- Rampant caste discrimination, gender disparity, income inequality and gap in education attainment
- The adoption of neo-liberal agendas of global economic growth systematically excluding women and the marginalized
- The phenomenon of ethnic and religious divides dominating the region
- Absence of a comprehensive social security system
- Lack of proper implementation of the Convention on Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)
- Steady curtailment of workers' rights

Recommendations

- A gender equality policy should be included in the government policies of all the South Asian nations
- Governments' affirmative actions to eradicate all forms of discrimination
- Ensure progressive taxation and adequate budgetary allocations for the poor/ marginalized people
- Actions to follow provisions of CEDAW/international conventions / treaty and appointment of monitoring bodies
- Governments should grant overseas voting rights to migrant workers.
- Governments should ensure Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and also ensure monitoring and reporting as part of the international commitment.
- Develop international trade union confederations and their affiliates
- Strong protests should be made against child labor and exploitation in South Asian countries

4.1.5 Governance

Issues and Concerns

- Lack of power decentralization and devolution of power
- Deplorable levels of participation of women, *dalits*, and marginalized sections in decision-making
- Ineffective rule of law, violation of human rights and rights of the marginalized
- Accountability suffering due to inefficient bureaucracy and governance structures
- Undermining the values and experiences of the marginalized people
- Inefficient and corrupt bureaucracy and governance structures perpetuating poverty

Recommendations

- Stronger legal framework and implementation of decentralized local government institutions based on principle of subsidiaries
- Strengthen mechanisms for ensuring women's participation in governance
- Reservation of at least one third of all elected seats for women at all levels
- Civil society organizations cooperate to launch a multi-year regional campaign
- Capacity building measures for officials, candidates and political leaders

4.1.6 Peace and Militarization

Issues and Concerns

- Economic and social discrimination based on caste, religion, ethnicity and gender
- Maoist Insurgency in Nepal
- Divisive politics of cultural nationalism in India
- Atrocity by State, Non - state and insurgents and gross violation of human rights in Kashmir

- Unrest in North East Region of India and atrocities by the army
- Bomb and grenade attacks against political leaders at public meetings and cultural programs in various parts of Bangladesh
- Arbitrary killings in the name of encounters in Bangladesh, Pakistan and Nepal
- Orchestrating threats of terrorism in India by the State in order to justify increased militarization and Police Raj
- Denial of the practice of cultural heritage
- Existence of cultural hegemony in the region
- Emergence of fascism in the form of fundamentalist religious groups supported by governments in the region
- Different regional networks of insurgents present to strengthen their regional and national initiatives
- Different conflict promoting groups specialize in different areas like
 - Manipulating the media
 - Destruction of property
 - Killing innocent people
 - Sexually assaulting women in conflict situation
- Misinformation on different countries
 - "Pakistanis are terrorists"
 - "Bangladeshis are infiltrators"
 - "Nepalese as Maoists"
- Draconian laws like the Prevention Of Terrorism Act (POTA) in India used for gross violation of human rights

Recommendations

- Create a People's Peace Commission and Civic Monitoring Mechanism
- Develop a regional coalition to promote/strengthen a culture of peace
- Promote experience sharing mechanism for promoting peace

- Declare Annual SAARC Peace day on December 8
- Develop mechanism for ensuring participation of marginalized community members in decision making and peace building
- Develop educational curriculum to minimize hostile behavior of citizens towards people of other countries

The Major Highlights of the Inaugural Session

▼ South Asianization

A process known as “South Asianising” in the countries of the region has been gaining ground of late among South Asian experts. For the past two years there has been considerable activity towards that end, at least between India and Pakistan. However, it is not a spontaneous process. Instead, it is taking place in a global context of capitalism under the guidance of the United States.

Thus, when people of the region talk of regional cooperation they have to understand the politics that guides the principles of this cooperation. It is important to understand whose interests people are serving to promote or to enforce the SAP agenda. Therefore first and foremost, the greater number of South Asians have to collaborate to work towards fulfilling those goals that would be beneficial to all. For instance, experts have proposed that South Asian magazines should act as platforms where people can express their opinions and ideas. But there is a need to list those who write for peace and development. Even though there are enough people who write on these issues, each of them writes with his/her national interest uppermost in mind. They write more as Pakistanis, Nepalese, Indians etc., rather than as South Asians. Unless people of the region collectively assert the rights of the majority there is no hope of creating mobilization in the interest of the people.

▼ Labor rights

The South Asian workers working within or outside the region need the utmost attention. The workers from different South Asian nations are today crossing borders and establishing their right to work. People of the region need to regulate labor movements and

respect the workers’ right to movement. There are some 2.5 million illegal workers in Pakistan alone. In this context, there is an urgent need to find ways to deal with the official national ideology, which provides for militarization and division of people. National interests are currently defined in terms of the interests of the elite. People of the region have to fight the nationalism protecting the interests of the elite. Despite a national identity, people of the region have to work together as South Asians. A regional campaign for a nuclear-free South Asia may have to be launched.

▼ Dissatisfying systems

Governance and democracy are two aspects that are being widely discussed in South Asia today. As matters stand, however, dissatisfaction with both governance and the democratic system prevalent in most countries of South Asia run high among their respective peoples. One UNDP study conducted in 2002 found that 70 per cent of the people in the study were dissatisfied with the government systems in South Asia. Ironically, even a study conducted in the developed world revealed that people were not happy with their prevailing systems. Also, though India is the only functioning democracy in South Asia, Indians too were not happy with the democracy at home, as revealed by a study of Ms Roy.

In this context it is important to identify how people of this region perceive matters prevailing in our states. It is important to contemplate our successes and failures over the years. For instance, development workers made attempts in the 1980s to make democracy participatory, but the question is where are nation states of the region after two decades? Therefore, the democratic process and mechanism need to be critically assessed and practiced in the region in a true participatory process.

▼ Digital divide

Although more and more people emphasize the role of Information Communication Technology (ICT) these days there is a digital divide between the digital haves and have-nots. Therefore, to address this major challenge the people have to take initiatives and SAP is in a position to give new a dimension to such initiatives.

This is very essential considering the colonial history followed by the nature of states, which was also a focal point of discussion in the sixth people's summit. The region has experienced colonial rule that exploited the people and endowed the elite with land and property not very long ago. However, now new viceroys have emerged in the form of dictators. People themselves need to fight this. However, the collective responses of the people have become very weak. There was no ICT facility then when the people fought against the colonial powers and yet the people came together to ultimately oust them. Now, with so much ICT there is a lack of effort though in today's world it is even more imperative that the new satraps be ousted from their seats of unbridled power. The region has the best people in the region but it is surprising that the people do not stand for their rights. People's will and commitment are equally important in the success of any effort, and without which nothing positive can be achieved.

▼ Engaged governance

Stress was laid on the need to introduce "engaged governance" and "institutional management" so as to link people more directly with the governments and thus provide them with a greater say in the decision-making process. This can go a long way in promoting social justice and equity.

Whatever people of this region want to do has to be done at the normative level: where they engage in conscious building among and within South Asian countries. Many countries like Peru have already begun this process. In order to complement the government processes, engaged governance is vital. This aspect has four important characters:

1. Normative nature
2. Capacity-building
3. Changing structures
4. Management skills

▼ Stronger regional cooperation

Of late, a lot has been discussed and said on the emergence of an increasing number of positive signs that the participation of the

civil society is growing in South Asia. However, the time is ripe for the civil society to play a role to give vitality to enable SAARC to perform and thus prod the governments into involving the people actively in this process. A narrow and self-centered attitude amongst the heads of the governments confirms the humongous challenges that lie ahead of the people of the region. Even the name of a summit such as the People's summit for people's SAARC can disturb SAARC.

Colonial history followed by the nature of the states has played a critical role in the development of the nation states of the region. Not long ago, there were colonial powers in the region, which exploited the people and endowed the elite with land and property. But now there are new viceroys in the form of dictators. The new ruling class of the region is creating a boundary line among the people that they need to fight against. However, the response of the people has become very weak. There was no ICT facility when the people fought against the colonial powers and yet the people came together to ultimately oust them. Now, with so much ICT facilities there is lack of effort from the people though in today's world it is even more imperative that the new satraps be ousted from their seats of unbridled power. Although the region has the qualified and skilled human resources but it is difficult to understand why the people are not standing up for their rights. The collective will and commitment of the people is equally important in the success of any effort, and without which nothing positive can be achieved.

▼ Suggestions

The following were the main suggestions given by the participants before the commencement of the seminar:

- To include "networking" as an area of focus
- To recognize the issues of child and labor rights
- The role of the media in raising the people's issues
- Taking up issues like social justice, caste discrimination and discrimination against minorities on a priority basis
- Highlighting the core issues, the trauma and troubles and core issues of internally displaced people

- Focus on the policy-making process, mainland policy on the conservation of mountains and mountaineering etc
- To ensure the politicians' commitment;
- End to discriminatory laws against women, for instance the issue of denial of citizenship rights to children on the basis of their mothers' names
- The role and effect of US-led MNCs, WB, IMF in identifying the kind of vision or project the ADB has for South Asia
- To start a joint action on various issues
- Inclusion process
- Peaceful settlement of disputes
- Effective management of water resources (resolution of the Koshi barrage problem in particular)
- Emphasis on Dalit issues, Human Rights violations, such as illegal detentions etc.

The exclusion of representatives from Bhutan and the Maldives in the People's Summits was a major area of concern. At the same time, the question of Bhutanese refugees was also raised and suggestions were made to include their representation at the summit.

In view of the above suggestions, participants came up with a list of priority issues to focus on areas where they could collaborate rather than merely concentrate on the issues that they are already working on, inasmuch as they would continue to work on those areas in each country. The need of the moment, they pointed out, was to identify all such issues where all participants can lobby and bring annual reports on selective issues, and also come up with suggestions like, what institutions and which people can be used to promote the findings and results of the workshop. For example, the SAARC commission on labor rights was deemed to be a committee that could be motivated to take up labor rights actively. The whole idea was to convert events into a people's movement by defining a criterion, and to ascertain that solid analysis and messages are projected to the governments and other stakeholders by identifying those who support these messages.

▼ Main points raised during the program:

Based on the major thematic areas, the participants raised the following points of concern:

- A troubling growth in military expenditure at the cost of people's basic needs
- The absence of any real social security for most citizens,
- The persistence of hunger,
- Inaction on many issues such as human trafficking and exploitation
- The inability of governments to deal effectively with disasters, natural and man-made
- The exclusion of many communities of society from full political, economic and social participation.

4.2 Thematic Group Presentations & Discussion

4.2.1 Democracy

The major concerns of the region follow from the very nature of the state that is governing the respective population of South Asia. It is a fact that democratic norms and principles are undermined by the despotic regimes of South Asia. People are denied their basic rights and democracy has been reduced to a farce. In such a situation, instead of guaranteeing the democratic rights of the people, military set-ups or dictatorships are taking over. Since such undemocratic regimes discourage the constructive role of the civil society and the media, "democracy" as a theme was hotly debated during the summit.

The major pressing issues regarding the failure of governance and inefficient bureaucracy in the South Asian countries are as follows.

- ▶ Decentralization of power
- ▶ Inadequate representation of women and excluded groups in governance
- ▶ Low capacity of voters, elected representatives and government officials

- ▶ Absence of clear registration of policies and process
- ▶ Unprotected guarantee of fundamental rights, both political and civil,
- ▶ Non existence of ensured labor rights for an unorganized labor force

Public scrutiny and parliamentary ratification have to bring to the fore international fundings from WB, IMF or ADB projects. The damage or good done by these projects at the regional level need to be assessed. People will have to pay a heavy environmental and social cost if these projects are allowed to go on without any monitoring.

Even with the realization of the facts and ground reality the question still remains on how to protect the rights of the South Asian people before ratifying any international conventions. How, with 52 per cent women voters, can we get the parties to allow greater participation of women when we can't get any constitutional change. There is a need to ensure adequate representation of women and the excluded groups in governance. The idea of thirty-three per cent representation of women in political governance is good, but not possible in the absence of democracy. Political leaders have promised this in the past but those promises have never materialised. In India all parties have this in their manifestos and it has long been in parliament but to make this true requires a mass campaign at the regional level.

South Asia States have been promoting decentralization of power which is a crucial issue. However, the policies have not been producing positive results because of a lack of proper implementation mechanism and political will of the decision makers and policy makers. To properly address this issue requires a situational analysis — to understand the situation at the national level and to learn from others. Regional meetings of the civil society have to be organized to ensure adequate representation of women and the excluded groups in governance. The current capacity of the voters is not adequate to determine the policies, mechanism and actions for strengthening the democratic process. Political and civil fundamental rights are currently not protected or guaranteed.

This is more so in an unorganized labor force whose rights are not ensured.

Efforts at bringing a gender balance in the representative system have yet to succeed in India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal. Women representation at the national level ranges from between 20.3 per cent in Pakistan to 3.2 per cent in Sri Lanka. Parliamentary participation ranges from 20.6 per cent in Pakistan to 2 per cent in Bangladesh. Nepal has only 7.9 per cent participation in parliament.

There should be active lobbying and advocacy for one-third female participation at all levels of governance. This participation has not only to be at the national level but also at the local, district and zonal levels. Why should there be reservation for women when they form nearly half of the country's population and are almost equal to men in number? This argument can be settled by recognizing the fact that more than anybody else women farmers contribute to their own domestic economy and also to that of the country. People of the region need to run a campaign centered around women farmers. The Civil society can highlight examples of women from India and Pakistan who contribute to the society, the economy and the home, so that women here can learn from them. In India, voters' education is said to be vital at the grassroots level but it is contingent to the political environment. Local government elections are going to take place and we should not be afraid of participating in the polls because this is what the civil society is supposed to do. Although the political environment remains bad, at least monitoring can be carried out.

Nepal's environment is different because the government's municipal poll seems to be a cosmetic façade as democracy and people's human rights have been hijacked. All countries are unhappy at the shrinking of space and control by extremism in Nepal. The Civil society should be focused on basically two or three agenda. The points to be considered are, whether it is possible for women to get anything; a review of the mindset and assurance that the parties will incorporate them. The experiences of India and Pakistan need to be studied in detail and we must also come up with new ideas.

Also, inclusive governance must be highlighted in the action plan because it means good governance.

People need to undertake actions to promote democracy in the region by campaigning to work for structural change. They must strive for a minimum of 33 percent representation of women; and provide a voice and platform to marginalized groups. The political parites must undertake signature campaigns to adopt these policies. At the same time the civil society needs to submit a draft plan or communiqué to SAARC, garner media support and hold a peoples summit by involving civil society organizations and their networks.

4.2.2 Peace and Militarization

Peace is a situation where people can live without fear and insecurity. Peace is possible only when a society is totally free from violence; offers good governance and values social co-existence without any social, political and economic discrimination based on ethnicity, religion, class, gender and color. Peace is possible in a society that entertains democracy, human rights, and the right to expression at the local, national and regional level.

Two thirds of the world's poor people live in South Asia. Although one of the world's largest democracies lies in this region, life here is a struggle in a world of political corruption, criminalization, conflict and militarization. Globalization has increased mistrust and rivalry instead of cooperation among the nations. Increasing communalization, religious fundamentalism, weaponisation etc. have undermined the regional issues of mass poverty, environmental degradation and cross border issues of small arms and girl child trade, women trafficking and economic and trade cooperation. The recent initiative to revive and revitalize SAARC and "PEACE" initiatives by Pakistan and India has kindled a hope of peaceful resolution to bilateral issues and regional co-operation. Many lives were lost in Sri Lanka in the long drawn out ethnic war till the end of December 2002. Bangladesh and Nepal are also experiencing a proliferation of small arms and light weapons.

However, acts of militarization along with the rising military expenditure in the name of securing peace and security in the region

has further aggravated social problems ranging from poor literacy rates, public health as well as issues of unemployment among others.

With 43 per cent of its population living in absolute poverty South Asia is witness to mounting violence, terrorism, inter\intra country conflicts and war situations. Consequently, a high level of expenditure goes into militarization as opposed to investment in development activities. The construction and possession of nuclear weapons by India and Pakistan have further jeopardized the region's security.

Governments in South Asia have pursued national security primarily through increasingly destructive military apparatuses. For example South Asia currently spends US\$15 billion annually on the military. Half the military expenditure of South Asia for one year could have provided primary school education for 119 million children for one year, provided safe drinking water for two years to about 200 million people and provided essential medicines to 117 million people for two years.

South Asian resources are used more for militarization, administration and law and order than for poverty eradication and development. Today, South Asian countries incur the highest expenditure in the military and armament among the developing countries of Asia, with India spending 3.3 per cent of its GDP on defence in 1990. According to the SIPRI Report, 1993, the expenditure for Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka was 6.6 per cent, 1.6 per cent and 4.8 per cent respectively. During the five-year period between 1987 and 1991, India spent US \$17,562 million and Pakistan US \$2,299 million on the import of conventional weapons.

The problem of poverty is further aggravated by various other social deprivations and discriminations as well as by the spatial inaccessibility of outlying, remote and distant terrain The structural adjustment policies of the open economy are likely to put further strains on the poor unless a strategy for poverty alleviation is put into immediate action.

Since almost all the countries of South Asia are living in a hostile atmosphere, “Peace” is a major area of concern for the people of this region. It is believed and has been proven through various reports that the majority of the poor in the region are living extremely insecure lives thanks to the rise in violence, and the number of victims falling prey to this escalating violence is increasing by the day.

The dominance of the majority over the minority and the discrimination based on religion and culture in Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Bhutan have caused serious internal conflicts.

On the other hand, poverty and the hardship brought into the lives of millions is also due to the growing militarization process in South Asia. It came to light during the follow up action that India and Pakistan are now not only nuclear powers, but also recipients of US military aid. Participants in the summit also felt that this was the main reason why the governments of the region had been unable to cater to the social sector since the countries had been increasing their military budget by leaps and bounds. Thus, peace and militarization were two major concerns of the region.

To maintain real peace, regimes must bring an end to political and social impunity and establish the rule of law. Water is a major cause of dispute in South Asia. The issues of sharing water between India and Pakistan; Nepal and India or between India and Bangladesh all have caused bilateral disputes. The recent unilateral decision by India to carry out its ambitious river-linking project without consulting (lower riparian) Bangladesh and (upper riparian) Nepal has added a new dimension in regional water dispute. Despite good relations at the people’s level, the relations at diplomatic and political levels are thus not as good as expected.

In South Asia, there is military rule in Pakistan and absolute monarchy in Bhutan. Nepal a monarchy had a very short experience of multiparty democracy. Maldives cannot be considered a real democratic country. Bangladesh despite proclaiming to be a democracy has its own internal conflict. India is the only country, which can be considered a democracy in spite of its failure to protect peace in many of her states.

South Asia represents a multi-ethnic, multi-linguistic, and multi-cultural society. Based on this multi-dimensional nature, people of different cultures, religions, classes, languages, and gender expect their own distinct identities. People expect proportional access to policy making, politics and society because of a lack of which South Asia today faces various conflicts against the traditional structures. Some states have been suppressing the people’s struggles and misinterpreting them as terrorism to meet their political interests. This attitude has become a hindrance to the maintenance of peace in the region.

Furthermore, SAARC has been lagging behind in promoting regional cooperation; restoring peace and settling regional disputes. Similarly, the adamant attitude of big SAARC nations and their unwillingness to involve the civil society in implementing its decisions at the regional level have further weakened the organization as a regional bloc. Due to the absence of a collective effort for regional cooperation, SAARC lags behind other regional blocs. The Charter’s clause for unanimous participation has also resulted in delays and postponements of summits in the past.

Meanwhile, religious fundamentalists and jingoists have been creating terrorism in the name of nationalism and religion. SAARC has not been effective in curbing and controlling such acts of inhumanity. The competition between two nuclear powers— India and Pakistan — to store nuclear weapons poses a serious threat to the well being of the whole of South Asia. For genuine peace, SAARC nations should proceed to reduce their defense budgets; head towards inclusive democracy and work for a collective cause.

The following are some of the issues highlighted by the summit:

- There is a dire need for the reduction of military expenditure by at least 10 per cent and its redirection to the social sector
- The illegal trade of small arms has also to be curbed and eventually brought to a stop
- South Asia has to be made a nuclear free region for the development and growth of the region.
- Both inter and intra-country conflicts have to resolved in a peaceful and equitable manner

- Lobbying and confidence building measures are very important. For this, coalitions are needed at the regional level, along with a dependable monitoring mechanism.
- There is a need to find out how much funds have been used in the social sector and to try and use that for lobbying.

The people of the region have to urge the governments of South Asia to slash their defense budgets by 10 per cent and allocate the savings health and education sectors. A close eye should be kept on Pakistan and India as the USA is giving huge loans and also arms to both the countries. Also, it is necessary to press for the curtailment of arms deals within the region; the civil society needs to work to stop such deals.

Considering the current situation of the region the civil society has to collectively initiate the process and actions to strengthen the culture of peace by developing a coalition to promote dialogue and peace in the South Asian region. SAARC, which could have played a crucial role in regional monitoring, has not been playing a stronger role. Therefore, there is a need for the civil society to build a strong monitoring mechanism at the regional level. However, at the same time the SAARC process needs to be collectively strengthened to address the voices of the people. The UN mechanism could also be used to initiate the peace process in the region.

4.2.3 Human Trafficking

The trafficking of humans, small firearms and narcotic drugs has become a major area of concern for the governments of South Asia. Thanks to the porous borders between some countries of the region, South Asia today is home to big time smuggling and large-scale trafficking of young and innocent people, especially girls and children. In order to halt such kind of inhuman activity rampant in the region, it is vital that women and young girls be protected and saved from being trafficked. For this, the state needs to formulate relevant and restrictive legal provisions.

For the last 30 years, trafficking for sexual exploitation has victimized some 30 million South Asian women and children. However, attempts at curbing trafficking have not been satisfactory

as an increasing number of South Asian people (especially women and children) are being trafficked. Trafficking cannot be narrowly viewed as carried out only for prostitution. Thus, there's a need to review and amend the SAARC convention on trafficking in women and children for prostitution as per the UN Protocol. Apart from this, the state should also look seriously into the issue of the lack of protection of the rights of migrant workers and their families

There are many loopholes in the functioning of NGOs working against women trafficking. Despite their presence the issues and concerns have not been addressed to the desired extent. All the governments of the region could be influenced to deal with the issues effectively. How can these organizations be responsible to parliament and the people?

In Nepal, the main problem is conflict. Because of displacement, people are trafficked. The Civil society has to get the government to follow Human Rights declarations. There are around 5000 women working as housemaids. There is no registered and insured way to regulate this sector of employment. A case can be identified, built up and given out to various countries.

A regional protocol needs to be drawn up and implemented for the care of the trafficked. It is not only a issue of welfare but also of Human Rights that those who eventually come back or are rescued from this modern slavery should be able to get access to the basic services available to the rest of the people. The civil society needs to actively lobby for this and also need to review the SAARC Convention relating to trafficking. A migration policy has already been drafted and finalized. The civil society can work towards implementing the conventions.

Media-based programs, like dramas, plays, interviews and documentaries can be of immense help in raising the issues of the trafficked, the displaced and of those working outside the country in either coercive or pitiable circumstances.

Remittance and foreign employment are not the best alternatives for rehabilitating the survivors, and so, the civil society has to look for other solutions at the national level. The National action forums

have implemented some policies lobbying for which requires the civil society to meet the people, hold meetings with judges and even parliamentarians. After this phase of interfacing, the media will have to be involved.

The governments have to immediately ratify and adopt\apply the SAARC convention, review the convention according to International HR standards and develop a strong monitoring mechanism at - the *SAARC level of the civil society and the National level at the Government level*.

The civil society must undertake actions such as the dissemination of information in the national and local languages; the distribution of this information to the SAARC secretariat and others; coordination between national, regional and governments and short term action before the SAARC summit as well as building and streamlining resources.

There are strong networks on anti-trafficking in South Asia which need to be coordinated for such initiatives.

4.2.4 Social Security

The rights to work, education, health and life are some of the major components of social security.

Social security is an issue that has been mostly ignored and is hardly considered a topic worthy of attention in South Asia. This issue has not been discussed widely in any of the SAARC summits held so far. Also, the governments of countries within SAARC have never given priority to the issue of social security. Since social security benefits including labour rights, are lacking in the region the issue itself has taken a backseat in the eyes of the policy-makers. Social security is extremely important to empower and protect citizens. Thus, the summit took up this issue as one of its major themes in order to draw the attention of the South Asian government authorities.

The unemployment rate has increased more in the year 1995 than 1990. The child mortality rate was 23 earlier as compared to 107 out of every 1000 in the year 2000. Around 40 to 70 percent of the adult population is still illiterate, except in Sri Lanka and the Maldives. The uneven distribution of resources has further widened the gap between the haves and the have-nots. Further, the higher militarization budget has curtailed the social budget and denied the people of their basic rights. There is also a lack of standardization of minimum income levels in the region.

South Asian development is in a stage of crisis. South Asian countries are becoming increasingly dependent on the global market. Secondly, international politico-economic processes, corrupt political leadership, inefficient state institutions and growing militarization are affecting regional development. Thirdly, socio cultural realities and geo political circumstances are not considered for decision-making. Fourthly, local communities are gradually losing their significance, as they are drawn into the 'modernization projects' of the government. Fifthly, high-powered groups continue to enjoy high positions. Finally, the situation of women in spite of some increment in literacy, income and participation, has generally not changed.

As a result, poverty in the South Asian region has presently reached an unprecedented level.

As much as 43 percent of the 1.35 billion people of South Asia live in absolute poverty, compared to 14 percent of East Asia (excluding China), 24 percent of Latin America and 39 percent of sub-Saharan Africa. Mortality rates - infant mortality, under-5 mortality and maternal mortality- remain unacceptably high. About 125 million children of school age do not attend schools and 375 million adults are illiterate.

Efforts at bringing a gender balance in the representative system have yet to succeed in India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal. Women representation at the national level ranges from between 20.3 per cent in Pakistan to 3.2 per cent in Sri Lanka. Parliamentary participation ranges from 20.6 per cent in Pakistan to 2 per cent in Bangladesh. Nepal has only 7.9 per cent women's participation in

parliament. The ILO report 'A Global Alliance against Forced Labour' documents that up to 90 percent of the victims of forced labor in South Asia are Dalits. However, until the 1980s there has been a sizable growth in the lives of Dalits in terms of increased opportunity in education and employment, raise in wages, fall in poverty and their access to land, water, health, education, housing and other resources owing to the Reservation Policy (33% for women and Dalits in India and other South Asian countries) that has been guaranteed to Dalits by the governments of most of the South Asian countries.

Though the countries of South Asia share a cultural and social history an adequate degree of complementarity of interest has not yet been achieved and the region is plagued by various intra-and inter-state conflicts and crises. The failure of SAARC to promote regional cohesiveness and settle disputes, the low levels of regional and bilateral trade, the uncontrolled proliferation of small arms, and the increasing militarization are contributing factors to the lack of 'region-ness' among the South Asian countries.

The high military budget in South Asia had forced a reduction in the allocation to social security (refer to figures). Sri Lanka which has a balanced military and social security budget also has fewer people living below the poverty line than other SAARC nations. The other issue in the region is that of uneven distribution of resources.

4.2.5 Natural Disasters

South Asia is home to the poorest of the poor in the world. The people here have been denied even the basic requirements for a dignified life. This means that South Asia is also home to those hungry millions who are striving to meet their daily needs. A major challenge for South Asia in general and SAARC in particular is to meet the basic needs of the poor and save their lives from preventable diseases and the harsh and inhospitable climate. The issue of hunger was thus a major theme for discussion at the summit.

However, it is not only hunger that the regional countries are forced to fight. South Asia is also one of the regions in the world that is most vulnerable to natural and man-made disasters. The life-shattering tsunami that hit the coastal areas of South Asian countries on December 26 2004 killed thousands of people and rendered hundreds of thousands homeless. Since the region is forced to live with the reality of facing recurring disasters, the states should themselves invest in weather forecasting and develop effective disaster management systems.

In a disaster-prone region, many disasters are water-related, cross border in character, and either created or magnified by human activity. The magnitude of loss and damage from the recent tsunami stands as an example of the lack of appropriate systems for early warning and detection of disasters in the region. Further, lack of effective policies on disaster management has put the victims and survivors in a more vulnerable situation. Disasters like landslides (in mountains and hills) and floods (in the plains) have been triggered by the mega hydro-electricity projects, including dams and canals.

Major issues of natural disaster are:

- Lack of appropriate systems and government policies for Disaster Management
- Mega Hydro-projects that lead to inevitable disaster
- No safety measures or policies to deal with disasters

With the given context of the region the civil society has to discuss and stressline the issues by judging which is more important, the **right to social security or the prevention of** hunger deaths? How to determine which is the greater issue and what concrete demand should be made to tackle the problem? What sort of campaign should be launched since poverty has been romanticized so much in the past? What kind of action-oriented efforts should be made? Only the analyses of such dynamics can help make a concrete suggestion.

People should have the right to access the means, and the only way is a guarantee of social security. Since people have the right to life

and thus the right to social security, this guarantee is the major means of dealing with the problem of death from hunger.

What are the points on water management that need further debate? As a start it is vital to get all the parties involved. This can be started by making Bangladesh the main focal country with one key person from every other country.

What sort of infrastructure do the South Asian countries need for disaster warnings? What is the optimal way to actively promote warning systems and link these up with support systems? To what extent would such a step give security and protection?

All those involved should come up with a study on the possibility of cooperation between the state and the people for tackling disaster situations, identifying barriers and deciding what has to be done to enhance that cooperation. This can be a major contribution in a year's time. Also, sustainable solutions that emerge from the society itself can be very effective. The civil society can start by opening the border areas when public interests demand.

It is also important to be aware of the threat from water projects. The civil society has to collectively identify the key projects (transnational projects), build a knowledge network, and create people-to-people contact. This is a serious area, and it is necessary to determine what is manageable and also how much the capacity of a group like this will add to the cause.

SAP-I should build networks with other organizations. It should begin campaigning against all major projects under construction or consideration. It should also start campaigning on the lines of the recommendation of the WCDR (January 24). It can also compile indigenous policies for the rehabilitation and prevention of disasters. There is a need to design short term and long term actions.

4.3 Group Recommendations

1. Democracy:

Actions:

- i Advocacy campaigning for democracy aimed at establishing the sovereignty of an elected parliament and the inviolability of fundamental rights of citizens, work for structural change, strive for a minimum of 33 percent representation of women at all levels of governance;
- ii Provide a voice and platform to marginalized groups, undertake signature campaigns among the political parties, submit a draft plan or communiqué to SAARC, garner media support,
- iii Lobby for full inclusion of historically marginalized communities in the democratic process,
- iv Engage the media to challenge political parties engaged in undemocratic practices
- v Hold a people's summit in Dhaka in November, if possible, involve civil society organizations and their networks'
- vi Collect, document and disseminate success stories
- vii Initiate capacity building to develop women groups and build strong women's networking.
- viii SAARC itself is undemocratic so a proposal should be made to reform its charter.

2. Peace and Militarization:

Actions:

- A. Lobby with the governments of South Asia to slash defense budgets by 10 per cent and allocate the amount thus saved to health and education sectors by:
 - i Organize campaigns and demands to national governments and SAARC on UN Peace Day on Sept 21st to reduce military expenditure by 10% and reallocate for health, education and development (organize human chain, signature campaigns etc.)

- ii Print and disseminate campaign stickers to the parliamentarian and legislators at the SAARC level
- iii Conduct a Study of budget Allocation for military purposes in South Asia
- B. Strengthen the culture of peace by developing a coalition to promote dialogue and peace in the South Asian region by:
 - i The formation of regional coordination bodies, representing national organizations, which work in each nation as the central coordination body at the national level
 - ii Monitoring of the regional action plan implemented in each country
 - iii The creation of an informal lobby group at the regional level, which would devise confidence-building measures within three months
 - iv Organizing peace marches of the youth in each country
 - v The creation of an informal lobby group which would devise confidence-building measures
 - vi The creation of a Regional People's Peace Commission to monitor the peace process and the arms trade by developing a civic monitoring mechanism to focus public attention on these issues
 - Monitor the proposed 10 per cent reduction in military expenditure by keeping an eye on arms deals;
 - Find ways to hold dialogue with the warring groups,
 - Build public opinion by creating material for discussions and report by this commission on militarization

3. Human Trafficking

Actions:

- A. Lobby and campaign for
 - i Immediate ratification and adoption\application of the SAARC convention
 - ii Review of convention according to International HR standards
 - iii Ratification of the RVWPP for combating commercial sexual exploitation against women and children

- (Regional Action Forum)
- iv Immediate ratification of UN Migration Convention, Migrants Rights, ILO Convention No. 19
- v Adoption of Regional Migration Policy drafted by civil society organization from the region
- vi The application of Victims Witness protection Protocols (VWPP) at the national level
- vii Immediate adoption of a minimum standard of services for survivors of trafficking and other forms of violence drafted by the civil societies of the region
- viii Developing and implementing the Safe Migration Policy at the national level, with a strong monitoring mechanism
- ix Ensuring that the national government allocates sufficient budget for the economic empowerment of women (especially survivors of trafficking and Internally Displaced Women and other vulnerable groups)
- x Creation of a tribunal to monitor these instruments
- B. Developing a strong monitoring mechanism at different levels.
 - a) SAARC level Civil society level
 - b) National level Government level
- C. Work for/to
 - i Bringing about bilateral, trilateral agreements etc. among the countries
 - ii Elimination of all discriminatory laws against women and attempt to press the government to formulate new laws according to International Human Rights standards
 - iii Ameliorate the problems of refugees
 - iv Lifting the ban on women wanting to go to Saudi Arabia; stop illegal migration
 - v Elimination of reviewed discriminatory laws
 - vi The reintegration of people (this can be done after drafting of a protocol for the purpose)
- D. Strengthen the existing networks of civil society working on Human Trafficking

- E. Dissemination of information to the SAARC secretariat, national governments, networks and civil society organizations in national and local languages

4. Social Security

Actions:

- A. Lobby and campaign for
 - i Elimination of reviewed Determining minimum employment wage
 - ii Registration of people working and their working areas
 - iii Making governments accountable for the elimination of hunger through media lobbying, campaigning, seminar/workshop, awareness programs, sit-ins, signature campaigns and networking
- B. Advocacy against: a) standardization of minimum income level b) minimization of military budget and c) for strong actions of state for social security including registration of work force
- C. Documentation and sharing of best practices and sharing of experiences and information sharing with each other at the regional level
- D. Analysis of existing scenario of the region
- E. SAP-I should build coalition with other networks working for poverty alleviation
- F. Monitor the social charter of countries in the region

5. Disaster

Actions:

- i SAP-I should build coalition with other networks working on disaster management and build networks with other organizations
- ii Campaigning against all major mega projects under construction or consideration.

- iii Campaigning on the lines of the recommendation of WCDR, Japan (January 24)
- iv Lobbying for opening border areas during disaster periods
- v Development of the capacity of people to promote early warning systems and link up with other systems of government (focus should be on a cheap mechanism of early warning)
- vi Identification of the gaps in the comprehensive disaster management strategies of UNDP/others
- vii Study of cross-border projects: Mahakali/Arun (India\Nepal) & Farrakka Barrage (India/Bangladesh)
- viii Development of a data base on disaster hazard at the regional level
- ix Documentation of the best practices of coping mechanisms during disaster
- x Compilation of indigenous policies for rehabilitation and prevention of disasters.
- xi Identification of the gap in the functioning of UNDP and other organizations by focusing on reports like UNDP's comprehensive disaster management studies.
- xii Policy formulation for improved water management issues with the focus on the rehabilitation of disaster victims.

Management and Coordination Responsibilities

Organizations:

SAP-I will coordinate the process.

Responsibilities:

- i Managing (resource person and finances)
- ii Coordination
- iii Communications (desk research, e-mail, participants should get documentation from the committee)
- iv Requirements are physical and financial resources

- v Follow and choose from WCDRR strategies
- vi People's Summits to be organized in parallel with SAARC summits
- vii Coordination of Actions during People's Summit:
 - a) Advocacy campaigning on the agendas of people's concern through
 1. Human Chain,
 2. Signature Campaign,
 3. Pamphlet development and distribution,
 - b) Draft text on democracy and other thematic issues to be presented to SAARC and other national governments,
 - c) Organize Civil society interactions and
 - d) Organize Media sensitization

5. PRESS CONFERENCE

5. PRESS CONFERENCE

Attended by:

1. Mr. Karamat Ali: Social activist, Pakistan
2. Dr Padma Ratnayake: SAP-Sri Lanka
3. Ms Bushra Gohar: Chairperson, SAP-I
4. Mr. Anil Singh: SANFSD, India
5. Mr. G. Nayeem Wahra, Bangladesh,
4. Mr. Richard Harmston: SAP-Canada, Canada
5. Mr. Mohamed Tashseen, SAP Pakistan
7. Dr. Rohit Kumar Nepali, SAPI, Nepal
8. Dr. Tirtha Raj Gyawali, SAP-Nepal, Nepal

Based on the three-day discussion, a press release was drafted after a consultation session with all the participants. The statement incorporated all that was discussed and the next plan of action. Ms Bushra Gohar and Mr Richard Harmston drafted a press statement that was presented to the journalists who attended the press conference on the last day of the program.

It was stated that the representatives of the five SAARC countries met for three days to deliberate on issues raised during the previous five summits. There were certain demands, and SAP now looks for concrete commitments from the SAARC heads of state and this people's summit was to put pressure on them.

Queries:

- How many representatives were present?
- Do you represent all the people of South Asia?
- What about dictatorial rules?
- Right of migrant workers?

There were around 65 representatives from South Asia during the meet and it was said that this was a follow-up meeting and all the issues were discussed during the workshops. The panel said, “We want to push for democracy” in the region.

Queries:

- Have you had dialogues at the government level?
- How are you planning short-term and long-term goals?

In answer to these questions, the panel said that it has tried to communicate with the SAARC Secretariat, SAP nationals and other national and regional networks and that it would send the drafts to the national governments. One point of criticism was that it relied heavily on the media for the communication of these messages.

Examples of how the governments have listened to SAP’s success stories

1. Through social charter
2. Kathmandu’s SAARC summit recognized the importance of involving people. So this forum is considered important. Since follow-up not always strong, the peoples’ summit took place in Kathmandu to strengthen SAP’s follow-up plans.

Query

- Why only 10 per cent reduction in military budget?

This is only a demand to reduce the military expenditure, annually. If we start at this level, we can alleviate some of the burden.

Query

- What do you mean by “full democracy”?

Any democracy should have a parliament and must recognize people’s rights. Now, the current systems undermine democracy. Secondly, democracy is not an end in itself. No one should have the right to suspend fundamental rights but in South Asia that is possible by constitutions only. The institutional arrangements are flawed. We need governments that actually work for the people.

Query

- What about migrant workers?

A South Asia Labor Forum was formed in Kathmandu in 1996 and it has developed a charter for migrant workers for those working within and outside the region. We have to urge the SAARC secretariat to take up this issue. We need media support here.

In this regard, the issue of “Exclusion” was also taken up. It is part of a campaign for democracy. Communities like the Dalits have been suffering permanent exclusion; this has to be brought to an end through socio-economic and political measures. We have support charters, such as the one signed in Mumbai.

Bonded labor is another form of exclusion. We are striving to address all forms of exclusion. People are asserting themselves and the panel said it wanted to support them through SAP’s programs.

Mr. Karamat Ali also urged all the citizens to observe September 21, 2005 as “Peace Day” for which the SAP will, on behalf of the citizens of South Asia, appeal to the warring factions to observe a ceasefire on this particular day.

ANNEXURES

ANNEX - I

Welcome Remarks

■ **Dr. Rohit Kumar Nepali, Executive Director, SAP-International**

“South Asia Partnership International (SAPI) is an integral part of the South Asian Civil Society. Born out of the work done by the National SAP organizations in Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Canada, its legitimacy has been acquired by its strategic position among the world’s largest poor population in South Asia and the challenges presented.

SAP-I was formed as a network for coordinating and facilitating the SAP system in South Asia. Its institutional structure has a general body, board of directors and a Secretariat located in Kathmandu. The executive directors (EDs) together constitute the program committee. SAP-I draws its strength from National SAPs who have a rich experience of working with the poor and marginalized to eradicate poverty and exploitation. SAP-I strives to make the voices of the poor and marginalized be heard at regional and international forums and aims at strengthening peace and regional cooperation for poverty eradication, socio-economic justice and prosperity.

Serving as an umbrella organization, SAP-I works with a network of local and regional organizations to develop collective agendas and implement programs to improve human development in South Asia. Together with National SAPs, it will pursue the vision of creating a peaceful South Asia, free from poverty and social oppression by focusing on three major areas: Livelihood, Governance and Peace. Poverty in the South Asian region has reached an unprecedented level in the present.

As much as 43 percent of the 1.35 billion people of South Asia live in absolute poverty, compared to 14 percent in East Asia (excluding China), 24 percent in Latin America and 39 percent in sub-Saharan Africa. Mortality rates - infant mortality, under-5 mortality and maternal mortality- remain unacceptably high. About 125 million children of school age do not attend schools and 375 million adults are illiterate.

Today two thirds of the poor people of the global population living in South Asia was struggling in a world of political corruption, criminalization, conflict and militarization in spite of having one of the world's largest democracy in the region. Globalization has increased mistrust and rivalry among the nations instead of co-operation. Increasing communalization, religious fundamentalism, weaponisation etc. have undermined the regional issues of mass poverty, environmental degradation and cross border issues such as small arms trade, girl child trade, women trafficking and economic and trade cooperation. The recent initiative to revive and revitalize SAARC and "PEACE" initiatives by Pakistan and India has kindled a hope of peaceful resolution to bilateral issues and regional co-operation. Many lives were lost in Sri Lanka in the long drawn out ethnic war till the end of December 2002. Bangladesh and Nepal are also experiencing a proliferation of small arms and light weapons.

South Asian resources are used more for militarization, administration and law and order than for poverty eradication and development. Today, South Asian countries incur the highest expenditure in the military and armament among the developing countries of Asia, with India spending 3.3 per cent of its GDP on defence in 1990. According to the SIPRI Report, 1993, the expenditure for Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka was 6.6 per cent, 1.6 per cent and 4.8 per cent respectively. During the five-year period between 1987 and 1991, India spent US \$17,562 million and Pakistan US \$2,299 million on the import of conventional weapons.

The problem of poverty is further aggravated by various other social deprivations and discriminations as well as by the spatial

inaccessibility of outlying, remote and distant terrains. The structural adjustment policies of the open economy are likely to put further strains on the poor unless a strategy for poverty alleviation is put into immediate action.

South Asian development is in a stage of crisis. Economically South Asian countries are becoming increasingly dependent on the global market. Secondly, international politico-economic processes, corrupt political leadership, inefficient state institutions and growing militarization are affecting regional development. Thirdly, socio cultural realities and geo political circumstances are not considered in decision-making. Fourthly, local communities are gradually losing their significance, as they are drawn into the 'modernization projects' of the government. Fifthly, high-powered groups continue to enjoy high positions. Finally, the situation of women in spite of some increment in literacy, income and participation has generally not changed.

Efforts at bringing a gender balance in the representative system have yet to succeed in India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal. Women representation at the national level ranges from between 20.3 per cent in Pakistan to 3.2 per cent in Sri Lanka. Parliamentary participation ranges from 20.6 per cent in Pakistan to 2 per cent in Bangladesh. Nepal has only 7.9 per cent participation in parliament. The ILO report 'A Global Alliance against Forced Labour' documents that up to 90 percent of the victims of forced labor in South Asia are Dalits. However, until the 1980s there had been a sizable growth in the lives of Dalits in terms of increased opportunity in education and employment, raise in wages, fall in poverty and their access to land, water, health, education, housing and other resources owing to the Reservation Policy (33% for women and Dalits in India and other South Asian countries) that has been guaranteed to Dalits by the governments of most of the South Asian countries.

Governments in South Asia have primarily pursued national security through increasingly destructive military apparatuses. For example South Asia currently spends US\$15 billion annually on the military.

Half the military expenditure of South Asia for one year could have provided primary school education for 119 million children for one year, provided safe drinking water for two years to about 200 million people and provided essential medicines to 117 million people for two years.

Though the countries of South Asia share a cultural and social history an adequate degree of complementarity of interest has not yet been achieved and the region is plagued by various intra-and inter-state conflicts and crises. The failure of SAARC to promote regional cohesiveness and settle disputes, the low levels of regional and bilateral trade, the uncontrolled proliferation of small arms, and the increasing militarization are contributing factors to the lack of 'region-ness' among the South Asian countries.

The cross border hostilities, restrictions on people's movement from country to country, political environment and other geo-political reasons have confined people to people contacts, linkages and interactions thus generating problems in harmony, unity and fraternity. Due to state propoganda and interest based media campaigns the element of demonization of each other has grown out of proportion. Moreover, the region is divided on religious, ethnic and political grounds by the myopic and narrow political interests of the successive governments in this region. In such a hostile situation the space for people's action and interaction is highly limited and have serious repercussions on growing militarization and cross border conflicts in the region.

While the global threats of wars and economic invasions are increasing the people of South Asia must evolve a cohesive vision of peace by developing strong interactions and partnerships. In the recent past, a pro-poor advocacy process has received considerable support from a coalition of NGOs and other civil society groups in South Asia including research institutions, the media and the private sector. Most of these groups have acquired considerable visibility at national levels. However, the region is characterized by a marked absence of regional level advocacy, organized social action and political discourse.

SAP-I's relevance can be seen in both its initiatives on the issues of the South Asian region and its active alignment with global civil

society movements. Over two decades of grass roots experience has imparted it with the knowledge to address the issues pertaining to the people at large. Its main concern is the eradication of mass poverty in South Asia, but it has also learnt to respect the people's long struggle against oppression, injustice, deprivation, dictatorial regimes and other threats in South Asia. Rigid social structures, bad governance, high illiteracy, massive poverty and poor institutional setups have hindered the development of South Asia.

The changing process of integrating national economies and markets with the world economy and global market has become an essential requirement for the economies of different nations. Though globalization has thrown open a lot of opportunities for the developed countries, it has also posed a lot of challenges for the developing countries.

SAP I has organized five South Asia People's Summits in the past since 2000 in partnership with various Civil Society Organizations including labor unions, women's organizations and activists. Issues have been collectively identified and recommendations have been made to eradicate poverty, address gender disparity issues, promote good governance, ensure livelihoods for the poor, and establish peace and human security.

It has successfully organized forums of Women's Political Participation in Governance, Peace and Human Security. SAP I has brought together people and actors from different walks of lives to discuss and bring out the issues pertaining to their livelihoods, social injustice and discrimination. Coming together to collectively address the issues of conflict, militarizations, atrocities, human rights violations has legitimized the presence of SAP I in the region. Recognition of working together for common issues with collective actions has laid down the foundation stone for the united efforts required in the region. In the absence of strong regional mechanisms of states it is but natural for the civil society to come together to show concern and act upon the agendas of poor people especially when globalization has taken over the rights of the people. The region consisting of two thirds of the world's poor needs to be sensitive about the issues of marginality, state responsibilities and the people's right to live with dignity."

ANNEX - II

Participants List

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