

5TH PEOPLES SUMMIT DECLARATION

This representative assembly of civil society organizations and network of South Asian countries (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka) condemns the unwarranted postponement the SAARC heads of state Summit and calls for its immediate convening to discuss the current social, political and economic issues.

The People's assembly has been deeply devastated and grieved by the Tsunami disaster and offers its heartfelt sympathies to the survivors and expresses concern over the neglect of states in providing relevant information to citizens and for failing to forewarn the people. We also express anger and shock over the mishandling of the post-disaster situation, failure in creating systems to reach the victims and the delivery of relief and assistance in rehabilitation. We recognize that the problems of disaster in our era are magnified by the failure of policy and poor governance. We appreciate the unprecedented generosity and benevolence of the people of the world and call for an effective mechanism to coordinate the relief efforts. We endorse the priorities and commitments made in the World Conference on Disaster Reduction (WCDR) framework of action. We urge an effective South Asian system with a sound organizational structure to share expertise, knowledge and hydro-meteorological information.

This assembly views with concern the recent developments in Nepal and the suspension of fundamental rights and civil liberties is unacceptable. It calls for the restoration of basic human rights and democracy in Nepal forthwith. The states must not be allowed to suspend fundamental rights and civil liberties under any pretext. Rights to information and communication as fundamental rights of respective citizens must be ensured.

The People's Summit expresses concern over the rapidly growing militarization of the states in the name of national interest and security. Such policies are detrimental to peace and democracy in the region and give rise to extremism, intolerance, confrontation and conflict. It therefore demands an end to recent arms deals and the immediate reduction in military expenditures.

We urge immediate negotiations without pre-conditions among SAARC states on existing and potential conflict-generating issues such as territorial disputes, shared water resources, and hydrocarbons resources. The Assembly demands the suspension of all mega hydroelectric projects that adversely affect the lives and livelihoods of millions and call for the development of a mutually agreed code of conduct for projects that negatively impact neighboring countries.

The assembly demands the right to live in a peaceful environment, not threatened by national nuclear policies and demands an immediate freeze on all nuclear designs and missile systems. We urge the states to take express measures for the eradication of nuclear weapons to make South Asia a nuclear free zone. States should enhance a culture of peace through dialogue and change in curricula and media.

The Summit notes that a majority of our people depends on agriculture for their livelihood and food security. It reiterates the urgent need for land reforms and land rights

for indigenous people with special efforts for the inclusion of the people of coastal and resource poor areas. It calls for legislation on rights of people employed in the informal sector such as domestic and agriculture workers.

Recognizing the ever-increasing global interdependence, we welcome mutually beneficial cooperation between countries and regions; however, we deplore the trends of the corporate culture that adversely affects the marginalized and poorer sections of South Asia. The assembly strongly urges the states to abolish the monopoly of MNCs on patent rights and corporate farming.

The Assembly advocates a comprehensive mechanism to deal with the voluntary repatriation of refugees and internally displaced persons keeping in view the refugee situation in almost all the SAARC countries. South Asia should be a refugee-free zone. Also required are measures to protect the rights of the migrant workers.

The Assembly denounces the privatization of basic services mainly water, health, education and power, and demands an end to neo-liberal economic guidelines detrimental to the survival of poor and marginalized people.

The Assembly urges all states to ratify and implement the SAARC Convention on Trafficking of Women and Children. We urge the ratification of the Regional Victim/Witness Protection Protocol to “Combating Commercial Sexual Exploitation and Abuse of Women and Children in South Asia” and the establishment of a Regional Tribunal for the Protection of Trafficked Persons.

The gathering takes serious note of the gender disparity and insensitivity in various national policies and practices and demands that the SAARC states implement gender equality in all areas of national control and influence. The state parties should take action for increased participation especially of women and excluded sections of society in decision-making bodies at all levels through affirmative actions.

To advance good governance throughout South Asia, we advocate a policy action by all states in two areas: to establish stronger legal frameworks and implementation of devolved local government, and to institute reservation of seats for women in at least one third of all elected bodies at all levels of government.

The assembly reiterates the need for the ratification and implementation of various United Nations international and regional conventions, covenants and treaties signed by the states.

The participating organizations committed themselves to deliver these messages to their governments and to report on their progress at the next People’s Summit.