

Declaration of 4th South Asian People's Summit
2-4 January 2004, Islamabad

This representative assembly of civil society organizations and networks of South Asian countries (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka) reiterates the pledge to promote people's struggle for a peaceful, democratic and prosperous South Asia; and commits itself to actively oppose all actions and policies of state and non-state actors that increase poverty, militarization, intolerance, extremism, patriarchy and exploitation.

Realizing that regional cooperation is the most important prerequisite for the progress of the people of South Asia – especially in the face of increasing globalization and imposition of destructive policies of the World Bank, the IMF and WTO – this assembly welcomes the convening of the XII SAARC Summit, and the opening up of communication and travel links between India and Pakistan, thereby facilitating travel between all SAARC countries.

This assembly welcomes agreement on SAFTA and believe that its implementation will lead to enhanced interaction and cooperation that will benefit the peoples of the entire region. It is imperative that the member states should ensure free mobility and guaranteed basic labour rights to all workers in the region. It is also essential that citizens' freedom of movement within the region be ensured to enable them to benefit from the fruits of free trade. A civilized and liberal visa regime be established in all the SAARC countries.

Although the governments in the region have taken some positive steps with regard to granting visas to visitors from other countries, this assembly calls upon these governments to allow all citizens of SAARC countries visas at the port of entry, as is currently practiced by Sri Lanka and Nepal.

This assembly condemns the rise of religious extremism in the region and its patronage by the states through fanning religious and communal hatred, and jingoism. It demands immediate disarming and disbanding of the extremist religious, quasi-religious and other militant groups. It demands inclusion of secular subjects into the curricula of religious and parochial schools and madrassahs inside mosques, temples and churches.

All member states should institute comprehensive peace education programs and set up a joint commission to scrutinize all textbooks and curricula and related practices in the educational systems that create stereotypes, hatred, prejudices and intolerance on any grounds, and eventually purge all such materials from the educational system.

This assembly takes serious note of the increasing use of repressive measures by the South Asian states against rights-based people's movements (such as the eviction of tenant farmers), and calls upon them to initiate dialogue with these movements and set up political processes for the solution of intra-state conflicts in the region.

For South Asian cooperation to fully materialize and sustain in the long run, it is imperative to create lasting peaceful conditions in the region that requires comprehensive demilitarization and denuclearization. This assembly therefore demands that South Asia should forthwith enter into a collective No-War Pact and these governments should declare South Asia a Nuclear Weapons Free Zone. In the interim both India and Pakistan should agree to put a freeze on their nuclear and missile programs.

This assembly demands that the governments of the South Asian states:

- Reduce existing military expenditures by at least 10% annually, diverting the savings to creation of Social Security Funds, to be used primarily for gender equality and youth empowerment programs.
- Include a clause on non-proliferation of small arms and light weapons as an additional Protocol to SAARC Convention on Suppression of Terrorism, 1987.
- Should withdraw all reservations and declarations, such as those made on CEDAW, and fully implement and enforce all international conventions and treaties signed and ratified by these states through statutory means; sign and ratify Optional Protocols added to Conventions and Treaties; and a SAARC Commission should be set up to monitor implementation, with the inclusion of civil society members.
- Should commit themselves to spend at least 10% of their GDP to basic minimum needs and social sector development, especially gender equality, education, health, safe drinking water, sanitation and environment.
- Come out with clear checks on governance ensuring decentralization of power at various levels and democratic participation of women in the decision-making process and protection of human rights. The participation of all disadvantaged and marginalized groups must be ensured.
- Should desist from implementing anti-poor conditionalities, such as withdrawal of subsidies on basic needs, imposed by international financial institutions and other lenders. They should restore subsidies in agriculture, water, food security and on the delivery of basic social services.
- Should take immediate steps to eliminate child labor and its root causes and should ensure core children rights including right to live in a healthy and cleaner environment, health care and education;
- Should take more steps towards an independent fair, free media and ensure complete rights of information, right of self-expression of the people of the region;

- The well-documented feminization of poverty must be addressed through concrete measures, including, but not limited to the following:
 - title deeds of state lands given to landless farmers must be handed over jointly in the name of both women and men in the family;
 - women farmers and livestock managers must be paid wages for their labour and produce, rather than the current practice of handing over a lump sum payment to the male household head;
 - women must have access to low-interest micro-credit through group guarantees and similar mechanisms, without the need for collateral;
 - enact legislation ensuring adequate availability of staple food and dairy products to indigenous people, poor peasantry, agricultural workers with effective support price mechanisms before permitting exports and allowing free trade;
 - address on priority basis the negative impact of mechanization and Corporatization on rural agricultural women's livelihoods.

- Enact legislation ensuring adequate availability of staple food and dairy products at reasonable prices before permitting exports and allowing free trade.

- Recognize core labour rights of all workers in all sectors of economies including agriculture and ensure strict compliance of ILO Conventions.

- Should adopt the SAARC Charter on labour rights and guarantee free mobility for labour within SAARC countries.

- Ratify the Ninth SAARC Convention and amendments should be made in the Convention (according to the definition of UN Protocol 2000) in coordination with SAARC Special Rapporteur on trafficking of women and children and establishment of SAARC Task Force for these amendments, proposals, policies and implementation of ninth Convention. It must have representation from civil society and the government. There must be mechanisms for treaty observation and border monitoring involving surveillance by the Governments and NGOs. Working of existing monitoring and implementation systems, mechanisms, state institutions and forces should be made efficient, effective and transparent.

- Declare a clear timeframe for resolution of inter- and intra-state conflicts through participation of victims and the civil society actors.

- A methodology should be formulated for the repatriation of prisoners, refugees and victims of trafficking.

- Stop glorification of nuclear capabilities and weapons through state media and display of war toys and replicas at public places.

- NGOs, media, academia and other civil society groups and organizations should be actively involved in the SAARC process and invited to the official SAARC Summits as observers
- should protect and promote the rights of religious, sectarian and ethnic minorities by repealing all discriminatory laws against minorities, dalits and indigenous people;
- All national resources, human and natural (including land, water and forest) be allocated, protected and managed in the interest of local communities, protecting property rights of the indigenous people, with a pro-poor and right based approach.

The summit also demands establishment of a South Asian Commission, with the full representation and participation of civil society in its membership, empowered to adjudicate cases of violation of fundamental rights of citizens.

**4 January 2004,
Islamabad.**