

**A brief report of**

**3<sup>rd</sup> South Asian People's Summit**

**11 -13 January 2003  
Islamabad, Pakistan**

**SAP-International**

### **3<sup>rd</sup> South Asian Peoples Summit January, 2003**

The third South Asian People's Summit was held from 11 to 13 January 2003 in Islamabad and took place simultaneously with 12<sup>th</sup> SAARC summit. Focusing on peace, livelihood securities and regional cooperation as the main agenda, the summit assembled leading names from South Asian countries to discuss the situation and formulate recommendations for the heads of states and governments gathered at the event of SAARC Summit.

The key themes for the commission set up in the summit were

- Peace and Regional Cooperation
- Poverty Eradication
- Social Development
- Governance
- Trafficking in Women and Children

The format of the summit comprised of inaugural ceremony speeches, two day discussions by five commissions set up on the above mentioned themes and then debate on the recommendations in the plenary. The commissions after thorough debate proposed recommendations on the issues and these recommendations were incorporated in the final declaration announced by the People's Summit.

Leading experts on the above mentioned issues presented thematic paper to set the scope and range of the discussions. The experts were Mr. I-A-Rehman (Peace and Regional Cooperation); Ms. Ayesha Ayub (Poverty Eradication); Dr. Mehmuda Islam (Social Development); Dr. Vijaya Jayatalika (Governance); and Mr. Punya Khanal (Trafficking in Women and Children).

Third and final day started with the thematic presentations by the commissions. The presentations were made by: Ms. Sheen Farrukh (Peace and Regional Cooperation); Ms. Ayesha Ayub (Poverty Eradication); Mr. Nadeem Malik (Social Development); Mr. Nivad Cabral (Governance); and Mr. Zia Ahmad Awan (Trafficking in Women and Children).

After in depth discussions on the recommendations, the concerns of the participants were incorporated in the recommendations while "Declaration committee" formulated a declaration on the basis of these recommendations. The declaration was made open through a press conference covered extensively by the press.

The enormous coverage, by print and electronic media, of the summit was indeed its high point. Without much doubt, it was most widely covered civil society initiative in the recent history of the country. The successful media strategy employed to get adequate coverage of this important event ensured this.

Besides that, the cultural events reflected the true spirit of South Asia. The great folk singer of Pakistan, Saen Zahoor, performed his art of singing and the participants danced and enjoyed all the night.

#### **Inaugural Ceremony**

The summit formally started with an inaugural ceremony attended by over 500 people from all walks of life.

The ceremony was chaired by the vice chairperson of SAP-International, Ms. Bushra Gohar; while Mr. Wijaya Jayatalaka (Sri Lanka Foundation Institute), Ms. Khawar Mumtaz (Shirkat Gah, Pakistan), Ms. Savitri Thapa (SAP-Nepal), Dr. George Mathew (Institute of Social Sciences, India) and Mr. Karmat Ali (Pakistan Institute of Labor Education and Research, Pakistan) addressed the large gathering present in the hall. The keynote speech was made by Mr. Mehboobul Karim, Senior Vice-President, PROSHIKA, Bangladesh.

Welcoming the participants and speakers, Mr. Irfan Mufti, Program Manager, SAP-PK, criticized the Pakistani government for not granting visas, except one, to Indian delegates of the summit. "It is the ample proof of the fact that both the states of India and Pakistan are acting in the same manner and perhaps for the same purpose," he added.

Next, Mr. Mehboobul Karim was invited to make the keynote speech. In the beginning, he explained the current socio-political and economic situation of South Asia in the context of the globalization. "We are meeting here at a time when the world seems more fragmented than before, despite globalization's promise to unify the world. The disparity between North and South, between powerful and powerless, between regions and even within the countries is widening now at fast pace. South Asia is one of the examples of this disparity," he said.

Further elaborating the gravity of the issues especially poverty in South Asia, he said, "South Asia, as stated in the human development indicators, is turning into the poorest, the most illiterate, the most malnourished, the least gender sensitive, indeed the most deprived region in the world." He lamented the poor governance by the states and governments of the region by saying that it was the most poorly governed region of the world where democracy was not sound footed, corruption was rampant and people were excluded from decision making processes.

Talking about the role of civil society in the region he said that strengthening democracy was the prime responsibility of the civil society of South Asia. "We have to work hard to bring people into the decision making," he added. Concluding the address he said, "we shall have meaningful exchanges and insightful deliberations in the summit to work out effective strategies for future actions."

Dr. George Mathews, the only participant from India, described the SAARC as dead organization as compared with other regional forums. "With nuclear bombs, India and Pakistan are being seen as the most dangerous states. We will have to understand that information, rather than arms, is the real power, he concluded.

Ms. Savitri Thapa explained the current situation of Nepal regarding Maoist insurgency. She narrated the hardships people were facing in this conflict. While lamenting the ineffectiveness of SAARC, she said that only people needed real collaboration to free themselves from the clutches of poverty and ignorance.

Mr. I-A-Rehman appreciated the fact that people of South Asia were increasing meeting each others while saying that the states were excessively abusing ideology to promote violence and chauvinism.

Dr. Vijaya Jayatalika deliberated upon the issue of good governance by saying that the governance meant transparent government, social justice and political freedoms. Adding to his deliberations, Ms. Khawar Mumtaz gave briefings on the South Asian social Charter being prepared under the protocol of SAARC. She emphasized upon making governments accountable and shifting the security paradigm towards human security. Moreover, Mr. Karamat Ali talked about the effects of negative policies

especially on the labor. He also proposed the labor charter for South Asia.

In the end, the chairperson, Ms. Bushra Gohar, thanks the participants and guests by saying that the people's agenda was crucial for the sustainable development. "The process may be slow but our goal is not impossible," she concluded.

### **The highlights of thematic presentations**

The commissions set up to deliberate on the five themes presented their recommendations on the final day of the summit. During the working sessions, the commission members discussed current situations and possible future actions at length. Needless to say, all the issues were seen in the overall perspective of South Asian realities while connecting them with international trends like globalization and World Trade Organization.

Most importantly, the SAARC initiatives around the selected themes of the summit were discussed at length. Similarly, the texts of the SAARC summit's declarations and conventions were thoroughly reviewed to understand the processes, achievements and commitments of the South Asian states.

The case studies presented during the working sessions helped the participants to learn from the successful experiences of others. Finally, concrete action plans with elaborate monitoring mechanism were also formulated by the commissions to advance the civil society position on the issues.

### **Commission on Peace and Regional Cooperation**

The commission on Peace and Regional Cooperation set following four items on its agenda

- Economic Cooperation in the Era of Globalization
- Small Arms and Light Weapons
- Peace Building lessons
- People-to-People Contacts

The agenda items set the scope of the discussions. While discussing the issue of economic cooperation in the region, the commission members deliberated upon the South Asian Preferential Trade Agreement (SAPTA) and South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA). The commission members, while deliberating upon the regional trade, emphasized upon the fair rather than free trade.

About the issue of small arms and light weapons, the commission members discussed the outcomes of UN conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons, held in July 2001. Besides that doing comparative analysis of small arms legislation in South Asia, the commission proposed a draft of Regional South Asian Convention on Small Arm using the African example of Bamako Convention.

Following are given commission's recommendations.

- Complete dewatering of society and militant groups.
- Complete and immediate freezing of nuclear and missile programs of India and Pakistan.
- Free and duty free flow of media and education material within the region.
- Immediate resumption of all communication links – including travel by air, road and sea – by both India and Pakistan.
- Easing of visa procurement policies.
- Immediate resumption of dialogue on all bilateral and multilateral disputes within South Asia without any preconditions.

- Immediate signing of Non-Aggression Treaty by India and Pakistan to avoid any armed conflicts.

### **Resolutions**

The members on the Commission, on behalf of their organizations, resolved to:

- Demand of the governments in the region, especially India and Pakistan, for Nuclear Free South Asia.
- Initiate a signature campaign on peace in South Asia with a target of signatures of one million people within the next six months.
- Publicize all the declarations on peace and regional cooperation in South Asia.
- Lobby with the South Asian governments to reduce the defense expenditure by at least 1% and direct that amount towards social development.
- Encourage the South Asian governments to implement SAFTA.
- Present the Joint Declaration of the Commission to the Speaker of the National Assembly of Pakistan on the last day of the Summit (13 January 2003).

### **Commission on Poverty Eradication**

The commission on Poverty Eradication had following three items on its agenda

- Review and analysis of SAARC Poverty Eradication initiatives
- Structural Reform Program
- Pro-Poor Budgets

Reviewing and analyzing SAARC poverty eradication initiatives, the commission members did extensive readings of the X1 SAARC summit declaration and other SAARC documents related to poverty eradication (Report of the first meeting of the Reconstituted Independent South Asian commission for Poverty Alleviation, 30-31 March 2002, Report of Ministerial Meeting on Poverty Alleviation, 8-9 April 2002, Report of the Workshop to finalize the Format of Regional Poverty Profile, 27-29 May 2002) Besides that, they review the follow up of the commitments made by the South Asian governments on the eve of above mentioned summit.

Most of the commission members were concerned about the severely negative effects of the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP), Extended Structural Adjustment Facility (ESAF) and Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP). It was a consensus opinion that these program and related government policies were rapidly increasing poverty in the region. Moreover, the states and governments of South Asian region were becoming more and more irrelevant to the plight of their people under such programs dictated by donors and big companies.

The budget making processes in the region came under discussion with the concern that this basic documents related to the lives of over one billion people of the region were increasing shelving the perspective of people's welfare. The budget making was more centered around debt returns and defense spending rather than human development. The commission discussed some case studies regarding pro-poor budget making especially the example of PROSHIKA in Bangladesh and of SAP-PK's campaign in Pakistan.

### **Specific Recommendations for Poverty Eradication**

The specific recommendations of the Commission on how to eradicate poverty were as follows:

- Strategies should be developed to ensure that resources for the poor target the poorest of the poor (the hard core or the ultra poor).

- Clear-cut strategies should be developed to deal with urban and rural poverty, both by the government and the NGOs.
- The poor, especially the rural poor, should be provided access to opportunities and services.
- Poverty should be measured in the context of severity of contradiction between the haves and the have-nots.
- Successful practices from the region should be replicated.
- Implementation mechanism for micro-credit programs should be critically reviewed.
- Development budget for education, health, water and sanitation, creation of infrastructure, etc. should not be compromised at any cost (mostly done to meet the shortfall in revenue or increasing defense expenditure).
- Quality of expenditure on poverty eradication programs needs to be monitored effectively.

### **Commission on Social Development**

As a basic parameter of social development in South Asia, the Pakistan version of SAARC Social Charter was thoroughly discussed in the working sessions of the Commission. The Charter is divided into the following four major themes, which also comprised the agenda items of the Commission on *Social Development*:

- Poverty Eradication
- Women Empowerment
- Children and Youth
- Human Resource Development

Reading the social charter, the commission members concentrated first on the preamble of the charter. According to the aforesaid preamble, “The prosperity and dignity of the people is the end goal of all the efforts against poverty. To meet this end goal, it is imperative to free people of South Asia from war, jingoism, bigotry, internal conflicts and displacements of the marginalized people. Every human being has a right to security, justice, dignity and prosperity. Regional solidarity, peace and security are pre-requisites. And all the member states of SAARC should ratify regional and international instruments on human rights”

According to the objectives described in the social charter, “ The objective of the charter is to make Pakistan a peaceful, democratic, progressive and prosperous country, to ensure the rights, liberties and guarantees of the people, to establish a regional court for ensuring the implementation of the social charter, to outline the role of civil society in achieving the objectives of the charter, to create a regional Social Forum to make the member states accountable and to impress upon the member states to cooperate with each others in eradicating poverty and protecting people against negative impacts of globalization.”

Following are given some salient recommendations of the commission on Poverty Eradication.

### **Recommendations on Poverty Eradication:**

- Poverty should be taken as a multidimensional issue rather than merely a matter of income.
- There should be equal opportunities of employment and capacity development for every human being.
- Poor people should be made a part of decision-making concerning micro and macro economic

issues.

- Retrogressive feudal and tribal social structures should be removed.
- The state should ensure safeguards from the negative fallouts of globalization.
- The state institutions should be reoriented in such a manner that they become tools to achieve prosperity and dignity of the people.
- The state should take proper steps to ensure that there is no environmental degradation. There should be concrete and viable policies regarding irrigation water and conservation of forests.
- The state should make its economic policies keeping in mind their social contexts.
- The state should reform the unjust distribution of taxes and ensure just land reforms.
- The state should ensure universal education, and reduction in population growth rate and infant/maternal mortality ratio.
- The state should repeal all the laws that are discriminatory against women, minorities and other marginalized groups.

**Recommendations on Women Empowerment:**

- There should be complete equality between men and women in all spheres of life.
- Women participation in policy- and decision-making processes should be ensured.
- The state should ensure that the women are protected from harassment, violence and insecurity.
- The state should eradicate the structures, systems and values based on patriarchy.
- Multiple justice system should be repealed.
- Male-biased interpretation of laws, religious edicts and traditions should be done away with.
- The state should ensure access to justice for women.
- The state should formulate policies that aim at ending the conditions of malnutrition, illiteracy, poor health, high mortality, etc.
- The ambiguity in policies regarding women should be removed.
- The state should exhibit political will to safeguard the rights of women.
- The state should establish appropriate implementation mechanisms to take affirmative action for women empowerment.
- There should be clear laws and policies to govern exploitative non-formal sector with an objective of promoting women empowerment.
- The state laws should facilitate women unions and develop independent mechanisms to monitor the state policies and plans.
- The National Commission on Women should be strengthened by making its recommendations binding.
- The state and the private sector should ensure that the gender-related wage discrimination is eliminated at all levels.

### **Recommendations on Children and Youth:**

- The multiple and contradictory laws about children should be made in conformity with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).
- Every child should be given the right to education, health and recreational facilities, and freedom from torture, labor and sexual abuse.
- Children and youth should be included in the decision- making processes.
- The state should implement treaties and conventions related to children and youth that it has signed, and ratify other related human right documents.
- The state should ensure the removal of child labor in informal sector and the end of child trafficking.
- The juvenile justice system should be based on the principle of safeguarding the best interest of the child.
- The children and youth should be given right to freely express themselves and be heard carefully.
- The state should ensure the removal of apartheid by abolishing different mediums of instructions.
- The state should constitute a commission to monitor the situation of children and youth, and the implementation of laws related to them.
- There should be clear allocation for the well-being of children in the annual national budget.

### **Recommendations on Human Resource Development**

- The state should devise concrete strategies and programs to provide employment to the work force.
- Capacity building or HRD should be considered as a goal in itself.
- HRD should be seen in the perspective of basic human rights, freedoms and securities.
- The labor should be respected and its working conditions and standard of living should be enhanced as a pre-requisite to economic and human growth.
- All the workers should be provided with education, healthcare, professional trainings and other facilities to enhance their capacities.
- The state should ensure the protection of traditional arts and crafts as well as cultural rights of the workers. There must also be concrete laws to preserve and promote traditional knowledge systems.
- The goal of HRD should not be blindly linked to the market and economy.

### **Commission on Governance**

The Commission on *Governance* had the following three items on its agenda:

- The crises of Governance in South Asian
- Recommendations and Plan of Action to overcome the Crises of Governance in South Asia
- Recommendations on SAARC Governing System (Governance principles, the SAARC Secretariat, inter-country relationships, prioritized key recommendations)

The discussion in the Commission started with the analysis of existing crises of governance in South

Asia. The discussions, first of all, took note of the legacy of Colonial rulers in South Asia. The most salient feature of this legacy was the centralization of power and resources and keeping people out of decision making processes. This legacy gave birth to elite-based institutions in the region with centralized powers/resources and people out of the system.

One method to keep people away from the benefits of the system is to deliberately develop the procedural labyrinth in such a way that only rich could benefit from the opportunities. The basic documents that ensures the equal rights of the people were the constitutions (despite of being rigid in most of the cases) that are highly disrespected as far as practical implementation is concerned. This brought the crisis of attitude in the region. Social trends depicting parallel psyche of feudalism, corruption, violence, extremism and isolationism are visible in the region.

The planning procedures are obscure and irrespective of the people's aspirations. For example, the mantra of devaluation named Local Government System that is facing great resistance from bureaucracy besides being high jacked by local mafias. The political parties, dominated by elites and deviated by their manifestoes, are busy playing power games. The result is myriad conflicts, law and order, corruption and ineffective service delivery in the region. With international economic forces bent upon extracting all the resources and profits, the people hapless.

Following are given recommendations by the commission on Governance

#### **On plan of action:**

- Strengthen local institutions by ensuring broad-based participation of people and their access to information
- Disseminate true information and initiate debates on local government system
- Strengthen mechanisms that ensure the participation of women in governance and bring civil society organizations in this process
- Install effective checks and balances to prevent abuse of power by governing bodies at local, national and regional levels
- Ensure that the local bodies are financially empowered to carry out their work by providing constitutional safeguards
- Develop and strengthen citizen groups to address issues related to private and corporate sectors
- Ensure that the tax systems are fair and follow the principle that the rich pay more
- Help democratize the political parties, civil society and state institutions
- Ensure accountability of political representatives, civil society group and all the state institutions including military and judiciary while ensuring independence of public institutions and clarifying their roles.
- Ensure that the rule of law is respected and is all pervasive in the society and ensure the impartiality of judiciary
- Eliminate all undemocratic traditional institutions and practices that discriminate against women and minorities

#### **On Governance System**

##### ***Governance Principles:***

- The procedure of making appointments.
- Organizational structure.

- Work culture.
- Resource allocation and fund raising.
- Opportunities for the SAARC stakeholders to achieve regional goals.

***The SAARC Secretariat:***

- The annual organizational management review should be conducted on agreed criterion and, if needed, remedial action should be taken. The process should be transparent with findings available to the stakeholders.
- The Secretary-General should have the authority to recruit the directors for the various sections. The recruitment principles and guidelines should be endorsed by the Council of Ministers.
- The structure should be reviewed every five years and, if necessary, changes should be made to reflect the emerging needs of the region.
- The Secretary-General should be responsible for and empowered to manage it efficiently and effectively.
- The Secretary-General should be given the authority to raise funds to undertake various tasks in relation to the SAARC objectives, ensuring that the long-term interests of the Association are not compromised.

***Inter-Country Relationships:***

- Build cordiality, trust and mutual respect among the Member States of SAARC.
- Retreats of Heads of Government/State should be coordinated by the SAARC Secretariat.
- Mechanisms should be evolved for interaction between and among different stakeholder groups.
- Interest groups should have a platform, facilitated by the SAARC Secretariat, to interact and develop regional program interventions.
- The SAARC Secretariat, in collaboration with other groups and organizations in the region, should compile a database of regional networks.

***The Prioritized Key Recommendations:***

- Introduce pro-people legislation; and make the judicial system independent, effective and approachable.
- Involve civil society representatives in the SAARC process to include people's concern.
- Strength local institutions and citizen groups by providing them constitutional safeguard in order to ensure consistency of the policies.

## **Commission on Trafficking in Women and Children**

The Commission on *Trafficking in Women and Children* had the following three items on its agenda:

- The SAARC Convention on Trafficking in Women and Children
- Recommendations to SAARC Convention on Child Welfare
- Successful Practices: Case Study of Lawyers for Human Rights and Legal Aid
- Review of SAARC Convention on Trafficking in Women and Children

The working of the Commission started with a discussion on various articles of the SAARC Convention on Preventing and Combating Trafficking in Women for Prostitution, particularly its definition and scope. The members on the Commission suggested that the definition of “trafficking” given in the Convention should be replaced with the one adopted under the UN Protocol 2000.

According to the Convention, *“Trafficking means the moving, selling or buying of women and children for prostitution within and outside a country for monetary or other considerations with or without the consent of the person subjected to trafficking.”*

While, according to the UN Protocol 2000, *“Trafficking in persons shall mean 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 of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person for purpose of exploitation.”*

The members on the Commission also suggested that the scope of the Convention should be widened beyond prostitution to other areas as defined in the UN Protocol 2000. Finally, they stressed that all articles of the Convention should be considered in accordance with the definition of “trafficking” adopted under the UN Protocol 2000.

### **Recommendations for SAARC Member States:**

- Ratify the Convention immediately.
- Make amendments to the Convention in accordance with the other conventions the governments have signed and ratified.
- Devise laws in accordance with the Convention.
- Adopt rights-based approach towards all kinds of migration.
- Train law-enforcing agencies, judiciary and border security forces to deal with the issue of trafficking.
- Create appropriate support systems (shelter, rehabilitation, counseling, legal aid, skill development, etc.) for the victims of trafficking.
- Set up mechanisms for facilitating early disposal of the cases of trafficked persons.
- Repeal all the laws that are discriminatory against women and children.
- Review the existing laws related to women and children rights in conjunction with the basic laws of the land.
- Create provisions in their constitutions to ensure that if any international convention is ratified, it is considered binding.
- Individualize rehabilitation and repatriation in the best interest of the child.

- Formulate and ensure a three-pronged strategy – at local, regional and international levels – to deal with the issue of trafficking in totality.
- Appoint a Special SAARC Rapporteur on Trafficking.
- Ensure repatriation along with rehabilitation, without limiting the choices to the victims of trafficking.
- Identify appropriate measures to address the issue to trafficking in women and children; and fulfill commitments and obligations under the Stockholm Agenda (1996), South Asia Consultation for the Second World Congress Against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (2001) and the Yokohama Global Commitment (2001).
- Work for the decriminalization of the trafficked persons.
- Constitute intra-regional groups(s) at the SAARC level to effectively address the issue of trafficking.
- Abolish all such customary practices that augment trafficking in women and children.
- Review and revise laws, plans and policies concerning women and children.
- Strengthen the national and regional networks of NGOs and other CSOs to effectively deal with the issue of trafficking.
- Sensitize the media to impart awareness to masses on the issue of trafficking, and the rights of women and children.
- Focus poverty eradication programs on the areas where women and children are vulnerable to trafficking.

**Recommendations for CSOs:**

- Adopt strategies to involve the trafficked persons and share their experiences on vulnerability.
- Develop databases and share information like best practices in dealing with the issue of trafficking.
- Review the existing laws related to women and children rights.
- Interact with organizations for training of law-enforcing agencies on issues like gender, children and women rights, etc.
- Create focal points in all the Member States of SAARC.

**Recommendations to the SAARC Convention on Child Welfare:**

- Ensure that the rights of the victims of trafficking are vindicated.
- Ratify the Convention on Regional Arrangements for the Promotion of Child Welfare in South Asia.
- Ensure that trafficking is distinguished from voluntary migration.
- Ensure that the victims are immune from criminal liability for any acts that arise out of trafficking.
- Ensure voluntary repatriation of the victims of trafficking provided that they agree to it.
- Ensure that reintegration and other support services are available to the victims of trafficking who choose to return home.
- Enact laws that provide compensation to the victims of trafficking and repeal laws that are discriminatory against them.

- Prosecute traffickers for all the crimes they have committed.

### **The joint declaration of the Summit**

This representative assembly of civil society organizations and networks of South Asian countries (Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka) reiterates the pledge to promote people's struggle for a peaceful, democratic and prosperous South Asia; and commits to actively oppose all actions and policies of state and non-state actors that promote militarization, jingoism, extremism 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, IMF and WTO – this assembly deplores the postponement of the XII SAARC Summit and calls for its immediate convening.

This assembly also condemns the recent denial of visas to peace and human rights activists by the governments of India and Pakistan, and terms these actions as detrimental to efforts for promoting peace and regional cooperation. It demands that the visa regimes should be eased and the states of India and Pakistan immediately should stop harassing, humiliating and victimizing visitors.

This assembly further calls upon these governments to allow all citizens of SAARC countries visas at the port of entry, as is done by Sri Lanka and Nepal. It demands that all communication and travel links among South Asian countries, especially between India and Pakistan, should be immediately restored.

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

This assembly condemns the rise of religious extremism in the region and its covert state patronage through fanning religious and communal hatred, and jingoism. It also demands immediate de-weaponization of all religious, quasi-religious and other militant groups.

This assembly demands that South Asia should be made a Nuclear Weapons Free Zone, and the nuclear and missile programs of India and Pakistan should be completely frozen. For this purpose, they should forthwith start negotiations and sign NPT and other disarmament agreements, notwithstanding their principled stand on global disarmament, especially the stoppage of vertical proliferation by other nuclear states.

This assembly makes the following specific demands from and recommendations to the governments of the South Asian states:

- Promote the autonomy and independence of democratic institutions, especially by guaranteeing the independence of judiciary by making it effective, approachable and affordable.
- Ratify and implement the SAARC Convention on Preventing and Combating Trafficking in Women and Children 2002.
- Involve civil society organizations in all efforts by the SAARC Secretariat that aim at promoting cultural exchanges in the region and strengthening the South Asian identity.
- Promote traditional arts, crafts, and information and knowledge systems to protect the cultural rights of the underprivileged sections of the society.
- Coordinate and harmonize policies in accordance with the local institutions and civil liberties of the

people.

- Ensure the participation of women, children and youth in the decision-making processes; and provide them with legal protection against violence, exploitation and marginalization.
- Guarantee active collaboration among their planning authorities to harmonize inter-state policies with the objective of ensuring that an increasing percentage of GDP is devoted to the social sector.
- Set up a comprehensive regional convention on small arms and light weapons to investigate, expose and curb illicit arms trade and trafficking across South Asia; and introduce a common legal framework for the region to effectively counter this menace.
- Provide aid and protection to victims of trafficking following a rights-based approach.
- Review and update the governing principles of SAARC to ensure that the smooth functioning of the forum is not jeopardized.
- Ratify all declarations, conventions and protocols on human rights and civil liberties; and ensure their effective implementation by setting up efficient monitoring mechanisms.

This assembly notes with serious concern the imminent outbreak of the war in the form of US-led attack on Iraq, ostensibly in the name of disarming it of weapons of mass destruction. It completely rejects any unilateral action by the US or any other country. It also rejects the use of war as a means to resolve international disputes and reiterates that all such conflicts should be resolved through peaceful means under the aegis of the UN.

This assembly also rejects the US-led war against terrorism, wherein the country has arrogated to itself the determination of both terrorism and terrorist as per definition of its convenience. While this assembly denounces all forms of terrorism by non-state and state actors, it believes that terrorism can only be eliminated by addressing its root causes that are embedded in injustice, inequality and exploitation at national as well as international level.