

The joint declaration of the Summit Kathmandu, 2003

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.