

# **The Sixth Asia-Europe People's Forum: presentation of the three thematic areas**

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**The sixth Asia-Europe People's Forum ( AEPF 6) was held on 3<sup>rd</sup> - 6<sup>th</sup> September 2006 in Helsinki, Finland. The program was organised around three thematic areas (or "clusters"): "Peace and Security", "Economic Security and Social Rights" and "Democracy and Human Right"s. Bellow are the three "Concept papers" introducing each area and its plenary.**

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## **Plenary Session on Peace and Security (Cluster 1):**

### **Europe and Asia - peace building or increasing militarization?**

(Monday 4 September 2006, 9.30h - 11.30h, Congress Hall, 2 ½ floor)

Plenary speakers:

Heidi Hautala (Finland), Achin Vanaik (India), Ramon Fernandez Duran (Spain)

Chair: Laura Lodenius (Finland)

The constitution of the European Union didn't get people's support behind it and its future is still open. The suggestion included several aspects which would have had an impact on the structures of handling EU:s Foreign and Security policy, and the defence policy. Even though the constitution is not in place many issues from that table have been put forward in a rapid timetable.

The developing of The European Defence Agency, the urge to compete on the arms trade and arms development market with US and Asian countries and the outspoken goal that the EU member states "should increase their military spending". Also developing of the new military crisis management tools is moving forward in very fast timetable, which many have seen as steps towards a common defence and army.

The Terrorism and the US-led "war against terrorism" has been used as a pretext for military intervention in many parts of the world. In Asia it has meant that in the interests of "war on terrorism" the "western" governments have in many cases turned the blind eye on issues as severe curtailment of civil liberties and human rights, and also on the development and further build up of new military capacity by repressive governments in countries where all resources should be directed to development, schooling and feeding people. Attacks on innocent civilians have increased in various corners of the world. The humanitarian law is not respected.

There is much to do for the the peace movements in Asia and Europe. The task for peoples movements is to resist this rising security-based and militarist Europe and Asia. Work for civilian - peoples Europe and peoples Asia, for visions including peaceful resolution of conflicts through dialogue, mutual knowledge, and elimination of the root causes of conflicts. A Europe and a Asia more as supporters of UN and disarmament, as developers of civilian crisis management and conflict prevention tools, a Europe and a Asia as regions doing cooperation and being partners, not competitors, where everything is seen from the view of economical and power political competition.

These themes are discussed in the plenary and in the workshops after.

Follow in workshops on:

Environmental Security,

Humanitarian Weapons: Militarisation of aid and its Implications for Global Peace,

Conflict Resolution from Below,

Peace Activists Discuss Strategies and Campaigns.

## **Plenary Session on Economic Security and Social Rights (Cluster 2)**

(Tuesday 5 September 2006, 9h - 11h)

Since the last Asia-Europe People's Forum (Hanoi 2004) we have witnessed contradictory developments in Asia as well as in Europe: on the one side the continuation of "market opening measures and financial economic considerations predominating over social ones" (Report of the World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalisation), the ongoing process of liberalisation and privatisation, leading to a global restructuring of labour markets with decreasing wages, increasing informal labour and social security, the further withdrawal of the state from providing social services to all people with negative consequences for millions of people. On the other side we are witnessing growing resistance against the current form of globalisation through social movements, NGOs and trade unions all over the world. At the same time we can observe some developments which stay in sharp contrast to the official multilateral credo:

- Great economic powers, the EU among them, try to circumvent the problems of multilateral liberalisation through bilateral Free Trade Agreements (in case of Europe Partnership and Cooperation Agreements), which in many cases allows even more liberalisation than the WTO-agreements

- Endeavours to create regional economic agreements have gained strength, although they differ in Asia and Europe. In Asia "ASEAN + 3" is further developing plans of East Asian Economic cooperation, in Europe the enlargement of the European Union has further developed the economic space.

- At the same time we see in lots of countries a wave of protectionism or "economic patriotism" trying to prevent the buyout of enterprises which are counted as of being of national importance.

Also on the peoples' side we observe contradictory developments: in all countries there are "winners" and "losers" of globalisation. The distribution of economic gains is unequal. Although in some countries there has been progress in poverty reduction, the situation of the poor has been worsening. That does not only describe the situation in Asia. In Europe too, the "welfare state" has been eroding and social insecurity is growing. Today there also the risk of poverty constitutes a majavascript:barre\_raccourci(",',"document.formulaire.texte)jor threat for large parts of the

population. Within the AEPF-framework the conference provides opportunity for stocktaking of the current developments and for further discussions how we can react on these developments and promote economic and social security, including poverty reduction, health care, education, labour issues, water security etc. Which role do international organisations play in this? What people's organisation in Asia and Europe can do to promote those developments goals, protect the interests of the vulnerable groups, farmers, migrants, people with disabilities etc.?

Plenary speakers:

Surin Pitsuwan (Member of the World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalisation, Thailand),

Susan George (Chair of the Planning Board, Transnational Institute, France)

and Thomas Wallgren (Network Institute for Global Democratization, Finland).

### **Plenary Session on Democracy and Human Rights (Cluster 3)**

(Wednesday 6 September 2006, 9h - 11h in Congress Hall, 2 ½ Floor)

**Coordinators:** Vasudhaiva Kutumbakan (Finland); The Family Federation of Finland; Institute for Popular Democracy (Philippines); Centre Lebreton-Irfed (France)

**Purpose:**

Reconceive a people's vision of democracy versus the neo-liberal project as a basis of solidarity across Asia and Europe.

**Rationale:**

Democracy and human rights issues are major concerns for the Asia-Europe People's Forum. The conditions for the exercise of democracy and realization of human rights in the world today are worsening and continue to lose ground. The challenges of globalization are increasingly putting pressure on human rights. The centres of political decision-making are edging away from the citizens and the role of political choices has lessened to the benefit of market values. If democracy is meant to reduce social inequalities and give the possibility for citizens to make political choices, this is far from what is happening today. The problems of democratic deficit in governance, human privation, political oppression and atrocity are widespread and indeed morally intolerable. One cannot talk about real democracy without putting into question the current neo-liberal, global, economic and political framework.

The role of social actors and movements on all levels is crucial in the establishment or reestablishment of democratic mechanisms that effectively respond to the exercise of "governments of the people, by the people, for the people". The praxis of "new social movements" embodies a much deeper meaning of democracy than what is understood and practiced in the mainstream political discourse. If democracy truly means the possibility for people to choose their future (the empowerment of people), democratic rights have to be understood in a comprehensive way, operating in all fields of society. The AEPF in Helsinki is again an occasion to rally together various social forces to exchange on old and new forms of people-based democracy and mobilize around these concerns.

Current models of democratic practice, be they European or Asian, have failed to deliver, and are now being challenged. There is a growing voice to rightly insist that "Western

democracy” (for what it has become) is not the only valid and legitimate model, as some may claim. No model is free from critique or from taking on stronger efforts at greater democratization. The search for more comprehensive and inclusive democracy is very much present even in Europe today, as illustrated by the recent and continuing debates —on European integration and construction; the free circulation of persons, capital and services; the capacity to integrate migrant communities; transparency and control of the media. EU policies too, in relation with the outside, are often in contradiction with the official discourse on the defence and expansion of democracy in the world and notably in Asia.

Human and civic rights have also severely eroded as a result of neo-liberal policies and the accompanying war against terror. In the name of national security and public safety, governments have passed anti-terrorism laws which allow military and police forces to conduct arbitrary arrests, search and seizure activities, and authorize the use of torture on suspected terrorists. After 9/11, discrimination against Muslims have taken worrisome trends in many countries of both regions, the effects of which have caused fear, incomprehension, intolerance and violent attacks against civilian communities. Another serious problem, which raises particular concern, are the numerous cases of outright killing of human rights defenders and journalists. Aside from constituting a violation of the right to life these killings also pose a serious threat to freedom of expression.

Adverse human rights implications of globalisation and neo-liberal policies do not, of course, limit themselves to civil and political rights but accentuate in particular as regards economic, social and cultural rights, not to mention the right to development. Democracy deficit and lack of respect for civil and political rights further tend to add to the neglect of economic and social rights. Denial of rights such as those of basic subsistence, health, education and fair working conditions not only concern growing numbers of people in Asia, but is reality even in many European countries where the living conditions of marginalized groups keep deteriorating. Violations of economic, social and cultural rights are particularly visible in the context of economic globalisation connected phenomena such as migration, human trafficking, forced evictions and land takeovers, targeting most severely vulnerable groups such as women, children, disabled people, minorities and indigenous communities.

AEPF calls on ASEM, which operates on the same paradigm as neoliberal globalisation, to give prime attention in guaranteeing the exercise of democracy and the protection of human rights.

**Plenary Speakers:**

Mr. Francisco Nemenzo Jr., Chair of Laban ng Masa / Struggle of the people coalition, Philippines;

Ms. Mirja Ryyänen, Democracy Forum Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, Finland;

Mr. Willem Bos, Ander Europa, The Netherlands;

Ms. Mariemme Hélie-Lucas (from Women Living Under Muslim Laws’ network).

Moderators: Tessa Agravante (Philippines) and Pierre Rousset (France).