

ASEM 2

# Peoples' Alternative to ASEM

London, 3-4 April 1998

Saturday 8 October 2005, by [PESC-KSP](#) (Date first published: April 2005).

## Contents

- [Asia Europe People's Forum](#)
- [Alternative State Reception](#)
- [Demonstration](#)

The Second Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM 2) was held in London on 3-4 April 1998. It was attended by Heads of State and Government from ten Asian and fifteen European nations. The leaders were accompanied by their Foreign Ministers, members of the European Commission and other Ministers.

Before and during the official ASEM 2 meeting, peoples organizations and NGOs held a series of parallel activities in London.

## Asia Europe People's Forum

The Asia Europe People's Forum held a two-day conference at the Royal Commonwealth Society, in London on 31 March and 1 April. The conference, which was attended by 150 delegates from Asian and European NGOs, was entitled: ASEM and Crisis: Peoples Realities and Peoples Responses.

The Forum had three key aims: Make the ASEM process more consultative, participatory, transparent and accountable: Ensure that economic discussion at ASEM addresses the impact of policies on ordinary people, human rights and the environment Broaden the ASEM agenda to include governance and human rights issues, environmental sustainability and people-centred development.

Clare Short, the British Secretary of State for International Development, gave the opening address for the conference. Her support to the conference and her call for all who seek change to adopt new thinking met general approval, her defense of the IMF's role in solving the Asian Crisis and of the OECD's Multilateral Agreement on Investment were met with scepticism.

The first day of the conference was devoted to discussing the economic crisis in Southeast Asia. The presentations by Prof. Walden Bello (Focus on the Global South), Dr. Martin Khor (Director, Third World Network) and Jan Kregel (University of Bologna), analysed the crisis from a macroeconomic point of view.

During the workshops in the afternoon, discussions focused on the impact of the economic crisis. The workshop topics were: - - the impact of the economic crisis on vulnerable groups (in particular, the women, farmers and migrant workers);

- International Financial Institutions and policy (particularly on the role of the IMF, and how

countries should approach the new debt crisis);

- the impact of the economic crisis on human rights and democratization.

The second day of the conference concentrated on the topic of Trade and Investment in Asia-Europe Relations. One of the inputs during the opening plenary session was a joint study by Jessica Woodroffe (World Development Movement, UK) and Billy dela Rosa (AFRIM, Philippines) on Foreign Direct Investments in Europe and Asia. And in particular, on European investment in Cebu and Korean investment in Wales. The study looked into the effect of foreign direct investments on the local economy, and what governments could do in order to ensure that the local economy benefits.

The workshops in the afternoon were focussed on the following topics:

- ethical trading and corporate responsibility (there was an input given by Maggie Burns on the Ethical Trade Initiative, a new UK-based platform that promotes codes of ethics for companies that source their products from the third world);

- investment and workers rights

- investment and the environment. During this workshop, Boboy Aguillon of TriPeace, an NGO working in the Zamboanga peninsula, gave an input on their campaign against RTZ (a UK mining company) which has applied for mining rights over 1.2 million hectares of land in the Zamboanga area.

The Asia Europe People's Forum also presented to the official ASEM 2 a paper called "A People's Vision", which was formulated before the conference, and signed by a whole range of POs and NGOs around the world. This paper was submitted to the official Asia-Europe Vision Group, which met for the first time in Cambridge on 6 April.

The Steering Group for the Asia Europe People's Forum includes: Asia Cultural Forum on Development (AFCOD), Thailand, Asia House, Germany, Asian Regional Exchange for New Alternatives (ARENA), Hong Kong, Catholic Institute for International Relations (CIIR), UK, Focus on the Global South, Thailand, Institute for Popular Democracy (IPD), Philippines One World Action, UK, Pacific Asia Resource Centre (PARC), Japan, People's Solidarity for Participatory Democracy (PSPD), South Korea, Transnational Institute (TNI), The Netherlands.

### **Alternative State Reception**

On 2 April, a People's Alternative State Reception "for the Unrepresented Peoples of Asia" was held at the Royal Institution in London. The Royal Institution, with its colonial-era grandeur, seemed quite an unlikely place to hold such an "alternative" activity. After all, the organizers were UK-based activist groups supporting various Asian causes. These were: The Free Tibet Campaign, Burma Action Group UK, British Coalition for East Timor, Tapol (The Indonesia Human Rights Campaign), Philippine Resource Center & Kanlungan Filipino Consortium, and the National Women's Network for International Solidarity (UK).

So, while leaders of the 25 ASEM nations dined at Tony Blair's residence, more 300 activists gathered to listen to the Nobel Peace Prize laureates from East Timor, Myanmar and Tibet plus other speakers. The opening address of the evening was given by Jose Ramos Horta of East Timor. Ramos-Horta accused the leaders at the two-day Asia-Europe summit of ignoring the very root causes of the economic debacle in Asia. "If they want to avoid turmoil, if they want to avoid bloody confrontation in the streets, if they want to avoid violence, if they want to avoid revolution, then they must address the root causes of these problems - and that is the lack of freedom, of democracy, of rule of law".

He said that East Timor, which Indonesia invaded and annexed in 1975, will continue to survive and its people will ultimately win the right to self-determination. "The next two or three years are going to see momentous changes in Indonesia, in Burma and in China," he said.

In a videotape smuggled out of Myanmar, fellow Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi thanked the delegates for their support of the struggle of the Burmese people for democracy. She also expressed hope that her country would soon enjoy democratic rights. Suu Kyi's opposition National League for Democracy won a landslide victory in the 1990 elections, but the military government refused to allow Parliament to convene and has maintained its grip on power.

The Dalai Lama, winner of the 1989 Peace Prize, who fled Tibet nearly 40 years ago as China tightened its grip on Tibet, said in a video message that China should be brought into the international circle. "The lies and mistakes of the past should be settled clearly and in a friendly spirit," he said. "Concealing the truth about China and insincere flattery have no place. They will not help the image of China."

### **Demonstration**

On 4 April, the last day of the official ASEM 2 summit, more than a thousand demonstrators marched through the streets of London demanding that ASEM should "Put People First, People Before Profit". The demonstrators carried streamers and placards on the need varied topics, such as the need to have fair and equal trade, for democracy in Indonesia and Burma, for the self determination of Tibet, Timor, etc.

The organizers were the same groups which put together the Alternative reception, but this time joined by groups such as Survival (for Tribal Peoples), Campaign Against Arms Trade, West Papua Forum and the World Development Movement.

The demonstrators gathered at the Jubilee Gardens (near Waterloo Station) and marched for almost two hours thru the streets of London, passing by the site of the official ASEM meeting at the QEII Centre, and ending at Trafalgar Square. There, speeches were held, mainly by representatives of unrepresented peoples of Asia. These included speeches by Tibetans, Burmese, Timorese and West Turkestan (Xing Qiang).

---

### **P.S.**

\* From Philippines International Review, Vol.1, No.1, Spring 1998.

\* The Philippines International Review is a quarterly publication of the Philippine-European Solidarity Centre (PESC-KSP). Article posted on its website: "<http://www.philsol.nl/>".