

Advancing women's human rights using law to achieve equality, justice, peace and development

F FORUM

NEWS

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Dear Readers

Greetings from APWLD!

We bring to you our first issue of the Forum News not only of the year but our first electronic version. For this year we are only bringing out two issues, each will cover a six-month period, beginning from January 2009.

The year has started with many challenges for APWLD. So although, it has taken some adjustments, we are proud to say that our programme and governance structures and the Secretariat have come together to overcome the many barriers that the organisation has faced over the past few months.

First, let me focus on the changes in APWLD. Our Regional Coordinator Lynnsay Rongokea Francis left us in February. Till a new regional coordinator takes over, APWLD's governance bodies decided to provide a collective leadership through its Programme and Management Committee (P&M) and Regional Council members. In line with my duties as a P&M member, it has been an honour to serve as the Interim Regional Coordinator (IRC); I was based at the Secretariat in Chiang Mai from April to June, 2009. The next few months Tita Lubi, a Regional Council member, will be at the helm, serving as IRC. By the time she leaves in October 2009, we are very hopeful that our year long search will be at an end and we will be able to announce the name of our incoming Regional Coordinator.

The year has in its short six months not only been challenging for APWLD but for women around the world. Forum News brings you a snapshot of some critical happenings in APWLD member countries. Of particular importance are the military operation in the northern parts of Pakistan and its links to the "War on Terror" which has many critical severe implications not only for the women and people of Pakistan, but globally; and the brutal war in Sri Lanka and its implications for human rights and women's rights.

Forum News highlights some of the challenges of global warming and climate change, issues that are intricately entwined with a whole range of basic rights issues including livelihood and food sovereignty as well as ecological balance of the Earth. The continued onslaught of neoliberal globalisation, even as our world rocks and suffers from massive self-inflicted shocks through its market-based policies, has created havoc in the lives and livelihoods of the poorest and most marginalised sectors of the third world whether they are migrant women workers or peasants or others. Forum News brings to attention the impacts of climate change, land grabbing and other issues associated to neo-liberal policies on women and their demands as detailed by its vast membership and the Secretariat.

An important area to be highlighted is the new sub-regional human rights mechanism being discussed in Southeast Asia. No doubt, APWLD through its unique membership of activists, academics and lawyers in the sub-region is at the frontline demanding for a strong human rights body to ensure that women's rights are not brushed aside.

It is the force of women like these and many more, who strongly believe in human rights, collective rights and people's rights, that APWLD continues to face the strong winds of change many of which are ominous and hold strong currents of patriarchy and many kinds of fundamentalisms, ranging from religious to market fundamentalism. Although APWLD has had to survive with a deficit budget, many changes in its programme structure and a weaker secretariat with an outgoing regional coordinator, its membership-based network has shown its strength and solidarity in coming together and standing as buttress against the crisis, and continues to put together its heart and mind to find ways ahead.

We give our thanks to all who have stood with us and given support in these times of havoc, heartburn and hand-wringing!

Long Live Women's Solidarity! People's Solidarity!

AZRA TALAT SAYEED
Interim Regional Coordinator



ABOUT FORUM NEWS

Forum News is a regular publication of APWLD. FN provides space for the network members to share information on their activities, campaigns, stories and reflections.

The opinion and positions expressed in the articles in this publication do not necessarily reflect those of the APWLD network but those of the individual authors.

FN welcomes sharing of articles, statements, photos from the members and network. FN reserves editorial rights.

FN also encourages feedback or request for further information from the readers. Feel free to send them to apwld@apwld.org.

APWLD is a women's human rights network with over 150 individuals and organisations as members. It is committed to enabling women in the region to use law as an instrument of change for the empowerment of women in their struggle for justice, peace, equality and development. It has a consultative status at the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the United Nations.

APWLD's secretariat is based in Chiang Mai, Thailand.

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Pakistan and the Global War on Terror

Azra Talat Sayeed, Roots for Equity

The so called War on Terror is happening in Pakistan. Today, there are nearly 2.5-3 million internally displaced Pakistanis living as refugees in various parts of Pakistan. This is indeed ironical, given that Pakistan is a country which has the largest number of refugees ever in history, approximately 4 million Afghans during the Afghan *Mujahideen* war in the 1980s. According to the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) report released 16 June 2009, Pakistan remains the largest refugee-hosting country with 1.8 million. Although the report does not say so, almost 100% of these are Afghan refugees. These people and many more on either side of the Pakistan-Afghanistan border are suffering from a war which has been nearly 30 years in the making. Today, the largest refugee populations under UNHCR responsibility worldwide are from two countries: Afghanistan (2.8 million) and Iraq (1.8 million)¹ who are victims of a war which has been thrust on them making them suffer untold miseries to this day.

It was in the 1970s when the United States, wanting to wrest control from the former Soviet Block, spent millions of US dollars in training Muslim men from Pakistan and other countries to fight against the Soviet under the status of '*mujahideens*', which laid the foundations for today's fundamentalist religious ideologies and practices. *Mujahids* are Muslims who fight against forces that are inimical to Islam. According to a testimony presented at a US Senate Hearing, "Aid (to Pakistan) rose from around \$60 million in economic and development assistance in 1979 to more than \$600 million per year in the mid-1980s. In total, the US gave \$3.1 billion in economic assistance and \$2.19 billion in military assistance from 1980 until 1990.² The US following the Reagan Doctrine³ had supported the War in Afghanistan to 'roll back' the Soviet takeover of Afghanistan. The US policy had been to train *mujahideens*, using the Pakistan military as the mediator. The *mujahideens* of yesterday are the 'terrorists' of today. The *jihadi* culture which was propagated through a widespread network of *madrissas* (Muslim religious schools which propagated a militarised form of Islam) to defeat the Soviets today has turned and now wants to 'bite' the capitalist hands which had fed it. So now we are witnessing a fight which is in essence between religious fundamentalists and the 'market fundamentalists'.

Today when such deeply patriarchal forces are wreaking havoc on the soil of Pakistan, when its earth is rich with the blood of hundreds of innocent people; its air stinging from the fire of heavy artillery, mortar fire and bombs, and fresh graves being dug every day from the suicide attacks of miserable human beings on innocent citizens, we watch this carnage and wonder when will it be our turn to be laid down in one of the graves.

On one hand we see the wreckage of the military attacks being carried out by the Pakistan Military and the omnipotent US drones, as well as the heedless killings of the US Army on the other side of the border in Afghanistan. And one trembles to think if soon these occupying forces will be in Pakistan, 'liberating the women of Pakistan' from the Taliban. And in the act of being 'liberated' how many of us will end up being 'collateral' damage? As we witness the flogging of women in Swat at the hands of the religious fundamentalists, we are also assailed with video tapes and pictures of women, children and men being raped, sodomised and abused in Abu Ghraib at the hands of the market fundamentalists.



Graveside, Chakdara, Lower Dir, Pakistan

US President Obama has stepped in disallowing the publication of all the pictures and videos available of sexual assault and rape being carried out by the US Marines in Iraq. According to him "The most direct consequence of releasing them, I believe, would be to inflame anti-American public opinion and to put our troops in greater danger." Suddenly 'freedom of the press' is no more such a staunch idol to be protected from government control. So although the US troops are to be given shelter from public ire, there is no discussion on what is owed to the women and the people of Iraq who have suffered from war crimes of the US Marines.

Ruth Rosen, Professor Emerita of History, University of California at Davis has highlighted the issue of 'sexual terrorism' in context to Iraqi women. Quoting from a Human Rights Watch report, Ruth Rosen writes:⁴

"The secrecy surrounding 'female detentions has resulted from a collusion of the families and the occupying forces.' Families feared social stigma; the occupying forces feared condemnation by human rights groups and anger from Iraqis who saw such treatment of women by foreigners as a special act of violation."

So it is indeed insane, that patriarchy is bent on guarding 'women's honour' to an extent that it is better to hide the crimes of war rather than suffer shame by letting it be known that women were raped. While the crimes and animalistic deeds of the Taliban are told to all, those of the US forces and most probably the Pakistani forces are being kept under cover. We will only come to know when the 'deed' is done, and buried deep in the name of national honour.

However, one question is still left unanswered! What is the US fighting in Afghanistan and Pakistan? Under the Bush Administration, the Iraq War had been ostensibly a quest for Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDs). More than a 100,000 Iraqis died in the hunt for WMDs. Today, it is generally understood that the war in Iraq had always been about the Iraqi oil. So, of course the question does come to mind, what are the Americans actually hunting in Pakistan and Afghanistan? Is it the hunt to overcome religious fundamentalists (a virulent fundamentalism which their money and their military intelligence are responsible for) or is it again oil or some other resource which market fundamentalism demands?

The same drama is now unfolding in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The Obama Administration is vouching that the more than 140,000 US marines in Iraq will be going home soon...or actually maybe going to Afghanistan not to mention Pakistan!

According to Obama, the US War on Terror in Afghanistan and Pakistan is a 'necessity'. Does the refrain sound familiar? How are citizens of the US unsafe from the terror of religious fundamentalists such as the Taliban? It is worth mentioning that the Bush Administration alone had given the Pakistani state more than US\$10 billion to fight the Taliban. Accountability measures for that huge sum of money remain unclear. At the same time, it seems that the Taliban are gaining force in Pakistan. According to the US, the money was not spent well by former President General Pervaiz Musharaff. Why is it that the US always learns its lessons too late? And why are those lessons learnt at the cost of people losing lives, livelihoods and lands none of whom are from the US soil? Is it that there is a different set of human rights for the American people and the rest of the world?

The Secretary of State Clinton says "I do not think anyone doubts their (Taliban) continuing efforts to plot against us. They have not given up on their desire to inflict damage, harm and murder on the United States of America."⁵ Currently, the harm is all being inflicted on the people of Pakistan and Afghanistan, a tragedy which nobody seems to be paying attention to.

Maybe one should pay attention to another side of the story. No matter how threatening the Taliban may seem in Pakistan today, it is still important to look at the issue from another angle. The oil rich resources above and around Pakistan, not to mention possible oil and gas reservoirs present in the country have to be taken into account when examining the fight against the Taliban. One has to take into consideration huge oil and gas reservoirs in the Central Asian countries including Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. The US Energy Information Authority estimates that Caspian Sea region oil production comes from proven (economically recoverable) reserves of 48 billion barrels,⁶ whereas the estimates are that it may hold up to 203-235 billion barrels.

If we compare these figures, Saudi Arabia has 261 billion barrels of oil and the US, 23 billion barrels. These are astounding figures and even to the most conservative mind it would not be so difficult to grasp that this war in Afghanistan could have 'some linkage' to the Caspian Belt oil and not only a 'Taliban frenzy'. The Caspian Sea countries are all landlocked. It is impossible to transport their oil and gas reserves without having access to a port, of which there are two in Pakistan. The newest port, the Gwadar Port, has three berths which can handle approximately 50,000 DWT. The 14.5-metre draft of the port will be able to accommodate up to "fifth-generation" ships, including Panamax and mother vessels. Maybe, herein lies some answers to the US War on Terror in Afghanistan and Pakistan. China has heavily supported both the building of the Gwadar Port, which allows it access to not only Caspian Sea oil but also brings it closer to the Strait of Hormuz through which a majority portion of the oil passes. In other words, Pakistan, especially its Balochistan Province where Gwadar Port is located, is of immense political, especially military and economic significance. There are many political players in this arena. China and the US have overwhelming interest, but the Middle East, Iran, India and Israel cannot be discounted as well.

It should be remembered that Pakistan has nuclear capabilities, a capability which has been developed on the backs of the Pakistani people. The current internal political instability of the country is not only the result of the vast spending on the military budget of the country but the elitist policies of the country, which have controlled the social and political development of the country to suit their needs, rather than the needs of the people. Today, the nuclear capabilities are of further concern and the incursion of religious fundamentalist into Pakistan is debated in the context of their ability to gain control of Pakistan's nuclear resources. Nobody now refers to the winds of yesteryears when the so called *mujahideens* were so thoughtlessly created, to achieve other political agendas of the US.



Kungi Camp, Lower Dir, Pakistan

Peace and justice in the times of fundamentalisms are bandied about at the will of patriarchal forces. In Pakistan, the reality is that patriarchal dictations have led to a situation where the country is ruled by various destructive forces all with a will to take over control of economic resources but using different 'calls', sometimes in the name of tradition and religion others in the name of democracy and women's liberation, safety and freedom. The true call which is political and economic power to take control over resources is never uttered which would actually make it easier to understand either market or religious fundamentalism.

¹ UNHCR. Press release, "UNHCR annual report shows 42 million people uprooted worldwide." June 16, 2009 downloaded from site <http://www.unhcr.org/4a2fd52412d.html> on July 2, 2009.

² Testimony of Lawrence Korb, Senate Foreign Relations Committee Subcommittee on International Development and Foreign Assistance December 6, 2007 downloaded from http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2007/12/pdf/Korb_Pakistan_Testimony.pdf, June 17, 2009

³ The US Department of State, "The Reagan Doctrine" downloaded from <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/time/rd/17741.htm> on June 17, 2009.

⁴ Tomgram: Ruth Rosen on Sexual Terrorism and Iraqi downloaded on June 17, 2009 from: http://www.tomdispatch.com/post/101034/ruth_rosen_on_sexual_terrorism_and_iraqi_women

⁵ <http://www.voanews.com/english/2009-05-19-voa40.cfm> downloaded on June 10, 2009.

⁶ Gelb, Bernard A. "Caspian oil and gas: production and prospects." The Congress Research Service Report for Congress. September 8, 2006 downloaded from <http://www.usembassy.it/pdf/other/RS21190.pdf> on June 10, 2009.

Sri Lanka After the War

On 19 May 2009, the Sri Lankan government claimed victory against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) or the Tamil Tigers brutally ending more than two decades of civil war.

People are still living in fear!

Geetha Lakmini

We are highly concerned about Sri Lanka society even though the war has been declared over now. Sri Lanka President Mahinda Rajapaksa declared his views during the victorious speech at the Sri Lanka parliament that there will be no majority and minority in our country anymore. There are only two categories: those who love the country and those who do not love the country.

So what are the criteria to be among those who love the country and those who do not? That will be decided by whom? We are worried that when we say things against the government in any situation, we will be labelled as part of the non-loving group and our lives will be in danger. This is a serious situation for human rights advocates and peace loving people in the country.

This is what has been happening. There should be one voice in the country. The government and the politicians will decide whether your voice is correct or not. With terror and fear ruling your life you cannot speak out about anything. So there is no freedom of expression in our country.

The Prevention of Terrorism Act will be applied against you. Some of the journalists like T. Tissnayagam have been in jail for more than a year now. Eleven journalists had been killed within three years of the present regime. All these atrocities are in the name of democracy for the people in the north and east. But the situation is becoming worse as more people are being threatened and some have already been exiled. Journalists were abducted, beaten up and thrown out into the streets. Some were assassinated. Media institutions were burned down.

If we want long term peace and sustainable development for the

country, there should be equal rights for all. We demand a political solution to the ethnic crisis even as government affiliates have a different view as to the best solution to the crisis.

We want the internally displaced persons (IDPs) to be resettled immediately and their security to be ensured. People need to go back to their homes and revive their lives and livelihoods soon. More than 280,000 people want to go back to their homes.

There is no serious attention being given in terms of food, sanitation and other basic facilities in the IDP camps. People are undernourished. According to UNICEF, most of the 30,000 children in the camps are malnourished. About 300 children have lost their parents. NGO leaders working at the camps claim that sanitation is very poor and toilet facilities need to improve substantially.

When UN Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon visited the camps last May, he urged the government to allow UN humanitarian agencies to work in the camps and to help improve the conditions in the camps. Also, he urged to speed up the political settlement for ethnic minorities, though there will be strong resistance from many political parties in the country.

Serious discussions among citizens in Sri Lanka are necessary to build ethnic harmony.

Condemning Genocide against Tamils in Sri Lanka

*Tamil Nadu
Women's Forum*

APWLD member Tamil Nadu Women's Forum (TNWF), India vehemently condemns the genocide operation against Tamils in Sri Lanka, which are prohibited absolutely as *jus cogens** under international law. TNWF absolutely rejects the military solution under the name of liberation of Tamils. Tamil ethnic problem should have been dealt with a political solution.

The war has taken the lives of more than 20,000 Tamil people. Additionally, many Tamils are missing whereas 300,000 who have survived the war are mostly kept in camps for internally displaced persons which are in very poor living conditions lacking water and food. They are dispirited, facing difficult situations. For instance, on 27 April 2009, Vavuniya Magistrate Alexraja registered the deaths of 14 elderly persons in one camp (Chettikulam) in one day alone, which he attributed to malnutrition. The presence of military and armed paramilitaries in the camp is also creating an environment of fear and anxiety for the Tamil people living in the camps.

TNWF strongly questions the culture of "Sinhala War Hero" which is now spreading to instil more fear in the minds of the minority peoples.

TNWF calls for a fair and open investigation regarding war crimes and crimes against humanity committed during the war operation.

TNWF urges the international community to demand that the Sri Lankan government provide the Tamils in Sri Lanka the right to self-determination.

* *jus cogens* – Principles of international law so fundamental that no nation may ignore them or attempt to contract out of them through treaties. (<http://www.nolo.com/definition.cfm/Term/13FB4261-D05C-44FE-A8554A5F5134FC55/alpha/I/>)

“Unacceptably” high number of casualties but no investigation?

Secretariat's Report, Tomoko Kashiwazaki

The UN Human Rights Council (HRC) held its eleventh Special Session and adopted a resolution on assistance to Sri Lanka in the promotion and protection of human rights on 27 May 2009. The resolution “encouraged the government to continue to pursue its existing cooperation with relevant UN organisations in order to provide, in cooperation with the government, basic humanitarian assistance, in particular, safe drinking water, sanitation, food, and medical and healthcare services to the internally displaced persons. It also urged the government to continue strengthening its activities to ensure that there is no discrimination against ethnic minorities in the enjoyment of the full range of human rights.” It was adopted by a vote of 29 in favour, 12 against, and 6 abstentions.

Civil society has been calling attention to the worsening situation of the civilian casualties, particularly the internally displaced persons, trapped by the crossfire exchanged between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan forces.

Following up the actions taken by its members in their countries including India and Sri Lanka, APWLD, led by its members in Sri Lanka, issued a statement calling attention to the specific impact of the crisis on women and demanding to ensure women’s needs and rights are met with no discrimination in the provision of humanitarian assistance. The APWLD statement was sent to several Sri Lankan Ministries and UN agencies and experts with 48 signatures (13 from Sri Lankan groups and individuals) from all over the world.

International civil society was also pro-active in demanding that the UN and its member states hold a special session on Sri Lanka at the eleventh session of the HRC. One initiative called signatures online urging the Japanese government, which is the major donor of Sri Lanka, to demand and ensure protection of civilians, delivery of humanitarian aid, and protection of human rights. A joint statement was sent to Japan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs signed by several human rights NGOs including International Movement against All Forms of Discrimination and Racism

(IMADR), Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch (HRW), and the Women’s Active Museum on War and Peace. However, the Japanese government neither supported to convene the special session nor voted for its resolution.

The resolution has been criticised by human rights activists and groups. “The HRC did not even express its concern for the hundreds of thousands of people facing indefinite detention in government camps,” said Juliette de Rivero, Geneva advocacy director of HRW in a HRW news release.

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said civilian casualties in the conflict between the Sri Lankan government and Tamil rebels were “unacceptably high”.

“There are strong reasons to believe that both sides have grossly disregarded the fundamental principle of the inviolability of civilians,” High Commissioner for Human Rights Navanethem Pillay said in a video message to the HRC’s special session on the human rights situation in Sri Lanka. She also said an “independent and credible international investigation into recent events should be dispatched to ascertain the occurrence, nature and scale of violations of international human rights and international humanitarian law, as well as specific responsibilities.”

On 27 May, the Sri Lankan delegation at the UN HRC in Geneva celebrated its victory in fending off an investigation into alleged war crimes committed by its army, reported Catherine Philp and Michael Evans in their article ‘Times photographs expose Sri Lanka’s lie on civilian deaths at beach’, Times Online, May 2009. International media reports relayed that the UN HRC has decided not to investigate the civilian deaths in the war.

Nimalka Fernando, APWLD member in Sri Lanka, also the president of IMADR urged the Sri Lankan government to agree to facilitate investigations of allegations of war crimes and violations of humanitarian law by both parties of the conflict, the government and the LTTE. She also demanded that the government clearly state, both internally and externally, its political framework and policy to create a multinational state where the rights of minorities including the Tamils and Muslims are guaranteed.

SOURCES:

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- <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=30984&Cr=sri+lanka&Cr1=>
- <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/asia/article6383477.ece>
- <http://english.aljazeera.net/news/americas/2009/06/200965155234774330.html>
- <http://www.imadr.org/>

Voicing Women's Concerns to ASEAN!

Secretariat's Report, Misun Woo, with reports from Tess Vistro

To ensure the engagement of national women's human rights groups in the ASEAN human rights process, the Regional Women's Human Rights Consultation on the Asian Human Rights Body (AHRB) was held on 18-19 February 2009 in Bangkok, Thailand. The event was organised by the Women's Caucus represented by APWLD and the International Women's Rights Action Watch Asia Pacific (IWRAP AP) in collaboration with FORUM-ASIA and SAPA Task Force on ASEAN Human Rights.

The meeting brought together 41 women activists from nine countries (Burma, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand, Timor-Leste and Vietnam). It provided a critical forum for collective assessment of the women's human rights agenda in Southeast Asia and gave substantive inputs into the first draft of the terms of reference (TOR) for the AHRB from a women's rights perspective. The consultation further identified national level priorities and developed strategies for moving forward. It also recognised the need to identify and engage with key ASEAN structures, including its socio-economic institution and in key processes towards ensuring the realisation of women's human rights agenda in Southeast Asia.

For the rest of 2009, women's rights activists agreed to continue to engage and participate in the AHRB and the ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children (ACWC) processes including the drafting of the TOR, lobbying for selection of members and the establishment of the AHRB and ACWC.

What is ASEAN and why ASEAN?

Established in 1967, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has primarily focused on the acceleration of economic growth and development of the region. The adoption of the ASEAN Vision 2020 and Hanoi Plan of Action in 1997 and the endorsement of Vientiane Action Programme (VAP) in 2004 saw significant changes to ASEAN, shifting its focus towards the promotion of human rights in the region.

The adoption of the ASEAN Charter at the 13th ASEAN Summit in November 2007 saw another significant shift in ASEAN becoming a rule-based organisation and signaling possible adherence to the rule of law and justice. In line with the purpose and principles of promoting and protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms as enshrined in the ASEAN Charter, Article 14 provides for the establishment of an ASEAN Human Rights body (AHRB).

Asia Pacific is the only region with no existing regional human rights mechanism, whereas three other continents (Europe, Africa and Americas) have their own regional human rights mechanisms and instruments.

What is HLP?

The High Level Panel (HLP) is composed of senior representatives from the 10 ASEAN member countries. It was established in July 2008 at the 41st ASEAN Ministerial Meeting to draft the TOR of the AHRB. The HLP submitted the first draft of the TOR to the ASEAN Summit in December 2008. The final TOR is planned to be adopted by the 10 Foreign Ministers in the 42nd ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on July 2009, in Thailand.

What is the ACWC?

Significantly for women, the VAP has set as its goal to, among others, the creation of an ASEAN Commission dedicated to the promotion and protection of the rights of women and children. The ASEAN Commission on Women (ACW) and the Senior Officials Meeting on Social Welfare and Development (SOMSWD) held the Joint Roundtable Discussion on the Establishment of the ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children (ACWC) in April 2008. The outcome document laid down valuable initial inputs for the establishment of the ACWC, including aims, principles, functions, modalities for the establishment of the commission, and recommended next steps.

What is the Working Group for ACWC?

The ACW and SOMSWD have set up a Working Group to develop the TOR for the ACWC. The first meeting of the Working Group took place in June 2009, Vietnam. The Working Group aims to develop the first draft of the TOR by September 2009 and the final draft to be submitted in the first quarter of 2010.

The consultation concluded with the adoption of an outcome document which reiterated the commitment of women's rights groups in Southeast Asia in pursuit of advocating for protection, promotion and realisation of women's human rights and fundamental freedoms in the region. The document in particular calls the ASEAN and its member states to fulfil their legal obligations under international human rights laws and to establish a credible, effective and independent AHRB. The participants representing diverse women's human rights groups in Southeast Asia reaffirmed that a parallel event will be organised during the subsequent ASEAN Ministerial Meetings and ASEAN Summits.

After the February consultation...

25 FEBRUARY 2009. The Women's Caucus represented by APWLD and IWRAW AP dialogued with the ASEAN Secretary General and the ASEAN Chairperson at the ASEAN Civil Society Conference (ACSC). A press statement was delivered by the Women's Caucus, calling for a full integration of women's human rights concerns into the AHRB and the sharing of the TOR for AHRB to ensure transparency of the process. The statement underscored states' obligation to ensure full and meaningful participation and equal representation of women at all stages in the process from drafting to final adoption of the AHRB and ACWC, as well as within all institution structures created by ASEAN.

28 FEBRUARY 2009. The Women's Caucus was involved in the meeting with ten ASEAN leaders in Hua Hin, Thailand. For the first time, Southeast Asian women's voices were officially acknowledged in this process through the ASEAN Chairperson's statement, recognising the critical importance of engendering the discussions of the AHRB and addressing women's human rights.

20 MARCH 2009. The Women's Caucus had an interface meeting with the High Level Panel (HLP), where the outcome document of the February consultation was submitted. The submission specifically urged the HLP to include a provision on substantive equality in the TOR and the AHRB to be established with strong protection and promotion mandates with investigative powers.

28-30 MARCH 2009, a Southeast Asia Consultation of Rural Women on the Establishment of AHRB and ACWC was organised by AMIHAN in collaboration with APWLD and FORUM-ASIA. (See Southeast Asia Rural Women Gathering on the AHRB and ACWC.)

29-30 APRIL 2009, the first meeting of the Working Group that will work towards the establishment of the ACWC was held in Manila, hosted by Philippine government agencies. The afternoon session was opened for participation of CSOs as observers which provided the context and enabled information sharing on Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), human rights bodies and CSOs involvement in the ASEAN and how the establishment of a human rights mechanism was done in other regions.

Up next...

1. HLP meeting, 10-12 July 2009, Chiang Mai, Thailand.
2. 42nd ASEAN Ministerial Meeting (16-23 July 2009) in Phuket, Thailand.
3. The ACW scheduled to convene the WG meetings almost every month in 2009.
4. 15th ASEAN Summit, 23-25 October 2009, Phuket, Thailand.

What challenges do we face?

1. Weak provisions in the draft TOR for AHRB. The current TOR submitted by the HLP at the 14th ASEAN Summit in February 2009 has no protection mandates. Furthermore, the draft recognises specific "ASEAN/Asian values" as well as the state sovereignty reiterating 'non-interference policy' in terms of human rights as opposed to the principle of universality of rights.
2. Lack of coordinated processes in relation to the establishment of AHRB and ACWC as well as the lack of clarity on the relationship between the two. It should be ensured that the ACWC is not a weak, isolated and/or secondary body to the AHRB. It is critical for women's rights groups to have further discussion and strategies given the weak TOR for the AHRB as well as the expedited process of the establishment of the ACWC.

What can be our advocacy focus for July-December 2009?

AHRB

- Influence selection process of the AHRB members in each country with regional level support to have independent experts!
- Publicise the TOR for the AHRB at local and national levels for awareness-raising!
- Urge strong protection mandate to be included in the final TOR for the AHRB, such as on-site visits, individual complaint procedure, periodic review of the country level human rights situation, and/or special rapporteur mechanism!

ACWC

- Contact ACW focal persons in each country and obtain information on the process!
- Awareness-raising on the ACWC process at local and national levels and mobilise women's groups to influence the process!
- Urge the WG for ACWC towards a meaningful engagement and dialogue with women's rights groups and civil society from the drafting of the TOR to the establishment of the ACWC.

Southeast Asia Rural Women Gathering on the AHRB and ACWC

Tess Vistro

The Southeast Asia Rural Women Consultation on the Establishment of the ASEAN Human Rights Body (AHRB) and the ASEAN Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children (ACWC) was held 28-30 March 2009 in Bangkok, Thailand. Sponsored by the Asia Peasant Women Network, with support from FORUM-ASIA and APWLD, twenty-one participants gathered representing national organisations from six countries of Southeast Asia: Thailand, Vietnam, Lao PDR, Cambodia, Philippines and Indonesia.

The consultation developed an advocacy position based on rural women's experiences and situation for submission to the ongoing process of the development of the AHRB and the ACWC. The consultation provided an overview of the ASEAN charter, its structures and various levels of engagement, the existing regional human rights mechanisms (Europe, the Americas and Africa), elements, mandates, and how CSOs have used these mechanisms for the realisation and fulfilment of human rights in the various regions.

The consultation was able to produce a wealth of ideas on the various levels of discrimination of rural women, including rural Muslim women, the strategies used, including mechanisms at the national and international levels that are being accessed to address the problems on the situation of rural women in Southeast Asia. Also raised and discussed in the workshops were rural women's recommendations to the leaders of the ASEAN, and the roles they have in the process of setting up human rights bodies in the region and in the creation of a Southeast Asian community that truly reflects the dreams and visions of rural women.

The rural women united on the following declaration statement that was issued at the close of the three-day gathering which called on:

the ASEAN

1 To fully implement the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and Convention on the Rights of the Child without any reservations. For all ASEAN states to sign onto the CEDAW optional protocol.

2 To urge ASEAN member states to adopt the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) to ensure the protection, promotion and fulfillment of the human rights and fundamental freedom of indigenous peoples; to establish a Commission for indigenous peoples within the ASEAN.

3 To establish a special ASEAN court that will tackle agrarian and other rural issues.

4 To create an ASEAN Tribunal that will prosecute officials of the state who are guilty of committing crimes against humanity, war crimes, corruption, and human rights violations.

5 Subject the ASEAN political security, socio-cultural and economic blueprint to wide discussion and approval of the people in the ASEAN regions, with the active participation of grassroots women and men in the process.

6 To create a forum for exchange among the CSOs, grassroots organisations and advocacy groups on human rights and development and other concerns regularly.

7 To promote and monitor the involvement of stakeholders, including sectoral bodies (people's organisations) or their representatives in the implementation of the programmes and activities of the ASEAN in each country. Ensure that the committee permanent representative have dialogues with sectoral bodies especially among grassroots people.

8 To stop economic policies that are harmful to peasants and rural people – the agreements within the World Trade Organisation, various free trade agreements, genetically modified organisms, contract farming, land conversion, etc.

9 To abrogate all treaties entered into by the various ASEAN governments that violate the rights of rural women and other rural peoples.

Changing the Existing Climate on Climate Change

Vernie Yocogan-Diano

Climate Change Impacts on Rural Women:

Climate change scenarios predict adverse environmental and socio-economic consequences. These include frequency and intensity of heat waves, droughts, floods, and typhoons; altered ecosystems; reduced output and productivity of the agriculture, fishery and forestry sectors, loss of livelihood, food insecurity and diminished supplies; and heightened incidence of certain diseases and pests on people, animals and plants. The burden of these will be borne by poor women and their communities who are most dependent on the land and natural resources for their food, livelihood, fuel and medicine, and less equipped to cope with natural disasters and weather variations.

Women are particularly affected because of socially ascribed roles resulting from entrenched feudal-patriarchal discrimination. Rural women are further burdened as they are the ones who try to make ends meet within the household and in the communities. This situation is compounding an already existing and deepening agrarian crisis linked to land concentration to landlords, rural underdevelopment, liberalisation of agriculture and land conversion policies causing debt and bankruptcy among peasant families. This situation forces women to migrate, or take on various forms of employment increasing their vulnerability to violence and abuse.

A number of studies and stories of rural women have determined that poor women are more vulnerable to natural disasters. While able to adapt and survive hostile conditions, facilities to support them during disasters are neither available nor accessible. Their shelters are the first to crumble during storms and earthquakes, their communities are usually difficult to reach due to negligible communication and transportation facilities. There is a lack of food supply as food production is barely enough for daily subsistence during normal conditions. The vulnerability of women and children is illustrated by higher incidence of deaths of women and children during disasters.

Survival Strategies:

As dependents on land and natural resources, rural women have managed and developed systems to nurture these resources. Particularly among indigenous women, resource management is based on the worldview of communal ownership, sharing and responsibility. This is lived by values such as, 'let us not monopolise the good', 'inayan' or 'paniyo' (restrain or have fear on being greedy or evil) among Cordillera indigenous peoples and among other indigenous peoples in Asia. Indigenous agricultural systems enriching the land, hydrology, forest management systems, pest management systems, among others, are proven to be effective and sustainable compared to market-oriented systems. Market-oriented systems impose the use of large-scale hazardous chemicals and mono-cropping of engineered or modified plant and animal varieties which damage the environment and exacerbate the effects of climate change.

As survivors, rural women have developed mechanisms to cope when produce is low and when disasters happen. Traditional practices of cooperation and exchange labour (innabuyog, ubbo, baddang, alluyon in the Cordillera, Philippines; parma in Nepal) are useful systems of support in times of difficulty. Rural women have developed crop diversification, multiple cropping and intercropping practices, cultivation of appropriate crops that are resistant to floods and droughts. They have built on homesteading, developed fishery in flood-prone areas, and promoted alternative energy-saving technology, adopted less labour-intensive technologies and invested in alternative irrigation facilities.

Rural women continue to build their capacities in strengthening their organisations and leaders; in negotiation, lobbying and confrontations with corporations, agencies of the state and inter-government bodies; and linkages with people's organisations/movements at various levels for solidarity and joint actions. However, rural women also face the constraints of resources, technological support and capacity in confronting the challenges of climate change.

Recommendations:

Financial resources allocated for climate change projects hardly include women's needs despite women's vulnerability and significant contribution in curbing climate change. Government policies and programmes on climate change barely consider and include women. Hence, it is recommended to develop principles and procedures to protect women's rights and encourage women's access to national climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies. Further, it is also important to conduct impact assessments of adaptation and mitigation strategies of government and enable rural women's organisations to access funds to further their strategies in curbing climate change.

Technological support should be available to rural women including enhancement of appropriate technology and the transfer of these to rural women. It is also important to have an exchange among Asian rural women on appropriate technologies they have developed to cope with climate change.

It is necessary to impress that women are powerful agents of change! Hence rural women's active participation should be enabled at all levels of strategies to adapt to climate change. The capacity of rural women has to be further strengthened to include equal access in negotiating, developing, managing and implementing adaptation and mitigation financing. It is also necessary to improve women's access to and control over natural resources in order to reduce poverty and vulnerability, to manage and conserve natural resources and to ensure that women have the resources to adapt in face of climatic disasters. Development of training and education programmes for women and girls on climate change should be enabled including community-based approaches and strategies.

The biggest contribution of rural women against climate change is their continuing fight against extractive industries, market-oriented production and over-consumption while asserting effective and sustainable practices on land and natural resource control and development through collective efforts. The liability of imperialist governments, their corporations and their agencies including subservient governments of poor countries, should always be scrutinised and sharply criticised and countered.

This discussion is from the APWLD discussion paper *Rural Women and Climate Change: Challenges and Recommendations* written by APWLD member and Innabuyog Chairperson Vernie Yocogan-Diano and APWLD secretariat Tomoko Kashiwazaki. The discussion paper was presented during the Women and Gender workshop at the Building the People's Movement on Climate Change towards Conference of Parties 15 (COP15) and Beyond conference. Held 23-24 March 2009, in Bangkok Thailand, APWLD through its members Innabuyog, Philippines and Sustainable Development Foundation, Thailand, facilitated the Women and Gender workshop.

Organised by the Asia Pacific Research Network, the objectives of the event were to provide a deeper understanding on different aspects of climate change issues from a grassroots perspective and consolidate the People's Movement on Climate Change (PMCC) towards the COP15 activities later in the year.

The workshop explored how efforts of CSOs, NGOs and the people's movement can be consolidated into a stronger voice to be heard by governments and local and international bodies working on climate change.

The event has strengthened and enriched the PMCC, a global campaign whose main agenda is the

People's Protocol on Climate Change (PPCC). In particular, women's issues and voices have been included in the PPCC. The PPCC is a framework agreement independently agreed upon by people's movements and their supporters both outside and inside governments to address the need for comprehensive and effective measures to mitigate climate change independently and through government action, as well as measures for effective adaptation and defence of people's rights and interests in the face of challenges brought about by climate change especially in developing countries. This framework agreement is to be submitted to the COP15 this December 2009 at Copenhagen and will be taken by the PMCC beyond 2009.

The next step towards the joint action process is the holding of the People's Action on Climate Change (PACC) which will be held on 28 September to 3 October 2009 in Bangkok, Thailand. This is a parallel activity to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change initiated by the Philippine Climate Watch Alliance in collaboration with APWLD, the International League of People's Struggles, the Asian Peasant Coalition and the Thai NGO Coordinating Committee on Development (NGO-COD). This will be a gathering of various sectors in Asia including women to strengthen the voice of the people and the movement in relation to COP15. Various local and national level workshops among grassroots women will be conducted to prepare for the PACC.

Defending Women,
Defending Rights!

Asia Pacific Regional Consultation on Women Human Rights Defenders

Secretariat's Report

APWLD, in partnership with the Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA), organised the Asia Pacific Regional Consultation on Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) with the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders (UNSRHRD), Margaret Sekaggya. The consultation brought together over 120 women and men human rights defenders from 20 countries from Asia, including members and partners of APWLD, FORUM-ASIA and other stakeholders such as National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) and UN agencies in the region.

“ WHRDs are not a group of women who have good education, money, or who are protected by their class background. On the contrary, they are in fact average women who are standing up for their rights, coming out onto the streets to protest risking their own security. ”

Azra Talat Sayeed
Roots for Equity, Pakistan

The consultation was able to identify existing human rights mechanisms for WHRDs to seek remedies at national and international levels; develop strategies to advance and better advocate for rights of WHRDs in Asia Pacific at local, national, regional and international levels; and strengthen partnership between WHRDs and the UNSRHRD.

The consultation also allowed defenders to look at who are the WHRDs and their current circumstances.

WHRDs addressed specific and multiple forms of violence they are faced with, including prejudice, harassment, rape, disappearances, arbitrary arrest and detention, torture and sometimes death. WHRDs are under great risk and targeted because they are women who challenge political and socio-economic structures and cultural practices and norms. WHRDs also expressed great concern for the security of their family members, relatives and friends. In many cases family and friends become targets and face retribution for the work being done by WHRDs, at times, forcing WHRDs to either give up their work or flee the country.

Situations of increasing conflicts, growing fundamentalisms, neoliberal globalisation and the global war on terror were identified as climates reinforcing violence against WHRDs as well as factors increasing the lack of accountability for WHRDs in the region.

To further human rights and fundamental freedoms of WHRDs, participants discussed and assessed what had been achieved since the adoption of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders (the Declaration) and what needs to be done to push forward better implementation of the Declaration on the ground. Defenders also shared strategies and good practices to localise and fully implement the Declaration as well as the recommendations of the previous UNSRHRD, Hina Jilani in her last report to the Human Rights Council.

Defending Women, Defending Rights!

“ People cannot talk about anything publicly due to security fears in Sri Lanka... Especially in the rural areas of the eastern part of Sri Lanka, it is not uncommon to find that at least one person has been disappeared. This situation cannot be addressed in many cases as WHRDs will face bigger threats to their security and human rights. Given the situation, having international support and/or reporting on the situation to the UN can be an alternative way to address the situation. ”

WHRDs from Sri Lanka



The consultation urged NHRIs, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and UN agencies to strengthen the protection of WHRDs. Specific requests were made to regional mechanisms, such as ASEAN and South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation to integrate WHRDs' issues within the system. The importance of having support from mainstream human rights group for the protection of WHRDs was also underscored.

The Special Rapporteur, in her speech identified WHRDs as defenders requiring special protection and urged for solidarity in the protection of WHRDs and for their work within the human rights defenders community. She asserted that more coordinated teamwork within the UN system is required to bring about change by using the different mandates that exist, including mandates on torture, executions, force disappearances and violence against women.

Defenders at the forum expressed their commitment to strengthen mutual cooperation and support amongst each other, especially integrating the issues of WHRDs into their programme of work at all levels, and to engage with governments, NHRIs, regional mechanism and the UN for the recognition and protection of WHRDs.

“ It is always an inspiration to learn that WHRDs don't easily lose their hopes or waver in their commitment to human rights despite the risks to their and to their families' lives. Their work always brings the status of women several notches higher in society, whether institutions recognise them or not....Coming back home with new knowledge helped me in further developing our training modules on human rights. It will be extremely helpful if WHRDs at the national or local level will have some sort of follow-up training, looking at strategies and ways to effectively use the UNHR mechanism. ”

Daisy Arago *Centre for Trade Union and Human Rights, Philippines*

“ Women and men activists are human rights defenders who are steadfast in their commitment to protect and advance women's rights, human rights and people's rights. It is important that their rights advocacy be integrated with the people's struggle for national freedom and democracy. No rights can prosper in a society where a few can impose their will on the majority, and where richer nations can control and plunder the resources of others. ”

Tita Lubi
GABRIELA, Philippines

Development Effectiveness and Women

Azra Talat Sayeed

The issue of aid is political and carries within it the North-South divide with tensions emanating from the colonial past of a majority of third world countries of the South. It is based on the injustices embedded in colonialism, that the Northern countries pledged support for the eradication of poverty and achieving human rights enshrined in the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness held in Accra, Ghana in September 2008, was the continuation of a process emanating from the issue of aid provision from northern to southern countries. In 2005, at a High Level Forum in Paris, a document governing the aid and development commitments of the OECD countries was signed. This document known as the Paris Declaration treads new grounds as it defines five critical principles between the Northern donor and Southern recipient countries for their dealings on aid and development. The five principles include: (i) ownership, (ii) alignment, (iii) harmonisation, (iv) management for development results, and (v) mutual accountability.

However, these principles were developed to be applied between governments of donor and recipient countries and failed to take into account the relationship of many other players in the arena connected with delivering and receiving aid. This lack has resulted in various civil society actors entering into dialogue with the donor community and the response has been the formation of various bodies representing civil society which have taken on the agenda of ensuring that aid effectiveness dialogue is broadened to a platform of development effectiveness. At the same time, these bodies have pushed for a process which would allow a more democratic involvement of other actors to raise their issues and concerns which are wider than aid effectiveness and encompass a broader framework to include development effectiveness.

A particular platform is Better Aid Coordination Group (BACG formerly known as the International Steering Group) which has full membership and is represented by its co-chairs at the Working Party on Aid Effectiveness (WP-EFF). The WP-EFF was created by Donor Assistance Community (DAC) of the OECD in 2003. Currently it is organised

through five clusters and is given the task of ensuring that donor and recipient countries meet their Paris Declaration and Accra Agenda commitments by 2010.

The BACG is tasked with various objectives including facilitation of civil society organisations monitoring and evaluation of the Accra Agenda for Action (AAA) at various levels (national to international), create policy space for civil society engagement at various aid effectiveness platforms as well as to broaden the aid effectiveness agenda in the lead up to the fourth High-Level Forum which is to be held in 2011, among others.¹ Currently, BACG's two co-chairs are Celina Alemany, Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID) and Tony Tujan, Reality of Aid (RoA).

Another civil society platform which was created post Accra was the Open Forum which has an agenda to facilitate a consultative process of various civil society actors at various levels (national, regional, international and thematic) through which civil society will develop and define its own development effectiveness framework. The Open Forum process is being led by a 25-member body the Global Facilitation Group (GFG). Currently its two co-chairs are Deepali Sood, PLAN International, and Azra Talat Sayeed, Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD).

It is important to note that the prime goal of providing aid is to put countries on the path of 'development'. Mainstream development policies were meant to lift people out of poverty and put them on a path towards social and economic development. Currently, development is being further defined to mean ensuring fundamental human rights, environmental justice and gender equality.



Development aid is effective if women are:

- INFORMED
- DECISIVE
- VOCAL
- VISIBLE
- MOBILE

In the run up to Accra, AWID and other women's organisations had been advocating to ensure women's voices in the aid effectiveness dialogue. AWID as part of the BACG continues its leadership role in further advocating for a strong civil society presence with particular emphasis on women in the official donor platform. At the same time, it is important that issues of women's organisations be brought to the Open Forum process, whereby women's rights organisations take a lead in defining effective development framework with the critical agenda of defining an effective political enabling environment in which they can carry out critical work which will lead to the full implementation of social, political and economic justice.

In the past year the world has undergone one of the worst economic catastrophes known to the modern world. The Washington Consensus in the years after have voiced their faith in market-based policies for ensuring development, with trade liberalisation and privatisation being the most preached and practiced framework for development. A massive deregulation agenda in almost all countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America has led to terrible slashing of government support to programmes and policies that provided some survival space for women in stringent patriarchal domains. In particular, the removal of subsidies from the agricultural sector has led to an acute increase in hunger and malnourishment, both suffered predominantly by rural women and children.

Further, in the past few years microfinance has become almost the sole 'vehicle' for 'women-centred' development policies. These policies have been vehemently decried by women's groups, and the 'market-led development agenda' has been debunked strongly. However, development aid remains directed toward microfinance. Many countries in the world are providing support for microfinance, the primary mode of operation for these so-called development programmes is to provide loans to women at very high mark-ups, and in many cases the interest rates go up to

30 percent. A patriarchal value which is often attached to women being provided credit is that they are careful to pay back their loans. In essence, the norms of obedience and subservient behaviour in women, all dictated by male-dominated systems are the ones which are being used and heightened in women through a market-based development orientation. These are the very norms which women's liberation movement has been challenging for many decades. For development agencies still to pursue development policies which are so opposed to women's empowerment shows lack of understanding of a very vast diverse need which needs to be fulfilled before women can be free of the shackles imposed through either feudal or market-based systems.

Today, there is acute shrinking of development aid for women-centred organisations, making it very difficult for civil society groups, particularly women's rights groups to keep to their agenda of advocating for truly democratic societies, where women's voices are given equal weight. The basic norms of society have not changed and still allow male voices central space in decision making. Therefore, for women to be able to demand for policy directions in effective aid mechanisms, it is important that a detailed plan of action is there which can be used to steer the decision making in the direction that women have eked out. Women's groups need to be able to say which policies work, where and why; what are the most successful methods of implementation. Women are not a homogenous group. Many critical factors impact any development programme. The culture, religion, education, mobility, health, work and economic background of women are just some of the factors which need to be taken into consideration before defining development policy for them. To remain effective, vocal and relevant partners for attaining social justice, ecological sustainability, and gender justice, it is critically important for women's organisations to take a lead role in defining aid and development effectiveness for themselves and all others who are part of this debate.

¹ Svoboda, Daniel et al. "Open forum on CSO development effectiveness as a response to Paris Declaration" available at <http://www.dww.cz/docs/svoboda-berger.doc>.

In The Philippines

Philippine Rural People's Camp-Out for a Genuine Agrarian Reform

52 days of protest rhymes, rage and resistance for women and peasants land rights!

Tess Vistro

It was April 13, 2009 – the first day of the resumption of the session of the 14th Congress.

They came, peasant men and women, with their children and families, with their most basic of belongings, about 300 of them. Eager eyes, great hopes, jubilant moods filled the air, as they set up their makeshift tents, determined as they were to stay, however long it takes to bring their cause to the hallways of the seat of legislative power, the Philippine Congress: the enactment of House Bill (HB) 3059 otherwise known as the Genuine Agrarian Reform Bill (GARB). Among others, the bill provides for the free distribution of lands to all able-bodied peasant women and men, and the provision of sufficient support services to make the lands productive.

The rural people's Camp-Out was spearheaded by five of the biggest national organisations of rural people in the Philippines: Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas (KMP, Peasant Movement of the Philippines), AMIHAN (National Federation of Peasant Women) PAMALAKAYA (fisherfolk organisation), Unyon ng Manggagawa sa Agrikultura (Agricultural Workers Union), and the youth group, National Network of Agrarian Reform Advocates.

Braving torrential rains and the scorching heat of the sun, the rural people campers persisted and went about their tasks of campaigning and advocating their cause. They lobbied with the legislators, held mini rallies in front of the Congress gates, distributed leaflets, generated support from church people, students, and teachers, staged cultural presentations, education sessions on the GARB and celebrated cultural traditions as protest actions.



Regular day at the Camp-Out.



The Camp-Out during heavy rains.

Mothers' Day May 10

Peasant mothers at the camp out asked only for one gift from the legislators: enactment of HB 3059 or GARB. The Mothers' Day celebration was also meant to protest the impending approval of House Resolution 1109, which would convene the Congress into an assembly to change the constitution of the Philippines. Among the changes in the constitution is the disastrous agenda that allows 100% foreign ownership of lands in the country.

To symbolise their protest the women danced the *Kuracha*, a traditional

Filipino courtship dance, but for the protest activities, was also interpreted to stand for *kababaihang magbubukid laban sa Kurapsyon at Cha Cha (KURACHA)* or peasant women against corruption and charter change.

KURACHA was also a protest against Joint Resolution No. 1, signed by the Congress and Senate, which aims to extend the life of the two-decade old comprehensive agrarian reform programme (CARP), which has failed to distribute lands amongst landless farmers.

Carmen Buena, AMIHAN, national chairperson, and a landless rice farmer from Pampanga said "We deplore the fact that Congress and the Senate are focusing their efforts in extending the CARP, a programme which made use of billions of pesos of the people's money but never benefited the farmers."

Children of farmers offered flowers and showered the peasant mothers with confetti in recognition of the great sacrifices of mothers, not only for their families, but also for the community and the society as a whole.

In The Philippines

Mothers' Day

May 10

Women dancing the *Kuracha* to symbolise their protest.



***Santacruzán* for a Genuine Agrarian Reform** May 13

Santacruzán is a religious-historical beauty pageant tradition in a largely Catholic country like the Philippines usually held during the month of May. AMIHAN's *Santacruzán* was held with the peasant women's version to present the rural people's quest for a genuine agrarian reform.

Presented in the *Santacruzán* procession-pageant were:

Reyna Sentenciada, the symbol of the convicted innocents, depicting the rural folks held in perpetual bondage in the absence of a genuine agrarian reform programme. She was presented bound and guarded by soldiers.

Preceding *Reyna Sentenciada* were *Reyna Abodaga*, the defender of the poor and the oppressed, and *Reyna Justicia*, both representing justice that continues to be elusive for the landless rural folk.

Following *Reyna Sentenciada* were *Reyna Fe* and *Reyna Esperanza*, symbols of faith, hope and determination of the rural folk that with unity and collective action they will attain their goal of a genuine agrarian reform. House Bill 3059 Genuine Agrarian Bill was presented by 10 children, dressed in white.

The finale was *Reyna Elena*, who in biblical history, found the Holy Cross. She represented the final victory of the rural folk in attaining a genuine agrarian reform. This triumph was portrayed by the rural folks through abundant harvest and festivities so instead of flowers held by *Reyna Elena*, an array of vegetables, fruits, grains, roots crops were carried by women farmers in native baskets.



The Feast of *San Isidro Labrador* May 15

Farmers at the Camp-Out celebrated the feast of *San Isidro Labrador*, patron saint of farmers and other toilers of the land not only with their rich cultural traditions through dances, songs, food, crafts and agricultural produce but also decried the landlessness and poverty of farmers largely due to the lack of implementation of a genuine agrarian reform programme.

Carmen Buena, herself a devotee of *San Isidro Labrador* said "We are the producers of food, but we suffer from hunger. We are denied the right to the land and the much needed support services for us to fulfil our roles as producers."

Buena further said "The majority of Filipino women farmers continue to be landless. Even if I will be issued a Certificate of Land Ownership Award (CLOA) under CARP, I am still not sure that I could pay for the high cost of land. As I do not have capital for production, I will depend on credits with usurious rates. In the end, if ever I can produce from the lands, these will all go to the payment of the loans and interests incurred for the production, leaving nothing for my family and even for the land amortisation. Eventually, the government will take the land back from me, if I cannot pay."

The whole day celebration also featured games like "Breaking the pot of Gloria Macapagal Arroyo (GMA)", "Sack Race to GARB Victory", "GARB/CARP tug of war", among others.



In The Philippines

May 22

40th Day: Violent Demolition and Dispersal of the Rural People's Camp Out!

At around 2:00 p.m., farmers, fisherfolk, peasant women and their families were forced out from the premises of the Batasan Complex on their 40th day of the Rural People's Camp-Out.

KMP Secretary General Danilo Ramos said: "The demolition was unexpected as the group had already given in to the demand of the House leadership to vacate the right wing side of the Camp-Out. We were even more surprised when anti-riot police and firefighters came to disperse us."

Tension heightened when a group of men inside the House of Representatives pointed their high-powered guns at the participants of the Camp-Out. Nine people, including a woman were injured during the dispersal.

The farmers declared: "This violation of our rights only strengthens our determination to fight for our legitimate and democratic rights."

Two days after the violent dispersal, farmers filed charges of prohibition, interruption and dissolution of peaceful assembly under the Revised Penal Code; ten counts of physical injuries; malicious mischief for destroying the personal properties of farmers; violation of Republic Act 7610 for inflicting injury to minors as two of those reportedly injured were 15 and 16 years old; and grave coercion and unlawful prevention of the exercise of rights to peaceful assembly and freedom of expression.

Meanwhile, the demolished farmers picked up the pieces of their tents and belongings, retreated and set up their camp in front of the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR).

On the 50th Day: Peasant Women Unleashed their Fury

On June 2, 2009, in a daring act, AMIHAN women farmers threw rotten vegetables and fruits on enlarged photos of GMA, Speaker Prospero Nograles, Senate Committee on Agrarian chair, Gregorio Honasan, House Committee on Agrarian Reform chair Elias Bulut, Reps. Edcel Lagman and Hontiveros – the people charged by the peasant women responsible for the continued non-enactment and non-implementation of a genuine reform programme in the country.

Speaking at a rally held in front of the DAR, Amihan Vice Chairperson Zen Soriano said: "We condemn the passing to third reading of Senate Bill 2666, extending CARP for another five years and the CARPER (HB 4077) at the House of Representatives. We have said time and again that CARP did nothing in 20 years to resolve the problem of peasant landlessness in the country. With all its loopholes and exemptions, this programme will not break up land monopoly and control of big landlords and foreign agro-corporations. The CARP has denied millions of Filipino farmers and their families their rights to the land and the justice they deserve."



Soriano further commented: "Also despicable are the attempts of members of this Congress to inveigle the farmers into believing that CARP with reforms (CARPER) through HB 4077, will be able to genuinely distribute lands to the farmers. CARPER's proposal for a Php100 billion fund for support services, will never reach the farmers even in trickles, knowing how corrupt this government is."

Soriano lambasted the gender reforms provision of CARPER as this will not lead to genuine women's participation and substantial equality but will only serve to deodorise the stinking CARP. Soriano added: "Substantive equality is all about outcomes and redistributive justice. Any talk about it is farce, when there are no lands distributed to the women."

On the 52nd Day: March to Mendiola

On June 4, farmers marched 12 kilometres for six hours, in heavy downpour to Mendiola. The farmers were violently met with anti-riot policemen armed with truncheons and shields and water cannons in the corner of Morayta and Recto Avenues in Manila, a few hundred metres away from Mendiola bridge and Malacañang Palace, but the policemen failed to disperse the crowd of about 2,000 farmers and their supporters.

Scores were hurt, including Soriano, who was part of the team that negotiated with the police to allow the contingent to march until Mendiola bridge. She was dragged along the cemented pavement as she and her companion, a human rights worker from the province of Laguna attempted to take back a streamer wrested from them by the police. She suffered bruises on her arms including a contusion on her back when she was hit by a truncheon.

"No amount of intimidation and violence, not even the military's bullet, will keep us from continuing the fight until a law on genuine agrarian reform is enacted and implemented," said Soriano before the crowd.



Discussion with students on GARB.



Medical mission.

How Women Fared in Elections around the World

Secretariat's Report, Nalini Singh

2009 kick started with election bells ringing from all corners of the globe. Some had momentous feats for women while others brought successes in small doses. There were upheavals, power struggles, successes and in the end, hopefully lessons learnt for all.

We begin in **SOUTH AFRICA**. Despite the fact that women made up more than half of the South African registered voters, it was striking to note the absence of women's concerns in the agenda of various political parties. It was obvious that political parties had failed to develop concrete strategies that would mitigate violence against women. These and the crucial issues facing South Africa's poor, dispossessed and economically marginalised set the backdrop for the 22 April 2009 elections. The results for women? Taking advantage of the 30 percent quota for each political party, the elections saw a phenomenal 10 percent increase in the number of women who won. From 32 percent in 2004, the South African parliament now has 43.5 percent women. Women now occupy 174 seats in the 400 seat parliament.

The **INDONESIAN** election, with more than 170 million eligible voters spread over approximately 17,000 islands, was easily one of the largest direct elections in the world. 2009 marked the third elections since the *reformasi* (reforms) ended 30 years of dictatorship under Suharto. The parliamentary elections were held on 09 April, for 560 seats in 77 electoral districts for which 12,000 candidates were fielded by 38 contesting parties. In the lead up to the elections, some important changes were introduced in the electoral law. One was the Constitutional Court ruling that the candidates on political party lists are elected on the highest number of votes received rather than their ranking on the list. This ruling has negatively affected party cohesion because candidates on party lists became each other's competitors. While the Constitutional Court ruling enhanced direct influence of the electorate over political parties in selecting the members for parliament, this reform affected the women candidates. Political parties had introduced affirmative action to increase the number of women in parliament by accepting a minimum of 30 percent women on their party lists. Now the number of votes of each candidate has been made the determining factor for election in parliament rather than the order on the list. This did not assure an increase in the number of women in the Indonesian parliament given that parties tend to favour male candidates with access to substantial financial resources. Today, after the elections, women comprise 16.6 percent of the parliament, noting a slight increase from 11.3 percent from the last elections. Nevertheless, some political analysts say that this is a dismal number for the third largest democracy in the world.

Historic wins by women in the **KUWAITI** general elections made headlines in May 2009. A total of 210 candidates ran for 50 seats in the general elections with 16 candidates being women. Out of these 16, four women won seats in Kuwait's parliament, the first women to do so in the Gulf Arab state's history. Kuwaiti women were first given the right to vote and run for office in 2005. However, they failed to win any seats in the 2006 and 2008 elections because in Kuwait, politics is still widely seen as a man's domain. About 384,790 Kuwaitis, over half of them women, were eligible to vote but turnout was low. Nonetheless, these women have joined the ranks with the former health minister Massouma Al Mubarak, who was appointed the first Kuwaiti woman minister in 2005.

This has seen the number of women in the Kuwaiti parliament jump significantly from 1.5 percent to 7.7 percent in 2009. This is a remarkable feat, given that women only first stood in elections in 2005.

INDIA – the largest democracy in the world went to polls from April to May 2009 where elections were carried out in five phases to accommodate the 714 million voters from its 1.2 billion population. A total of 8,070 candidates stood for 543 seats in *Lok Sabha* (lower house of Parliament). Out of the 556 women who stood for elections, 60 women won. This is a slight jump from 9.1 percent from the previous elections to 10.9 percent now. These are dismal figures when compared to the vast numbers India has to deliver, as well as being the largest democracy in the world. However, it might be history in the making for Indian politics with the announcement of the first Dalit woman leader to occupy the seat of speaker of *Lok Sabha*, Meira Kumar. The head of the leading political party in *Lok Sabha* is also a woman. Out of the 60 women, it is notable to see that several of them were given ministerial positions. Best of it all is the fact that many of the women leaders are younger women, in fact the youngest woman member of *Lok Sabha* is only 28 years old.

SAUDI ARABIA has no women in its parliament after the February 2009 appointment of the new *Shura Council* (Consultative Council) – an all-male body appointed by the king. The world's biggest oil exporter, Saudi Arabia has no need for women members of parliament or elections, says the royal family but reform activists hope the advisory *Shura Council* will be transformed into an elected legislature one day. The day women will have the right to vote or to stand in elections is still a far off dream.

Women and Politics

IRAN's election however, had clearly illustrated violence against women in politics. All 42 women candidates who registered for the 10th presidential elections have been excluded from standing in the elections on the grounds of discriminatory criteria. Amnesty International reported that the Council of Guardians screens all candidates for election to "ensure their suitability for the presidency". Article 115 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran stipulates that candidates must be religious and political personalities of Iranian origin; have Iranian nationality; administrative capacity and resourcefulness; a good past record; trustworthiness and piety; and have a convinced belief in the fundamental principles of the Islamic Republic of Iran. In previous elections, majority of the candidates registered were disqualified under these criteria,

including all women. The exclusion of women appears to have been a result of an interpretation of the word *rejalas* meaning 'men'.

While talk of women's rights had taken centre stage in the campaigns of presidential candidates, and while some women's rights activists were engaged in discussions with candidates, the pressure on campaign activists continued. Campaign activists targeted were the same activists, who under great pressure and during a very negative policy environment toward women's rights, managed to elevate the discourse on women's rights in Iran, making it an issue of concern and priority for the grassroots and officials alike. Campaign activists Jelve Javaheri and her husband, and Maryam Malek were arrested on the charges of being members of an 'illegal' organisation the One Million

Signatures Campaign alleged to have the aim of "disrupting public order and security". This campaign, also known as the Campaign for Equality, is collecting signatures for a petition demanding equal rights for women.

While the world watches and welcomes the commitments made by some electoral candidates during their campaigns to address the issue of women's rights, we hope that once in the elected seats they don't fall back on their promises.

In comparison to the global average of 18.6 percent of women in parliaments, many countries are far from achieving that or the targeted 30 percent. While at the moment it is still a numbers game, true gains will only be noted if the women winning elections are working for the women, voted by the women and are part of the women's movement.

Rajamani - An Extraordinary Example of Courage in the Pursuit of Political Seating

Fatima Burnad

In the face of being mocked and called a loud-mouthed woman who came empty-handed into the political arena, Rajamani proved that "Politics is not for men alone!"

Kana Rajamani, 52, a Dalit woman district leader, agricultural worker, trade union leader, from the Tamil Nadu Dalit Women's Movement (TNDWM) along with seven other district leaders contested for the 15th *Lok Sabha* (lower house of parliament) elections in May 2009. She stood against regional parties and multi-millionaire candidates.

Before the elections, Rajamani with 20 other Dalit women election hopefuls went to the District Collector's office to file their nominations. There, they were ridiculed by rich male politicians saying that, 'as poor Dalit women, how do they come for nomination?'

Rajamani took no note of this mockery and filed her nomination with a deposit of Rs.5,000 which she obtained after mortgaging her jewelry. Rajamani is a strong woman and had the continued support of Dalit women. Other mainstream political parties had

approached her to contest under their banners. She refused and she stood as an independent candidate supported by the TNDWM.

Rajamani and other Dalit women leaders from TNDWM campaigned door-to-door. The public commented that as the various political party leaders were bribing people by paying Rs.100 to Rs.500 per vote, Rajamani was being supported by Dalit women and the public by contributing small amounts of cash (Rs.10 to Rs.20) and in kind throughout the campaign.

The people recognised the leadership of Rajamani and they showed a lot of support to the TNDWM. The movement has spread throughout all the villages in the area through political education programmes they had organised. A platform for the movement was provided during the election campaigns that Rajamani carried such as to: show an alternative, clean campaign process is possible and expose corrupt politicians; encourage grassroots women to contest in elections particularly Dalit women; and strengthen the Dalit women's movement.

Her campaign strategy was very simple. She travelled in an auto rickshaw (three-wheel automobile) and distributed pamphlets to people whilst other politicians travelled in the air conditioned



Rajamani's election symbol was a sewing machine.

comfort of their cars with an entourage showcasing their economic power and campaign paraphernalia of large banners, posters and flags everywhere.

Despite having the support of the Dalit women's movement, she was unable to emerge as a victor when the ballots were finally counted. Nonetheless, Rajamani proved to everyone that with determination and support women too can stand for elections and an alternative, fair, free, safe, honest and genuine campaign is possible. Although she only managed to get 4,138 votes, Rajamani is happy with this result given that one of her opponents who spent much more money only managed to get 6,000 votes. As a candidate, she has won the support of her community. In parliament or not, she will continue to voice her community's and Dalit women's issues.

In and around Asia Pacific

January – June 2009

BPfA is turning 15 in 2010

Among the first activities for the year on Beijing+15 was the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) Expert Group Meeting (EGM), held in Bangkok from 13 to 15 May 2009. UNESCAP organised the EGM to prepare for the High-level Intergovernmental Meeting in October 2009, to review the implementation in the Asia-Pacific region of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA) adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995) and the outcome of the 23rd special session of the General Assembly (2000). The outcome of the High-level Intergovernmental Meeting will be an input to the global review and appraisal of the implementation of the BPfA, to be carried out by the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) at its 54th session in 2010.

At the EGM, a general agreement among the experts was reached as to how Beijing+10 has taken a backseat while attention is being given more to Millennium Development Goals and the UN Aid Effectiveness. This shift in attention has affected the women's movement. "In the end, the transformative agenda and the human rights discourse of the BPfA have been displaced by service delivery and economic effectiveness approaches. This trend has manifested itself in the substantial funding reduction for women's movements as well as the diminution of BPfA as a benchmark in progress reports especially a decade after the 1995 World Conference on Women which yielded BPfA," stated the report by Bianca Miglioretto of Isis International.

The EGM also importantly discussed alarming trends in the region and its impact on women such as: aging population, environmental degradation, climate change, and the economic crisis. These trends are emerging issues which will impact women the hardest as they are the most vulnerable.

IMPORTANT EVENTS THIS YEAR:

Asia Pacific NGO Forum on Beijing+15, 22-24 October 2009, Quezon City, Philippines.

With the theme: Weaving wisdom, confronting crises, forging the future, the Asia Pacific NGO Forum on Beijing+15 will convene at Miriam College, Quezon City, Philippines. Organised by Asia-Pacific Women's Watch, the forum will contribute into the global NGO Forum, which will take place prior to the 54th session of the UN CSW in 2010.

IMPORTANT EVENTS IN 2010:

The **54th session of the UN CSW in 2010** will be devoted to the implementation of the BPfA. The UN CSW session will review and appraise the implementation of the BPfA and the outcome of the 23rd Special Session of the General Assembly.

Beijing+15 Global Women's Forum, 26 & 27 February 2010 immediately preceding the 54th session of the CSW. The Global Women's Forum aims to: report on the current condition of women and articulate a vision for the future of women around the world; report on the gap between words and deeds regarding the implementation of the BPfA; generate renewed commitment and engagement on the implementation of the BPfA at all levels, including international, regional, national and local levels; and promote the critical need for action and implementation.

15 September 2010, on the day of the 15th anniversary of the 1995 conference, there will be a worldwide celebration.

SOURCES:

- http://www.isiswomen.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1238&Itemid=1
- http://apww.isiswomen.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=38:asia-pacific-forging-towards-beijing-15-note-from-the-convenor-of-the-asia-pacific-ngo-forum-on-beijing-15&catid=2:ap-ngo-forum-15&Itemid=25
- <http://www.ngocsw.org/en/donations/2010-ngo-forum-fund>
- BPfA link: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/plat1.htm#framework>

In and around Asia Pacific
January – June 2009

The Durban Review Conference

The Durban Review Conference (DRC) took place on 20 - 24 April 2009 in Geneva, Switzerland. The conference evaluated progress towards the goals set by the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance in Durban, South Africa, in 2001. This year's conference adopted the outcome document by consensus at the plenary on 21 April available at: http://www.un.org/durbanreview2009/pdf/Durban_Review_outcome_document_En.pdf.

The conference exhibited the existing problems and politicking among countries. Nine countries boycotted this year's conference: US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Israel, Germany, Netherlands, Italy and Poland. Czech Republic withdrew after the conference started. The boycotts were prompted by fears that the conference will be used to disparage Israel, promote anti-Semitism, and that the conference will not deal with discrimination against homosexuals, and for focusing on the West and ignoring problems of racism and intolerance in the developing world. Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's statement calling Israel a "cruel and repressive racist regime" led dozens of states delegates to walk out of the Assembly Hall.

The outcome document was full of compromises and trade-offs between states. The major issues include: "defamation of religions" was removed in favour of freedom of expression; discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender expression was not included despite the advocacy by the EU states and NGOs; discrimination based on work and descent remains unrecognised.

APWLD NGOs and CSO interventions

Interventions at the DRC were made particularly on the language and content of several draft outcome documents during the preparatory process. Coordinated interventions by Asian civil society organisations (CSOs) started with the Asian Regional Workshop on the DRC in February 2008. APWLD's analysis of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action (DDPA, 2001), a collation of APWLD's suggested language to the DDPA and comparative analysis of DDPA, CEDAW, BPfA and Beijing+5, published in 2003 was shared with Asian CSOs. Since the first draft of the outcome document released by the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights (OHCHR) in November 2008 until the final adoption of the document by the conference on 21 April, the Asian CSOs coordinated and responded to each revisions of the draft document. The main focus of APWLD's intervention was on globalisation, intersectionality of discrimination including gender and sexuality, and war on terror. APWLD as part of the Asian CSO group, persistently sent suggested language to the drafts.

To highlight the issue of war on terror as it has significant impact on discrimination of particularly Muslim women in Asian countries, APWLD supported its member, Azra Talat Sayeed from Roots for Equity, Pakistan and jointly responded to the assessment of the implementation of the DDPA and emerging issues at national level using the questionnaire sent from the OHCHR in September 2008. Also, a joint statement by the International Movement Against all forms of Discrimination and Racism (IMADR), FORUM-ASIA and APWLD highlighted the discrimination on the grounds of religion in the context of war on terror.

APWLD also issued the joint statement with International Women's Rights Action Watch Asia Pacific (IWRAP AP) which was read by Wathshlah Gajapathy Naidu, of IWRAP AP at the conference on 23 April 2009. The statement expressed our shared concerns on the absence of key issues such as discrimination based on work and descent and discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender expression. The statement urged all states to:

- Recognise the intersectionality of all forms of discrimination including gender and racism;
- Not use arguments of cultural relativism to undermine the universality and indivisibility of human rights;
- Recognise that communities most affected by this situation are women and those who live outside the hetero-normative framework and are discriminated based on their gender identity, sexual identity and sexual orientation;
- Ratify and implement the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, among others.

The effective Asian CSO intervention was made possible through online discussions and email listserves. The exchanges were held in a participatory and cooperative way with significant contribution to bridging CSOs in Asia and Geneva by the staff of FORUM-ASIA and IMADR based in Geneva. The groups were dedicated to providing detailed information on every development happening in Geneva, and delivering the inputs made by the CSOs in Asia to Geneva.

Musawah

Musawah, a global movement for equality and justice in the Muslim family, was launched in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 13-17 February 2009, bringing together some 250 Muslim scholars and activists from 47 countries. The participants shared scholarship, strategies and experiences in pushing for equality and justice in Muslim family laws and practices. They also discussed why reforms to laws that bind, shape and affect the daily lives of Muslim families are necessary and possible.

Musawah aims to: strengthen women's voices demanding equality and justice in the family at the national, regional and international levels; build analysis and strategies that bring together scholarship and experience regarding Muslim jurisprudence, human rights principles, fundamental rights guarantees, and the lived realities of families today; provide those advocating for rights in the family with tools and resources, including a Framework for Action; and raise the visibility of initiatives advocating for equality and justice in the Muslim family.

'Musawah' means 'Equality' in Arabic. Other information on Musawah may be found at www.musawah.org. You may also look up Musawah Project Director Zainah Anwar's 'Bearers of change' article in the International Herald Tribune on 5 March 2009 at: <http://www.ihf.com/articles/2009/03/05/opinion/edanwar.php?page=2>

Source: <http://www.musawah.org/faq.asp>

Women Speak on Musawah

“ Musawah was very important and relevant to the work my organisation, Shirkat Gah – Women's Resource Centre, is doing in Pakistan. We run Legal Consciousness campaigns to increase women's access to information and justice and to bring equality at different levels including the family. The Musawah event gave a new and focused direction to the feminist movement to see how equality could be brought to the family level as this is the basic unit and provides a framework for action in terms of women's empowerment. The movement brings Muslim women's perspectives, especially in terms of dealing with the growing reference of Islam towards women's rights into the broader feminist movement. ”

Shahnaz Iqbal
Pakistan

“ The Musawah global meeting brought together a diversity of women from throughout the Muslim world and beyond demanding justice and equality in the Muslim family. It was an opportunity for us to declare our existence and struggles as a socio political force at the local, national, regional and global levels. We found confidence and inspiration from the vibrant exchanges and debates among 250 sisters who came from 47 countries in Asia, Africa, Middle East, Europe and North America. I myself felt energized by the young women among us who often raised the hardest questions and introduced new ways of doing things. ”

Kamala Chandrakirana
Indonesia

“ Musawah marks a momentous feminist challenge to patriarchal power relations and fundamentalist politics disguised as religion. The global coming together of women from different Islamic contexts – spanning secular, religious and plural legal systems, was charged with the electric energy of a movement. The unanimous assertion of the emancipatory goals of Islam over static, rigid patriarchal textual versions, was not just about debating what Islam is today, but rather, about challenging hegemonic and hierarchical power structures that have controlled religion. Musawah is not just about re-claiming religion – it is also about asserting democracy and accountability in all areas of public policy, including policy justified by religion. ”

Madhu Mehra
India

In and around Asia Pacific
January – June 2009

PM Nepal promises to rid country of untouchability

Although Nepal was declared free of untouchability three years ago, "...it is unfortunate that we haven't been able to implement this declaration in practice," Nepal Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal said during the Untouchability Free Day. He asserted that untouchability should be viewed as a punishable offence.

He further stated that apart from introducing stricter laws to root out untouchability, social awareness programmes and political campaigns should also be initiated. "The state is committed to do whatever needs to be done for the upliftment of the Dalit community," he said. This involves the government's plan to celebrate Jestha 21 as 'Dalit Rights Day' every year to inspire the Nepali society to be rid of discrimination, oppression and untouchability.

It is estimated that there are close to 4 million Dalits in Nepal which has a total population of 27 million. Most Dalits live in impoverished parts of the country, and do not have easy access to education and basic health services. Dalits occupy the lowest strata of the Nepali society and are looked down upon by many and are subject to oppression and inhumane treatment.

Source: nepalnews.com 04 June 2009 <http://www.nepalnews.com/archive/2009/jun/jun04/news10.php>

Congratulations

Fatima Burnad!

The India International Friendship Society (IIFS) has awarded our very own Fatima Burnad of Tamil Nadu Dalit Women's Movement with the "Rashtriya Gaurav Award". The award was given to Fatima Burnad for her activism and social work. Her worthy example has been a great inspiration to others.



She was given the award and the Certificate of Excellence for her life's work in May 2009, New Delhi, India. The IIFS honours successful meritorious Indian personalities with these awards given to extraordinary men and women who have specialised in various fields such as science and technology, education, industry, fine arts, politics and social work, in lieu of the yeoman services rendered with excellence in their respective fields.

Delhi high court decriminalized homosexuality

We do recognise that this news came after the deadline set for Forum News January to June 2009, but we just have to congratulate activists and friends in New Delhi for this landmark judgement now than later, when the news is already stale. On 2 July 2009, New Delhi, India's high court decriminalized homosexuality. The court said that a statute in Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, which defines homosexual acts as "carnal intercourse against the order of nature" and made them illegal, was an "antithesis of the right to equality". The judgement is available at: <http://lobis.nic.in/dhc/>

New UNSRVAW

APWLD congratulates the new UN Special Rapporteurs on violence against women, its causes and consequences, Ms. Rashida Manjoo of South Africa. We look forward to the continuation of our collaboration and coordination with the UNSRVAW office.

Women's Day 2009

March 8, Women's Day across Asia Pacific!

Mongolia

Air pollution, mining, destruction of land and water resources, violence, are just a few issues surrounding human security that people of Mongolia are faced with. Although Mongolia has a state national security policy and Council of National Security under the President, this policy and the body do not respond to the increasing danger to human security.



Since 2007, Mongolian Women NGOs Network (MONFEMNET) organises the yearly "Through Women's Eyes" during Women's Day. This year's forum addresses security issues with the theme "National Security is Human Security" linking security issues to human security. CHRDR presented three of the papers at the forum: National Security and Environment which focused on disasters caused by mining and other corporate activities; National Security and Enabling Environment for Sustainable CSO activities; and National Security, Migration and Human Trafficking report. The People's Coalition for Food Sovereignty, Mongolia also provided a report on national security and food sovereignty. The Coalition is a culmination of a series of activities which had been initiated with APWLD providing a training on trade and food in Mongolia in 2005.

– *Center for Human Rights and Development (CHRDR)*

Philippines

More than 10,000 Filipinas led by GABRIELA trooped to the streets nationwide to illustrate their disgust over the anti-women government of Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, especially in light of the high court's decision on the RP-US Visiting Forces Agreement as constitutional.

GABRIELA members donned headdresses and hats depicting issues of poverty, unbridled corruption, violence against women, servility to foreign interests and flagrant perpetuation of Arroyo in power. Women artists, former government officials, opposition senators, urban poor and peasant women, as well as workers and youth sector participated in the activity.

– *Cristina Ellazar Palabay, Gabriela Women's Party*

On this year's International Women's Day, Innabuyog commenced the 25th year of GABRIELA, a national organisation of women in the Philippines. Innabuyog serves as the sectoral member for indigenous women as well as the regional chapter in the Cordillera region, Philippines. Innabuyog marked the week-long celebration with an exhibit dubbed Indigenous Women Securing Food, Traditional Knowledge and Rights coinciding with the annual Flower Festival of Baguio City. The exhibit provided a different aspect to the commercial event and educated the public on the significant role women play in food production and in the assertion of transfer of traditional knowledge which is critical to the survival of indigenous peoples. The exhibit culminated with a gathering of women activists, support groups and advocates through a programme entitled Filipino Women Portraits, Poetry and Music that paid tribute to respected women leaders and activists who continue to inspire young women and men to offer their service and commitment to marginalised women and their communities. The event closed with songs from Salidummay, a local singing group which makes use of indigenous music as a way to convey the struggles of the people to the public.

– *Vernie Yocogan-Diano, Innabuyog*

Women's Day 2009

In the Philippines, more than 10,000 Filipinas led by GABRIELA trooped to the streets nationwide.



Sri Lanka

Women's day celebration was held in Attalachchenai in Ampara district on 9 March with more than 1,000 women from the northeast and the southern parts of Sri Lanka.

Five women leaders raised issues in their district in relation to the conflict situation that the country is facing. Fathima Sakiras of Ampara district, Achchu Mohomad Asmiya of Nintavur district, Amadarothuppahige Wasanthi Samanthika of Trincomalee district, and Athauda Arachchige Jayawathi, coordinator of Puttalam lagoon fisher organisation, spoke on the situation in their communities and the conditions which make women vulnerable in conflict situations. They also shared how women are struggling to overcome the situation and how they assist each other through networking and alliance-building.

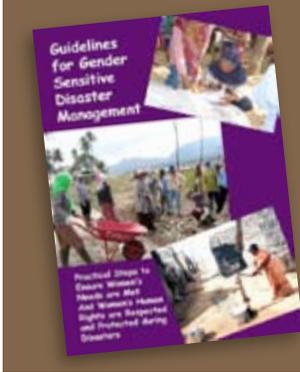
Geetha Lakmini spoke about the history of Women's Day and the unchanging conditions women have been faced with. Women have demanded for food and peace for their survival since ancient times. Today access to jobs and other sources of livelihood and peace are also sought for. Geetha, as part of the Rural and Indigenous Women Task Force, delivered the APWLD statement "War against Women". As a response to the current conflict in the country, the statement called for a stop to human rights abuses of women, and uphold gender equality and non-discrimination in Sri Lanka. The statement has been forwarded to Sri Lankan government and international mechanisms.

– *Geetha Lakmini, National Fisheries Solidarity*



The immediate challenges in Sri Lanka society today are:

- Political settlement based on equality and social justice in society,
- Ethnic harmony among Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim people,
- Resettlement of internally displaced persons within a reasonable time period and help them to revive their livelihoods and sustain life,
- Build up the country with a deep sense of people-centred development.



Publication Updates: Guidelines for Gender Sensitive Disaster Management

In 2006, APWLD published the Guidelines for Gender Sensitive Disaster Management (Guidelines). The Guidelines are the result of the documentation project “Survey of Women’s Human Rights Violations in the Aftermath of the Tsunami in India, Indonesia, Thailand and Sri Lanka and the October 8, 2005 Earthquake in Pakistan” coordinated by APWLD.

The Guidelines have been praised for providing many sound advices for agencies handling disaster management efforts. Recently though, it has received comments particularly from the World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA). WABA is a global network of individuals and organisations concerned with the protection, promotion and support of breastfeeding worldwide.

WABA has communicated with APWLD and given detailed comments, particularly: “While your document covers a more comprehensive perspective to disaster management...some of the information on infant feeding in your guidelines contradicts the Infant and Young Child Feeding in Emergencies (IFE) guidelines. We are concerned that as a result, some recommendations concerning infant feeding/formula and baby foods will undermine breastfeeding practices in emergencies.”

As part of APWLD’s process, we have consulted with our members and we have come up with the following statement also in line with suggestions provided by WABA.

APWLD would like to stress that gender sensitive disaster management must be based on the fundamental principles: “Women’s Rights are Human Rights – therefore relief efforts should not only be based on needs, but on ensuring that women’s human rights are protected and promoted.” (page 4, Guidelines, APWLD 2006).

APWLD has had a campaign on Food Sovereignty since 2005. Food Sovereignty repudiates the use of infant milk formula and considers breastfeeding as a right of the mother and the child. We recognise that infant formula is a corporate agenda to increase profit of TNCs and is dangerous for the health of the child.

APWLD asserts that the intention of the Guidelines is to ensure that women and children have the right to food. The baby milk formula recommendation came from situations when mothers cannot naturally lactate or instances when babies cannot be given breast milk because the mothers have died in the disaster. Another issue was that in the earthquake affected regions in Pakistan, even milch animals that could have been used as a last life saving measure rather than infant milk formula, could not be found.

The disaster response at that time did not provide any alternatives to the women. At the time of the disaster and in the areas where the research was conducted, babies died for lack of milk and nourishment.

The whole scale of the problem was not just lack of access and information but encompasses gender inequality, socio-economic power structures, cultural differences and discriminatory caste systems. With all these coming into play, women in disaster situations are even more burdened making them extremely vulnerable during disasters. Then the disaster struck. They have not been given voices in decision-making, they have not been consulted.

We iterate the need to ensure that safe spaces, support and nutrition are available to women to enable relactation. Relief agencies should ensure that women are informed and supported on how to relactate, and be provided information on the dangers and consequences of formula milk feeding, when women could opt for relactation. *The IFE Guide Protecting Babies in Case of Emergencies: The role of the Public* also states:

“In cases where there are babies whose mothers have died or cannot be located, the option of wet nursing, where another woman breastfeeds the baby, should be explored. In such situations babies may be breastfed by a woman who is already breastfeeding, or a friend or relative may relactate.”

“Babies continue to be born in emergencies and no matter what country or type of emergency, all mothers should be supported to breastfeed their babies within half an hour of giving birth and encouraged to not give their baby any other food or liquid until they are six months of age.”

(IFE Guide Protecting Babies in Case of Emergencies: The role of the Public, p. 2. <http://www.ennonline.net/ife/generalpublic/whatshouldhappen.aspx>)

We recommend that information on women’s rights and viable alternatives be made available especially immediately after disasters, ensure that information reaches the women who are most vulnerable, and systems and processes be in place to enable women to realise their rights especially during disaster situations. There should be no stigma attached to the provision of relief services when a woman has made an informed decision, and this decision should be respected.

We would like the public then to refer to the following when planning their disaster response for infant and child feeding during emergencies:

- **Protecting Babies in Emergencies: The Role of the Public:** <http://www.ennonline.net/ife/generalpublic/default.aspx>
- **Infant and Young Child Feeding in Emergencies (IFE) Guidelines:** <http://www.ennonline.net/pool/files/ife/ops-guidance-2-1-english-010307.pdf>
- **The Sphere Handbook:** http://www.sphereproject.org/component/option,com_docman/task,cat_view/gid,70/Itemid,203, and the WHO Guiding Principles 4 feeding infants and young children during emergencies
- **International Baby Food Action Network – International Code Documentation Center (IBFAN-ICDC) Focus on the Code and infant feeding in emergencies, May 2009.** Focus is an IBFAN-ICDC series that highlights specific issues relating to the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes and subsequent relevant World Health Assembly resolutions.

At the Secretariat

APWLD's Evolving Programme Structure

The year 2009 has seen many changes in APWLD! Change is here and APWLD's governance bodies have taken the challenge. The critical financial crisis in the external environment has also impacted on APWLD making it difficult to meet all its programme obligations. However, retaining its dynamic, vibrant and pro-active role in fighting for women's rights as it has done in the past, APWLD has taken a thoughtful critical review of its changes, engaging its programme-based membership to come up with a new structure which could deliver the organisation's critical contributions to the women's movement and people's movement.

Based on the deliberations, as well as APWLD 2006-08 external evaluation report, it has been decided that APWLD will now focus on four niche areas:

- (i) Feminist Legal Theory and Practice**
- (ii) Food Sovereignty (iii) Gender and Politics, and (iv) United Nations Special Procedures.**

In addition, we have identified certain emerging concerns for APWLD:

- 1) Climate Change 2) Aid Effectiveness**
 - 3) Sub-Regional Human Rights Mechanisms and 4) Labour, Migration and Trafficking.**
- Issues pertaining to Women Human Rights Defenders will now be considered cross cutting all initiatives.**

The former five task forces (Women and Environment, Women's Participation in Political Processes, Labour and Migration, Rural and Indigenous Women, Violence Against Women) and the Working Group on Women's Human's Rights have now been dissolved. Instead, through a participatory nomination process involving the programme-based membership, governance structures and the Secretariat, a 15-member Programme Working Group (PWG) has been selected to develop a programme as well as an implementation process for the above identified niche areas and emerging concerns.

Although the process of addressing the financial crisis, and internalising the recommendations from the last two external evaluations were difficult and required much dialogue and debate, the commendable role of the committed, dynamic and active membership allowed the process to run smoothly. The PWG will be meeting for the first time in late August to take the organisation forward into another evolving era of APWLD!





Building the Capacity of the Secretariat on Globalisation

The Secretariat took the opportunity to enhance their capacity and knowledge on globalisation while Interim Regional Coordinator Azra Talat Sayeed was with us in Chiang Mai. Her

expertise on the topic provided the Secretariat a levelling off on globalisation and APWLD's stand on the issue. The two-day training held 14-15 June 2009 provided a bird's eye view of globalisation and will be followed with a Food Sovereignty training by her in August of this year still as part of APWLD's staff development to enhance the skills and capacity of the Secretariat.

Secretariat on Women's Day

Chanting "We didn't create the crisis; but we can clean it up for you", APWLD and friends joined the thousands of women who marched to the streets of Chiang Mai to celebrate International Women's Day. With the local Women's Day campaign theme: Women are in the driving seat of our economy!, the march brought together migrant workers, Burmese and Thai women's groups, lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgender and intersex groups, and other Chiang Mai based nongovernment organisations and advocates with varying calls and campaigns joining as one voice on Women's Day.



The march called attention to the significance and contribution of women in the country's economy particularly women migrant workers and unfair labour practices and lack of protection of the rights of women migrant workers. Thai laws do not recognise domestic work as work, forcing majority of the estimated 100,000 migrant women in Chiang Mai doing domestic work to work illegally. The Women's Day event was co-organised by then City Mayor Dr. Duentemduang na Chiengmai, who participated in APWLD's 2008 Gender and Politics training.

At the Secretariat

Women's Exchange Get Together

5-8 March, 2009, Chiang Mai, Thailand – A series of side workshops on CEDAW and General Recommendation 26, led by APWLD Programme Officer for Labour and Migration Nalini Singh, was held during the Women's Exchange get together event organised by Migrants Action Programme Foundation (MAP Foundation) to coincide with Women's Day. General Recommendation 26 recognises undocumented women migrant workers who migrate independently to work or who join their spouses or other members of their families who are migrant workers.

The participants realised the importance of CEDAW, especially the significance of the new General Recommendation 26 since most of them had undocumented status in Thailand. Women who had been part of the Burma Shadow Reporting process related their experiences in the workshops. As Thailand is reporting to the CEDAW Committee in 2010, the participants were asked to see how they can link up via their monthly Women's Exchange to put forward their issues to the

Thai women's groups writing the shadow report. The participants confirmed that they would like to contribute their issues as migrant workers in Thailand to the Shadow Report such as: working conditions in informal sectors, fair payment for work done, security issues such as deportation, employers holding on to documents, lack of health benefits for migrant workers, abuse and exploitation from employers, family related issues such as education and health for children etc.

Goodbyes and Welcome

Fairwinds Sisters!

APWLD bade farewell to two people in the Secretariat during the first quarter of the year:

Sachee Vilaithong, our long-time Liaison Officer. She has been with the organisation since APWLD moved to Chiang Mai, Thailand in 1997. The staff with the most institutional memory, Khun Sachee has provided invaluable support in the holding of governance meetings and made sure everyone came in or flew in on time, was well fed, slept in good, inexpensive beds and happy during meetings and in the Secretariat. Khun Sachee will now be enjoying her retirement after eleven years of tirelessly working with APWLD.

Lynnsay Francis, our Regional Coordinator (RC) for 2006-2009. Lynnsay first joined the Secretariat as an interim RC in 2005 and came on board full time in 2006 up to the early part of 2009. Lynnsay came to the organisation and faced the challenge of securing funds for APWLD in the next couple of years. Most especially, Lynnsay made sure that the Women, Law and Development networks of the three continents Asia, Latin America and Africa got together to celebrate after 20 years since APWLD formation. She initiated the first ever Joint Task Forces/Working Group meeting on globalisation, militarisation and fundamentalisms in line with the network's objective to harmonise efforts and activities and deepen the understanding of the network among our overarching issues. Her enthusiasm and passion for the creative has made her leadership in APWLD never boring. She made sure that the presence of our Pacific members is strongly felt and their voices loudly heard!

Thank you Khun Sachee and Lynnsay for all the hard work and commitment you have given to the organisation. We wish you all the best in your future endeavours.



Khun Sachee



Lynnsay



Welcome!

We would like to give a warm welcome to **Navarat Nophiran**. Educated in Bangkok, Navarat finished a masters degree in Anthropology from Thammasat University. She has had various NGO experiences including as Office Manager of Committee for Asian Women in Bangkok from 1999 to 2004 and as Research Assistant on sexual harassment project at the Friend of Women Foundation. Navarat joins APWLD as the new Liaison Officer.