

APWLD GENERAL ASSEMBLY COMMUNIQUÉ

DATE: 8th July 2021

PREAMBLE

The General Assembly (GA) of APWLD was held on 21 - 23 June 2021. Due to the travel restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the General Assembly took place on a virtual/online platform for the first time in APWLD's herstory. The overall General Assembly was facilitated by the General Assembly Committee members - Azra Talat Sayeed from Pakistan, Govind Kelkar from India, and Joan May "Joms" Salvador from the Philippines.

A total of 93 APWLD members from South Asia, Southeast Asia, East Asia, Central Asia, and the Pacific registered and attended the three-day meeting. APWLD's General Assembly was convened by APWLD's Regional Council for the purposes of strategic planning and selecting the Regional Council members.

On the first day of the General Assembly, the Regional Council (ReC) and Secretariat presented to the members of APWLD's collective work, achievements, challenges, and institutional responses for the period of 2017-2020. The General Assembly elected the new ReC members for the term of 2021–2024 with 21 members from 16 countries, representing all five sub-regions across Asia and the Pacific. The newly elected ReC subsequently elected 4 members of the Programme and Management Committee (P&M) for the term of 2021-2024.

On the second and third days, members had strategic discussion to establish APWLD's plan for 2022-2026 as a feminist, membership-driven network. Members' discussion at the GA was building on from the five sub-regional convenings APWLD organised with its members and strategic allies during March – May 2021. A draft report consolidating the sub-regional convenings was presented to facilitate the GA discussion in analysing socio-economic and geopolitical context of women's realities, and APWLD's responses to generate a structural change for women's human rights and Development Justice.

OBSERVATIONS

Members at the General Assembly observed that:

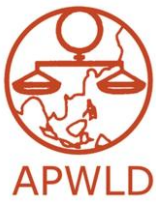
1. Since the first cases of the COVID-19, the global spread of the virus has devastated the lives, especially of those on the margins of our societies, exposing systemic issues with the current economic, political and socio-cultural systems, and deepening already worsening inequalities. Responses from the governments have been mostly ineffective, driven by the same patriarchal, neoliberal, militaristic and authoritarian forces.
2. Despite the pandemic, and often in the name of economic recovery, several countries across the region further liberalised its economy and labour policies. Across the region, land and resource grab/conflicts and debt crisis are going deeper with devastating consequences on women's human rights and Development Justice. The pandemic has exposed the inadequacy of the public health system of many countries which have been weakened by privatisation and low budgets and are highly dependent on foreign medicines and supplies. Pandemic further exacerbated the pervasive economic injustice women experience such as the loss of jobs and livelihoods, significant increase in care work, feminisation of informal and precarious work and oppression against women's union and organising.

3. The countries in Asia and the Pacific are most vulnerable to climate change and to environmental and climate disasters, which have gendered impacts that exacerbate existing inequalities.
4. The system of migration was recognised by members, largely to sustain national economies for sending countries, extract profits from cheap labour migration for receiving countries as well as to respond to the reproductive crisis in East Asia from marriage migration with women's bodies being a battlefield. An increasing trend in climate and conflict-induced migration or displacement was recognised by members, expanding APWLD's understanding and response to different forms of migration women experience in the region.
5. Asia and the Pacific region have seen a rise in anti-democratic, hyper-masculine, authoritarian and militarised governments that oppress the freedom of speech and assembly, and severely violate democratic representation, participation, and accountability. The brazen use of militarism strengthened militarisation as well as different forms of fundamentalisms to 'other' or 'marginalise' communities while sustaining the status quo of power were noted as the political characteristics of the region. Across the region, members pointed to the lack of women's political power and participation in democratic decision-making as a serious issue of concern.
6. Entrenched patriarchal norms and practices exacerbated by rising fundamentalisms are the cause of pervasive forms of gender-based discrimination, violence, and the control of women's bodies across the region. This directs the prevalence of discriminatory, regressive and anti-rights laws and its implementation, hindering women's access to justice. There is alarming rise in anti-feminist violence as a backlash to women's organising and movement building as well as increased attack on women human rights defenders.
7. Members noted the crisis in multilateralism and the neoliberal orchestrated shift to multistakeholderism as evidenced by the disguised form of multilateralism outside of the UN system created by and for few powerful countries and private sector companies and their finance. Compounded with the digital divide, there is a growing concern on the removal of meaningful, democratic engagement opportunities for civil society and peoples' organisations to hold governments accountable to their regional and global policy commitments.
8. Members pointed to the vast digital inequalities and divide with serious consequences on women's human rights and democracy. The unaccountably growing power and influence of digital companies as well as the use of digital technology by states for surveillance were of particular concern, with the urgent need for feminist analysis and solutions for digital justice and digital rights.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Members at the General Assembly recommended the followings:

1. Update and deepen APWLD's analytical framework of Patriarchy-Globalisation-Fundamentalisms-Militarism (PGFM) reflecting on the socio-economic and geo-political changes and trends.
2. Strengthen capacity building and create knowledge resources that are more accessible to grassroots women and their communities. with the focus on young women to build their leadership and enable intergenerational dialogue and learning.
3. Continue the work to democratise decision-making and advance accountability at the regional and global levels, and to make regional/global advocacy powerful and accountable.
4. Deepen feminist use of law and women's access to justice.



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5. Focus on the issue of WHRDs in crisis to extend solidarity and support by strengthening the urgent response mechanisms and legal strategies to protect WHRDs.
6. Support building members' digital capacity and create a pathway for feminist digital rights and digital justice.
7. Create more spaces for members' engagement and solidarity that are inclusive, intersectional, and intergenerational.

CONCLUSION

Members at the General Assembly appreciated the collective work of APWLD and celebrated our nearly 35 years of herstory as the region's leading feminist, membership-driven network. The General Assembly took a moment to remember and appreciate all APWLD's founding members, including Virada Somswasdi who passed away in March 2020. The General Assembly mandated the Regional Council and Secretariat to translate members' discussion, analysis and recommendations to a concrete strategic plan for APWLD's work in 2022-2026 to achieve women's human rights and Development Justice.

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