



Asia Pacific CSO Statement Sustainable and Just Economies

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Jai Bhim! My name is Paul Divakar Chair of the Asia Dalit Rights Forum Representing the DWD and the Dalit constituency in APRCEM. DWD (Discrimination based on Work and Descent) affects in the Asian continent affecting more than 260 million population in the Asia Pacific Region. They face extreme forms of discriminations even though they are the majority of farm workers, construction workers, artisans, domestic workers and many of unpaid and underpaid and are continually pushed to the margins.

Covid has brought economies to a grinding halt. Thousands of people have lost their lives already and the numbers are exponentially growing. More than any other time in our history, this is time for us to build sustainable and just economies - focusing on the people and planet and to redefine 'prosperity'.

Our surveys identified several systemic barriers to achieving sustainable and just economies, which includes unequal trade and investment agreements, unjust financial and tax regimes, corporate capture and resources grabis, weakening of labour regulations and violations of labour rights, militarism, as well patriarchy-casteism and fundamentalism.

Our concrete recommendations are as follows:

On Governance,

- **Put in place a regional tax body to reform the taxation architecture and synergies regional cooperation on taxation.** This can prevent illicit financial flows (current amount have gone up to 285 billion USD!) and combat corruption. It can also tackle the issue of tax evasion, misappropriation of state assets, laundering proceeds of crime as well as profit shifting by MNCs thereby limiting the capacity of governments to fund sustainable development.
- **We need to enforce a strong binding legal framework to regulate the private sector re human rights and accountability standards** - We are concerned that Of the top 100 largest economies in the world, 69^[3] are now corporations. They capitalize on low wages and lack of social protection resulting in resource grabbing from farmers, Dalits, fisherfolk, and other grassroots communities. Without the free, prior and informed consent of indigenous peoples and other vulnerable communities, and have resulted in land grabs and mass evictions. **Violations of labour rights and weakening of labour regulations need to be addressed** - massive displacement of workers, race-to-the-bottom working conditions and wages, and lead to further curtailment of freedom of association and right to collective bargaining. Labor informalization and decreasing levels of unionization are also becoming more prevalent with the rise of the platform economy.
- **Recognize Dalits, Indigenous peoples, fisherfolk, farmers, particularly the women among them and strengthen the informal economies created and sustained by them** - the current development agenda is patriarchal resulting in economic and political marginalization of these marginalised groups.. Women's cheap labour is viewed as a source of competitive advantage for

corporations, thereby keeping their wages low. Women defending their land and livelihoods are often subjected to intimidation and violence.

- **We reiterated our call to build mechanisms in the region for SDG and Human Rights Compatibility Assessment of trade and investment agreement, tax policies, technology and SCP initiatives.** - liberalisation and deregulation imposed by WTO and bilateral and multilateral trade have resulted in poverty for the labor sector consisting of indigenous families, small farmers, fisherfolk Dalits, and other DWD communities. This has resulted in migration from their homelands, affecting their livelihoods and aggravating the vulnerable conditions of women and children.

In terms of financing,

- Donor countries must fulfil the historical commitment of ODA equivalent to 0.7% of their GNI. In addition, Addis Ababa Action Agenda (AAAA) should focus on helping developing countries in navigating macro-economic pressures embodied in conditions of **market deregulations, debt distress reduction, and debt-consolidation and austerity measures** to avoid massive cuts to key strategic sectors like education, health and standard of living ensuring adequate fiscal space for sustainable social development.
- **We can also shift military spending to universal social protection** - for instance, country like India currently allocated almost five times more of its national budget on defense than healthcare from 2017 to 2019[4]. Meanwhile, the Philippines allocated almost seven times more on defense than for scientific research and development in 2017 and 2018[5].
- Progressive taxation model, proven as the most efficient socially just redistributive policy measure, should be implemented to decrease wealth and income gaps for inclusive and sustainable economies in the region.
- Social and Solidarity enterprises need to be aggressively supported and necessary legal and administrative framework to be adopted for its smooth functioning.

Lastly, to promote *Individual and collective action*, we need to ensure that voices of civil society and people are reflected in the implementation and monitoring of the SDGs. To do this, we need to stop the criminalization of civil society workers, human rights defenders, communities, and movements. retract restrictive and repressive laws and disabling conditions that hinder the full operation of CSOs

It is time that we get down to designing sustainable and just economies just as we are forced by these pandemics to remind us once again that these frail economics of profiteering cannot sustain.