

## **A People's Vision Towards a more just, equal and sustainable world**

The People's Vision was first developed for the ASEM People's Forum held in London in 1998. The document was based on wide consultation among civil society organisations in Asia and Europe and supported by a broad [List of signatories](#) from citizens, community and people's organisations in Asia and Europe and subsequently it was revised and adopted at the ASEM 2000 People's Forum (Seoul, Korea, 2000).

### **Fundamental Principles**

We believe that ASEM provides both an opportunity and a responsibility for our nations. As Asian and European organisations, networks and citizens committed to working for a more just and equal world, we call on Asian and European leaders to join with us in building a new relationship founded on four fundamental principles:

- i) the promotion of economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights as agreed in international human rights and humanitarian law;
- ii) the promotion of environmentally, socially and economically sustainable patterns of development;
- iii) greater economic and social equity and justice including equality between men and women.
- iv) the active participation of civil society organisations in the ASEM process. To enable this ASEM should become more transparent and accountable to national parliaments.

We believe that respect for human rights and self-determination and the development and strengthening of open and participatory democracies form the basis for sustainable economic and social development both nationally and internationally.

Democracies have many components and will vary from society to society. However there are some key principles which we feel are essential to the promotion of a social and political fabric which can be the foundation for sustainable economic and social development.

The application of these principles should involve genuine commitments by ASEM nations in the following areas:

#### **1. Workers, Democracy and Development**

In many ASEM member countries there has been a gradual erosion of the rights of workers over the last two decades. A key factor has been the downward pressure on wages and conditions, and the accompanying trend towards casualisation, exerted by ever-more cut-throat competition between exporting countries in a globalized world

market. Migrant workers have often borne the brunt of deteriorating working conditions. Labour flexibility undermines job and income security, exacerbates the problem of growing unemployment, and further diminishes workers' collective rights.

There is concern that many governments have consciously weakened their own regulatory capacity in terms of social, environmental and economic regulation to facilitate the operation of transnational corporations and their subsidiaries. This is at the same time that they have adopted repressive labour laws and severe restrictions on workers' organising activities, the persecution and imprisonment of advocates of democratic rights and workers' rights, and the introduction of economic policies such as the promotion of Export Processing Zones which give TNCs even greater freedom to exploit workers and their communities. The economic and social situation of workers in the informal sector, the majority of the work force in many countries, has deteriorated. This has undermined their rights as citizens.

While we support the recognition of, and adherence to, Core Labour Standards we condemn their use as a protectionist measure.

## Recommendations

1.1 ASEM governments should reaffirm their commitment to fundamental human rights for all workers. These include:

- a) The right to join a trade union of one's choice and to organise and bargain collectively.
- b) Freedom from slavery and bonded labour.
- c) Freedom from discrimination on the basis of gender, race, colour, religion, political views or national or ethnic origin.
- d) An end to exploitative and hazardous forms of child labour. These Core Labour Standards, expressed in the ILO Conventions 29, 87, 98, 100, 105, 111 and 138, should be incorporated into both the Investment Promotion Action Plan (IPAP) and the Trade Facilitation Action Plan (TFAP) agreements signed at the ASEM summit.

1.2 Individual governments should adhere to the key Core Labour Standards that they have ratified.

1.3 Agreements should be developed on mechanisms to ensure the protection of worker's health and safety.

1.4 ASEM governments should ratify the UN Convention for the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families.

## **2. Women, Democracy and Development**

There can be no sustainable or equitable development unless discrimination against women is eliminated and gender-based inequality removed.

The promotion and protection of women's economic, social and political rights are fundamental to sustainable social and economic development. The pattern of economic development, to date, has assumed women's un-waged labour in the home, community and economy, and low-waged labour in the market place. Trade liberalisation, in particular, increases the vulnerability of the poorest and most marginalised who are outside the formal sector. Poor women, in particular, are often so disadvantaged that they are unable to take up any new opportunities. Even for those people who have access to the new employment opportunities, gains in income are often accompanied by loss of health and time for family, community education and leisure. For poor working women work is often accompanied by significant levels of exploitation and harassment. Many women are face increasing levels of poverty and insecurity. They are seizing any possibility of work or income in order to ensure that basic needs are met. They are working in insecure jobs with irregular hours, little protection from health and safety hazards and severely limited opportunities for promotion. Any increase in economic and social security which women might gain is at present highly vulnerable. This situation is no foundation for sustainable economic development. ASEM should provide some mechanisms to move towards a more equitable and durable future for millions of women in Asia and Europe.

#### Recommendations

2.1 ASEM policy and policies developed by ASEM member states should comply with international human rights agreements such as CEDAW and the 1993 Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women. They must also support the implementation of the commitments made at the UN conferences at Vienna, Cairo, Copenhagen and Beijing.

2.2 Gender analysis should be incorporated into all future Asia Europe aid, trade and political relations;

2.3 Asia Europe relations should aim to reduce gender-based inequalities and promote political power sharing and equal access to, and control over, economic resources.

2.4 Programmes of positive action to redress the current bias against women are a necessary partner to mainstreaming gender-analysis.

### **3. CHILDREN**

Although the needs and problems of children have long been recognised, in many parts of the world - especially in Asia - children's basic needs for food, clothing, shelter, primary health care, basic education and protection from violence and abuse, have remained largely unfulfilled. Most governments, although they have ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), still lack the political will to address these problems. In other cases, wrong choices have been made in terms of social policy and social development,

especially in relation to the children of vulnerable communities - urban poor, farmers, ethnic minorities, refugees, migrants and others.

Despite dramatic economic performances in recent years, the phenomenon of child labour has significantly increased. Asia today has more than two-thirds of the world's child labour, including some of its most repugnant manifestations.

#### Recommendations

3.1 All member-states of ASEM, as signatories to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, should pledge their commitment to promoting and protecting the rights of children in their countries - with special attention to vulnerable and exploited children.

3.2 ASEM member-states should develop transparent mechanisms for participation in the monitoring and reporting process on the CRC. These should benefit from the insights and experiences of NGOs and community organisations working for the best interests of the child.

3.3 ASEM governments should, with immediate effect, pledge their commitment in both policy and practice to the total elimination of the most intolerable forms of child labour, including, among others, affirming their commitment to respect international standards and expressing their support for the adoption of the new ILO Convention on the Most Intolerable Forms of Child Labour in 1998.

3.4 ASEM governments should affirm their commitment to respect international standards on child labour and to support the adoption of the New ILO Convention on the Most Intolerable Forms of Child Labour in 1998

### **4. An End to the Sexual Exploitation of Children**

The Stockholm Agenda for Action has been adopted by all ASEM countries except China and Brunei. The Agenda calls for all governments to take action by the year 2000 to address the issue of the commercial sexual exploitation of children.

#### Recommendations

4.1 ASEM governments should affirm their commitment to eliminate the sexual exploitation of children, including action in line with the Stockholm Agenda for Action.

4.2 ASEM governments should commission further work on this area, to be reviewed by Foreign Ministers at their meeting in 1999. This could include an exchange of information on progress so far in implementation and encouragement for the conclusion of bilateral co-operation agreements and Memoranda of Understanding on exchange of information and law enforcement

### **5. Strengthening Civil Society - Human Rights, Democracy and Self-determination**

A strong civil society is fundamental to making decision-making more democratic, transparent and accountable. At the same time it is essential that citizen's basic needs are ensured as these are part of their democratic rights. Development NGOs, trade unions, women's organisations, human rights organisations, farmers associations, community movements and the media have an important role to play in ensuring greater consultation and participation in policy development and in the monitoring of practice.

#### Recommendations:

- 5.1 ASEM governments should reaffirm their commitment to building and supporting strong civil society and democracy based on the widest possible degree of public participation and accountability.
- 5.2 ASEM governments should respect and ensure freedom of expression, association and assembly.
- 5.3 Support for the development of regional mechanisms for the promotion of human rights with the participation of civil society.
- 5.4 ASEM should actively use the opportunities of their political dialogue to promote human rights, participatory democracy, self-determination and conflict resolution. There remain fundamental concerns in some areas including Burma, East Timor, Tibet and Northern Ireland.

## **6. ARMS TRADE**

The peace dividend expected after the Cold War has not materialised and we are witnessing an escalation in intra-state wars. The arms trade continues and has grown 22% since 1995. Over 27% of arms are produced in Europe. Asia is where the growth in arms purchases has been largest. In spite of the pressures of the economic crisis in East Asia most arms purchases have continued leading to social services bearing the burden of public expenditure cuts.

The European Union is home to some of the world's most significant producers and exporters of armaments. Conflicts which threaten and destroy the lives of millions are fuelled by the arms trade, posing a fundamental obstacle to the objectives of sustainable development and upholding human rights. The trade in arms and the means of the repression of citizens is a key factor preventing the achievement of human security as defined by the UNDP.

#### Recommendations

- 6.1 ASEM governments should develop and agree transparent and binding mechanisms for controlling arms imports and exports.
- 6.2 EU and Asian governments should respectively adopt and implement European and Asian Codes of Conduct on the arms trade and explore the possibility of developing a binding worldwide code.

6.3 ASEM governments should impose and implement a total ban on the production, stockpiling, use export/transfer of anti personnel mines.

6.4 ASEM governments should ratify the Ottawa Treaty on landmines and actively develop and implement policies to reduce the production, sale and purchase of arms in their respective countries.

6.5 ASEM governments should ensure the full and public disclosure of details of their defence and security budgets.

## **7. Environment and Economic Development**

Economic growth which depends on the over-use of natural resources and which damages the environment is unsustainable, it marginalises and impoverishes local communities and destroys their quality of life, livelihoods and culture. This pattern must be reversed.

ASEM member states have made many commitments to environmental sustainability and protection, for example to the Rio Declaration and Agenda 21. While some progress has been made, most have fallen far short of targets that have been set.

### Recommendations

7.1 ASEM members should build on the positive achievements of the Climate Change talks in Kyoto in 1997 and work to reach agreed targets and establish enforceable monitoring mechanisms within the agreed time scale.

7.2 ASEM member states should evaluate all development projects against Agenda 21 criteria and other international environmental commitments. National and local Agenda 21 plans must be incorporated into trade and investment plans. In particular all large scale projects such as, hydro-electricity dams which fail to meet these criteria should not be supported by ASEM members.

7.3 Ensure the Investment Promotion Action Plan (IFAP) and the Trade Facilitation Action Plan (TFAP) include an obligation to assess their environmental impact and impact on local communities control of natural resources.

## **8. Trade and Investment for Sustainable Environmental, Social and Economic Development**

The UN commitments agreed by the Asia and European members of ASEM cannot be fulfilled if policies other than development cooperation, such as those on international trade and investment, do not pursue the same objectives. Global wealth flows including direct investment, capital transfers and trade must be regulated to ensure that they too promote sustainable social and economic development and greater justice and equality. Trade and investment should be become means to promote social and political rights as opposed to eroding them.

## Recommendations

8. The ASEM is likely to agree the Investment Promotion Action Plan (IFAP) and the Trade Facilitation Action Plan (TFAP). We call on ASEM governments to ensure that both IFAP and TFAP state clearly that the overall objectives of any increases in trade and investment are to

- promote economically and socially sustainable development;
- support greater democratisation;
- promote equality between women and men;
- greater food security.

Both plans should incorporate respect for internationally agreed standards of environmental protection, health and safety and the seven key ILO Conventions on Core Labour Standards. These should be adopted by ASEM member nations and lead to a reassessment of the objectives and practice of the WTO.

## **9. Responses to the Economic and Social Crisis**

Economic relations between ASEM countries have been thrown into turmoil by the Asian economic crisis of the last year. Trade has been hit and many investment plans frozen. But this is much more than a financial crisis. Already, the economic recession has thrown millions of women and men out of work through no fault of their own. Social unrest is rising, leading to the victimisation of migrant workers and ethnic minorities in several countries.

The manner in which Asian governments, international bodies such as the IMF, and European governments respond to the crisis is crucial in determining its social impact.

Many European governments, as well as multilateral institutions such as the World Bank and EU, have in recent years put poverty reduction at the heart of their relations with the countries of the South, and committed themselves to working in a coherent manner towards this aim.

This is seen for example the British Government's White Paper of November 1997. Yet these same bodies have failed to put poverty reduction at the heart of their response to the Asian crisis. The measures contained in the Asian loan packages appear more concerned with imposing further trade and investment liberalisation on Asian economies, than with safeguarding the livelihoods of the poor and promoting sustainable development.

## Recommendations

- 9.1 The IMF and Asian governments must carry out an immediate poverty impact assessment of the measures that are being proposed in the current IMF loan packages.

9.2 All negotiations and agreements between the IMF and Asian governments should be made public, and public participation encouraged to improve the quality of programme design and effectiveness.

9.3 European governments should ensure that the IMF avoids imposing deflationary economic programmes on the Asian economies, at a time when the private sector is already in crisis.

9.4 Asian and European governments should actively explore ways to regulate global capital markets, whose volatility has played such a large part in exacerbating the current crisis.

9.5 Asian and European governments should critically assess the instruments, policies and procedures of the IMF and World Bank.

9.6 Asian governments should explore alternatives to the IMF as a response to the Asian crisis.

## **10. Peopling the ASEM Process**

There has been only limited possibility for democratic scrutiny of the ASEM process to date in parliaments in both Europe and Asia. Elected representatives of the European Parliament have also been excluded.

The ASEM process has so far concentrated on promoting cooperation between governments and representatives of business interests, and its agenda has been dominated by trade and investment issues. There has been no attention to incorporating and learning from the experiences, ideas and visions of the women and men, workers and farmers in both continents, who have felt the effects, both negative and positive. The Asia Europe Foundation has been established with one of its three objectives the promotion of people to people exchanges.

## **Recommendations**

10.1 ASEM governments should make the ASEM process more transparent and accountable, by establishing mechanisms to promote people to people exchanges and a mechanism to enable the ASEM process to fully incorporate and benefit from the active participation of a wide range of organisations in civil society. All relevant documents should be made publicly available in an accessible form.