



*A call to social movements, frontline communities
and campaigning networks, and progressive NGOs,
academics and parliamentarians across Asia and Europe:*

Join the 9th Asia- Europe People's Forum

“People’s Solidarity against Poverty and for Sustainable Development: Challenging Unjust and Unequal Development, Building States of Citizens for Citizens”

Vientiane, Laos, 16-19 October, 2012

On 5-6 November, 2012 the 9th Asia Europe Meeting (ASEM9) will take place in Vientiane, Lao PDR. Under the theme ‘Friends for Peace, Partners for Prosperity’, leaders of 49 member states and governments in Asia and Europe will exchange views, priorities and plans on regional and global issues that are of common interest to both regions at the summit.

Prior to and in conjunction with ASEM9, the Asia-Europe People’s Forum (AEPF9) will hold its 9th biennial People’s Forum on 16-19 October, 2012 under the title ‘People’s Solidarity against Poverty and for Sustainable Development: Challenging Unjust and Unequal Development, Building States of Citizens for Citizens’.

AEPF9 will tackle four major themes or People’s Visions, which represent AEPF hopes for citizens of ASEM member countries and the communities they live in. These are:

- Universal Social Protection and Access to Essential Services;
- Food Sovereignty and Sustainable Land and Natural Resource Management;
- Sustainable Energy Production and Use; and
- Just Work and Sustainable Livelihoods.

Progress towards the realisation of these People’s Visions is at the heart of a way out of the multiple crises confronting people, states and institutions globally. The ecological, debt, financial and food crises, which have been caused and compounded by the policies and practices of many governments in both rich and poor countries and their approaches to regulation of business, have caused increasing social polarization between peoples and states. In Asia, the crises are exacerbating poverty and inequality; already widespread before the present crises. In Europe, the crises are creating indebtedness, joblessness and insecurity. We are increasingly experiencing ‘corporate capture’: multinational and national corporations structuring and determining our lives and livelihoods. The responses of citizens are often at local and national levels and to complement these, the AEPF is looking to encourage and strengthen cooperation and solidarity of people’s networks regionally, inter-regionally and globally.

There are three stages that will contribute to building and promoting the Asia-Europe People’s Visions:

Preparation; ensuring that people across ASEM countries have the opportunity to debate, discuss and shape the AEPF9 themes.

The AEPF9 Forum; ensuring that the event is open, dynamic and inclusive and focuses on meaningful and practical discussion for change.

Beyond AEPF9; ensuring that commitments made during AEPF9 are honoured and that a sound platform for AEPF10 is laid.

AEPF9 will be an exciting series of interlinked dialogues, workshops, actions, policy debates and open spaces. You can be part of this event by actively participating in discussions to build the People's Visions, which will be the basis of declarations from the Forum or by co-organising an event and/or contributing human and financial resources. There will be a call for expressions of interest to organise workshops and events soon.

Interested in joining us? Contribute your knowledge, resources or time to enable AEPF9 to be a success. This is YOUR forum.

Please watch out for announcements on AEPF9 activities and on how to register as a participant or co-organiser of events at the AEPF website (www.aepf.info). For further information, you may contact the following people, depending on your location:

AEPF9 Secretariat in the Lao PDR
Learning House for Development
Secretariat: secretariat@aepf9.info

AEPF9 Focal point/ Secretariat in Asia
Institute for Popular Democracy
Tina Ebro: cgebro@gmail.com or Maris dela Cruz: sirmallet@gmail.com

AEPF9 Focal point in Europe
Transnational Institute Contact
Pietje Vervest: pietje.vervest@tni.org

The Asia-Europe People's Forum (AEPF)

Since its formation in 1996, the AEPF has become the only continuing civil society inter-regional network connecting people's movements and advancing their voices in ASEM. The AEPF is a people's forum and it is critical that all people including those with disabilities, from ethnic communities, and from other vulnerable groups representing social diversity across Asia and Europe have access to the forum and the accompanying process.

Not just a one-off biennial event, the AEPF facilitates network-building, solidarity, and joint actions between and among civil society groups in Asia and Europe. It opens up new political spaces for influence, dialogue and cooperation, providing opportunities for social actors in each region to share, build, and strengthen campaigns and develop recommendations and people-centred alternatives at the national, regional, and inter-regional levels. It has also made significant contributions to increasing attention on the importance of influencing (inter) regional integration processes and placing regional network consolidation on the agenda of CSOs as a priority strategy. Its most active, longer-term coalitions and initiatives have been around water privatisation, EU-ASEAN Free Trade Agreements, transformative social protection, and participatory governance in pursuit of alternative regionalism and building states of citizens for citizens.

Now in its sixteenth year, the AEPF has entered a new phase of development where there is a strong consensus across Asia and Europe that the dominant neoliberal economic approach over the last decades – deregulation of markets, privatisation of public services, and trade liberalisation, as well the increasing power of multinational corporations and unaccountable multilateral institutions – is failing in its declared aims of meeting the needs and rights of the people.

Rationale of AEPF9 (Context)

The AEPF9 will be held at critical historical juncture when multiple crises confront people, states and institutions. The ecological, debt, financial and food crises have caused greater inequalities between peoples and between states; pain and impoverishment of the middle classes and destitution of the poor; and progress towards realising the basic social and economic rights for all has been reversed for many citizens across Europe and Asia.

Internationally, the traditional great powers like the USA are in economic decline, with de-industrialization and high unemployment, while giants from the South such as China and India are ascendant, with high growth and as the new manufacturing and consuming hubs. Meanwhile, Europe is in the midst of its deepest crises since World War II and a period of high growth and financial and social security is clearly over as indebtedness, joblessness and insecurity are growing. States are withdrawing subsidies, diminishing social nets and dismantling public utilities that were the result of many historic people's struggles. Many states are adopting harsh measures to transfer the crises from financial institutions to the people. The international system is evolving into one where the USA, EU, China, India and Russia dominate decision making.

These new trends need to be understood and explained in order to develop appropriate responses from both policy makers and people. These historical changes indicate that Asia and Europe are more inter-dependent than ever before. There is much that the European and Asian social movements, as well as policy makers, can learn from each other. There are many policies that can be reformulated together. Asia can draw lessons on the need for sustainable growth that focuses on human development in order to avert its own financial, food, climate and social crises. Europe can learn how states need to control and regulate their economic and social systems to be inclusive and tolerant. Both need to collectively analyse the changing nature of the capitalist system and the state, in order to enable pro-people and inclusive policies and practices. Europe and Asia have to collectively resist militarization, reject conflict and re-invigorate transparent and truly democratic systems that can become more a reality for citizens where economic and social rights are more respected and are linked to genuine participation and access to services.

In this context, it is important to develop and advance coherent alternatives towards transformative frameworks for people-centred development that is more holistic, just, equitable, participatory and sustainable. Equally important is identifying common and collective strategies to effectively repudiate the failed neoliberal economic-centred model.

The causes of poverty are complex and are not limited to economic and other asset deficits; space for people's voices to effect change that they value, power relations, personal and communal responsibilities, justice and the fulfillment of basic rights are essential for sustainable development.

Sustainable development must ensure that resource use does not deprive future generations of access to resources for their livelihoods and their well-being. This will require innovative initiatives for the 21st Century. At present we are consuming more than the earth can regenerate. Business as usual will not work.

People's Solidarity against Poverty and for Sustainable Development

While a number of Asian countries have seen economic growth continue, though at a slower rate over the last two years, two thirds of the world's poor and hungry are in Asia and struggling to live in dignity. Almost 80 per cent of the workforce in this region are pushed into the informal sector and suffer from extremely low wages and precarious working conditions. Hundreds of millions of women and men in Asia are in extreme poverty. Poverty that is not uni-dimensional and is broader than an economic measure; it includes an individual's well-being and her/his opportunity to live a life of dignity. The fulfillment of not only civil and political rights, but also of economic, social and cultural rights are factors in addressing this poverty and achieving sustainable development – where future generations are not deprived of access to resources in order to live well.

The response from many governments and policy makers to these changes have been seen as unacceptable by many around the world and this has led to a number of people's actions globally around issues as diverse as anti-corruption, pro-democracy and social and economic justice; including movements for decent work and universal social protection, including the protection and strengthening of public services especially health, water, education and housing and land rights and protection of the commons.

The social organisations and movements involved in the Asia Europe People's Forum have continued to prioritise this people's solidarity against poverty for sustainable development.

The Economic, Social and Fiscal Crises in Europe

2011 witnessed the implementation of some of the most comprehensive structural changes in the European Union since the Lisbon Treaty, greatly affecting European people's employment, access to public services and social security. Labour market policies are being altered to favour more flexibility and lower wages, and austerity measures are being institutionalized through mandatory limits on public spending. There are linked pressures for the greater privatisation of essential public services including health and education. This is leading to cuts in public services central to European citizens' lives and livelihoods. Such dramatic changes have been advanced swiftly in an attempt to 'save or stabilize' the Eurozone.

As the race to save the euro continues, all EU members, except the UK and the Czech Republic, have signed a Fiscal Treaty which will give a major role to the EC in member states' fiscal and economic policies. The euro crisis has set the European Union on course for a new model of 'economic governance' that puts the European Commission in a position to check and correct member states' fiscal and economic policies before they are discussed in national parliaments. The change of the norms and rules on which the European Union rests will deeply influence the inter-relationship of the EU with the rest of the world.

It will be vital for citizens in countries outside the European Union to be aware of these changes, assess how they may change the European Union's relationship with other regional groupings such as

ASEAN and ASEM and assess whether the economic, social and financial crisis in Europe will change the resource procurement, investment and marketing strategies and priorities of European based companies, particularly with respect to ASEM member countries from Asia.

Food Sovereignty and the Food Crisis for Citizens in ASEM Member Countries from Asia

For many citizens across Asia, one key challenge for poverty reduction has been the significant increase in food prices over the last five years. For many this had led to problems of access to food. The changes in the financing of food production and the financialisation of food markets at national and international levels have led to distortions in markets for key foods, which have also contributed to increases in price for consumers.

A linked pressure has been from the emerging effects of the liberalisation of trade and investment, often as result of agreed inter-regional, country to region and country to country trade and investment agreements. This is having cumulative, negative effects on food sovereignty and food security for a growing number of communities and countries.

The 'global land grab' has captured worldwide attention in recent years with a focus on the explosion of commercial land transactions, land speculation and subsequent dispossession of rural communities, fuelled mainly, but not solely, by the large-scale production and export of food and agro-fuels. Alarm is now also growing that a 'global water grab' is under way, with water increasingly described as the next big commodity, a 'blue gold', sought after by states and investors worldwide. Water has become a new object of appropriation at the heart of a range of environmental, energy, food, and development concerns. These trends in land and water grabbing by a variety of means are very visible in a number of Asian ASEM member countries.

Climate Crisis and Sustainable Energy Policies

Parallel to these pressures have been drives across Asia and Europe to increase energy production to support economic development and growth. Several developing countries in Asia and Europe have placed an emphasis on supply side energy planning and as a result they are investing in capital intensive energy production, including production from life-threatening and ecologically destructive sources such as big hydropower, nuclear power or coal and gas-fired power plants. In contrast, through energy saving, energy efficiency practices and demand side management it would be possible to address energy needs, decreasing the requirements for increased energy production.

Some approaches to energy production, especially coal and gas fired power plants, are contributing to increases in greenhouse gases which are contributing to negative aspects of climate change. Key issues of environmental sustainability have dominated national and international agendas post-Kyoto. ASEM has held a range of discussions on these issues and the AEPF9 is committed to anchoring these discussions in the daily pressures faced by citizens and commitments to sustainable and environmentally sensitive economic development. These discussions will take place in the aftermath of the Durban Summit on Climate Change and its limited outcomes and commitments.

For many poor countries, addressing the climate crisis is even a matter of life and death or basic survival. Development policies, including energy policies, have to consider not only their economic end, but more importantly how these would contribute to the realization of ecologically sustainable development.

There is great concern over the growing pressures to adopt a 'Green Economy' in response to the climate crisis. The Green Economy is an ambitious global project that seeks to de-link economic growth from environmental deterioration through three-dimensional capitalism that includes physical capital, human capital, and natural capital (rivers, wetlands, forests, coral reefs, biological diversity and other elements). For the Green Economy, the food crisis, the climate crisis and the energy crisis share a common characteristic: the failed allocation of capital. As a result, the Green Economy treats nature as capital; 'natural capital'. Deeper still is the inability of our education system and practices to evoke positive emotions, such as caring and compassion. Instead it is encouraging new generations to become self-centred, contributing to over-consumption and senseless mass production. The Green

Economy considers it essential to put a price on the 'free' services that plants, animals and ecosystems offer to humanity in order to 'sustainably manage' biodiversity, water purification, pollination of plants, the protection of coral reefs and regulation of the climate. For the Green Economy, it is necessary to identify the specific functions of ecosystems and biodiversity and assign them a monetary value, evaluate their current status, set a limit after which they will cease to provide services, and concretise in economic terms the cost of their conservation in order to develop a market for each particular environmental service. For the Green Economy, the instruments of the market are powerful tools for managing the 'economic invisibility of nature'. The discussions in AEPF 9 will look beyond the veneer of false hope being generated by green growth and the green economy and will look at real alternatives needed to bring about the necessary decrease in global greenhouse gas emissions.

Sustainable Growth and Governance

The current economic, ecological and social crises, and the international governance responses to these, are providing opportunities and imperatives to develop multi-lateral and multi-faceted solutions based on new approaches and principles. The AEPF is concerned that despite this and the pressing need for action that will ensure social justice, human rights and equitable and sustainable growth across the two regions, the agenda and decisions at the ASEM will remain dominated by narrow national and financial interests. AEPF9 will develop 'People's Visions' that will be presented to ASEM and its member states that will provide recommendations for policies and practices that can enable more pro-people, inclusive and sustainable development.

Objectives of AEPF9

AEPF9 seeks to learn from and build on the discourses and recommendations of previous AEPFs and to ensure that the global experiences of people's forums from around the world inform and shape the AEPF9 agenda. It will take a more integrated and holistic approach to development, which includes people's well-being at all levels. It is critical that AEPF9 is undertaken in the context of key regional and international fora including the ASEAN People's Forum and the 4th High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Busan and that AEPF9 process supports national civil society initiatives to meet commitments outlined at these levels.

This mutual understanding will ensure that the event is held in an environment that encourages learning, reflection and sees diversity in opinion as a strength that will lead to people's solidarity for sustainable development globally. Solidarity is important at the national, regional and international level given the interconnectedness of the world. It stresses harmony, compassion and understanding, whilst recognising strength in diversity and the role diversity plays in strengthening solidarity.

The AEPF9 seeks to reflect and understand the current historical juncture, be able to build and promote a People's Vision that defines sustainable development from the people's perspective, and to strengthen people's solidarity at national, regional and international levels.

Specific Objectives

AEPF9 cannot be viewed as a single event but as an integrated process:

Preparatory stage; ensuring that the AEPF9 agenda is driven by the people and provides space for broad engagement nationally, regionally and internationally in ways that provide ownership of the agenda by the people.

During the AEPF9; encouraging dialogue to look beyond economic-only factors in the creation of a shared understanding of sustainable development and policies and practice to make this a reality. Developing a shared understanding of solidarity and what it means for people, identifying where and how civil society organisations and social movements can play a role in bridging gaps between policy and action and preparing a strong, unified, representative and inclusive statement to ASEM from the people.

Following Up from the AEPF9; ensuring that civil society and governments are accountable to their commitments made at the AEPF and ASEM, sustaining mutually beneficial dialogue, learning and exchange between civil society and social movements nationally, regionally and internationally that link to relevant people's agendas and form a platform for AEPF10.

Building and Promoting Asia-Europe People's Visions

With ASEM9 coming in the midst of current social and economic crises, the AEPF provides a unique opportunity to assess how responses to the crisis have affected the lives and livelihoods of citizens in Asia and Europe and to articulate the policy solutions being voiced by civil society from across both regions.

AEPF is committed to working for a more just and equal world. In order to progress towards this reality, and to take forward the commitments expressed in the AEPF9 title, AEPF will be working to deepen knowledge, hold discussions and develop recommendations on four themes which represent what it would like to see as a living reality for the citizens of the ASEM member countries and the communities that they live in.

These themes are:

- Universal Social Protection and access to Essential Services;
- Food Sovereignty and Sustainable Land and Natural Resource Management;
- Sustainable Energy Production and Use; and
- Just Work and Sustainable Livelihoods.

Building on preceding People's Forums, there is recognition that there are cross-cutting issues or mechanisms that different approaches to can either contribute to or hinder progress towards the achievement of these themes. Specifically, these cross-cutting issues on trade and investment, including Free Trade Agreements; revenue and tax policies and practice; climate policies; holistic and relevant education; and peace and security programmes, all of which it is hoped will be integrated into the reflections, discussions and recommendations emerging from AEPF9.

The Thematic Workshops are an important part of the People's Forum, providing an informing context and background to the workshops, open spaces, roundtables and other events, as well as potentially being an important contribution to the Final Declaration of AEPF9. To enable a broad and rich process before the People's Forum itself, there will be a series of inter-locking activities and processes across Asia and Europe that will contribute to an evolving draft of People's Visions for each theme. The outcomes of these processes will be brought together as contributions to the Final Declaration of AEPF9.