

*By Tina Ebro, on behalf of AEPF11, member of AEPF International Organising Committee (IOC)*

Your Excellencies,

For 20 years, the Asia-Europe People's Forum, has been a strategic gathering of Asian and European civil society networks pursuing democratisation, human rights, and social, economic and climate justice.

AEPF11 held on 4th to 6th July in Ulaanbaatar was honoured by the full support and presence of the President of Mongolia and Chair of ASEM who stressed at the opening session, the importance of people's participation in realizing inclusive and sustainable development.

Under the main theme "Building New Solidarities: Working for Inclusive, Just and Equal Alternatives in Asia and Europe," 750 citizens from civil society, trade unions, academics and some parliamentarians from 42 countries engaged in constructive exchanges, and adopted the AEPF11 Final Declaration that we respectfully submit to the 11th ASEM Summit. We share four main points.

Firstly, we raise urgent concerns that human rights defenders and citizens face in countries where democratic space is shrinking like Kam Ley in Cambodia and Gloria Kapitan in the Philippines.

One, the enforced disappearance, almost 4 years ago, of AEPF9 main organiser Sombath Somphone. We urge the Lao PDR Government to complete its investigation, make public the result, and take forward appropriate legal actions against those responsible for his disappearance. Please return Sombath safely to his friends and family.

Two, we ask ASEM members to exert significant pressure on the military regime in Thailand to restore human rights including freedom of speech and assembly the right to campaign on the constitutional referendum, and to return democracy to the people.

Secondly, what has been presented as a 'financial crisis' is actually multi-faceted and interlinked crises – food, energy climate, social and human security, and ecological destruction – that are devastating the lives of millions across Asia and Europe.

We met at a time of growing inequalities, injustices and turmoil world-wide. There was a strong consensus at AEPF11 that the dominant development approach over the last decades - based around deregulation of markets, trade liberalisation, the privatisation of essential services and resources - has failed to meet peoples' needs and rights, and contributed to climate change with its catastrophic consequences. This development approach has caused massive joblessness, exploitation and informalisation of labour, hunger, lack of basic services and social security, and the plunder of natural commons for the benefit of an extreme minority. These give rise to exclusion, polarisation, racism, xenophobia, terrorism, armed conflicts, and people's displacement and migration.

Transnational corporations and multilateral institutions have become even more powerful, gaining significant control over our lives, leading to a hollowing out of democratic accountability and contributing to making the financial system so unregulated and unaccountable. Corporations must therefore adopt democratic mechanisms and respect human rights.

This development approach needs to be transformed – to go beyond endless growth and relentless capital accumulation – so that peoples can live freely in peace and dignity, restore their relationship with nature, and renew solidarity amongst peoples and nations. The need for change is urgent and fundamental.

Thirdly, we urge governments to heed the People's Visions and urgent demands including:

- Implement universal and comprehensive social protection guaranteeing decent work, food, essential services and adequate income to vulnerable groups. Reverse the privatisation of essential services especially healthcare, education, and water, and implement just fiscal policies including financial transaction tax, closure of tax havens, and the cancellation of illegitimate debts.
- Stop land grabbing, implement Agrarian Reform and support small farmers.

- Halt all negotiations based on current trade and investment protection frameworks until an alternative, inclusive and sustainable model is established. Withdraw the inclusion of the extremely dangerous element of the Investor-State Dispute Settlement mechanism.
- Stop dirty energy, and develop alternative renewable energy sources and other concrete short and medium term plans for appropriate emissions reduction to achieve the 1.50C limit.
- Welcome Mongolia's nuclear-weapons-free status and expand the nuclear-weapon free zone. Cut military spending by at least ten per cent in the next five years. Settle disputes and conflicts by peaceful means in areas such as Ukraine, Korean Peninsula, and in the South and East China Sea.
- Respect the rights of migrants and refugees, and adopt legal and political frameworks which allow them safe movement. Share responsibility to cope with present humanitarian crisis.
- Support civil society organizations, and citizen-led democratic processes including mechanisms for direct democracy, gender equality and participation of youth, women, LGBTI and differently abled people, as well as ethnic, religious and other minorities.

Finally, at this critical juncture, States with political will, to put people's welfare at the center of policy-making are a must. ASEM in its 20th year has an historic opportunity to encourage governments to take bold steps and work together with civil society in realizing peoples' alternatives towards a multi-polar world that is inclusive, just, equal, and ecologically sustainable world. Please, seize this opportunity.