

**15 years of the Asia-Europe People's Forum  
A review and reflection with recommendations for  
strengthening for the future**

---

**Synthesis  
and Recommendations**

**By Anuradha Chenoy  
and Andy Rutherford**

---

**Presented to the Asia Europe People's Forum International Organising Committee  
Paris  
28<sup>th</sup>- 29<sup>th</sup> October 2011**

**Revised following discussions - Final version  
November 2011**

## Executive summary

---

*The world is movement, and you cannot be stationary in your attitude towards something that is moving" Henri Cartier-Bresson*

There has been a clear affirmation by the vast majority of the people who have contributed to the review that AEPF is both a **relevant** network and that it has **unfulfilled potential**. In the context of the continuing social and economic injustices that deprive millions of women and men across Asia of their rights and the growing social and economic exclusion of millions in Europe and the role of the ASEM member states in perpetuating this situation through their financial, economic and social policies and practice, there is a great need to both strengthen and give focus to the campaigns and lobbying of the movements and networks involved in the AEPF.

The legitimacy, strength and uniqueness of the AEPF is its explicit commitment to the linking of social movements and organisations across Asia and Europe. The current global crises and relative shifting of economic power to China and India make it more imperative than ever that Asian and European scholars and activists share their common experiences and problems as they are converging like never before. This has the potential to be a powerful voice in and contribution to strategic campaigning and advocacy and an important way of actually strengthening social movements. The **AEPF People's Forum** events have provided a valued and strategic opportunity for social movements and organisations and networks working for justice and equality. There were no recommendations that they should cease. They should continue.

There was a strong consensus on the objectives of the AEPF. It is a venue to bring together social movements and civil society organisations and parliamentarians from Asia and Europe to exchange ideas, visions and strategies for a more just and equal world. It brings people together to work to take forward the AEPF Charter and its principles. There is a **commitment to consolidate and strengthen links that come out of the People's Forums and undertake activities between People's Forums**.

It is the view of most 'outsiders' that the AEPF does provide a unique and legitimate space for Asia-Europe interaction. The AEPF has been a catalyst for more contacts and links with Asia based networks and organisations and has increased collaboration and joint activities. The AEPF has enabled the sharing between social movements, networks and organisations across Asia and Europe which was not happening before the AEPF. People have been able to see that they are not alone in their struggles and the type of challenges that they are

facing. This in itself has strengthened people's work. "We have shown that there is an organised civil society that can analyse issues and present alternatives."

The AEPF remains the only permanent network and forum linking Asian and European movements and organizations. This is a very important and historically irreplaceable role, especially in terms of the social capital that has been generated. It has never developed a single 'secretariat' but has kept two Focal Points, one in Asia and one in Europe.

The AEPF has consistently been able to prepare, organise and hold the People's Forums albeit in very different contexts. It has not been preoccupied by agreeing and disseminating statements on a range of issues in between the People's Forums. This has not led to a divisive, distracting of energies.

Activists felt that as a solidarity network, AEPF still faces some limitations primarily because of limited budget and technical support in between the People's Forum events. It has kept itself flexible structurally, organisationally and thematically which is both a significant strength and limitation. The bureaucratic 'light touch' was seen by some 'outsiders' as positive and making participation in People's Forums relatively easy.

A number of respondents said that the AEPF has not been concrete with a 'realistic' agenda for change but has drawn up a 'counter-culture shopping list'. To contribute to change this is not enough. Linked to this there has not really been an honest assessment to see what influence that AEPF has had. How has it made a difference?

The formation of AEPF **advocacy circles** (i.e. trade, transformative social protection, water, etc.) and more regular campaigning/advocacy work is an effective way of engaging especially with the regional/interregional bodies.

Straightforwardly, if its main objective is the linking of social movements and civil society organisations from Asia and Europe to exchange ideas, visions and strategies for a more just and equal world, then it has been very successful, at least through the People's Forums. The AEPF way of linking social movements is good and effective. It has become a place, a space, to meet, build cooperation, trust and legitimacy. This is very important and should not be underestimated.

The main organisations working on Asia and EU/Asia relations in Europe are NGOs. There is limited interest on Asia in Europe amongst NGOs and even less amongst European social movements. It is perceived that Asia based organisations involved in the AEPF are predominantly social movements whereas in Europe they are mainly NGOs not social movements. Some respondents felt that the IOC lacks renewal in Europe and it has not been able to regularly and systematically connect with European social movements that 'look towards Asia' as well as European social movements organising around the AEPF priority areas but in Europe. As a result, the IOC has been 'imbalanced' with the Europe

based IOC representatives largely being NGOs with an interest specifically in Asia. There is now an opportunity to address this.

In Asia, AEPF's contribution to a progressive activism that has generated critical analysis and debates among social movements, civil society organizations, government functionaries and the general public on national issues of neo-liberalism and its related crises as well as conflict and peace was appreciated by the respondents. It is difficult and not appropriate to do a 'cost benefit analysis' of a social movement, but it is clear from this 'Review at 15' that the AEPF has consistently generated tangibles since 1996, so making a difference to thousands of women and men's lives.

### **Strengthening the AEPF**

The current structure of the AEPF is based on the IOC, People's Forums, NOCs and Working Groups/Circles. Many respondents expressed the need to review the balance between them and increase the role and activity of Working Groups/Circles. This should be informed by an **agreed strategy** that enables the AEPF to be clear on its objectives, priorities and role. It was suggested that this strategy should be revisited and reviewed every two years, as soon after a People's Forum as possible.

- There is a very strong consensus on the need to **strengthen the working groups/circles and their interaction with the IOC** and the need to focus on some **key themes** and advocacies in the context of the AEPF's agreed, written strategic priorities.
- There was agreement on the need to discuss and agree a plan on how to develop the AEPF/IOC itself including the engagement with other **social movements** as well as strengthening ways of working.
- In the context of a likely transition of Europe based IOC members, there is a pressing need ensure that movements are central to the IOC especially the Europe based members.
- The AEPF could consider rotating membership.
- It could be beneficial to examine if having a maximum term for an individual representative of an organisation of six years is desirable.
- IOC Sub groups: Establish an **IOC People's Forum sub-group** to work with an NOC on the day-to-day decisions related to the preparation for each People's Forum. Three

other groups could be Peoples Vision- popularizing, translating and promoting; Funding, fundraising and Budget; Relationship with and lobbying of ASEM meetings

- The declarations are part of the legitimacy and identity of the AEPF and an important means to share the priorities and discussions of the Forum to social movements, networks and organisations who did not participate in the forum directly. It is recommended that, where appropriate, the **AEPF declarations** include specific institutions that are targets for specific campaigns/demands. The IOC should develop and agree a timetable and process for taking forward the AEPF Forum declaration at the end of or as soon as possible after each Forum.
- Encourage the IOC to be more proactive in contacting and disseminating information about AEPF
- It is recommended that the existing **Ways of Working** are the basis for discussion and are revised and agreed. The IOC discussions should work to ensure each IOC members 'ownership' and agreement of the revised and agreed Ways of Working. These are the IOC's Ways of Working and, with the expectation of new members joining, it is important that they are adhered to and respected.

# Synthesis

## Background and process of the Review

---

The Asia-Europe People's Forum (AEPF), a network of Asian and European active civil society organizations, first came together on the eve of the Asia Europe Meeting (ASEM) Summit in 1996. It has undertaken a reflection and review in the context of its 15 years of advancing peoples' voice and agenda within Asia-Europe relations. This is intended to be a forward-looking process. The objective is to assess the achievements and challenges of its activities, identify key lessons, and draw practical recommendations for future actions and ways of working for the AEPF. Among the major activities of AEPF are the biennial People's Forums that are held parallel to the ASEM Summits, dialogues and advocacy actions on urgent Asia-Europe issues (trade and finance, decent work, transformative social protection, alternative regionalism, peace and security, climate change, food security/sovereignty, water justice).

Andy Rutherford and Prof. Anuradha Chenoy conducted this reflection on behalf of the International Organizing Committee (IOC). The reviewers would like to record their thanks to Ms. Maris de la Cruz and Tina Ebro, AEPF Asia Focal Point, and Pietje Vervest of the Transnational Institute, The Netherlands, the Europe Focal Point, for their unstinting assistance. The reviewers are grateful to all the participants who answered their questions with extraordinary insight and patience. Needless to say, the synthesis and recommendations are Andy Rutherford and Prof. Anuradha Chenoy's responsibility.

### Methodology

The reviewers drafted a set of questions based on the stated objectives of the AEPF, its documented history and its activities. The aim was to assess its current strengths and relevance and gather people's views on how it could be strengthened for the future. About forty people associated with the AEPF in different capacities were chosen for interviews. These were IOC and NOC members who have been involved in developing the AEPF process - or the 'insiders' and participants from social and grassroots movements as well as civil society organizations who had attended AEPF meetings; experts and intellectuals associated with think tanks and academia who had attended and spoken at some of the AEPF biennial forums and representatives of Ministries of Foreign Affairs and the EC- or 'outsiders'.

The opinions and ideas of these interviews were contextualized by both the outcome documents of AEPF meetings as well as socio-political and economic situation of the time.

### Limitations

There were several limitations during the review. A few of the people on the list did not respond, though we are not complaining, as we got very representative and comprehensive

responses from most of people on our list. The reviewers were fortunate to have met on the sides of an ASEM meeting in Manila from 11-14<sup>th</sup> October 2011, and discuss the parameters of the report. The other limitation was the challenge to review a movement that combined so many different movements, activists, participants over so many years and reflect on the outcomes.

We felt that this kind of movement of ideas, advocacies and critiques could not be viewed like a balance sheet or strict 'cost-benefit analysis'. Nor could it take the credit for every challenge made to neo-liberal policies or steps towards democratization that have been made by peoples' movements as the Arab Spring and the 'Occupy' movement. But yet there was no underestimating the value of such a movement as the review discusses below.

Andy Rutherford interviewed the Europe based respondents and Anuradha Chenoy the Asia based respondents. Overall, there are some important differences in balance and emphasis between the discourse and analysis of the respondents in the two regions. As a result, in parts of this synthesis we have kept the consolidation of the responses as regional inputs.

The reviewers presented the Synthesis and Recommendations to a full AEPF International Organising Committee meeting held in Paris between the 28<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> October 2011. This meeting included a full discussion of the Synthesis and Recommendations. The reviewers also facilitated a detailed discussion between IOC members on the recommendations of the Review and Ways Forward. The relevant comments and parts of the discussions are included in the revised and final version of the AEPF Review.

## **Context**

Globalization that was designed to create new openings and greater benefits for finance capital has had many unintended though not unpredicted consequences. The most evident crises include indebtedness of the Eurozone; the bailout of the banks by States at the cost of public services; rising unemployment; the impoverishment and pain of the working and middle classes. Internationally the spectacular rise of Asian countries, especially China and India mark a shift in the global power balance. China and India, with their increased growth rates, financial clout and relative ability to withstand current worldwide economic crises, are sustaining their economic edge on the base of their exploitable surplus labour market and displacement of their own peasantry and petty producers as they expand their industrial base and raw material extraction.

The crises ridden West and Eastern 'Giants' share collectively, for the first time, the phenomenon of rising inequality- between the 1 and 99%; uneven development, destitution and stagnant human development; and changed nature of the state that support policies that favour such a financial structure and political arrangement. At the same time there is a massive but fragmented resistance to such lop sided growth, manifest in protests like the 'Occupy Wall Street' and corresponding movements across Europe and Asia that

demand the reigning in of corporate power and demand participatory and inclusive economic and social democracy.

In such a context Asia and Europe are more inter-dependant 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 they need to re-formulate together. Asia can draw lessons on the need for sustainable growth that focuses on human development in order to avert its own financial, food and climate 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 change it to enable pro-people policies and practices. Europe and Asia have to collectively resist militarization, shun wars and re-invigorate transparent and truly democratic systems that can only arise when there are economic rights and access.

Forums such as G-20 and ASEM insist on continuing along the same path, even while huge movements want alternative policies. It is for such ideals, as expressed in the AEPF Charter, that the AEPF endeavours to provide a platform, generate ideas and connect social movements and civil society representatives.

## a) **Background and history of the AEPF**

---

A Joint Asia-Europe Conference of Active Citizen's Organisations and movements took place in Bangkok in 1996. It was attended by 400 campaigners, grassroots leaders, researchers and scholars, and progressive parliamentarians from Asia and Europe. This historic gathering emphasized the imminence of regional integration, political and economic re-grouping, and the imperative for the working together of Asian and European civil society activists to address the new challenges posed by neo-liberal globalization and to forge a shared vision and common programme of action. This led to the formation of AEPF in 1997. The idea was to have a People's Forum parallel to the Asian and European countries summit, ASEM.

This people's initiative evolved through time in the form of People's Forums as an inter-regional network of hundreds of organisations across Asia and Europe working on issues of common concern to both regions: London (1998), Seoul (2000), Copenhagen (2002), Hanoi (2004), Helsinki (2006), Beijing (2008), and Brussels (2010). Based on wide mobilisation and active participation of key civil society networks especially from Asia, the forums became venues for timely, substantive, and quality debates in the conferences and workshops prior to and during these biennial forums and defined the evolving role of the AEPF. A collective statement or **Peoples' Agenda** containing recommendations and alternative policy proposals for the priorities of Asia-Europe relations was developed and agreed at each People's Forum and presented to the ASEM Summit. It is significant that ASEM felt pressured enough to 'receive' these recommendations and ASEM representatives have regularly met with the AEPF representatives and have addressed a number of the Forums including Helsinki, Beijing and Brussels.

Basic mechanisms have existed to insure internal and external accountability, though up to now AEPF has remained a loose and flexible network. In 2003, the IOC, as part of its review, resolved that there was need to reorganise and restructure the AEPF into a more inclusive, transparent, democratic and open network. A working paper by One World Action, based in London, helped the AEPF to embrace these values in the coordination and operations of the Asia-Europe network. This led to the adoption in 2007 of the AEPF Ways of Working. In 2005, points of coordination or Focal Points had been established by consensus, in Asia and Europe, who report and work with the IOC in managing the activities

of the network. The Europe point of coordination is based at the Transnational Institute (TNI) in Amsterdam with Pietje Vervest as the Coordinator. TNI has been performing this role since 1996. The Asia Focal Point or Secretariat is at the Institute for Popular Democracy (IPD) with Tina Ebro as the Coordinator and head of the Secretariat. Charles Santiago is a Co-coordinator based in Malaysia. Tina Ebro is assisted by Maris de la Cruz who works full-time as operations manager with two part-time staff.

### **Structure**

The structure of the IOC is planned in a way that members represent movements at the grassroots, national and regional levels. The AEPF has advocacy circles or working groups. As the AEPF has grown since 1996, it has been joined by hundreds of campaigners, grassroots leaders, researchers and scholars, and progressive parliamentarians from Asia and Europe. Wide mobilisation has been attempted and received significant response because of the substantive and quality debates in the conferences and workshops prior to and during these biennial forums.

The IOC is geographically represented with 6 European and 6 Asian NGOs as members. The European members are largely NGO representatives who were responsible for AEPF's formation, the newer members joining it have been nominated by groups in their respective countries. Major policy decisions are made at the IOC meetings, and emails as well as tele-meetings are used on an as-needed basis to follow-up on decisions or if there is a need for a new decision or mandate.

## b) AEPF objectives

---

### **Overview**

The purpose of this bi-regional network between organisations and movements from Asia and Europe is to contribute to a world based on the concepts of peace, participatory democracy, social justice, human rights, food sovereignty, sustainability and people's rights to self-determination. The AEPF is a space to link struggles and visions on alternatives from both regions.

The formation of the bi-regional network opens a new chapter in people to people relations between civil society organizations in Asia and Europe. Social actors from both regions recognize the growing significance of inter-governmental relations between Asia and Europe and the necessity to develop new political and organizational responses.

The AEPF advocates a positive agenda of joint proposals and demands that enable us to influence policy on EU-Asia relations at the ASEM government and EU level. The AEPF also facilitates strategies and action as civil society on a variety of issues concerning both regions.

### **Consensus on the objectives**

There was a strong consensus on the objectives of the AEPF. It is a venue to bring together social movements and civil society organisations and parliamentarians from Asia and Europe to exchange ideas, visions and strategies for a more just and equal world. It brings people together to work to take forward the AEPF Charter and its principles. There is a commitment to consolidate and strengthen links that come out of the People's Forums and undertake activities between People's Forums.

Advocacies for 'another' Asia-Europe relations and alternatives to the neo-liberal agenda underpin the AEPF. Activities include lobbying relevant European, Asian and ASEM related decision and policy makers.

Some respondents simply said that the objective was building solidarity between people of Asia and Europe and contribute to social movement strengthening. AEPF thus has a wider frame than just advocacy. It generates ideas as it builds on larger Europe-Asia issues and connects people's concerns across geographical lines.

One of respondent, in the context of the AEPF objectives, stated that "Ever since its beginning in the mid-1990s, the AEPF has set the objective to foster solidarity between the peoples of Asia and Europe, to identify convergences and to promote the voice of the people in the relations between Europe and Asia. Up until today, it has fulfilled these functions with brilliance: it has successfully established itself as the "people's" equivalent of the Asia-Europe Meeting between Heads of State and of Government. Its authority and credibility next to the governmental, the business-oriented and the parliamentary discussions is unquestionable."

- c) An assessment of the **relevance** of the objectives of the AEPF, biennial people's forum and network and their consistency with the priorities and needs of connected and potentially connected social movements in the Asia and Europe regions.
- 

### **Europe based respondents**

The priorities outlined in the AEPF Charter cannot just be challenged on a national basis, it is important to work through international networks such as the AEPF. There are very few, if any other, networks working on Asia/Europe relations. Is the AEPF the only such Asia-Europe network? It is the view of most 'outsiders' that the AEPF does provide a unique and legitimate space for Asia-Europe interaction. One IOC member recollected that the Finns and Japanese had evaluated ASEM at 10 in 2006 and that review had revealed that AEPF was the only serious non-governmental agency that was seriously building on Europe -Asia issues. It stated that the EU should look to the AEPF as a serious player.

The sharing between members is very important and good. For some there have been 15 years of cooperation. "AEPF appears well connected and well entrenched among grassroots organizations and civil society. It has an open debate culture and hence, generally pursues priorities and needs that are of relevance to the global community, and in particular to Europe and Asia. In that regard, its attempts to build bridges about issues such as human rights and social exclusion and to promote sustainable solutions to the global economic and financial crisis are worthwhile. They appear fully in line with the priorities and needs voiced by other social movements. For their meeting in Brussels, they associated trade unions in their conference work, including trade union representatives from Asia."

The AEPF has been a catalyst for more contacts and links with Asia based networks and organisations and has increased collaboration and joint activities. This was said to be important for many Europe based organisations, i.e. Finnish organisations linking with IPD on Social Protection.

The AEPF can take domestic campaigns to the international level. It also informs domestic campaigns i.e. role of European companies in Asia.

For a number of 'outsiders', the role of the AEPF to provide to link and enable interaction between Asia based and Europe based social movements/networks/organisations is of great relevance and an important role in itself and for itself. "In the fulfilment of its role as a connecting factor between the peoples of Asia and Europe, the AEPF is considered a trustworthy partner. The policy positions, in particular those emerging from the discussions on the margins of the biannual ASEM summit meetings, serve as useful points of reference to be compared with governmental positions."

Some 'outsiders' were concerned that the AEPF remains dominated by an anti-globalisation agenda which excludes lobbying for achievable alternatives i.e. improved working conditions and worker's rights. It is sometimes difficult to see what its priorities are.

The main organisations working on Asia and EU/Asia relations in Europe are NGOs. There is limited interest on Asia in Europe amongst NGOs and even less amongst European social movements. Few people/organisations have Asia/Europe relations and actions as part of their priorities/jobs/work.

For some such as TNI it has always been relevant. Since 1996 TNI has been part of shaping the agenda, been active in the IOC, between Forums and the European Coordination/Focal point since 1996. Many TNI fellows have become key in the AEPF at different times since 1996 - Walden Bello, Acin Vanaik, Joel Rocamora, Jun Borrás, Susan George, Hilary Wainwright, Praful Bidwai, Boris Kagarlitsky and Brid Brennan. TNI has worked tirelessly to make AEPF happen, and this work is based primarily on a combination of personal commitment and organisational backing.

For most European based organisations the Asia linkages have been very positive. However within Europe, linkages have always been a challenge and organisations have struggled to build an EU-Asia network. The role of individuals to push their organizations towards this agenda needs to be recorded. (TNI, CNCD, AsienHaus, One World Action). The potential is there with Decent Work, Trade and Investment, Migration, and Climate Change but it is yet to be well linked.

It is perceived that Asia based organisations involved in the AEPF are predominantly social movements whereas in Europe they are mainly NGOs not social movements. The Asia secretariat is perceived as playing a 'big role' in pulling organisations in different Asian ASEM countries together between People's Forums.

There have been many attempts to involve Europe based social movements. For example the Belgian NOC discussed involvement in AEPF8 with Via Campesina but they did not see the relevance of being involved at that time.

In general the international engagement of European social movements is low with the exception of Labour Rights organisations. A key agenda for the AEPF would be to work with some appropriate social movements and networks to try and develop this, specifically with an Asia/Europe lens. This process would need to happen between People's Forums.

It is still unclear in Asia based and Europe based social movements what relationship EU Asia relations have to their day-to day issues and struggles.

### **Asia based respondents**

Activists flagged the relevance of this movement particularly in the realm of ideas, where it has enabled critiques and understanding of a number of essential issues. AEPF's

contribution to a progressive intellectual activism that has generated critical analysis and debates among social movements, civil society organizations, government functionaries and the general public on national issues of neo-liberalism and its related crises as well as conflict and peace was appreciated by the respondents. As argued by one activist: "we cannot produce knowledge on our own" but "our findings can be tested by experts. Our experiences can be systematized for others. Our horizons can be broadened only through interaction with other organizations." Clearly activists benefit from the interaction of ideas and knowledge and Network building that supports their work. The inclusion of the voices of the poor, marginalized groups, from both Asia and Europe makes this forum especially important for them. The Forum's has also been able to disseminate critiques to the media and help shift the visions promoted in the mainstream.

The methodology followed by the AEPF, notably the creation of "circles" gives continuity to exchanges in a growing number of fields. Respondents in the review valued the AEPF because it remains the only permanent network and forum linking Asian and European movements and organizations. This is a very important role. A background context is that Asia is 'a weak link' in European solidarities; and Europe 'is a weak link' in Asian networks.

Activists felt that as a solidarity network, AEPF still faces some limitations primarily because of limited budget and technical support in between the People's Forum events. Advocacy and solidarity works really needed continuous support besides the main AEPF event. The main problem as visualized by 'outsiders' (to the IOC) and recent participants was that the IOC of AEPF still has limited institutional support for daily activities, especially for the AEPF's country support. Some advocacy groups such as trade and labour group have been established. Other issues are still in the consolidation phase. At the same time a Forum like AEPF cannot intervene or have relevance in the daily practices of civil society organizations. Some of our interviewees felt that the AEPF remains unevenly rooted in the countries of Asia and Europe. It has deep roots through social movements and working class organizations in some countries, but remains weak in South Asia, primarily because India has only recently joined ASEM. AEPF's relevance comes on account of the visible interest it has attracted from civil society that helps to promote some public accountability. Its commitment to progressive, alternative ideas have given it social capital and put pressure on the ASEM process to recognize it for their own legitimacy.

d) An assessment of the **effectiveness and strengths** of the AEPF as a network and consider/gauge its processes, ways of working and relationship with the networks and movements that it engage with.

---

### **Europe based respondents**

Put simply, the AEPF has enabled the sharing between social movements, networks and organisations across Asia and Europe which was not happening before the AEPF. People have been able to see that they are not alone in their struggles and the type of challenges that they are facing. This in itself has strengthened people's work. "We have shown that there is an organised civil society that can analyse issues and present alternatives."

It is seen as an excellent way of communicating and of linking social movements and organisations.

It has wide geographical coverage and wide thematic coverage.

Its breadth, the issues it works on, the range of social movements and organisations involved and the countries that they come from give the AEPF legitimacy and enable it to be taken seriously. In some cases this enables politicians "to need to listen". In Finland for example, it has consistently been possible to have a discourse with relevant politicians and put issues on the official agenda.

It seen as a great tool with great potential, a fact that we elaborate in the later section on forward looking strategies.

Even if we just hold the People's Forums every two years, this is positive.

The AEPF has enabled a number of Asia organisations and movements to look at the European integration experience and reflect on it in the context of the emerging regional integration processes in Asia (i.e. ASEAN)

The Water, Trade, Alternative Regionalisms, Local Democracy working groups/circles have been vital forums for mutual learning, sharing and strategizing.

The involvement of European companies in privatisation programmes in parts of Asia i.e. water, has been highlighted and has been an alarm bell and has fed into reflections on the European Water Facility.

The AEPF has consistently been able to present people's visions and voices in ASEM process. From the outside, the AEPF is perceived to be legitimate and representative of a range of social movements and organisations. It is seen to have "opened up the official ASEM process to alternative perspectives" as developed by active civil society organisations. "The establishment of a link between the peoples of Asia and Europe through fostering solidarity and promoting their voice is the unique selling point of AEPF. The

forum moreover provides an institutionalized approach to this valuable characteristic and does so in a continuous way, based on the principle "from summit to summit". A further strength is its capacity to deliver an output of its work in the form of policy recommendations that feed into the discussions of the Heads of State and of Government during the ASEM Summits."

It has contributed, especially in Asia, to the sense that people are part of active civil society addressing some common challenges. The People's Forums have been key in achieving this.

A number of 'outsiders' noted that it needs to be recognised that as ASEM is such a top down and quite closed process that there are limited possibilities to influence it. Since 1998 the AEPF put on the ASEM agenda that it needs to be accountable and to develop ways of being so, including with elected national and European parliamentarians. The persistent People's Forums have been key in keeping this demand alive. The increased access since 2004 is an example of a response to this.

The AEPF has consistently been able to prepare, organise and hold the People's Forums albeit in very different contexts.

The AEPF set a precedent, existing before the World Social Forum. It has become a vital, unique space for Asia and Europe based social movements/ networks and organisations to interact.

It has been of great value for a number of issue based advocacies and has contributed to numerous, positive bilateral co-operations between organisations.

It has kept itself flexible structurally, organisationally and thematically which is both a significant strength and limitation. The bureaucratic 'light touch' was seen by some 'outsiders' as positive and making participation in People's Forums relatively easy.

It has never developed a single 'secretariat' but has kept two Focal Points, one in Asia and one in Europe.

It has not been preoccupied by agreeing and disseminating statements on a range of issues in between the People's Forums. This has not led to a divisive distracting of energies.

The lasting results of the AEPF6 in Helsinki have include the establishment, continuing existence and influence of an active, functioning Finnish AEPF Committee with roots in Finnish civil society and a range of social movements and with good links to Finnish parliamentarians and government officials. The AEPF agenda is now linked to common campaigns in Finland. This could be a model transition for other NOCs?

AEPF8 was considered a success by participants, many movements were brought together, the 'right' participants attended, the interaction with ASEM, through the hosting nation,

was significant including the participation of the Prime Minister in the People's Forum and the circulation of the Declaration to all ASEM delegations. AEPF is recognised as an important 'voice' of civil societies as policy makers wish to dialogue with it.

The core of people working with the AEPF have a proven ability of bringing together different interest groups and to communicate with governmental partners and diplomats.

In the past the AEPF newsletter, ASEM Watch, a TNI initiative, was excellent for outreach and communication. Since then the AEPF has been able, through TNI, IPD and Finnish AEPF Committee, to have presence on web. This has enabled links from the EC and at times ASEM websites.

Many other European organisations mentioned the positive aspects of collaborating and working with TNI on their work and programmes of action.

### **Limitations**

- There has been a tendency to repeat the same language too often and the AEPF has not evolved as much as context it is working in. "We tend to be right in analysis but not pragmatic and/or strategic in ways this is expressed." Often too abstract. This was a view shared by 'insiders' and 'outsiders'.
- A number of respondents said that the AEPF has not been concrete with a 'realistic' agenda for change but has drawn up a 'counter-culture shopping list'. To contribute to change this is not enough. "Yes we have silenced EPAs but not achieved concrete alternatives."
- There have been only a few joint campaigns.
- Need stronger networking and actions on immigration/migration -taking on Fortress Europe. (?Could increase cooperation with Statewatch?)
- Not really had an honest assessment if have influenced the official process.
- Too focussed on holding the People's Forums, greater emphasis should be given to activities between the People's Forums.
- We keep on organising workshops but do not talk to each other about how we want to build things.
- AEPF has been gradually dependent on a few people as opposed to organisations/networks. This leads to vulnerability and needs to be addressed.
- Lack of consistent involvement from organisations in Southern and Eastern Europe.
- Limited linking of the issues that AEPF is working on i.e. Water privatization and FTAs.

- A number of NOCs reported that the working relationship with the IOC in the build up to a People's Forum was very stressful and often problematic due to the apparent inability of the IOC to take decisions. "it almost killed me last year"
- Limited interaction with the official process. The AEPF could link with other bodies such as the Trade Unions for joint actions where appropriate. (This has happened in the past i.e. 1998, 2000 and 2002 and in the lobbying related to the Labour Ministerial.)
- Fundraising "has been a nightmare" "AEPF appears also to be in need of more stable financial resources. It gets injections at the time of ASEM Summit meetings. This still appears rather precarious."

### **Asia based respondents**

AEPF's strength lies in that it is able to fulfil the objectives for which it has been set up. It facilitates the exchange of ideas. One person interviewed described the AEPF as a 'hub of global networks' that provides solidarity to activists and movements that can lead to common action- "though this is not easy", some activists argued. Several leaders of social movements felt that AEPF communicated people's voice to policy makers. There was consensus amongst those we interviewed that it is effective in providing alternative information resources.

The diversity of people who are committed to work for change and seek a more just, equal and sustainable world, that come together on a common platform, strengthens commitment to the culture and process of democratization. AEPF is effective because of the strong regional issue-based formations, progressive and credible alternative thinkers or activist scholars, and activist and respected parliamentarians. It has a commitment to work together through a trickle up approach in coming up with alternatives. AEPF has also enabled a culture of tolerance for critique and dissent in developing a model where the ASEM leaders publicly recognize alternative voices.

In our conversations and the review of the many AEPF meetings it became evident that the AEPF has been resilient enough to adjust to the exigencies of each summit of the ASEM. AEPF's 'place' at each summit is dependent on the specific circumstances, in particular the Summit host and the extent to which it is willing to give AEPF access to the inter-governmental process. Representatives from the other process that is parallel, the ASEF, has appreciated the role that the AEPF plays.

At the same time it is worth noting that AEPF has used ASEM as only one opportunity to engage with policy makers and it has been clear that their existence is independent of

ASEM. In fact many argued that while ASEM was suffering from fatigue, AEPF continued to generate ideas that were reaching out to new and historic movements. AEPF's impact on the ASEM process is constrained by the amount of genuine space for dialogue that is provided by the ASEM governments. For example, representatives of the Asia-Europe Business Forum are invited to address the ASEM leaders at the summits. The fact that the AEPF congress takes place and is able to pass its statement to the ASEM governments assembled is good in itself, but truly meaningful interaction is limited. This however has not deterred AEPF, since this forum is used for interactions between Asian and European movements and activists to strengthen and energize each other.

Review of the effectiveness of AEPF in its interventions, implementation of activities and the extent to which they have contributed to the objectives being achieved can best be elucidated in the words of Walden Bello, who remains a leading intellectual activist in Asia:

"The AEPF has served as a great mechanism to bring together people's organizations and movements in Asia and Europe. AEPF has institutionalized these relationships in ways that other fora have failed to do. One looks in vain for a similar forum performing the same function for Asia and North America, for instance. AEPF is also noted for its being able to accommodate organizations with different ideological persuasions, to bring them under the same tent despite differences. This also makes it unique. Ironically, ASEM, the formation to which the AEPF is attached as a parallel forum has accomplished very little whereas the AEPF is a vibrant network."  
(Walden Bello, interview, 30 Sept, 2011)

For more effective impact some interviewees felt that participation was varied and depended on different NOCs, so for example, from Indonesia, mostly NGOs participated, and only some had links to grass root groups. This was felt differently by others who said that the problem was not with AEPF but within countries: 'We need AEPF to develop a civil society forum inside a country like Myanmar.' While others felt that the effectiveness was felt at the political and symbolic level. It became clear, that Asian activists gained significantly from the AEPF and wanted more of its activity. Some argued that the political arena it is addressing (ASEM) is not as important as before because other forum like G-20 had become more important. Other's felt that ASEM was a valuable platform for civil society for making their voices heard, while G20 did not open to civil society and BRICS etc. still remain limited in their agenda.

It was unanimously accepted that the recognition given by some ASEM officials to AEPF as a civil society network and its issues in the run-up to and during ASEM-8 was a result of sustained interventions by AEPF in various ways. Such recognition was expressed in several ways including AEPF being on the ASEM-8 website. AEPF was listened to in some of the preparatory events to ASEM-8. The ASEM-8 Task Force Head received and disseminated AEPF-8 Statements/Declaration during the ASEM Senior Officials Meeting and during

ASEM-8. The Belgian Prime Minister, and so Chair of the ASEM summit, spoke to and then engaged AEPF plenary in Brussels in a question and answer session. The overall belief was that though there is no direct formula to gauge the effectiveness of AEPF, it does create effective avenues for dialogue on the key issues being faced by the marginalised and excluded people, especially in Asia.

Participants, particularly 'insiders' and those who had been part of the forum over the years were satisfied at the way AEPF has been evolving methodologies to continuously make it more participatory, while simultaneously welcoming new and creative ways to strengthen its functioning. The loose coordination and priority to struggles and movements makes AEPF a credible platform acceptable to movements, networks and intellectuals. Activists wanted more intensive communication between networks and also updates on the developments of the negotiations made between governments of Asia and Europe and follow-up on the status of the recommendations submitted to the governments during the AEPF and ASEM. Trainings, internship, solidarity visits and regional meetings are the best way to upgrade the human resources of AEPF members. AEPF can become sphere/medium for social movements to discuss challenges and criticise ideas and findings from social movements.

The formation of AEPF advocacy circles (i.e. trade, transformative social protection, water, etc.) and more regular campaigning/advocacy work is an effective way of engaging especially with the regional/interregional bodies, was a demand by some of the 'outsider' participants in the review. Having national working groups or at least regular meetings or events at the country level (i.e. Finnish AEPF Committee and South Asia Working Group) strengthens the working together/solidarity of groups at the country level, broadens mutual appreciation of and leads towards formulation of alternatives and strategies that connect various issues which are usually undertaken separately when under specific issue-based campaigns/formations. There was an underlying belief by some that the NOCs should be more active, while the NOCs wanted more logistic support from the IOC. The commitment of the Finnish NOC was well recognised and appreciated.

Some specific **examples** of how the AEPF has been effective are:

1. The AEPF has created a new momentum for active citizen's organisations and social movements to work together at regional and inter-regional levels on trade, climate justice, food sovereignty, decent work and social protection for all.
2. The AEPF has been establishing inter-regional networks or circles working on key issues e.g. Trade and FTAs, Transformative Social Protection and De-privatisation of Essential Services, Food Sovereignty and Climate Justice. It involves various groups working independently of the IOC, yet these networks or circles sometimes report

regularly to the IOC. In this sense, there is a link between the work of networks or circles and IOC in terms of information dissemination, decision making. In this way, the work, concerns, and issues confronting them are incorporated in the overall direction of the AEPF.

3. The empowering and de-centralization of decision making that the AEPF IOC has established as in the case of the EU-ASEAN FTA network. However there is the need to enhance information dissemination, reporting and monitoring, and the need to stimulate feedback, recommendations and initiatives. The use of e-groups as a powerful medium is now seen in the case of AEPF-Asia and EU-ASEAN FTA e-groups.
4. Since 1996 the Forum has established a dialogue with institutions like the EC and the EU that play a major role in ASEM and in development strategies and their implementation in many countries in Asia.
5. There was active involvement of people's organisations especially in the events leading to AEPF-8 and ASEM-8. The AEPF-8 preparatory or build-up events at the national level organised by AEPF networks in India (including Pakistan and Nepal), Philippines, Vietnam, Thailand, and Indonesia had positive results. A South Asia Working Group (India, Pakistan, Nepal) was formed, ASEM and other urgent issues in the region were collectively discussed, and possible future cooperation/ working together at the country level on ASEM and AEPF issues was consolidated.
6. AEPF8 was a big leap forward in that people-centred alternatives/ recommendations were disseminated during the Senior Officials Meeting before ASEM8 and included in the documents in ASEM8. The Chair of ASEM8, the Belgian Prime Minister came to the Forum, addressed the plenary and then participated in a questions and answers session. Some of AEPF8 recommendations were recognised in the final ASEM8 Chair's statement
7. Almost everyone in this review and other people that the reviewers have personally met have a positive example of the impact that the AEPF has had on their work. The issue of social protection was one such idea that many participants had gained from AEPF meetings and then put it into action in their own networks and mobilization programmes. In the Philippines, a large number of activities, meetings, mobilizations and campaigns have been carried out around demands for social protection policies.

8. An example of AEPF engagement with struggles for human rights and democratization was the case of the detention of the Malaysian Socialist Party (PSM) activists, and the detention of Pakistan Labour Party activist Farooq Tariq, during the movement to end the dictatorship of General Musharraf in 2007. In both cases many organizations connected to AEPF wrote protest letters that they felt were effective.
9. Activists in Myanmar felt encouraged and inspired by women politicians and activists they met at AEPF and subsequently established linkages with women MPs in Myanmar and are engaging in establishing Phan Tee Eain and working for the women leadership development in political field.
10. Chinese participants felt that appeals and statement by AEPF helped them critique neo-liberalism because in China "the commodification of everything is reaching an all-time high since 1989."
11. Discussions at the 8th AEPF in Brussels highlighted the need to support an ILO Convention on Domestic Work that would provide legal recognition for domestic workers as workers with the same rights as workers in general. The issue was picked up and supported the CSOs and social movements participating in the Forum especially the workshop on domestic work. The AEPF Recommendation included a call for governments attending the ASEM to support the adoption of the Convention in June 2011. MFA's advocacy and that of other groups, around the AEPF contributed to the landmark adoption of ILO Convention 189 known as the Domestic Workers Convention, 2011.
12. For others, the linkage between state and civil society across Asia and Europe like the dialogue with the European Commission and Parliament was seen as one the most important interventions and activities by AEPF .
13. Several also cited the meetings with different people's organizations, like with the Chinese as an eye opener as well.
14. Many noted with appreciation that it was after their participation in AEPF that they got a clear idea of the nature of globalization and the financial crises. This helped shape national policy in Vietnam for example, where for example "it gave us a

balanced picture that free trade was not necessary for the development paradigm. So sharing of approaches is positive.”

15. Another example was the discussion on Burma, in Vietnam and in China, and embargoes- “such a discussion was politically important.”
16. The Finnish AEPF group organized public events in the Asian Social Forum in Karachi, Pakistan in 2006, which exposed AEPF and Asian social groups to each other.
17. During the Beijing Biennial Forum and later in Brussels intense discussion between intellectuals and activists and all participants were organized under the umbrellas of the 'Beijing Nights' and Brussels Nights'. These meetings running late into the nights were intellectually stimulating high level discussions on issues and changing social realities in a fast changing globalized world. Issues like the European and global crises of neo-liberal capitalism were actually seen as happening and urgent calls were made for de-globalization.

e) Review of the **effectiveness** of AEPF in its interventions, implementation of activities and the extent to which they have contributed to the objectives being achieved.

---

### **Europe based respondents**

Straightforwardly if its main objective is the linking of social movements and civil society organisations from Asia and Europe to exchange ideas, visions and strategies for a more just and equal world, then it has been very successful, at least through the People's Forums. The AEPF way of linking social movements is good and effective. It has become a place, a space, to meet, build cooperation, trust and legitimacy. This is very important and should not be underestimated.

ASEM representatives have recognised the AEPF People's Forums and have participated and contributed in them in a range of ways. The latest example was the speech and following Q&A by the Belgian Prime Minister/Chair of ASEM in AEPF8. This was considered to be "beyond tokenism". AEPF7 received a speech from the Chinese Foreign Ministry and AEPF6 from the Finnish Foreign Minister and presentation of the People's Forum Declaration to the Finnish Prime Minister/Chair of ASEM after AEPF6 before the ASEM. "The 'umbrella' position of AEPF vis-à-vis the majority of networks and movements it is related to, provides it with a double effectiveness, I believe. On the one hand, AEPF can feed into the workings of smaller movements that are active in one or more countries in Asia or Europe. On the other hand, the networks and movements provide to AEPF an important ground on which common Asian-European viewpoints can be tested and readapted if necessary. AEPF provides to its participating non-governmental organizations international visibility and access to the highest political level."

The ASEP structure and practice has been adapted to accommodate AEPF representatives in events preceding the ASEMs.

Some of its campaigns have been partially effective. Successful Asia-Europe linking has taken place through the Trade, Water, Social Protection and Local Democracy working groups and putting reflections and discussions about Alternative Regionalisms on the agenda.

On some issues alternative proposals have been developed but this has been too limited. "We have been strong on analysis and weak on proposals/alternatives."

There has been increasing working with Parliamentarians. Some European

Parliamentarians have said that the AEPF provides them "good information from the ground".

The advocacy and policy debates in the Residence Palace in Brussels on the last day of AEPF8 were a very good example of the potential of the AEPF. They brought together activists, social movements, NGOs, academics, politicians and decisions makers in the EC, EU and ASEM. This was a clear opportunity to influence the neo-liberal agenda. What has been the follow up? Has the IOC systematically reviewed what has happened since?

There has been the successful establishment of the Finnish AEPF Committee following AEPF6 in Helsinki, now with 17 members. It is seen as a legitimate voice and so can comment i.e. on national Development Cooperation policy.

Forums - the 'necessary quota system' for people being supported to attend has led to some organisations being excluded/pushed away. Country representation in Asia has tended to work well at Forums but, as it can't be open, it has tended to exclude some networks

By not 'renewing' the IOC some networks have been excluded

Some respondents felt that in Europe there has been some renewal through the joining of the Finnish AEPF Committee after Helsinki (2006) and hopefully with CNCD from Belgium after Brussels (2010). This built on the joining of Vietnamese representatives after Hanoi (2004). Other respondents felt that the IOC lacks renewal in Europe and it has not been able to regularly and systematically connect with European social movements organising around the AEPF priority areas. As a result, the IOC has always been 'imbalanced' with the Europe based IOC representatives largely being NGOs with an interest specifically in Asia. This situation is compounded by the difficulties in getting support for European participants to the People's Forums and that funding in general is based on development cooperation channels.

There has occasionally been more involvement but generally it has been difficult to involve networks and movements including the environmental justice movements. They have their own spaces, what can the AEPF add? If AEPF is to be a specific 'roof' under which movements and networks can link then it would need to have appropriate structures for this. i.e. Friends of the Earth may not look for day-to-day collaboration

The working groups are open and this has been positive.

There have been regular and periodically successful attempts to involve Trade Unions in the AEPF, the organisation of the European based People's Forums and in some of the advocacy work. This potential has lacked consistent follow through and is probably a lost opportunity as a result.

The slow decision making of the IOC and specifically between the IOC and NOCs has been a consistent problem. This has contributed to the IOC not living up to some outsider's, albeit high, expectations.

### **Asia based respondents**

AEPF has an organic link with the idea of social movements in Asia and Europe, even though many of these diverse movements have not been represented at the AEPF People's Forums some have been. There was feedback that AEPF has provided momentum and been an inspiration for some movements. A concrete example of this synergy has been the work /solidarity/networking that were generated during meetings of World Social Forums, ASEAN Peoples Forum, Climate Forums, CounterNATO, No Bases Network, Forums on Debt, Parallel to APEC civil society initiatives, Nuclear Abolition caucuses, International Peace Bureau meetings and many more have continued to be discussed and analysed in AEPF meetings. Similarly, ideas discussed in the AEPF have been taken up as praxis by these social movements. Ideas from the AEPF have found their way in media networks (example-TNI websites); academic class rooms; activists workshops. AEPF "weaves and ties ideas together" said one feminist- activist.

Clearly respondents wanted more activities of the Forum and hoped that the gap and different priorities and concerns in between forums could be filled. Some felt that there was a little representation from movements that represented mass social movements for example of minority communities, indigenous people in some countries, primarily because of the inability to provide information (in different local languages) and relate to the political stand of some of these movements. On the other hand, other respondents) felt that the AEPF objectives must in some ways be relevant to social movements in some regions. Some were worried about 'NGO-ization' and wanted representatives of mass movements to be more closely engaged. One person felt that the AEPF had organized events but "was not complemented by dynamic campaigning and cooperation on issues. There is a need for AEPF to show that it is connected with movements both in Asia and Europe as well as across regions." However, others reminded us that AEPF does not have its own grass roots constituency, and its objective cannot be mobilization at the mass level. At the same time, participants also felt that there were specialized forums for specific campaigns and issues like FTAs and that AEPF was a good input for a general framework. .

Some significant outcomes of the biennial peoples' forums highlighted by respondents were:

- First AEPF in Bangkok in 1996 gave the discussions on political crisis and the peoples' struggle in East Timor significant exposure to Asian and European CSOs and to the international media.
- All biennial peoples' forums after 1996 have provided a unique venue for strategizing and cooperation between European and Asian CSOs, particularly the solidarity groups with Burma's democracy movement.
- The AEPF6 in 2006, which linked the representatives from Aceh and Finland, building on the active involvement in Aceh peace process of Finnish groups, especially of the former President of Finland Marti Ahtisaari, who later received a 2008 Nobel Peace Prize for his peace efforts in Yugoslavia and Aceh. The role of the AEPF and especially of the Finnish NOC in bringing international attention to the Aceh movement and the support it received can be counted as major achievements of the AEPF.
- The statement from the 1st ASEM Labour Ministers Meeting in Potsdam in 2006 carried a number of proposals such as "affirmation of the concept of 'decent work' as promoted by ILO and inclusion of the social partners in the ASEM process" from the parallel AEPF conference in Germany which was a preparatory discussion for the People's Forum and ASEM summit in Helsinki that year.
- AEPF-7 in 2008 was the first and biggest gathering (over 700) of Asian and European CSOs which gave the opportunity to present the peoples' urgent issues to the Chinese government. AEPF-7, also the second biggest international forum of CSOs in China after the 1995 Beijing Women's conference, providing a venue for Asian and European social movements and NGOs to build relations with emerging CSOs in China, for dialogue between independent NGOs, organisations in exile and government NGOs in Myanmar (for the first time), an open discussion on HIV/AIDS in China led by people who were openly HIV+, a caucus of representatives of poor people's movements in Southeast Asia that led to the formation of movement for transformative social protection.
- The AEPF ideas have filtered into the ASEAN process through the mobilization of the South East Asian partners of AEPF.

Almost everyone felt that there is potential to increase links with social movement activists - those with grassroots strength- but they were also worried about financial constraints. There were also specific suggestions that representatives of trade unions, women's movements, food security movements could be included. Organisations of the lawyers, the bar associations could be approached. Some felt that representatives of political parties should 'listen in' to the People's Forum discussions.

The linkages and networking of organisations attending the People's Forums has been reported as being very positive, especially within Asia.

The discourse on Asia-Europe relations and the critique of the neo-liberal social and economic policies has been significant in some of the hosting countries especially Vietnam. Since 1996 the AEPF has made a contribution to the consolidation and strengthening of a democracy and human rights in a number of Asian ASEM countries.

The AEPF has become an element of the ASEM agenda but has not been co-opted, this is an achievement in itself. "AEPF is a necessary link in the Asian-European chain, next to the governmental, parliamentarian and business connections. Its recommendations carry authority for the seriousness with which they are developed and the balance which they reflect. In that regard, its impact on the relations can be considered as equally important to the impact of those other fora. In addition, it fulfils a social function for it brings together people's organization of Asia and Europe around issues of common relevance. This generates mutual emulation and constitutes mutual encouragement to the pursuit of similar objectives. By fostering solidarity among civil organizations, one could say that the AEPF has on its own a meaningful impact on the Asian-European relationship."

The growing engagement with parliamentarians is recognised as positive. However the limited use of the **Declaration for Parliamentarians** developed in Beijing in 2008 was seen by some as a missed opportunity.

On the impact of the declarations and priorities of each People's forum on the official agenda, the consensus of 'insiders' is that the impact has been low/limited. It was added that this is effectively speculation as the IOC and AEPF have not tried to assess this systematically.

However this is seen differently by some 'outsiders'. "AEPF has formulated well-balanced and thought through recommendations to the Heads of Government and of State taking part in the ASEM 8 Summit. The issues covered include trade and development, decent work, food sovereignty and climate change. These issues represent major social challenges, which both Asia and Europe face today, and as a matter of fact, coincide with those issues that were on the agenda of the leaders' Summit itself. The fact that the AEPF debated these issues and that it issued recommendations, in my view, provides a useful contribution to public and private thinking. It also plays a role in raising awareness about these issues and constitutes an encouragement to further civil society mobilization."

One respondent said that "We have challenged ASEM but have undertaken limited work on scrutinising its policies. We have increasingly limited discussions on militarization and disarmament."

### Concrete political results

- The first Labour Ministers Forum in Potsdam in 2006 and its comprehensive and relevant discussion and focus on Decent Work and labour rights. This followed a systematic lobbying activity, working with Trade Unions and the Frederich Ebert Stichtung over the preceding years. The AEPF has only given limited follow up and has not held ASEM governments to account for the non-implementation of the Potsdam commitments. ?A weakness and missed opportunity. The ITUC has followed up on this opportunity and now has a dialogue at the post Potsdam Labour Ministers Forums and social partners consultative events in between the Forums. 'Outsiders' stated that it is unlikely that this Ministerial would have been established without Trade Union and AEPF pressure.
- Successful inputs on Human Rights issues
- Highlighting of poverty and exclusion in the crisis
- The day of lobbying/consultations in the Residence Palace on the last day of AEPF8 was seen by 'insiders' and 'outsiders' as a very positive and successful interaction.
- Linking of in-country Burmese organisations and activists with outside organisations and activists has had a significant impact. The AEPF has consistently ensured Burma and before that East Timor are key issues in the ASEM discussions including in Vietnam and China.
- 'Outsiders' agreed that the AEPF work on Alternative Regionalisms was an "extremely important initiative"
- Reclaiming Public Water Network
- The growing work on Social Protection
- Collaboration with the International Peace Bureau.
- The development of a similar EU-Latin America Forum building on the AEPF practice.
- AEPF6 was the biggest such event ever in Finland.
- The AEPF has enabled follow on initiatives such as the EU-China Civil Society Forum led by AsienHaus

However, most European respondents, especially 'insiders' felt that there had been limited/little impact at the political and policy level. The AEPF has put some issues on the agenda for scrutiny i.e. FTAs and linked up with some influential academics.

In each country that has hosted the People's Forum there has been a significant impact. Does the gradual enlargement of ASEM from 25 to 46 member countries present a threat or opportunity? The AEPF should be selective. It is very positive that India is now part as this has opened up the possibility for collaboration with Indian social movements.

f) An assessment of the **coherence** of the AEPF activities.

---

**Asia based respondents**

Coherence was seen not just as a question of relations between groups within AEPF but also between participating groups and the wider public, and here it was seen that AEPF was able to give a coherent point of view to its own constituency, the policy makers in ASEM and to the electronic media and get across its messages.

The issue of practices that should be followed by participating groups vis à vis the wider public, it was felt should be discussed with social movements. There was general agreement that AEPF had reached out to many of the important social movements but not all social movements and alternative thinker. A lot needed to be done, especially in regions/ countries new to ASEM. While movement representatives wanted more activism from AEPF, they did recognize that stepping up AEPF activities and coherence would require the strengthening of organizational structures; necessitate more time commitment by its leadership and organizing committees and long term financial commitments.

Feedback from country specific movements had specific suggestions for broadening - but the overall frame remained the one that AEPF already taps: social and grass roots movements; trade unions; women's and movements of excluded communities. Members of Parliaments, Advisory committees, National Committees, and civil society networks, institutions. Some representative 'slice' of some progressive parties that support the AEPF charter.

AEPF's coherence is founded on its relationship to its principle objective of linking social movements so bringing together the experiences of tackling social and political issues and examining alternative models of development. Activists are able to learn strategies- for example, the issue of social protection with a rights-based approach is really in demand currently in many countries and AEPF has been able to respond by discussing it in their meetings. AEPF's activities have different contexts in different countries, for example AEPF may help indirectly in the promotion of progressive agendas among limited number of NGOs in China, but there is no direct relevance to China activists because of its weak connection to China's grassroots organisations. A strong need was felt to include discussions on inter-communal and inter-ethnic violence and peace building in future Forums, especially from participants from South Asia, where such conflicts are on the rise.

## **AEPF-NOC Activities in between Biennial Forum**

Some NOCs have been active between biennial forums. The Finnish NOC is one example that has been cited before, which keeps up its activities, and will continue this tradition. Vietnam also has activities at both national and international level. One example is that they have organized discussions on FTAs before these were signed by Vietnam and got through to the policy makers on this. Similarly on GMOs and food security and on peace and security issues (organized conferences) The Vietnamese NOC took forward the ideas of AEPF to their policy makers. They also organized exchanges with Malaysia, Indonesia and Philippines. They were able to get speakers and intellectuals associated with AEPF to be part of these exchanges. Finland and the Philippines also had similar activities which have continued. The South Asian NOC had also organized 2 conferences with a number of groups and activists involved in Food Security, as well as the National Federation of Indian Women, National Trade Union Initiative and others participating.

\*Inter-regional Caucuses of key campaigners and scholars were organised:

- i) - on Peace and Security in Kuala Lumpur, that facilitated strategising towards joint actions by representatives of international peace networks and key organisations from Japan, South Korea, Vietnam, Indonesia, Philippines, Finland, Greece, the Netherlands.
- ii) - on Democratisation and Human Rights that brought together representatives of key human rights networks and scholars from both regions to exchange and produce a common positions regarding the democratic and human rights deficit in Asia and Europe, and to prepare the Democratisation and Human Rights programme of the People's Forum in Beijing.

\*Asia-Europe Capacity-building Events were organised in several cities - Jakarta, Manila, Cebu, Bangkok, Beijing, Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, Delhi - that deepened civil society critique of the ASEM, and advanced a people's agenda for just Asia-Europe relations, including major issues and advocacies of the AEPF, e.g. on alternative regionalism, on the FTAs, on transformative social Protection. Prominent intellectual activists, progressive parliamentarians and policy-makers were mobilised for these events. Top ASEM and Asia-Europe specialists such as Alfredo Robles and Sebastian Bersick were involved as key resource people and they provided incisive papers for these events

## Europe based respondents

"I think so" "Absolutely Yes"

The AEPF is seen by most respondents to have a coherent programme of issues and themes addressed. Until 2010 this was expressed under the four themes that the People's Forums were organised around.

The AEPF has worked hard at trying to maintain the Asia/Europe dimension of activities and advocacies though it has not always been successful.

However some felt that the inclusive agenda was a problem. "We have a broad, too broad, agenda so it becomes a general shopping list and so is less coherent. We have accommodated many, various demands without addressing coherence. We must do so."

The focus of the AEPF8 on challenging corporate power was felt to be more coherent than some previous People's Forums. There is great potential to build on the cross cutting issues i.e. Labour Rights and FTAs, Climate Justice and FTAs etc.

## g) How can the AEPF be strengthened for the future

---

### Asia based respondents

The large number of suggestions showed that participants in AEPF from Asia had developed a stake in furthering and strengthening this Forum. Suggestions for strengthening included:

- **Widening Activities and Ideas:**

- Widening the network by including more grassroots organizations and social movements
- develop more focused activities within regional and geographic approaches
- develop human capacity building through training, internships and studies
- monitor developments about the recommendations/statements sent to the ASEM governments
- dissemination of ideas discussed in the AEPF to local grassroots organizations (and NGOs) through websites and local initiatives.

At the intellectual level it was recommended that AEPF cannot be a collection of movements with pressing individual concerns. Most of the struggles that we have can be put in a rubric of these 4 categories. :

- Economic Justice: against a system of inequalities and poverty
- Ecological balance
- Politics of cultural exclusion in all its forms
- Militarism- in all its forms. AEPF could review its charter based on opposition to these four 'apocalypses' of our time.

Two other things should be addressed:

1. Question of hegemonic stability in which key powers play a role and what is the role certain new powers can play?
2. What is happening in Asia-Europe relations, as the centre of gravity is shifting to Asia?

**Financial:** Discussions or reports on (pilot) projects of financial or economical subsistence of grass root organizations so that they shouldn't depend on long term commitment of budget support from international donor agencies and NGOs. AEPF should try to get more

financial and logistic support and both the IOC and NOCs should be more enabled financially.

**Organizational:** Suggestions on the organizational issues came from 'insiders' based on work experience and from 'outsiders' based on idealism. Some members of the IOC argued in favour of strengthening the structure and learning methodology. They advocated

- change in the way groups become members of the IOC.
- make the membership to the IOC a revolving one.
- get more new groups involved.
- the formation of a committee of actions which could organize common actions or advocacies.
- Develop more institutional tools and rules for internal AEPF structures and bodies.

The question whether the AEPF serves the needs of 'connected and potentially connected' social movements in the two regions could not be answered because it is not possible to make such an assessment in the context of the evolving phenomenon of social movements.

There were suggestions that AEPF could consider expanding or renewing the membership of their International Organizing Committee to reflect ASEM's enlargements since 2004. We also understand that national-level activities to 'downstream' AEPF to the country/sub-national level could be more successful in some but not all the AEPF's constituent countries.

There was feedback that the IOC communication should be strengthened; the IOC-NOC relation be strengthened.

One insider to AEPF felt that the IOC should be strengthened with representatives from those parts of Asia and Europe, who are not currently there. The 'quality' of IOC members should be those who can mobilize and connect with civil society in their region. There should be stronger national processes. Militancy of civil society should be reflected.

Some respondents who had experienced a number of People's Forums said that the Forum should look at how workshops are being organized. The quality varies- especially self-organized workshops. These could be better structured and facilitated. Co-ordination after the forum has to be better.

Some who have been involved in AEPF since the start said that some organisational priorities have already been identified including systematizing mechanisms that would improve accountability and participation, and redefining organisational policies that would deepen a democratic, pluralist and non-sectarian way of working together. These are important in the light of an expanding network, with the incorporation of new organisations from Europe and South Asia, and membership to the IOC of the AEPF Working Group in India. Some participants wanted procedures for selection of each representative for AEPF Forum in each country

### **Europe based respondents**

Two key questions were addressed

#### **1. Who to work with?**

There was a general consensus that there is a need to have strategic discussions to agree this. "Do we just confront as a strategy and make demands and/or do we lobby on realistic problems with clear demands for articulated alternatives and programmes to proceed towards them."

Should the AEPF be a coalition of social movements or continue to include NGOs who support and work with social movements but do not take up their space. As a way forward the AEPF would need to actively bring together networks i.e. on Climate Justice to highlight the Asia/Europe dimension and potential relevance to them of collaboration through/with the AEPF.

#### **Social movements/networks that were mentioned**

Some common movements/networks were mentioned by a number of/most respondents

- Seattle to Brussels Network
- Climate Justice Movement
- Movements on land and Food security issues (i.e. Via Campesina -Nyeleni Forum, Fian International)
- European Union Migrants Forum
- International Trade Union Congress

Others were mentioned by one or a few respondents

- Kalayaan - Justice for Domestic Workers

- Clean Clothes Campaign
- ATTAC
- International Peace Bureau
- Asian Movement Against Military Bases
- CRID, France (Research and Information Centre for Développement (Centre de Recherche et d'Information pour le Développement - CRID))
- RITIMO, France (Réseau d'Information Tiers Monde des centres de documentation pour le développement)

It should be noted that Trade Unions are open for discussions on how to collaborate more. "Based on the experience last year, relations with Trade Unions could be further developed, though all the while preserving the specific mandate of the respective organizations."

## 2. Themes to be a focus for the AEPF

Some common themes were mentioned by a number of/most respondents

- Trade and Investment especially Free Trade Agreements
- Decent Work
- Migration
- Climate Justice

Others were mentioned by one or a few respondents

- De-Growth
- People centred and just Asia-Europe relations (ASEM Watch)
- Alternative Regionalisms

Most respondents felt that ASEM does remain a legitimate lobbying focus, especially for Trade and Investment and Climate Justice issues.

Some outsiders stated that the AEPF agenda was old fashioned anti-globalisation focus and it needed to "modernise" its approach.

## A. Recommendations:

---

### Background to recommendations from Asia based respondents

#### Opportunity:

There was a strong belief amongst Asian activists that there remained significant opportunity for connections between Asian and European NGOs to be made over a wide range of issues and advocacies. ASEM 8 Chairman's statement ostensibly raised the profile of AEPF within the ASEM process and some respondents viewed this as positive recognition of what the AEPF brings (whether or not this gets translated into something concrete remains to be seen, of course).

There are means to act strategically and interact with ASEM (e.g. influence on the summit agenda). One example was cited: For many years, the inclusion of a social pillar (in addition to the political, economic and cultural ones) has been an AEPF advocacy; specifically the request that ASEM convene a labour ministerial as well as a social affairs ministerial. The labour ministerial was finally achieved; the first meeting took place in 2006 and, so far, the ASEM labour ministerial has continued to convene regularly since. Other such efforts could be made to achieve certain objectives that the AEPF might have vis-à-vis ASEM.

While AEPF remains a source for strength from Asian networks, the ASEM, is focussing on enlargement and dwindling resources. ASEM is currently in a state of inertia. For instance the 2008 ASEM Outlook Workshop had concluded that ASEM could consider making NGO or civil society participation more structured in its meetings. This could be an issue for AEPF to consider. This could also be one way to stimulate ASEM accountability. There were many endorsements for the continued strengthening of the AEPF without radically altering it.

#### Recommendations:

AEPF's achievements were recognised across the board and several types of recommendations were made, that can be distinguished by those made by 'insiders' and those by 'outsiders'. Some 'outsiders' suggested that there should be some research on grassroots organizations and social movements in Asia and Europe in order to identify relevant groups that AEPF should engage with. 'Insiders' recommended that AEPF become more campaign-oriented. Encourage more Working Groups that are self-

governing/functioning/financing to be created. These in turn can nominate their representatives to the IOC. This can make the AEPF more attractive to new groups. Engagement with progressive research institutions; reflection and review of earlier activities.

A second set of suggestions was to encourage the IOC to be more proactive in contacting and disseminating information about AEPF. There was a suggestion that regional meetings could be organized with specific issues that emerge as common concerns. Strengthening national networks by facilitating more support for meetings was an organizational suggestion. Some wanted more discussions prior to the organisation of the People's Forums.

Practical recommendations:-

- more dissemination of AEPF Reports to be prepared and passed on to regional and national groups;
  - more information on processes and how to participate in the AEPF;
  - more representatives from less represented countries and more time for discussions.
- AEPF should have a road of map for appropriate medium and long-run Asia-Europe relationships 'watch dog' priorities.
  - For the future actions, the meeting of IOC as well as the national circles should get more priority and support.
  - It is good to note that the AEPF's general plans for 2011-2012 incorporate some of the suggestions that were made during this review:
    - Continue providing space for Asian and European (inter-regional) dialogues and networks working with key campaign networks on trade, social protection, climate change, and food security.
    - Continue dialogues/interventions with ASEM and with key members through the EU and ASEAN, especially on the issues taken up during the AEPF-8 in Brussels (trade, social protection, climate change, food security/sovereignty, and peace and security).
    - Sustain and expand country-level networks at existing country committees/working groups in Indonesia, Philippines, Vietnam, Thailand, Malaysia, India, and South Asia.

It will also try to activate committees/ working groups in Pakistan, Nepal, Myanmar-Mekong region, China, Korea, and Japan.

- It could try to activate networks in Greece, Ireland, the UK and France and in Southern Europe where movements - resisting austerity measures of the states and repudiating capital as the culprits of the crises - are growing.

### **Background to recommendations from Europe based respondents**

The AEPF has a range of mechanisms that it works through, mainly the IOC, People's Forums, NOCs and Working Groups/circles. Many respondents expressed the need to review the balance between them and increase the role and activity of Working Groups/circles. There is a need to rethink alliances and links. This should be informed by an agreed strategy that enables the AEPF to be clear on its objectives, priorities and role. It was suggested that this strategy should be revisited and reviewed every two years, as soon after a People's Forum as possible. "We need to get a balance between modest expectations and keeping enabling a space for people to engage"

There is a very strong consensus on the need to strengthen the working groups/circles and their interaction with the IOC. Need to focus on some key themes and advocacies in the context of the AEPF's agreed, written strategic priorities. Cannot do everything. There is widespread support for the development and strengthening of working groups/circles. They would benefit from being able to develop their own appropriate resources for their work. Sub-groupings can release new energies.

"The AEPF has found a proper and balanced way of functioning. Its relevance is demonstrated. Its main challenge is to ensure that it can rely upon a stable group of supporters and on a solid core of key animators. It is right that its agenda is dominated by the two-yearly summits, yet, as discussed, if it achieved more continuity, it would gain even more in authority and influence."

There is a continuing commitment to ensuring that some social movements and networks see relevance of the AEPF as a venue to influence policy. They could be included in debate when appropriate.

In the context of a likely transition of Europe based IOC members, there is a pressing need ensure that movements are central to the IOC especially the Europe based members. The AEPF could consider rotating membership. We need to "have new air". Also it could be beneficial to examine if having a maximum term for an individual representative of an organisation of six years is desirable.

There was agreement on the need to discuss and agree a plan on how to develop the AEPF/IOC itself including the engagement with other social movements as well as strengthening ways of working.

Positive experience of national AEPF committees (Finland, Indonesia, Philippines, Vietnam and emerging in India)

More thematic based and less geographical based members of the IOC.

A few people/organisations specifically to engage with the official structure and report back.

The IOC should be even more transparent in its decision making. Minuted IOC Skype conferencing has been a positive step forward. Cooperation amongst the IOC members around the preparation and decision making related to People's Forums must be improved. Some respondents suggested a clear working group to work with NOCs.

"If we have limited resources we should continue to hold the People's Forums, do them well and maybe have fewer workshops and more discussions." Engage more with people who are putting alternatives into practice and less with academics. If the AEPF wished to lobby the official process then cooperation with Trade Unions is important.

Changes should be underpinned by an achievable funding strategy. AEPF needs 'core funding'. This could include being more recognised as a process and less as an event. It should not be forgotten that the AEPF has been working excellently with limited resources. There is already a significant civil society contribution which can be better presented and shared.

Explore a range of activists' e-lists and Facebook

Relationship between NOC and IOC. There was a common stated need for much more clarity about decision making, procedures, respective roles and responsibilities including fundraising. Deadlines need to be respected. A People's Forum Working Group with 4 representatives from the NOC, 4 from the IOC and the coordinating local agency i.e. CNCD, CAIFU, KEPA etc. would be a clear way forward.

The AEPF has limited institutional memory and apparently does not learn from past mistakes.

A weakness has been the lack of a well-resourced secretariat. Preparing for the forum is largely 'voluntary work'. Develop a secretariat, part in Asia and part in Europe that could be an option if resources could be generated.

Need to continue the discussion on how best to work with ASEF. One 'outsider' felt that a strong partnership between AEPF and ASEF would be out of the question. Another said the lack of strong relationship was not AEPF's fault.

From all respondents there was very positive feedback on role and contribution of Pietje (TNI) and Tina (IPD).

Changes should be underpinned by an achievable funding strategy.

## Suggestions for / practical recommendations for

### a. Future actions

---

There has been a clear affirmation by the vast majority of the people who have contributed to the review that AEPF is both a **relevant** network and that it has **unfulfilled potential**. In the context of the continuing social and economic injustices that deprive millions of women and men across Asia of their rights and the growing social and economic exclusion for millions in Europe, the role of the ASEM member states in perpetuating this situation through their financial, economic and social policies and practice, there is a great need to both strengthen and give focus to the campaigns and lobbying of the movements and networks involved in the AEPF.

The legitimacy, strength and uniqueness of the AEPF is its explicit commitment to the linking of social movements and organisations across Asia and Europe. This has the potential to be a powerful voice in and contribution to strategic campaigning and advocacy and an important way of actually strengthening social movements and organisations across Asia and Europe by their linking with one another

The **AEPF People's Forum** events have provided a valued and strategic opportunity for social movements and organisations and networks working for justice and equality. There were no recommendations that they should cease. They should continue. Each one should build on ongoing AEPF activities and develop its strategic priorities in the context of the current political and economic context, the agreed AEPF strategic priorities and the AEPF Charter.

The IOC should discuss and agree a model preparation timetable for a People's Forum. Some key components could include agreement in principle to hold an AEPF Forum, ideal date and feasibility review for potential partners to be a key contact for an NOC and to provide an in-country secretariat for organising the AEPF Forum, the agreement of which IOC members will be part of an IOC Forum sub-group to work with an NOC on the day-to-day decisions related to the preparation for the forum. It could be considered that this has two IOC members from Asia and two from Europe who would liaise with representatives from the NOC and a representative from the People's Forum secretariat in the hosting country. The absence of clarity on most of these areas from the IOC has been seen to be a weakness by most NOCs.

#### Strengthening campaigning, lobbying and advocacy between forums.

An important way to strengthen the AEPF should be to increase activities and campaigning, lobbying and advocacy between forums. There is significant support for and interest in

this. How to do so is the key question. The IOC should discuss and agree the key areas for campaigning, lobbying and advocacy every two years immediately following each forum and agree the most appropriate ways of working and organizing for different actions between forums. There is no one approach that suits all actions.

There is significant and potential in strengthening and developing **AEPF working groups/circles**. They can

- be a focus for actions between forums and enable taking forward the agreed priorities of a forum and final declaration
- strengthen cooperation between different social movements, organisations and networks
- be places where 'new' social movements, organisations and networks can become part of the AEPF
- strengthen visibility and legitimacy
- be a focus for raising financial resources

**Priority working groups/circles** at present

Active - EU-ASEAN FTA

- Social Protection

- Reclaim Public Water (more active in earlier years)

Potential - Food Security (which aspects would need to be agreed)

- Climate Justice (which aspects would need to be agreed)

- Financial sector reform (which aspects would need to be agreed)

- Protecting public services (which aspects would need to be agreed)

- It is recommended that a key part of the discussions on how to the strengthen the AEPF focuses on how to strengthen, develop and increase common actions and activities linking Asia and Europe based social movements, organisations and networks through working groups/circles.

### **Relationship to ASEM and the ASEM process**

The AEPF and the IOC have not concentrated energies on trying to 'follow' the ASEM process and become a network which has focussed its lobbying energies on the detail and priorities of the ASEM itself. This is to the AEPF's credit. It has not become a 'technical' lobbying network and so has not been distracted and absorbed in the detail of the process and in the syntax and emphasis of ASEM's declarations and statements.

This is a mixture of two main reasons. Firstly, the political and social movement interaction and strengthening priorities of the AEPF. Secondly, the ASEM process is one of the more opaque international cooperation mechanisms that the EU participates in. Notwithstanding this, or even because of this, the AEPF has a disproportionate level of access and influence on the ASEM process, given the time and energy that it invests in it. This is true around the different forums, AEPF8 in Brussels was a very positive example of this, with the EU/EC and with some ASEM member governments. This has also led to a potential access to some ASEM related activities, notable some of those coordinated by ASEP.

Following the ASEM process does not appear to be a political and strategic priority of the AEPF. Also it does not have the human and financial resources to do so. This is a reflection of the AEPF commitment to social movement interaction and strengthening.

However of the current and possible campaigning, lobbying and advocacy activities, most i.e. the EU-ASEAN FTA, would have as a component of their activities some attempt to influence ASEM related processes, policies and decision makers.

- The IOC and the respective working groups should include in their specific lobbying strategies a component that focuses on ASEM related processes, policies and decision makers if this is appropriate. The AEPF, IOC and Working groups/circles would benefit from this clarity.

**Taking AEPF declarations forward.** Each forum has agreed a declaration which is then presented in some way to the ASEM member states at the ASEM itself. This is either via the host nation's leader (i.e. Belgium and Finland) or through senior representatives of the host nation's Foreign Office (i.e. Vietnam and China). Though an important expression of the Forum itself there is little evidence that the declarations have become the basis of either campaigning, lobbying and advocacy activities after the Forums or of a programme of campaigning, lobbying and advocacy activities of/led by the IOC. The People's Agenda for Parliamentarians agreed in Beijing was an attempt at this but was not translated into practice. The declarations are part of the legitimacy and identity of the AEPF and an important means to share the priorities and discussions of the Forum to social movements, networks and organisations who did not participate in the forum directly.

- It is recommended that, where appropriate, the AEPF declarations include specific institutions that are targets for specific campaigns/demands.
- The IOC should develop and agree a timetable and process for taking forward the AEPF Forum declaration at the end of or as soon as possible after each Forum.

## **b. Ways of working of the AEPF.**

---

Many of the areas that have been raised by people who have contributed to the review are addressed in the existing, agreed but not fully implemented Ways of Working.

The current ways of working of the AEPF were agreed by the IOC in Port Dickson, Malaysia in 2007. These were the result of a comprehensive consultation and discussion. Most of the recommendations remain relevant. Most have not been implemented and/or internalised into the current ways of working. They provide an important framework for the review of the Ways of Working of the AEPF.

### **Background to the transition**

The AEPF IOC is beginning a period of transition. This should be recognised and changes should be taken forward in a way that is not destabilising.

Since 1996 the IOC has been characterized by consistent membership of a number of organisations and, from those organisations, there has been a high continuity of participation in the IOC of these organisations representatives. Additional members of the IOC have largely come from countries that have hosted the Forum (UK, Vietnam, Finland and Belgium). The main exception was the addition of a representative from Indonesia following an election from the large Indonesian national delegation that came to Hanoi in 2004.

The continuity of the majority of the individual members of the IOC has led to a strong institutional memory. It has also contributed to the predominantly informal, un-bureaucratised and 'light touch' approach. While this has had many benefits, the review has found that it has also made the IOC challenging to work with for some 'outsiders' including a number of NOCs.

The European based members of the IOC have essentially functioned as a regional circle, providing support to the European focal point, TNI. Of the five current **European members** of the IOC, two organisations - One World Action and Centre Lebret-Irfed may soon cease as organisations or at least ones with the capacity to participate in the IOC. In addition the representative of one organisation - AsienHaus is considering retirement. It should be noted that CNCD have not formally been invited to apply to be a member of the IOC following the successful AEPF8 in Brussels in October 2010. A previous Europe based IOC member 11 11 11, took the decision to end its involvement in the AEPF following internal restructuring. As a result only TNI as 'founder' IOC member and European Focal Point and the Finnish AEPF Committee which joined the IOC after the Helsinki Forum of 2006 could provide consistent European based membership in the near future.

This provides a **significant opportunity** for renewal and new membership of the IOC. The AEPF IOC should address this opportunity in the context of its strategic priorities and revised and agreed ways of working.

There are more established **Asia members** of the IOC with MSN Malaysia, FOCUS, FORUM Asia and IPD (Focal Point) as long term members. There has also been no change in the Indonesian National Circle elected organisation, IPGI, since they were first elected. However there have been no elections since 2004. There may be an Indian National Circle representative but this needs to be confirmed.

- As a matter of urgency there is a need to review IOC membership
  - If agreed, a formal invitation should be given to CNCD to join the IOC and contact person in that organisation should be confirmed
  - The organisational representative and contact person in that organisation from the Indian National Committee should be confirmed
  - A re-election process should take place in Indonesia
  - The situation of One World Action and Centre Lebret-Ifred should be confirmed
  - If any vacancies occur in Europe then the IOC should recruit new members based on the revised, agreed Ways of Working and in the context of the agreed strategic campaigning priorities

#### **Overall points for AEPF Ways of Working**

1. There is a need for an inter-regional structure and that this has to be founded, informed and inspired by people's experiences, strategies and visions.
2. The base should be geographical and thematic, building on our strengths and the Asian and European regions.
3. Our structure should bring together organizations and movements and facilitate exchanges of experiences, information, strategies and actions between them.
4. The type of organizational structure most appropriate to the development and strengthening of the AEPF is not pyramid shaped but circular.
5. We do not have the resources for one permanent secretariat.

## **What continues to be relevant for AEPF Ways of Working**

- The importance of our Charter. It would still be important to review it following on the discussion of our strategic priorities
- Our overall structure IOC, People's Forum, Working Groups/Circles, Focal Points, NOCs
- Geographical and thematic circles/working groups
- The two Focal Points
- The overall balance of members of the IOC of organisations based in Asia and Europe.
- The IOC membership criteria, including for new members
- Responsibilities of the IOC and frequency and ways of meeting
- Delegation of responsibilities
- No one secretariat
- Limited focus on developing AEPF positions and statements

## **Recommendations that remain relevant and unimplemented in the AEPF Ways of Working**

- The approach to working groups/circles and the principles behind them
- Clear agreed ways to link working groups/circles to each other where appropriate and to link working groups/circles to the IOC
- Processes for election and accountabilities of link people and an agreed timeframe for follow on elections. This is also true for regional and national groups/circles
- Review of the IOC membership's size and composition IOC every two years.
- Quorum for IOC meetings and IOC decisions
- Clarity about the role and responsibilities of an NOC and agreed and implemented ways of the IOC working with an NOC in the preparation of Forum
- Agreed sub groups for
  - Planning and organisation of the currently bi-annual People's Forums
  - Peoples Vision- popularizing, translating and promoting
  - Funding, fundraising and Budget
  - Relationship with and lobbying of ASEM meetings

### **Areas for review/revision and agreement in the AEPF Ways of Working**

- The priority campaign, advocacy and lobbying issues (Please refer to the consensus areas above)
- Whether working groups/circles are the best way to take these forward. If they are not, agreement what, on an issue by issue basis, what would be the best way
- A clearer, agreed and owned process for establishing a working group/circle
- It is recommended that the existing Ways of Working are the basis for discussion and are revised and agreed. The IOC discussions should work to ensure each IOC members 'ownership' and agreement of the revised and agreed Ways of Working. These are the IOC's Ways of Working and, with the expectation of new members joining it is important that they are adhered to and respected.

## **Afterword from Asia respondents**

The feedback gathered revealed an overwhelming vote of confidence in AEPF and a strong insistence on its relevance, effectiveness. There was a felt need and hope for the AEPF, perhaps higher than what a biennial forum can actually deliver. Social movement partners were more likely to emphasise the need for greater immediate resourcing and a facilitating role.

There were numerous requests for support in campaigns, country and regional programmes. From Asia based respondents the feedback on the organization and relationship with IOC was close to universally positive, though there were demands for more communication from them. Other meetings in between the two yearly People's Forums - should be used to get other groups involved i.e. different forms of outreach through conferences, media, and demonstrations. Outreach is important to raise awareness, even if it does not have immediate effect but has an impact on delegitimizing policies in which AEPF is critical. The success of a movement like AEPF can be measured when political decisions change after lobbying; by the impact on public policy and in influencing decision makers and public opinion. The fact that many Asian countries are seriously considering social protection measures, an idea consistently advocated by AEPF has been one of the direct outcomes of its advocacy.

Many of the social movements and civil society groups associated with AEPF have contributed to the shift away from elite dominated paradigms that legitimize corporate led capitalism. Many ideas collectively added to the change in public discourse on the issue of neo-liberalism, especially by young people in many countries and they are beginning to raise uncomfortable questions about the crises.

The second set of indicators is the success emanating from conducting of major events - like the biennial forums where solidarity was felt to galvanize and energize movements and alliances and open new possibilities.

AEPF will remain relevant as long as bilateral relations between Asia and Europe matter and universal values of rights, development and justice can be shared.

## **AEPF International Organising Committee, Paris, 28-29<sup>th</sup> October, 2011.**

### **Input to review**

The main concern is what is the AEPF value added and how do we take this report and AEPF forward the next 5 years. What kind of leadership is the AEPF going to provide and what are its priorities and forward looking strategies? - Strategies for what kind of roles for the social movements and NGOs. Another question was how formalized should the decision making process be with this being linked to the question of democracy versus efficiency. There was an input expressed by some respondents in the review that the IOC decision making process was sometimes slow. Some in the IOC felt that there has been an increase in the involvement from South Asia but not enough from the North East Asia. It was generally felt that that the 'open approach' and flexibility exercised by the IOC gave it strength because that was the only way to respect the diversity of the AEPF in terms of geographical and movement's spread. As the AEPF grows and perhaps includes movements from West Asia, we need to keep this approach since it has been recognised as very appropriate and effective. It was felt that the follow up mechanism with policy makers should be given some attention. There was much focus on getting stable sources of funding.

There was a response to the sentiments of some NOCs that they were not involved in between People's Forums. It was suggested that one way to be involved was to become part of the advocacy circles that work in between the biennial People's Forums.

There was a need for a systematic way for follow up of AEPF declarations, even though these were emphasized in various meetings, advocacy groups etc.

At the organizational level, the space provided by the AEPF including during the preparatory meetings was much appreciated.

## Systematization of Experiences of IOC Members

Systematization of Experiences of both personal and collective experiences that reflect how AEPF IOC see themselves and relate with others. - *An exercise in recapturing without conclusion.*

1] It was strongly felt that the main value added of AEPF has been to build solidarity, in both Asia and Europe. It had strengthened existing networks. The AEPF had been useful for both Asian and European partners in sharing analysis and experiences and for facilitating Active Citizen's Organisations and movements. It was felt that many solidarity actions, like support to Aceh; solidarity with the Philippines social protection movement, Karachi Social Forum, would not have been possible without the umbrella of the AEPF. Similarly, French and German people to people links, and links with Chinese groups.

2] It was also established that the AEPF was doing work that was not being done by other groups and networks.

3] There was consensus within the AEPF that the intellectual output being provided by AEPF was of a high quality and quite different in comparison to other groups. This was because of the diversity, flexibility, plurality in approach.

4] Organizations like Centre Lebret-Irfed said that AEPF had been enabling and gave the example of how the AEPF space had been used to reflect on religious fundamentalism and conflict/ and people living together side by side using Asian experiences as examples.

5] The AEPF facilitated convergence of interests by linking grassroots, national and regional constituencies to international ones. Groups like the IPD in The Philippines, used ideas on universal social protection to turn this into large popular movement and peoples' demand. Yet the AEPF needs to take more advantage of areas that they have broadly addressed and bring them on their platform. Good examples of the AEPF initiated campaigns were: free access to water campaign; response to the Malaysian crises; Aceh; The EU-ASEAN FTA work done by AEPF has its own life and has had lots of activities in between the People's Forums. For example, this was raised in the Malaysian Parliament.

6] The discussion on the roles of NGOs and social movements should be seen as how they can enable each other, rather than as an 'either/or', or even that only social movements were relevant. The argument was that each had their own place and could add to social transformation projects.

7] Some IOC members felt that NOCs can bring new ideas and add content to biennial People's Forums, NOCs wherever they were active, as in Finland, can add to the process of the AEPF.

8] For a research and intellectual organization like TNI, AEPF has added value by helping to understand the internal dynamics of European policy making and the impact building "Europe" has externally.

9] There should be a discussion and dialogue on the AEPF charter and advocacy on its common goals.

10] Representatives of most of the major organizations that contribute to the IOC said that the AEPF was a 'sub-theme' in their work and organization, so not high in their priority. Having said that, they were of the view that individual commitment had kept them and their institutions active and they, as individuals, and their organizations, as institutions, had gained in many ways through AEPF activities. In addition, the bi-lateral cooperation between Asia and Europe helps bi-lateral cooperation between IOC members- thereby strengthening their organizations.

#### Forward Looking Suggestions from IOC:

\*The AEPF cannot give leadership to movements, but helps set the leadership discourse in social movements and CSOs and brings groups together to facilitate movements. AEPF had thus been critical for shaping agendas and this agenda shaping has allowed sub groups of AEPF (e.g. FTA) to take on a life of their own. This is what should be central to the AEPF programme for the next five years.

\*The AEPF has to make an effort to work with organized groups especially in Europe-(trade unions, etc.) but also to reach out to the younger generation- the Facebook- social networked generation- combined with the younger generation who are mobilized but not organized. It was suggested, that some funding be mobilized for a more inter-active AEPF website and web network. This website should list who is working on what; advocacy groups; circles, etc. All different organizations that supported the AEPF should have links to this website. This is necessary for information sharing. [It was stressed, that it is not AEPF's task to develop social media for any specific campaign, and that should be left to the local organizations.]

\*In this period of financial, ecological, food and other crises, the AEPF's forward looking strategies should include social protection in both Europe and Asia. This is a major issue for the future.

\*Another issue that AEPF must engage in is analysing debt- which is a common feature of Europe and Asia. We can engage in a debt audit, with other groups. Links on this can be regularized.

\* AEPF's work on alternate regionalism fits well into alternative financial architecture discussions and debates, and this can be taken forward in the framework of developing **just** Europe-Asia relations.

\*Energy politics and nuclear power plants, this is another issue that is shared between Asia and Europe and that the AEPF can work on.

\*The AEPF has several law makers, parliamentarians, from different countries that support it and who can take up the AEPF demands in their own parliaments. AEPF should re-visit the ASEM Parliamentarian group.

\*Europe and Asia share the common problem of dealing with fundamentalisms and debates on secularism. In Brussels, there was a workshop on this. This should be taken forward in the next 5 years.

\*There are ways that AEPF IOC can help sustain old circles and initiate new ones for example: some circles are not so difficult to develop i.e. a France based and an India based organisation committed to developing an anti-nuclear energy circle, and to get someone working on this from Japan. The AEPF can develop an anti-nuclear energy initiative.

\*It was felt that it would be good to look at the changing nature of the relationships between States and corporate power and have comparative and analytical research from European and Asian angles.

\*There is a need to keep up work on the re-democratization project and build on the work the AEPF has already done on this. This has been evident from their support to Asian democratization movements (Burma, Aceh, etc.). Linked to this should be work on human rights and economic and cultural rights- such as social protection.

## Funding as Critical

\*Funding is an issue of major and common concern. It was clear that most people in the IOC have laboured for AEPF because of individual commitment and that this has strengthened the commitment of their organizations. Important themes like social protection have had no one dedicated to the issue. The AEPF is in dire need of core funding. The funding it receives primarily for the biennial People's Forum before the ASEM is far from enough. There needs to be a proper distribution of labour, properly organized coordinators and circles that have dedicated budgets. Any future structure should be based on an agreed and funded budget. There is thus need for organizational, political and financial will necessary to keep the AEPF going. It would leave a terrible gap if it were not to continue.

\*The list of issues that were suggested for AEPF work was: Access to Services; Decent Work; Transformative social protection; FTAs; Migration; Energy Politics and Issues of peace, security and identity. There should be a civil society group on Asia-Europe relations. Several of these issues were already being worked on. For example: TNI was working on FTA's; debt; investment; IPD and the Philippines NOC were working on social protection; the Finns were working on issues of peace and security; A range of members were engaged with anti-nuclear energy. These were 'ready' focal points for developing these networks/advocacy groups/circles. The water network of the AEPF had developed autonomy, it was felt should be linked back into AEPF activity.

Relationship with ASEM: AEPF is larger in its imagination, reach to people and activities and not restricted to an ASEM focussed agenda. It is a big player in ASEAN and separate from ASEM.

Working Groups: These should include experts and the governance process should include more communication by and with the IOC; have a link person and themes related to the IOC; there should be a circle list and AEPF list of supporters and participants over the years.

## Conclusion

It is difficult to calculate AEPF's contribution, but it is much more significant than it appears. AEPF has been a catalyst for many groups and movements that advocate alternative formations. In this current crisis of Europe and the international financial and ecological downturn it is important to locate the role of this Europe-Asia network. The problems of the European-Asian peoples are more similar now than ever before because of the socio-economic stresses and similarities and the effects of neo-liberal globalization over the last twenty five years. So the time for an alternative paradigm is now. The AEPF already has made significant social gains and access to large social movements, these have to be strengthened. This can be done by building the AEPF with the same energy and passion that has been contributed by individuals, organisations and social movements over the past 15 years.

# **Charter of the Asia Europe People's Forum (AEPF)**

*December 2005*

### **Background**

AEPF emerged in the mid 1990s from a common desire and need among people's organisations and networks across Asia and Europe to open up new venues of dialogue, cooperation and solidarity. A first convergence of these networks came together in the Asia-Europe Conference which was organised in Bangkok in February 1996 on the occasion of the first Asia Europe Summit Meeting (ASEM). The Bangkok Conference concluded by launching an Asia-Europe civil society initiative which was named the Asia Europe People's Forum (AEPF) in 1997. As it developed, the AEPF has sustained information, education and constituency building initiatives and it has also organized People's Conferences in London (1998), Seoul (2002), Copenhagen (2002) and Hanoi (2004) preceding the ASEM intergovernmental meeting.

### **Preamble**

From its beginnings, the AEPF has provided a space for social actors in each region to:

- strengthen network building on a national and regional level and undertake cross-regional initiatives and campaigns
- analyse issues of common interest such as security, militarisation and neo-liberal globalisation and its consequences for the peoples in each region and how these issues relate to global economic and political trends
- provide people's organizations and networks with a channel for critical engagement with official ASEM
- In 1998, a 'People's Vision towards a more just, equal and sustainable world' was elaborated and widely endorsed by hundreds of people's organisations and networks. It was later revised and endorsed at the ASEM 2000 Peoples Forum in Seoul.

### **People's Charter**

Our People's Charter of principles underpins the ways of working and practice of the Asia Europe People's Forum.

Therefore we, the participants in and supporters of the Asia Europe People's Forum, declare that:

### **We support the**

- promotion of economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights as agreed in international human rights and humanitarian law, particularly the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
- promotion of environmentally, socially and economically sustainable patterns of development; greater economic and social equity and justice including equality between men and women, and
- active participation of people's organisations and networks in the ASEM process.

We demand that the ASEM process recognize and respond to people's needs and rights and become more transparent and accountable to national parliaments.

**We state that**

The AEPF's purpose is to engage and advocate for change in Asia and Europe, including in the overall ASEM process and to reflect social issues and people's concerns.

The alternatives proposed by the AEPF stand in opposition to the current paradigm of globalisation dominated by financial capital and transnational corporations in their search for profit and power without consideration for equity and the environment, and by governments and international institutions which are increasingly serving corporate interests.

The alternatives being pursued by AEPF in co-operation with people's organisations and networks designed to ensure that a globalised solidarity between people and people's organisations will be at the centre of a new stage in world history.

**We respect**

- universal human rights;
- the rights of all women, men and children.

We will work for the protection of the environment and will found our actions on democratic international systems and institutions at the service of social justice, equality, peace and the sovereignty of peoples in Europe and Asia.

**We affirm that**

- The AEPF is an open space for reflective thinking, democratic debate of ideas, formulation of proposals and networking for effective actions by groups and movements of civil society that are opposed to neo-liberalism and to domination of the world by corporate power and any form of imperialism.
- The AEPF is an inter-regional process between Europe and Asia - all the meetings that are held as part of this process have an inter-regional dimension.
- The AEPF is a plural, diverse, non-sectarian and non-governmental space that, in a decentralised fashion, interrelates organisations and movements engaged in concrete actions and initiatives.
- The AEPF wants to build relationships, dialogue, shared analysis and action between progressive organisations in Asia and Europe. The AEPF brings together and interlinks active citizen's organisations and movements from all countries in Europe and Asia.
- The AEPF welcomes and participates in the World Social Forum and the Regional and National Social Forum processes associated with it.
- Neither government nor military organisations shall participate in the AEPF.
- The Proposed organisational framework and policy for the AEPF network and AEPF biennial Forum are set out in the AEPF network structure.