

Asia Europe People's Forum – Core themes

The Asia Europe People's Forum has a regular process of reviewing and reflecting on what should be the priorities of our advocacy, campaigning and lobbying activities. The actual Forums every two years are an important opportunity to bring representatives from social movements and organisations across Asia and Europe together to exchange experiences, ideas and strategies and to develop interlinking plans of action for the future.

Each one builds on the previous ones and our common plans are informed by our Charter. The priorities of the AEPF in general and each Forum are also, of course, informed by the contemporary social, economic and political challenges that we are facing and our priorities are a response to these. Each Forum is unique and we have also worked to ensure that aspects of each Forum are informed by and relevant to the priorities of citizens of the country hosting the Forum.

We would like to share our core themes as they stand at present in the build up to the next People's Forum in Laos in October 2012 with organisations who are involved in the Asia Europe People's Forum.

Building on the AEPF8 in Brussels, the Review and Reflection of the AEPF's 15 years and an International Organising Committee meeting in November 2011 we would like to share with you the current context and possible core themes for AEPF9.

We encourage you to share with us

- Whether they link with the priorities of your organisation or movement and its priorities in the current context
- How you might take them forward
- Which specific themes or part of those themes could you be part of and contribute to at the AEPF9 and preparations for it
- Given our priorities and the current context, are there additional themes that you believe should be considered. If there are ones, why and how could you be part of and contribute to at the AEPF9 and preparations for it around that theme.

Some key contexts for AEPF9

People's solidarity against poverty and for sustainable development

A number of Asian countries have seen economic growth continue albeit at a slower rate over the last two years. However, progress towards realising the basic social and economic rights for all has been reversed for many citizens across Europe and Asia as a result of the current economic, social, and fiscal crises. There have also been negative effects from Free Trade

Agreements. This has given even stronger focus to the movements for Decent Work, universal social protection and the protection and strengthening of public services especially health, water, education, and housing. The social organisations and movements involved in the Asia Europe People's Forum have continued to prioritise this people's solidarity against poverty and for sustainable development.

The economic, social and fiscal crises in Europe

2011 witnessed the implementation of some of the most comprehensive undemocratic structural changes in the European Union since the Lisbon Treaty. New rules on economic governance have been passed effectively giving the European Commission increased powers to intervene in the economic and fiscal affairs of member states. Labour market policies are being altered in favour of more flexibility and lower wages, and austerity measures are being institutionalized through mandatory limits in public spending. There are linked pressures for the greater privatisation of essential public services including health and education. If enforced, these will lead to cuts in public services central to European citizens' lives and livelihoods. Such dramatic changes have been advanced swiftly and quietly, under the pretext of restoring stability in the Eurozone.

As the race to save the euro continues, the EU is preparing for a major role in member states fiscal and economic policies. This role is based on a stronger enforcement of the policies favoured by the Commission, powerful member states, and indeed by big business lobby groups. Austerity and attacks on social rights are to be the order of the day in the European Union. The euro crisis has set the European Union on course for a new model of 'economic governance'. A model that puts the European Union institutions in a position to check and correct member states fiscal policies and economic policies. It is also one which is pushing for greater private sector control and influence over hitherto public services. It will be vital for citizens in countries outside the European Union to be aware of these changes, assess how they may change the European Union's relationship with other regional groupings such as ASEAN and ASEM and assess whether the economic, social and fiscal crisis in Europe will change the resource procurement, investment and marketing strategies and priorities of European based companies especially with respect to ASEM member countries from Asia.

Food sovereignty and the food crisis for many citizens in ASEM member countries from Asia.

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

With the accelerating trend to urbanization in all countries and the interest in growing more 'cash crops' both for national and international markets there have been increasing pressures to control productive land. This has led to a trend in land grabbing by varieties of means in a number of ASEM member countries from Asia.

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

Climate Change and sustainable energy production

Parallel to these pressures have been drives across Asia and Europe to increase energy production to support economic development and growth. This has faced the reality of how some approaches are contributing to increases in greenhouse gases which are contributing to negative aspects of climate change. Key issues of environmental sustainability have dominated national and international agendas post Kyoto. ASEM has held a range of discussions on these issues and the AEPF9 is committed to anchoring these discussions in the daily pressures faced by citizens and the commitments to sustainable, environmentally sensitive economic development. They will take place in the aftermath of the Durban Summit on Climate Change and its limited outcomes and commitments.

Sustainable growth and Governance

The current economic, ecological and social crisis and the international governance responses to these, are providing opportunities and imperatives to develop multi-lateral solutions based on new approaches and principles. The AEPF is concerned that despite this and the pressing need for action that will ensure social justice, human rights and equitable and sustainable growth across the two regions, the agenda and decisions at the ASEM will remain dominated by narrow national and financial interests.

Core themes so far

This analysis has informed the theme chosen for AEPF9 – People's Solidarity Against Poverty, with particular focus on

- Access to essential services in the context of the economic and financial crisis
- Decent work and social protection
- Trade and investment and financial market regulation, debt and tax justice
- Food and land sovereignty,
- Sustainable energy production

- Climate Justice

The AEPF9 will also build on previous dialogues on Peace, Security and Human Rights.

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