

Women Workers at the Front Line of Sustainable Solutions

“Statement of the First Women Workers Summit”

9th-10th December, 2009

We, more than a hundred participants of the first Asian Women Workers Summit in Bangkok on 9th-10th December 2009, from twenty countries, representing the women workers movements among manufacturing, home-based, agriculture, plantation, domestic and migrant workers, fisherfolk, peasants and our support organisations, gathered to analyse and confront the main impacts of the global financial crisis on our lives. We seek to link our efforts and forge our sisterhood to build a common vision and strategy in attaining sustainable solutions to the recurring crisis of global capital by building a conscious women labour movement in Asia.

Women workers carry multiple burdens and face complex challenges as they are historically discriminated against, exploited and suppressed in Asian societies and other parts of the world. In a neo-liberal capitalist world, these inequalities are magnified at home and at work. Today women workers are facing a turbulent period in the history of capitalism. Capitalism has failed to deliver the progress and development it has promised for decades. Worse, the crisis is accompanied by the destruction of productive forces, the earth's natural and energy resources, cultures and communities. This is most manifest in climate change and food crises with devastating results such as forced migration, extreme poverty and starvation. For women workers, today's global financial crisis has its roots in capitalist greed, patriarchy, imperialism, neo-colonialism, fundamentalism and militarisation.¹

Seventy percent of the world's working poor are women who can be found in low-skilled and insecure jobs. Women workers especially in Export Processing Zones face job loss and deteriorating working and living conditions, shunting them off in greater numbers to precarious informal work. Unemployment, rising prices of food and fuel, reduced government spending on health and social services -- all these have compounded women's unpaid labour in the home and community. Asia's migrant women workers' contribution towards wealth creation in host countries is not measured or recognised and comes at the expense of their families and communities. They are the first to lose their jobs in this crisis.

In food and agriculture, the globalisation process has intensified the expansion of corporate monopoly control over the food chain from production to marketing and the exploitation of

¹The statistics are stark: massive unemployment registered 25,000 among Philippine garment and electronics workers in the first quarter of 2009, 67,000 in Vietnam's industrial zones and 44,000 in among garment workers half of 1.3M million unemployed in Thailand in 2009 are women largely from the electronics and textile industries; 20 million of China's migrant workers lost their jobs in January and February 2009.

women's labour, natural resources and biodiversity. It leads to loss of control over crucial resources like land, forest, water, and especially seeds which are mainly women's special domain.

Asian government responses such as stimulus packages prioritise bailouts and tax exemption for corporations. These are solutions that exclude women and communities. None of these measures address the root causes of the global capitalist crisis, deepening socio-economic and gender inequities.

We demand an overhaul of the profit driven economic system in favour of sustainable socially just and gender-equitable economic policies. This includes abandoning reliance on foreign markets in favour of sound domestic industrial and agricultural policies and dependence on 'labour for export' policies in favour of full labour employment at home.

Therefore, we demand:

- Job creation and sustainable livelihoods in urban and rural economies that provide long term employment for women and men. Production is not profit driven but meets human needs;
- Protection of the right to decent work, self-organisation, democratic decision-making and workers' empowerment including skills upgrading;
- Recognition of informal workers as workers and protection of their rights;
- Increased public investment in social infrastructure such as education, health and child care. End privatisation and commercialisation of basic services;
- Implementation of comprehensive land reform and investment in sustainable agriculture, comprehensive land reform and food sovereignty where women are owners, managers, developers of land and other productive resources;
- An end to war and conflicts in Asia and the building of genuine peace through the substantial participation of women in peace building;
- Elimination of all kinds of gender discrimination;

Finally, it is a time for unity and radical interventions from our ranks in the labour movements, trade unions, civil society and women's movements. We all are engaged in struggles in relation to jobs, food, water, energy, war and conflict, climate change, environment and democratic rights.

As women workers at the forefront of these struggles, we are opening doors, setting precedents. We are writing a new chapter in our lives, we are building a just and humane world.

ENDS

