

**DEVELOPMENT JUSTICE AS KEY ENABLER TO ACHIEVE A RESOURCE  
EFFICIENT AND POLLUTION FREE ASIA PACIFIC AND THE WORLD**  
CSO FORUM STATEMENT for  
Asia Pacific Ministerial Summit on the Environment

**Overview**

More than sixty civil society organizations (CSOs) in Asia Pacific met in Bangkok on 4<sup>th</sup> September 2017, representing diverse constituencies including NGOs, women, youth and children, farmers, indigenous people, differently abled, fisher folk, people of different sexual orientation, gender identity and expression and sex characteristics, people living with and affected by HIV, workers and trade unions, migrants, community leaders and other stakeholders; all affected by the twin crises of an extractive neoliberal economic model and deepening inequalities, which are fueling climate change and environmental degradation. We reaffirm our pledge to a resource-efficient and pollution-free Asia-Pacific and a world free of pollution.

We appreciate the space provided by the United Nations Environment and the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN ESCAP). We also welcome UN Environment's report "Towards A Pollution Free Planet," and express our solidarity with this aspirational goal. We hope this report will attract urgent attention to the environmental crises and inspire inclusive and sustainable solutions that benefit people and the planet.

Rich, developed and industrialized countries as well as some emerging economies are the main contributors to the climate crisis. The operations of extractive and agrochemical corporations focused on profits are tolerated, and in some cases, even promoted, by developing countries. And as a result, pollution continues unabated to the detriment of the region and the globe.

The UN definition of pollution does not capture the diversity of people's realities and the lived experiences of community members. While there is a growing understanding of the issues facing our environment and the problem of pollution, an acknowledgement of the root causes and drivers of these problems is needed. Action needs to be taken on the business-as-usual framework of the global capitalist economy and corporate capture of resources and services.

Pollution is an inevitable consequence of a profit-oriented system of extractive and agrochemical industries that has benefited from corrupt government's political interests at the expense of the people and the environment. Many of the Fortune 500 companies - including Nestle, Cargill, Monsanto, Unilever - are promoting their interests in the region by influencing

multilateral and bilateral agreements that undermine people's food sovereignty, including seed sovereignty and the basis of life on the planet.

The achievement of sustainable development and freedom from pollution in Asia Pacific is blocked by systemic barriers, including the large-scale land and resource grabbing, trade and investment agreements, corporate capture, militarism and conflict, as well as patriarchy and fundamentalisms. They are directly linked to the intensification of environmental plunder and destruction of local and natural ecosystems, impacting food chains and people's health. Environmental degradation is a pervasive problem that worsens the situation of the most marginalized and vulnerable sectors of our societies, whose lives are dependent on their respective ecosystems.

We strongly advocate for Development Justice with its five transformative shifts - redistributive justice, economic justice, social, cultural and gender justice, ecological justice and accountability to the peoples - provides a practical framework for fundamental transformation in economic governance in order to achieve the twin goals of pollution free planet and agenda 2030.

### **State of the environment as we see it**

Pollution in Asia Pacific is a reality that affects all of us. An increasing number of deaths and harmful effects on pregnant women, fertility, and fetal health are caused by air pollution and indoor air contamination, freshwater pollution, scarcity and lack of access to safe water causing water borne diseases, chemical pollution and wrongful disposal of e-waste, and the degradation of marine and terrestrial ecosystems. The governments and the UN have failed to address the fundamental drivers of pollution, and remain market-based. It is necessary to incorporate measures to strengthen access to justice, human rights and gender sensitive approaches and to ensure people and planet's well being throughout decision making and action. Policy responses are clearly not enough.

### *Air Pollution*

Air pollution alone causes seven million premature deaths every year, with two out of three deaths occurring in South-East Asia and Western Pacific sub-regions. And nine out of ten people are breathing air which exceeds WHO safe levels for pollution. Emission from thermal power plants, Short Lived Climate Pollutants (SLCPs) and indoor air pollution is causing negative health impacts, such as stunted growth, respiratory illnesses and increased mortality. Without addressing these issues, the region risks falling far short of the agreed targets under Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 3 on health, and the other goals.

While Agenda 2030 and a pollution-free planet is being pursued, more than 1200 thermal power plants are currently being planned or are under development, in sixty-two countries. If built, they will add another 840 gigawatt to the global coal plant fleet. The majority are being planned in Asia and Africa, and are being pushed by Asian power companies. Halting this requires international action.

Intense forest and peat fires, which engulf South-east Asian countries are also increasingly common. One recent forest fire in Indonesia was caused by the clearing of a forest for palm oil plantations.

A resource efficient and pollution free planet must derive its energy from accessible and affordable renewable energy sources. We call countries at this Summit to commit to markedly increase, in line with Paris Agreements, the share of accessible and affordable renewable energy sources whilst quickly and decisively phasing out dirty, harmful and corporate-control energy generation.

#### *Land and Soil Pollution*

In addition to air pollution, land, soil, and connected ecosystems are increasingly polluted by chemicals from industrial sources including extractive industries, use of fertilizer and pesticides, genetically engineered organisms and improper waste management. It is deleteriously impacting human health, particularly of women, children and other vulnerable groups, and will negatively impact future generations.

Many highly hazardous pesticides continue to be used in developing countries causing untold harm, including acute and chronic health problems and environmental impacts. Banned pesticides are smuggled or legally shipped from countries where they are banned. Numerous studies indicate that certain pesticides negatively affect child development, including disrupting mental and physiological growth. The creation of “cancer villages” is also a result of these developments.

The war industry also negatively impacts the environment, and its contribution to land and soil pollution has yet to be acknowledged. In Japan (Okinawa), Vietnam, the Philippines and other nations where the US currently has or formerly had military bases, hazardous and carcinogenic materials and landmines are routinely discovered in forests and agricultural lands. Local people continue to experience the legacy of this toxic contamination.

Another critical dimension of land pollution is caused by corporate capture of land for large-scale chemical-intensive monoculture, export crops and biofuels. Biofuels are promoted as an

alternative source of energy however, they are still pollutive and unsustainable, in addition to removing available land for food crops. The expansion agro-plantations for biofuels and export crops lead to further dispossession of land and resources from farmers and indigenous communities. In addition, agribusiness companies with governments are promoting genetically modified food in the region that not only threatens biological and genetic integrity but also reduces biological diversity for the future.

#### *Water pollution and scarcity*

Water scarcity and deteriorating water quality are commonplace throughout the region, especially in North East and South Asia. Forty two percent of the deaths globally associated with unsafe or inadequate supply of water, sanitation and hygiene occur in Asia.

Fossil fuel and industries stand at the most prolific source of freshwater pollution. UN water estimates that the fossil fuel sector alone contaminates between fifteen to eighteen billion cubic metres of freshwater resources every year; and seventy percent of industrial wastewater is dumped untreated into waterways in developing countries. In Asia Pacific, an estimate by the ADB puts this figure at eighty percent.

Industrial fishing by mechanized trawlers not only threatens the livelihoods of millions of fisherfolk but also impacts freshwater and marine ecosystem irreparably. Fisherfolk communities are being displaced from their fishing areas in the sea and other bodies of water by commercial development. Approximately sixty percent of the coastal mangroves in Asia and Pacific are being cleared for infrastructure or commercial development, and more than eighty percent of the coral reefs are at risk.

Marine ocean and coastal ecosystems are particularly threatened by plastics, micro-plastics, and transboundary pollutants. Despite recognition of transboundary pollution and existence of a number of regional and global instruments, many countries particularly small-island states are routinely affected by transboundary pollutants including carbon dioxide, sulphates, nitrous oxides, mercury, methyl mercury, benthos pollutants due to deep seabed mining. In addition, pollution of rivers upstream due to mine spills, pesticides and fertilizers, industrial wastes among others severely affects riverine life, food and livelihoods in downstream countries and cities.

Pollutants like chemicals, pesticides, solid wastes, mining waste, e-waste and food waste demand severe attention in terms of reduction, and the regulation of the polluters including industries and business is imperative to ensure social and environmental integrity.

### *Climate change*

Climate change has already resulted in increased pathogens, disrupted food supply chains and associated health impacts with additions of more vector/water borne diseases. However, the Arctic permafrost which has acted as a methane and carbon sink is now melting, and threatens to destroy the atmosphere of the planet. When released, Greenhouse Gases threaten to further exacerbate our already unstable climate. Top polluter countries like China and the US are still failing to act on this.

The World Bank has estimated that by the end of the century, the coolest months in tropical South America, Africa and the Pacific are likely to be warmer than the warmest months at the end of the 20th century.

At the forefront of these environmental challenges and dispossessions are marginalized communities. Environmental and rights defenders continue to experience harassment, threats and even killings by corporate and state-sponsored forces. According to Global Witness, in 2015 alone more than three persons each week were killed while defending their communities from being dispossessed of their lands and resources.

### **Challenges and enablers in achieving pollution free Asia Pacific**

While globally, the SDGs highlight finances, technology, and capacity building as important and necessary responses to sustainability challenges, these are more pronounced in Asia Pacific. The region will require USD 2.1 to 2.5 trillion investments per annum to achieve the SDGs. Huge financial gaps indicate that it is not possible to be generated nor shouldered within the region.

Global cooperation still has a significant role to play in financing the SDGs. An increasing emphasis on domestic resource mobilization and South-South cooperation should not be advanced as a pretext for going back on the historical responsibilities of pollution, and taking action in the spirit of the Common But Differentiated Responsibility that is based on respective capacity; a fundamental principle of global cooperation. Developed countries will have to shoulder their fair share of the burden, if any progress is to be made.

The region is home to several global technology leaders, yet on the Global Innovation Index more than a quarter of the countries in the lowest 10% are from Asia Pacific. Many countries suffer from severe capacity gaps, and will require substantial investment in institutional capacity as well as for data collection and monitoring. Partnership with the private sector that defines the role of business organizations and their responsibility in the prevention of pollution and rights violations, and the provision of compensation and clean-up for continuous

contamination and disasters rather is necessary. Removing the undue faith in private sector engagement to mobilize resources is a key factor in achieving a pollution free planet.

Similarly, stakeholder engagement including with frontline and affected communities and CSOs will also be key enabling factors. However, civic space is becoming increasingly constrained in many countries in the region despite this call for partnership.

Resource efficiency is another challenge. Developing countries in the region, on an average, need five kilograms of material to produce one unit of gross domestic product (GDP), while industrialized countries need one-fifth of this. According to ESCAP resource efficiency in the region has been decreasing since 2000 - barring energy efficiency which has registered impressive gains.

Domestic material consumption and material footprint per capita is rising and so is resource intensity. This trend is highly worrying and governments in the region need to work together to reverse it. The intensifying plunder of natural resources, overproduction of consumption goods, and unequal consumption further worsens unequal access to resources of the most marginalized of the sectors; and there is a big gap between sectors in terms of access to resources. There is an urgent need to affirm this strong inverse relation between resource consumption and sustainable development and make progress towards peoples' access to their own resources.

### **Key systemic issues**

Despite economic growth in some countries in the region, pervasive inequalities exist in access of rights, opportunities and living conditions. Violence and discrimination on the basis of gender identity and sexual orientation, and against marginalised communities is pervasive. These fundamental and systemic issues are not being addressed adequately. A pollution free planet cannot be achieved without addressing poverty and inequality, and corporate domination of the development agenda.

Asia Pacific has 2.6 billion people trapped in poverty, 490 million going to bed hungry, 420 million without access to energy, and 1.7 billion lacking access to drinking water and sanitation. It is imperative to address rising inequalities, as the difference between rich and poor in the region is widening. Inequality entrenches poverty; eradicating poverty without a frontal attack on inequality is not possible. Gender outcome gaps are being reduced, however, many challenges persist including low representation of women in politics, governance and enterprise, violence and female genital mutilation, and discrimination in ownership of property

including land. These need to be addressed through a variety of measures including legislative, policy and programmes.

Business corporations and trade agreements work in tandem to weaken public services, restrict peoples' access to natural resources and basic facilities, and concentrate wealth and power in fewer hands. New trade agreements with WTO plus provisions restrict state capacity to regulate trade for the benefit of the people and its sovereignty.

Chemical and nuclear waste pollution, destruction of ecosystems, and massive climate-altering greenhouse gas emissions are some of the direct effects of militarism that need to be addressed, as impacts stretch over several generations and can severely alter the planet's ability to sustain life. Militarism has historically been used as a tool for expropriation of resources and to enforce the current unjust and unsustainable global production and consumption systems. As such, addressing militarism is an important component in the pursuit of sustainable development.

We strongly believe that a Pollution-Free Planet cannot be achieved unless we comprehensively address the systemic issues in a development justice framework, expediting transitions in economic, social including gender, ecological and redistributive justice, as well as accountability to the people.

### **Reflection on (the official programme and) follow up of previous ESCAP and UN Environment resolutions**

We would like to draw your attention to the Regional Implementation Plan adopted at MCED 6, Astana in 2010. The plan prioritized six areas including harmonized rapid economic growth, employment generation and environmental sustainability, promoting sustainable urban development, improving energy resource management, improving water resources management, and enhancing resilience of socio-economic development to climate change. We are disappointed to note the limited progress on the Plan where only 13 out of 62 members and associated member countries responded to the survey to measure progress on the agenda.

We call for alignment of the review of implementation of UNEA and MCED Resolutions with the tools, indicators and review framework adopted for the SDGs and expect concrete action to be taken on the nine policy pathways suggested.

We would like express our appreciation of UN Environment's support to the CSO Forum in advance of the Asia Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (APFSD) in 2017. However, we would like to request that CSOs be given more space in the official agenda and the programme,

rather than relegated to one representative on a multi-stakeholder panel. We also underline that the financial support provided by the UN should be scaled up and made more consistent to ensure a truly transparent and participatory process.

The draft report by Secretary of the UN Environment titled “Towards A Pollution Free Planet,” which is the theme of UNEA 3, is welcomed. However, we are concerned to find no mention of important principles like CBDR and Polluter Pays in the draft report. Too narrow of a focus on national action completely overlooks global responsibility, which is not only an ethical and historical onus but a development justice debt. It is important to note that communities have a significant role to play in combatting pollution, and many of them still keep the knowledge of less polluting lifestyles and nature-based technologies for tackling ecosystem degradation, including from climate change. We also find the draft report very soft on transnational responsibility of countries’ business regulations, and the means of implementation including finance, technology and partnerships.

We urge the governments be accountable to the agreements made at these summits. We call for better coherence in regional environmental UN processes, specifically between MCED of ESCAP and the Regional Forum of UN Environment, and welcome the Ministerial Summit as a concrete step in that direction. We also stress that ESCAP and UN Environment should envision a greater role for communities, peoples movements and CSOs in response to their contribution in adopting and encouraging sustainable production and consumption, ecological limits, environmental protection, disaster management rescue and relief and preventing pollution.

### **Peoples and communities movements and CSOs contribution**

Peoples’ movements and communities have been protecting the environment and strengthening ecological justice in numerous ways including through resistance and creative undertakings. They are also the ones who have been paying an unduly high price for pollution and environmental degradation. Millions of people in the region are solely dependent on their ecosystems, which not only provides them with food and livelihoods, but also protects them from natural calamities. These people and communities have often found themselves at the wrong end of a failed development paradigm.

We are extremely concerned that in many countries in the region, people’s movements and organizations are experiencing political repression. Their leaders are being arrested and detained, and there are also many cases of torture, disappearances and extrajudicial killings. These are often interlinked with the struggles against plunder and dispossession of their resources.



Despite this, communities are raising their voices and continue to be at the forefront of the struggles. They continue to fight oppression and repression in numerous ways, from organizing themselves, making demands on their governments, and the promotion of sustainable alternatives. These actions have resulted in improved access to resources and increased community participation, particularly for women and indigenous communities. These groups need to be encouraged and strengthened. It is high time to empower peoples' communities and other marginalized sectors of society, including youth, for a greater role on development.

### **We demand**

Environmental pollution puts an additional burden on the poorest, most marginalized and ecosystem dependent communities. A pollution free planet requires concerted, systematic and genuine efforts to remove systemic barriers and violence. It is critical to understand the inextricable relation of pollution with poverty, inequality, gender discrimination and loss of livelihoods. Contributing factors are a growth economy, capitalism, trade dominance and malfeasance, and corporate capture and control.

The planet cannot be free of pollution with increasing concentrations of power, economic resources and wealth. In particular, if half of the planet's wealth remains with only 6 persons. The planet cannot be pollution free if half of women remain undernourished, face routine violence and discrimination, lack power to take decision and lack opportunities to work and political representation. The planet cannot be pollution free if forests are cleared of the indigenous and forest dependent and forest nurturing populations. The planet cannot be pollution free if few companies control almost all pesticides and fertilizers. The planet cannot be pollution free if big corporations own more wealth than many countries. Any effort to make the planet pollution free will have to factor in these critical considerations of communities, water, culture, and nature.

We demand enhanced commitment and swift action on a number of areas that will facilitate a pollution free environment:

For UN and international institutions:

1. We demand policy coherence and enforcement and coordination mechanisms and establishing a policy framework creating synergy in prevention of pollution and achieving agenda 2030.
2. We call for access to environmental information, public participation in decision-making and access to justice in environmental matters, which are universal environmental rights that reflect the essential elements of sustainable development.

3. Greater attention and response to increasing militarization and its impact on the environment. Recognition that the military industrial complex as an industry that impacts not just sovereign rights of peoples, but also ecosystems. The military industrial complex is also accountable and required to follow environmental impact standards, as well as compensation for their past and present environmental crimes.

We call for our governments to:

4. Adopt new systems of measuring environmental health which incorporate social dimensions including sexual and reproductive health and rights.
5. Adopt sustainability principles as the central paradigm, align national budgets and finance with sustainable development priorities and put in place policies, laws and regulations that internalize environmental and social costs, including occupational safety and health policies to protect workers from occupational hazards and risks, adopt precautionary principles in regulation to review chemicals, pesticides, GMOs and other toxic substances, review of development projects and its impacts to critical ecosystems, and a strong policy on environmental standards. And reform fossil fuel subsidies as an important step to moving towards a pollution free planet.
6. Enhance state and corporate accountability and compliance with environmental regulations, including granting appropriate inspection powers to authorities. These should incorporate principles such as polluter pays, intergenerational equity and common but differentiated responsibility, respective capability and decent work. Corporations responsible for harming the health of workers and communities through their production processes and products should be made accountable for their action including compensation and clean-up.
7. Increase opportunities for engagement with grassroots communities, including mechanisms for social dialogue throughout policy and decision-making processes at all levels and enhanced participation of all relevant stakeholders so as to adopt policies that reflect their views and concerns.
8. Promote people-led, scientific, traditional knowledge and evidence-based solutions to the problems of pollution, and move away from technological fixes that do not address the root causes of the problem and bring adverse consequences to the environment and livelihoods.
9. Ensure policy for and support the implementation of agroecology as well as strengthening farmers and small food producers movements to advance agroecology.
10. Stop the unequal trade treaties that are signed in secret and without the people's participation, and illicit financial flows and its impact on environment
11. Create an enabling policy for sustainable and environment-friendly, pro-people jobs and social enterprises.

12. Create an enabling environment for participation of people's movements, CSOs, and environmental and human rights defenders and ensure that they are protected from detention, disappearance and harassments.
13. Provide security to indigenous peoples' rights and environmental defenders as well as their rights to lands, territories and resources in order to ensure the protection of customary forests that are playing vital role in the purification of the polluted atmosphere.
14. Eliminate the impact of workers' exposure to pollution in hazardous and dangerous industries and ensure a safe working environment.
15. Under a just transition framework, we call our governments to establish compensation, employment, skills development, and social protection measures for workers in sectors and their respective supply chains that will be affected by a shift to environment-friendly and pro-people industries and practices.