Asian Women’s Day Statement 2020
8 August 2020

No to COVID, Coal, & Debt!
WOMEN FIGHT FOR SYSTEM CHANGE!

Today in the midst of sickness, hunger, lockdowns, violence and repression we raise our voice for our vision of a transformed and just world where women are free from discrimination, oppression and exploitation, where no woman needs to live in hunger or fear or insecurity, and every woman enjoys a life of dignity.

We are women from grassroots organizations and movements from Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand. We are joined by women and men in other parts of Asia and the rest of the world.

We are facing conditions we have not seen before with the world under the grip of a pandemic. As virulent as Covid-19 is, it need not have been as destructive and the economic crisis it spawned need not have been as deep if our societies had been organized around systems that uphold the primacy of peoples’ needs and rights. Instead, our economic systems and decision-making structures prioritize profits over people, exploit labor and natural resources, feed on and perpetuate inequalities, while plunging the entire planet into a climate crisis that is no less than a state of emergency.

Together we seek to transform these conditions. We are not looking for recovery that retains the same system and leaves us as vulnerable as we are now. We will fight to address underlying social ills and pave the way for lasting transformation. The pandemic has shown how we have been living on the edge for a long time. We must take bold steps toward change.

On this day we call particular attention to three urgent issues - COVID19, COAL and DEBT. They are vital not just in terms of impacts on our people but because they are also emblematic of the multiple crises women and our people are suffering from - the global health pandemic and the failure of our governments to secure our health and safety; the climate crisis that requires, among others, an end to fossil fuel energy systems; and, the economic crises and deepening poverty and inequality.

WE SHOUT NO TO COVID. The pandemic has generated miseries in various fronts - into encompassing health, survival, water and sanitation, housing, food, jobs and livelihoods, among others. These are the result of decades of neglect of public services and social investments, and of neoliberal policies that put profit over people and rights, and greed before climate and planet.

The harshest impacts fall on working, impoverished grassroots women of the South who heavily bear long-standing layers of discrimination, and exclusion. The pandemic exacerbates women’s multiple burdens, further increases women’s exposure to gender-based-violence, and intensifies economic insecurity. This is the case even for women frontliners -- paid or unpaid as health workers, workers in food production, among others -- on whose labor the global economy relies on.

Lockdowns under the pandemic have even taken a dark turn as the concern to curb viral spread has led to repression of demands for food, medicines and other essentials, and, to quell dissent. The new anti-terrorism law in the Philippines and terror charges against Fridays for Future for
working against the dilution of environmental laws in India are but two examples of the rise of authoritarianism at a time when leadership is needed to unify people to combat the pandemic.

**WE SHOUT NO TO COAL.** All over the world women are in the frontlines bearing a disproportionate burden of climate change impacts. That is also why women are in the frontlines of the struggle for climate justice, and why we shout NO TO COAL.

Coal is the single biggest contributor to global greenhouse gas emissions and thus to the climate emergency which is hitting millions of people in South and Southeast Asia hard. Ending coal energy is a key step to preventing the climate crisis from reaching catastrophic levels and limit the global temperature rise to below 1.5 degrees Celsius.

We call on people around the globe to join us in campaigns to stop governments, international financial institutions, private and commercial companies to stop public and private investments and promotion of coal and other fossil fuels, and to make a swift and just transition from fossil fuels to clean, renewable and democratic energy systems for people, communities and for powering just, equitable and sustainable economies. We need a total global exit from coal as quickly as possible, and a total phase out of oil and gas shortly thereafter.

**WE SHOUT NO TO DEBT.** In 2020 and 2021 alone, repayments on public external debts by low-income and middle-income countries are estimated to be between US$666 billion and $1.06 trillion from middle- and low-income countries. These are much needed resources that should be going to health care, economic assistance, and other programs to secure the well-being and rights of people in the face of the multiple crises, and programs towards building more equitable, just and sustainable economies.

The debt relief offers on the table - by the IMF and the G20 - involve far too little amounts for far too few countries. The G20 in fact is merely postponing debt service burdens by merely offering suspension of payments for 2020. We call for immediate cancellation of payments for at least 4 years and a more comprehensive response towards total and unconditional debt cancelation and lasting solutions to the problem of unsustainable and illegitimate debt. Actions on the debt should be part of broader and deeper changes in the financial and economic system that will prioritize people over corporations, banks, financial institutions and elites.

We must recall and take heed the points reiterated by women and world leaders at the Beijing conference 25 years ago -- debt and the oft-associated conditionalities of austerity measures, privatization and other neoliberal macroeconomic reforms, present a barrier, if not a threat to the full realization of women’s human rights.

We oppose bailouts and public subsidies for private big business, including mining and dirty energy companies. We oppose corporate income tax cuts, suspension of export duties, further expansion of tax incentives for big corporations, corporate tax abuse, tax havens, illicit financial flows, and corruption. These cannot be justified nor tolerated under any condition, but especially so under the worsening multiple crises.

**WE FIGHT FOR SYSTEMIC CHANGE.** Today August 8, we bring sharper focus on the women and gender dimensions of the multiple crisis, and vow to strengthen our solidarity and intensify our fights for survival, for justice, the end to tyranny and inequality, and a safer planet for our families and communities.

We raise women and peoples’ demands for decisive and effective actions to address the multiple crises. We denounce attempts to restore a system that has only driven inequalities within and
between countries, heightened the climate emergency and intensified discriminations of gender, race and ethnicity.

We will work together for policies that will prioritize peoples’ survival, contribute to transformative processes towards re-building economies and societies that are people-centered, gender-just, and sustainable. We will overthrow deeply rooted structures and systems of oppression and exploitation. We cannot allow the crisis-prone neoliberal system to continue dominating institutions and government policies, and widening inequality in the world to an obscene scale.

Today, we march together to call for system change. We invite all women and women’s organizations and movements in Asia -- from your homes, communities and places of work, or wherever we may be in Asia, to raise our voices of resistance and struggle for social transformation.

Full, equitable, and democratic solutions to the crises NOW! People’s health and needs over corporate profits!

People’s money for peoples’ survival! Cancel unsustainable and illegitimate debts! Stop corporate bailouts! Stop subsidizing coal and fossil fuels! Total coal exit now.

No gender justice without economic and climate justice! Make economic policies and climate policies work for women!

System change for climate justice and economic justice!

NO TO COVID, COAL, AND DEBT!
WOMEN FIGHT FOR SYSTEM CHANGE!

**Asian Peoples’ Movement on Debt and Development**
8 August 2020