

## Working for inclusive, just, and equal alternatives in Asia and Europe

11th Asia Europe People's Forum (AEPF11)

4-6 July 2016, Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia



The theme of the AEPF11, held in Mongolia, was 'Building New Solidarities: Working for Inclusive, Just, and Equal Alternatives in Asia and Europe'.

More than 300 participants from Mongolia, and approximately 180 participants from other parts of Asia and Europe, took part in the 11<sup>th</sup> biennial Asia-Europe People's Forum (AEPF11) in Ulaanbaatar organised under the theme 'Building New Solidarities: Working for Inclusive, Just, and Equal Alternatives in Asia and Europe'. AEPF11 tackled strategies on major themes or People's Visions, representing the hopes of citizens of the two regions. These were - Resource Justice, Land Rights, Equal Access to Water, and Participation - Going Beyond Extractivism; Food Sovereignty/Food Security –

Beyond zero hunger; Climate Justice - Towards Sustainable Energy Production and Use, and Zero Waste; Socially Just Trade, Production and Investment; Social Justice – Social Protection for All, Decent Work and Sustainable Livelihoods, Tax Justice and other egalitarian Alternatives to Debt and Austerity; Peace Building and Human Security - Responses to Migration, and Fundamentalism and Terrorism; and Participatory Democracy, Gender Equality and Minority Rights.

The meeting had several aims – (1) To bring together and review ideas on inclusive, just and equal alternatives, because policies that exclude lead to alienation, dissatisfaction and unrest. Policies and systems that fail to deliver justice or are perceived as unjust, lead to all kinds of oppressions and people taking law into their own hands. Economic and social policies that lead to inequality, result in the breakdown in social cohesion and unrest. The AEPF wanted to further the dialogue and bring out ideas and practices of civil society on these themes. (2) To review the work, ideas and practices of the past AEPFs to assess if AEPF had fulfilled the mandate it was set up for. (3) To continue the conversation of CSOs, social movements and activists from Asia and Europe on alternative and new ideas and policies, in the only forum of this nature. This dialogue allows for comparative assessment of key issues between the two continents and within these countries as well.



The 'Open Space' session, organised by several civil society organisations, highlighted that democratic and inclusive methods and open discussions was very important in building long term institutions, whether for governance or peace building.

The program was structured around three goals - (1) To set the context and analyses and introduce the seven themes for discussions for the duration of the meeting. (2) The workshops were organised to deepen and broaden the themes, where problems, contexts, sub-texts and challenges towards creating an alternative vision would be discussed. (3) Working out strategies for people's vision and future perspectives and how these can be taken forward.

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Discussions at the Forum workshops showed how Mongolia's socio-economic and political governance issues related to major concerns in both Asian and European countries.

There were also 'open spaces' where many CSOs had organised workshops on topics they worked on and which were related to the AEPF.

In the introduction and welcome session, the President of Mongolia, Tsakhiagiin Elbegdorj, underscored the importance of civil society in democratic transformations. He stressed that Mongolia believed in its CSOs and NGOs and that their ideas and work were inputs into the development of Mongolia both for both its domestic and international vision.

A session was dedicated to AEPF at 20 - Reflections and Moving Forward. Anuradha Chenoy, Professor at Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi, India, showed how the AEPF meetings over the last two decades had provided an alternate voice to that of the states of Asia and Europe - in ASEM.

The 'Open Space' session, organised by several civil society organisations, encouraged participation from young activists and were on a wide number of themes ranging from participatory democracy to peace building in Korea. The underlying appeal was that the democratic and inclusive methods and open discussions was very important in building long term institutions, whether for governance or peace building.

Bolorsaikhan Badamsambuu, Vice Coordinator, 'All for Education!' National Civil Society Coalition of Mongolia (AFE Mongolia), an ASPBAE member, participated in the AEPF11 and spoke in the thematic cluster titled 'Socially Just Trade, Production and Investment'. In his address, 'Trade and Investment Agreements: Fundamentals of the Framework', Bolorsaikhan raise issues related to tax justice, resource nationalism, right to development, and the challenges faced by the government of Mongolia in adhering to international treaties, including international human rights instruments and bilateral investment treaties. Tungalag Dondogdulam, AFE Mongolia General Coordinator, and other representations from the coalition pressed for the government to ensure human rights, especially the right to education for all, transparency, accountability, and meaningful participation. They called for action against privatisation of public services, including education. Tungalag and other AFE Mongolia members also participated in discussions in several thematic clusters, including 'Participatory Democracy, Gender Equality and Minority Rights', and 'Social Justice - Alternatives to Debt and Austerity, Social protection, Decent Work, and Sustainable Livelihoods'.



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The active participation by Mongolian civil society members and academics, whose engagement and critical approach to national and international policies was inspiring, made for lively debates and interesting exchanges of experiences and further proposals. Many of the discussions during the workshops also showed how Mongolia's socio-economic and political governance issues related to major concerns in both Asian and European countries. Mongolia's struggles share a familiar pattern in both Asian and European countries, where the increasing neoliberalisation of policies and society has marked a preference of the market over the interests of people and the environment. In this context, the contributions by Mongolian participants gave rise to interesting discussions on how to work together to counteract these developments in both regions and support affected people at local level.

AFE Mongolia contributed to developing and drafting recommendations for the [AEPF11 Ulaanbaatar Final Declaration](#).

*This write-up is drawn from the final AEPF 11 report and from inputs provided by AFE Mongolia.*

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