

## **Committee for Asian Women**

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### **ASIAN WOMEN WORKERS' DECLARATION ON FREE TRADE AGREEMENTS (FTAs)**

We, delegates to the **Regional Conference on "Informalisation of Work Through Free Trade Agreements: Eroding Labour Rights"**, organised by the Committee for Asian Women, gathered in Bangkok on June 19 and 20, 2008 reassert our opposition to globalised poverty as facilitated by the same trade infrastructures that have resulted in today's food crisis. We make this statement in the face of yet another crisis, which is an indication that unfettered free trade is failing.

There is increasing and irrefutable evidence that free trade deals devalue and homogenise cultures, stunt economic development, displace communities and are major drivers of increasing rural and urban poverty. Women are disproportionately affected.

Asian governments need to be alert to mounting unrest as many of the social and economic gains made over the past decades are now threatened by the consequences of FTAs. The European Union- ASEAN Free Trade Agreement, and the Non-Agricultural Market Access (NAMA) Agreements by the World Trade Organization constitute such instruments of deprivation of decent livelihood that have affected workers in Asia and much of the global south.

FTAs have facilitated corporate profitability to undermine nation's right to self determination and sovereignty. FTAs have eroded the autonomy of national governments to promote and sustain appropriate economic development models, which prioritise education, income, food and health security for its peoples. Driven by global competitiveness, FTAs are at odds with Asian cultural cohesiveness, instead requiring removal of state support to national industries, social services and genuine agrarian reform. Farmers and local enterprises are unable to compete in the global economy.

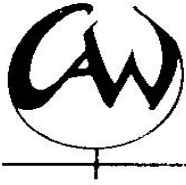
As a result women workers are forced to accept wage cuts, informalised work, loss of trade union rights and degraded conditions of work. Privatisation of public services has multiplied the burdens of women. Another consequence is growing violence against women within and outside of the work place.

Despoliation and dislocation of rural communities and destruction of the natural environment in the wake of FTAs has exacerbated trafficking and coerced migration particularly of women.

FTAs have promulgated unjust trading system, through processes which are non-transparent, favouring rich countries and their corporations, which are unaccountable.

We demand that Asian governments promote local economies for more sustainable development, and direct public funds to social development and public infrastructure.

We demand that the poor in our countries not be further impoverished and indebted by greater dependency on external markets, vulnerability to speculative finance capital, leading



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to price increases, especially in essential needs like food, education, health care and housing. We call for an end to land appropriation especially agricultural and arable land from the poor for purposes of setting up special economic zones and factories.

We unequivocally reject the establishment of FTZs within which trade union and labour rights are suspended. All Asian Governments must ratify and enforce the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), ILO Core Labour Standards and other international instruments.

We strongly urge sovereign governments to resist the pressure from international corporations and international financial institutions to sign onto FTAs on dubious promises of growth, development and poverty reduction.

We demand a moratorium on existing trade agreements and reject any new unequal bilateral and regional trade agreements, particularly in view of climate change and rising energy prices which are incompatible with international transport of goods.

We hereby renew our commitment to actively support and acknowledge the courage and determination of the people and social movements of Asia and the global south in pursuit of better working and living conditions for women workers.

*Adopted by delegates of regional conference on "**Informalisation of Work Through Free Trade Agreements: Eroding Labour Rights**", organised by the Committee for Asian Women, in Bangkok on June 19 and 20, 2008.*

**END**