

# Tamil Nadu Women's Forum (TNWF) in Asia Social Forum, Jan 2003, Hyderabad

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## 1. Workshop on Women and Food Sovereignty

In this workshop, speakers shared the situation and impacts of Globalisation on rural and fisherfolk women in India, Thailand, Philippines and Kyrgyzstan.

**Dr. Vandana Shiva** called on women's groups to unite for food sovereignty. She argued that food should be a primary issue of feminist movement since food is in the heart of women's lives. Women centred economies are taken away by corporate centred patriarchal economies. Globalisation destroys livelihoods. Food sovereignty is based on women's knowledge and is centred on women. The ways to achieve food sovereignty is to get rid of TRIPS on seed and bring back the culture of sharing; WTO must be out of Food and Agriculture; and corporations should not be allowed to take control of food. Therefore, Asian women should combine their struggle against corporations and patriarchy. The Diverse Women for Diversity, a leading feminist group working for food sovereignty, calls for "Let the Global Markets eat leftovers. First and best Food must go to Women and Children".

**Frances Quimpo Dongeto of Kalikasan Peoples Network for Environment, Philippines**, gave a thorough analysis of

WTO, AoA, TRIPS and Phyto Sanitary Agreement, showing why WTO should be out of Food. **Rita Baua, of RIW TF and ILPS representative**, strongly emphasized how the increasing militarization threatens people's food security.



The second half of workshop was spent on exploring alternative ways of achieving food sovereignty. The participant **Valarat Chaiyatap** spoke on how Karen communities in the Northern Thailand preserved community resources and women's role in seed preservation. Participants emphasised how the principles of Sustainability and Continuity as well Freedom and Peace are the essential to food sovereignty.

**Boonpan Masem** shared her struggle to get back the land taken by government from landless farmers in the Northern Thailand. She suggested that land banks can be established to provide loans to small farmers

to buy land and give land ownership right to communities.

**South Korean Women Farmers Association** reported that about 100 women's groups and NGOs united in the Solidarity Network for Food Sovereignty are working to get rice out of WTO. They aim to influence domestically as well regional (e.g. APEC) and international players.

**Fatima Burnad** shared the experiences of TNWF which organises Food Festivals every year aiming to promote local, healthy alternative foods such as small grains, millets, fruits, vegetables, local drinks mad from flowers, leaves, toddy instead of fast food, Coke and Pepsi cola. Despite the fact that women play a major role in the producing and preserving food they have less control over the resources, particularly over land. Rarely they own land and property, have less access to water, their wages are too low. Food should be given to women first, and it should be undertaken and landless Dalit women must be given land. Land, Water, Work and Food crops! That was the main call of the workshop emphasizing on the women's rights to food, rights to land, rights to safe water/seeds, calling to fight for land reforms, better wages and the rights to sustainable livelihoods.

Tamil Nadu Women's Forum (TNWF), Tamil Nadu Dalit Women's Movement (TNDWM) and Society for Rural Education and Development (SRED) co-organised a series

of events at the People's Encounters, which went under the slogan "Drive TNCs to Hunger". They started a rally with 10,000 women, men, workers, tribals, farmers from India, Philippines, Pakistan, Malaysia, Nepal and Bangladesh. Rallyists marched 7 kilometres with various performances with musical instruments and masks. The public meeting addressed the current social, economic, political and cultural crisis, that TNCs, WTO, US imperialism with G8 allies, local government elite are responsible for the misery people.

Fatima Burnad reported that 600 leaders from grassroots organisations from Andra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu travelled long distance in over crowded train, standing all night, but the overwhelming feeling was that of "People's power", "People's Unity" at the activities in Hyderabad.



Together with other organisations, TNDWM organised Tribunal and Seminar on Caste Discrimination, Dalits and Land Alienation. Voices of most silent, marginalised women expressed that Dalit women bear most of the

burdens of persisting caste discrimination. On top of this, shift to export crops, prawn culture and mechanisation/ modernisation of agriculture have created more unemployment among Dalits. Landlords with support of police suppress any protests by Dalits. Violence against Dalit women increased, they are trafficked, raped and murdered. But people not only revealed those atrocities, but also proposed what should be done to change the situation. To address landlessness among poor peasants, there is a need to conduct a genuine land reform by redistributing land to landless Dalit women and men, instead of giving unlimited areas of land to companies. Legal actions can be taken against each case of violations of Dalits.

SRED also co-organised a seminar of Trafficking, Migration and Gender Insecurity. One of the issues raised by SRED was an

issue of Matthamma, when sexual exploitation of women is justified in the name of religion. Girls are offered to the Matthamma Temple in exchange for healing favors.

**Titi Soentoro, SC member from Indonesia**, led the seminar on Export Credit Agencies (ECA). She also contributed to the People Voices Struggles of Courage, Resistance and Hope by submitting a story on the struggle of local people against PT Network Minahasa Raya, a subsidiary of Newmont Mining Corporation of USA, in Buyat Bay of Indonesia.

For sure, the objective to strengthen solidarity of women's organisations with broader social and people's movements working against neo-liberal policies on the issues of food sovereignty, violence against women, fundamentalism and women's human rights was achieved in Hyderabad.

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## 2. Seminar on Globalisation and Terrorism: "Unmasking the war on Terrorism"



**Tamil Nadu Women's Forum (TNWF)**, with its members, joined this seminar. **Fatima Burnad**, Main Coordinator of TNWF, welcomed the audience and introduced the seminar.

War on terrorism, she pointed out, is translated as the state terrorism in India,

genocide in Gujarat, and every day atrocities on Dalits, particularly on Dalit women and also the Bush war on Iraq for oil.

There were lectures on "Bush's War on Terror and the U.S. Drive to consolidate its World Hegemony". There were two speakers from Philippines who focused on how the U.S.A. after September 11, has become more assertive in its colonial agenda, using globalisation as an economic offensive, with "free market", and claiming to be sole super power to impose a Pax Americana in a new world order.



A book was recently released called "Unmasking the War on Terror". Copies of another book, "U.S. Imperialist Hegemony

and Crisis" were given to partner organisations, Society for Rural Education and Development (SRED)/ TNWF/ Tamil Nadu Dalit Women's Movement (TNDWM).

The materials used in the seminar are good and important that the local groups are trying to get copies of these, for them to use. They will try to translate and simplify for the villagers and other audience here.

We will continue to spread this message on Unmasking the War on Terror, the real face of U.S. We will organise protest and resistance against U.S. imperialism. We will join the others in the world through mass actions to Stop War on Terror. This seminar enlightened us more on U.S. imperialism.

We planned to oppose War on Terror. We understood more about State Terrorism. We oppose Imperialism and we say "NO TO WAR".

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